# What is fully inclusive wellness in the workplace?

By Bridget Underdahl

The most common approach, when wellness is mentioned or a goal is set in workplaces on wellness, is to discuss self-care. It makes sense, if one has not had the opportunity of a background in social, emotional, and mental wellness. Self-care would be an area of greater comfort to address first. Many workplaces who have initial goals of organizational wellness have good intentions. Without a deeper knowledge base of organizational wellness, it is unfortunately common to miss possibilities for harm reduction or always provide the positive impacts as intended.
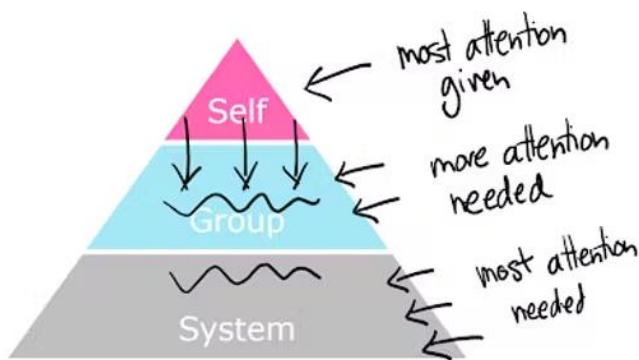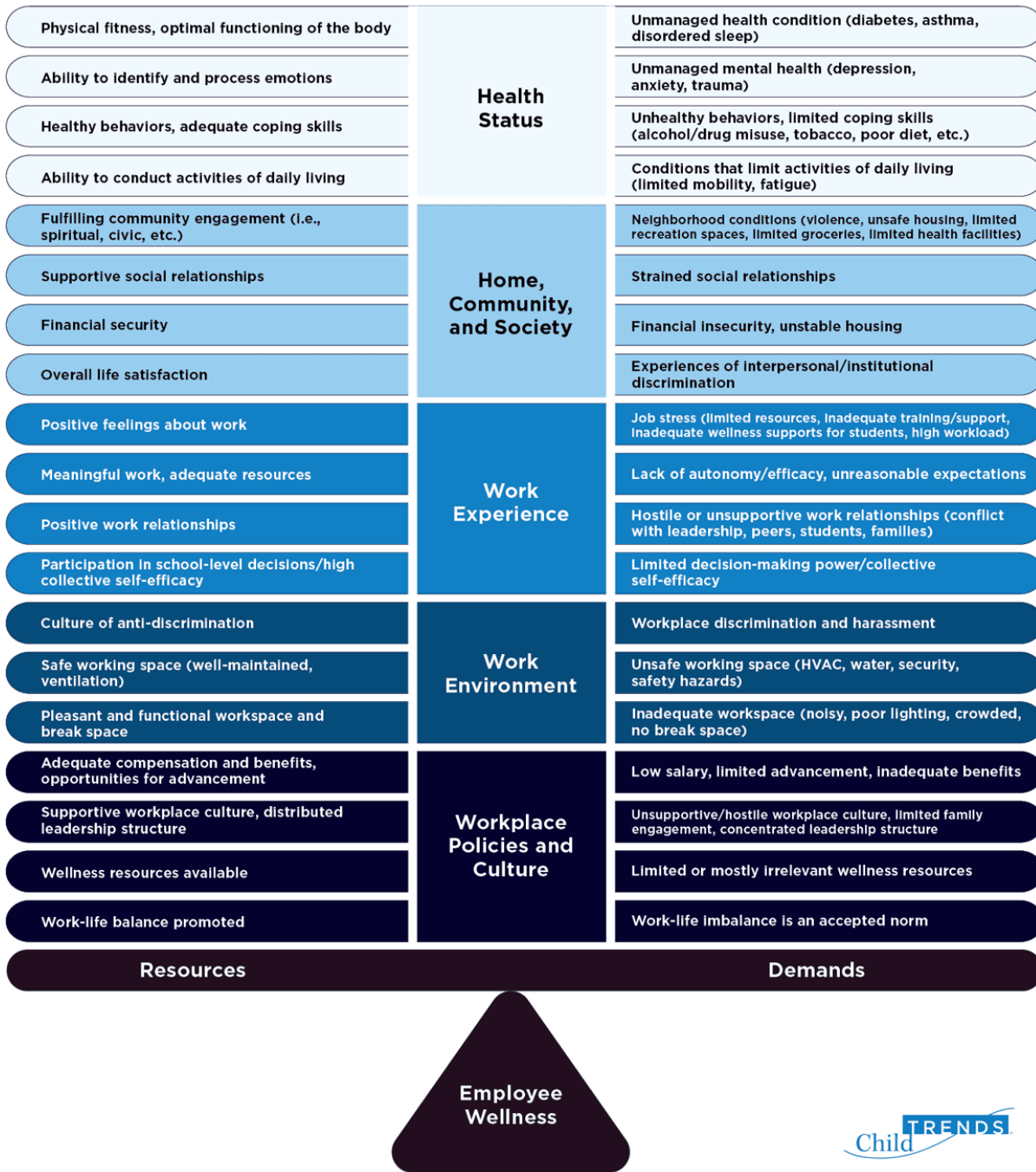

Some easy examples of better understanding wellness are first the wellness pyramid from Sean Slade, 2021. This easy visual makes clear the biggest impact on wellness is systems. When systems are in place, individuals have greater opportunity and capacity to take part in communal or group care, which is the second biggest impact. Only when these are addressed can individuals then have any real ability to make smaller impacts that would qualify as self-care. Self-care, of course, having the least impact on wellness. As Paul Gorski in *Fix Injustice, Not Kids* says "Yes, burnout is an individual issue, we must do a better job of taking care of ourselves. But it's also a community issue."

Another helpful visual of the impact workplaces have on overall wellness comes from Child Trends Comprehensive School Employee Wellness Framework (see next page). Workplaces can take accountability for: policies and culture, work environment, and work experience. Workplaces can be thoughtful of the resources they make available and demands they place on staff in each area. Only after these are intentionally addressed should workplaces proceed towards additional goals that might be in interaction with community wellness or workers' individual health status. This visual shows that workplaces can acknowledge and respond to the deep impact they have on one's overall well-being.

Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

Comprehensive School Employee Wellness Framework

Resources		Demands
Physical fitness, optimal functioning of the body	**Health Status**	Unmanaged health condition (diabetes, asthma, disordered sleep)
Ability to identify and process emotions		Unmanaged mental health (depression, anxiety, trauma)
Healthy behaviors, adequate coping skills		Unhealthy behaviors, limited coping skills (alcohol/drug misuse, tobacco, poor diet, etc.)
Ability to conduct activities of daily living		Conditions that limit activities of daily living (limited mobility, fatigue)
Fulfilling community engagement (i.e., spiritual, civic, etc.)	**Home, Community, and Society**	Neighborhood conditions (violence, unsafe housing, limited recreation spaces, limited groceries, limited health facilities)
Supportive social relationships		Strained social relationships
Financial security		Financial insecurity, unstable housing
Overall life satisfaction		Experiences of interpersonal/institutional discrimination
Positive feelings about work	**Work Experience**	Job stress (limited resources, inadequate training/support, inadequate wellness supports for students, high workload)
Meaningful work, adequate resources		Lack of autonomy/efficacy, unreasonable expectations
Positive work relationships		Hostile or unsupportive work relationships (conflict with leadership, peers, students, families)
Participation in school-level decisions/high collective self-efficacy		Limited decision-making power/collective self-efficacy
Culture of anti-discrimination	**Work Environment**	Workplace discrimination and harassment
Safe working space (well-maintained, ventilation)		Unsafe working space (HVAC, water, security, safety hazards)
Pleasant and functional workspace and break space		Inadequate workspace (noisy, poor lighting, crowded, no break space)
Adequate compensation and benefits, opportunities for advancement	**Workplace Policies and Culture**	Low salary, limited advancement, inadequate benefits
Supportive workplace culture, distributed leadership structure		Unsupportive/hostile workplace culture, limited family engagement, concentrated leadership structure
Wellness resources available		Limited or mostly irrelevant wellness resources
Work-life balance promoted		Work-life imbalance is an accepted norm

Resources — **Demands**

Employee Wellness

Child TRENDS

To think deeper on the dynamic between system and self-care we can refer to Robert Crawford who coined "healthism." This is the ideology that health is the sole responsibility of the individual, therefore advancing value judgements, assumptions and hierarchies that have more to do with power and privilege than well-being. Workplaces can be reflective of bias when it comes to human health and well-being by continuing to learn as individuals and as teams and build systems level supports for adults into their Multi-Tiered System of Supports.

It should be noted, self-care can be a powerful and personal tool of resistance against systemic unwellness. Audrey Lord said, "Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation, and that is an act of political warfare." When deeply understood and intentionally acted upon, this a radical way forward through wellness impacts. Fully inclusive wellness in the workplace leaves capacity for individuals to address self-care in a way that fits best for their unique needs. Workplaces can acknowledge systems level impacts and responsibility to systems level care which will better allow for individuals to have deeper access to their own self-care practices over time.

For more Information on the why, what, and how of organizational wellness in the workplace check out the additional resources as well as the December Graduation Equity Webinar.

Bridget Underdahl
 Assistant Director, Mental Health Systems
a SAMHSA Project AWARE *funded initiative*

Student Engagement & K12 Supports
Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)
Phone: 360.790.0527

All students prepared for postsecondary pathways, careers, and civic engagement.

Subscribe to SES Engage Newsletter and Alerts