



# Well-being in education in childhood and adolescence

## Research summary March 2022

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## Background

The aim of this study is to give the International Baccalaureate (IB) and IB World Schools (IBWS) an overview of the latest research behind well-being in childhood and adolescence. The report can be used by the IB to develop a thoughtful, strategic, and evidence-based approach to well-being across IB programmes. The study also provides a well-being framework that can inspire and guide well-being practices within the IB community of schools.

### Student-centred well-being

This report focuses on subjective well-being—specifically, how a young person evaluates their own life at school. With a modern, student-centred view, it is crucial to consider the perspectives of young people themselves, which often differ from the views of adults.

**This subjective well-being approach suggests that the young person's own positive experience or appraisal is the overarching good to strive for, and the most important indicator for them.**

The definition of well-being used in this report involves three key areas of subjective well-being: life satisfaction; affect; and meaning or purpose. In particular, the researchers propose a school-specific definition of well-being.

***"This school promotes the well-being of all students. We define well-being as our students being satisfied with their school lives, having positive experiences at school, having positive feelings about school, and believing that what they do at school gives them some purpose and meaning."***

## Research design

The study involved three main phases. A literature review offered an overview of the leading international scientific research and initiatives that have been established to define, measure, and enhance student well-being (ages 3–19) in school settings.

Researchers then present a well-being framework and corresponding set of principles, based on evidence from the literature review, that can be used across ages and stages in all school contexts. The study used school life satisfaction as the key performance indicator, as this gives schools the power to move the needle on student well-being. The framework incorporates the areas that show the most potential in the literature to impact school life satisfaction and student well-being.

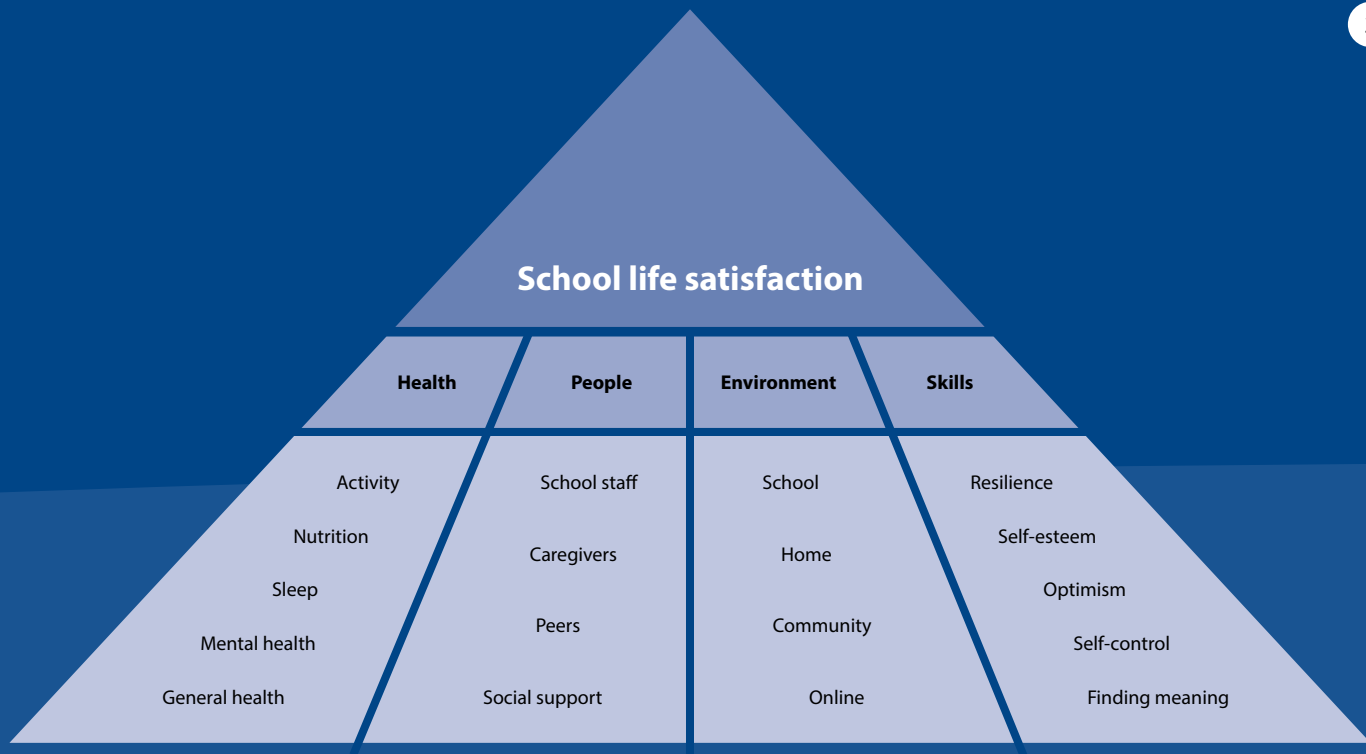
Lastly, a school stakeholder questionnaire was sent to a small subset of IBWS to obtain feedback on the framework as well as the strengths and challenges of implementing such a framework in a school setting.

## Key findings from the literature review

- **Childhood and adolescence are key developmental windows** for psychological interventions in areas like well-being. Well-being interventions can not only improve the life of the young person, but can also influence cognitive developmental processes to prepare them for adulthood.
- **There is value in using school time, money, and resources to improve student well-being.** These improvements will likely not only have immediate benefits for students, but may also have a driving effect on other positive outcomes (individually, socially, and academically) and could positively impact the future lives of young people as they mature into adulthood.
- Psychological functioning is a complicated predictor of well-being, and more research evidence is needed before firm conclusions can be drawn about which elements influence well-being. Related areas that show promise are **resilience, self-esteem, optimism, growth mindset, self-control, emotional regulation, and finding meaning or purpose.**
- **Family interactions are very impactful on the well-being of young people and, for children in particular, they are the most significant driver.** While schools and initiatives have very little control over the home environment, they can provide guidance and information to caregivers about how they can support their child's well-being.
- **School climate** is influential for both students and staff, and impacts many other drivers of well-being. It is particularly important for the school environment to feel safe and for teachers to have good relationships with students.
- **Cooperative learning** in the classroom is very important for well-being. Young people benefit from seeing themselves as part of a team; they can benefit from competition when it is team-based rather than focused on individuals.
- There is a place for both **whole-school approaches and targeted interventions.** If implemented properly, whole-school approaches can be effective; however, targeted interventions are still needed, and are helpful for young people who are struggling.
- **Community consultation and ownership** is recommended for well-being strategies to be adopted and promoted by the school community. Community stakeholders could include parents and caregivers, students, staff, and the wider community. Crucially, consultation should include student voices and a child-focused approach.
- **Well-being policies and strategies should be formalized,** any intervention implemented should have clear guidelines, and staff should know which areas they are individually responsible for.
- Interventions should have a **sound theoretical base,** and school stakeholders should ensure that these essential theoretical elements are taught during the intervention and not lost through adaptation.
- External experts can be useful for the initial set up of an intervention, but for the intervention to thrive, **in-house staff must take over to ensure that the intervention becomes embedded** and is successful in the longer-term.

## The well-being framework

This framework is intended as a broad overview of factors that are likely involved in well-being in



schools internationally. Based on the literature review, researchers identified promising elements for influencing well-being.

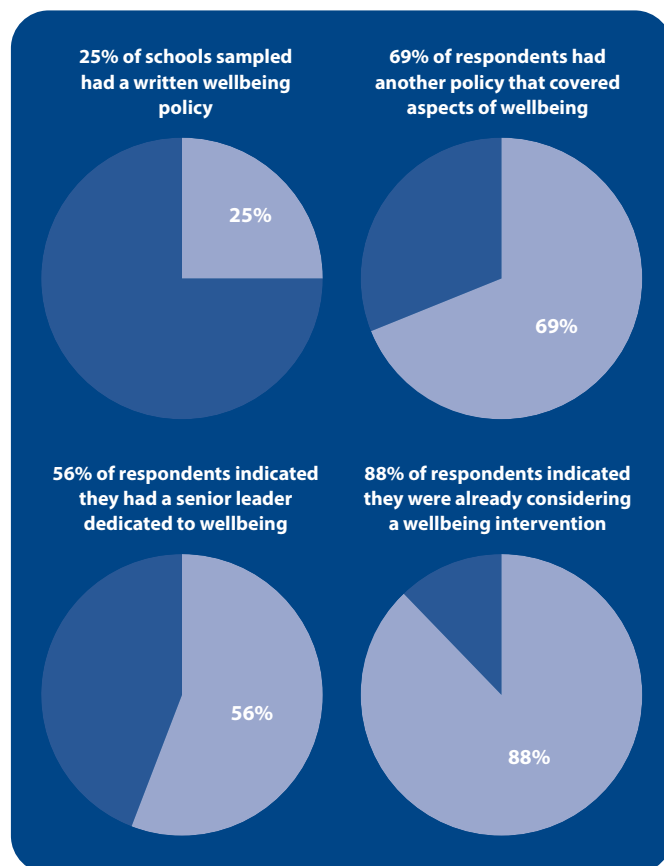
The framework is intended to cover all ages and stages, but depending on the individual student and context, each of these drivers may be more or less influential on school life satisfaction. Therefore, the framework has no set hierarchy and is presented within four themes: **health, people, environment, and skills** (see sections 2.1.1–2.1.4 of the full report for details about each theme and category).

The crucial element of this framework is that each of these areas can be explored independently within schools based on their individual needs. The framework is meant to be a guide for school stakeholders to explore variables that might be of interest at the programme or whole-school level, and schools should be able to pick and choose which areas are appropriate to target for their population. It aims to be practical and flexible, and to create as little burden as possible for schools and teachers.

## School feedback

The feedback from a small sample of IBWS suggested that most schools are interested in well-being and are considering or already taking action to improve well-being in their school. Schools were also generally positive about the proposed well-being framework.

Results showed that while only 25% of schools sampled had a written well-being policy, 69% of respondents indicated that they had another school policy that covered well-being aspects. 56% of respondents indicated that their school had a member of the senior leadership team dedicated to well-being. Encouragingly, most respondents (88%) indicated that they were already considering well-being interventions.





## Recommendations

- **There is seemingly no trade-off between well-being and academic performance. Put simply: happier young people make better learners.** Schools can feel confident in using time and resources to improve student well-being with the knowledge that this will likely also lead to improvements in academic attainment.
- **Each school or educational setting should decide which definition of well-being works well in their context.** Emphasis should be placed on what is possible within the school setting with a focus on two aspects: **can we measure it, and can we influence it.**
- **Focusing on subjective well-being is the clearest logical and practical approach for schools.** Subjective well-being is how people think about and experience their lives.
- **Post-COVID-19 interventions are needed in schools to support young people and staff with their well-being after a challenging period.**
- **Socio-demographic factors are important predictors of well-being.** Although schools cannot influence many of these factors (such as age, gender, ethnicity, and genetics), schools can use this knowledge to explore the well-being

of populations in their own educational setting and implement interventions that will decrease disparities in well-being.

- Physical health (including the absence of disease or illness, physical activity, diet, and sleep) is crucial to well-being, and a deficit in any area of physical health can have a significant impact. **Robust evidence suggests that there is a link between physical activity and well-being—this is a key area that schools and interventions should explore.**
- The interactions between peers at school are very important for young people’s well-being, especially in adolescence. **One key area that any well-being policy should focus on is building social support and reducing instances of bullying.**
- **Teacher well-being is a predictor of student well-being,** and the research is nearing a causal relationship. **Any well-being policies should emphasize ways to support teacher well-being.**
- **Schools should assess school-related anxiety within their community** to find out whether students are suffering from school-related anxiety and if there are any key areas, such as workload, that are particularly troubling for them.

## Conclusions

There is a great deal of interest in well-being science from schools and policymakers, and the demand is higher than ever due to the changes globally as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. A focus on subjective well-being and school life satisfaction is practical, measurable, and comprehensive and gives schools and the IB an opportunity to make a difference in the lives of young people.

This summary was developed by the IB Research department. A copy of the full report is available at: [www.ibo.org/en/research/](http://www.ibo.org/en/research/). For more information on this study or other IB research, please email [research@ibo.org](mailto:research@ibo.org).

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