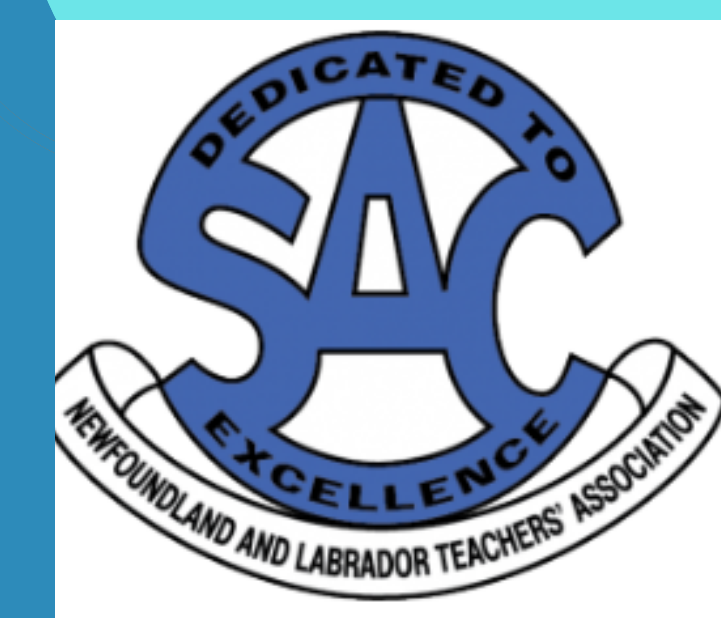




THE WELL PRINCIPAL

Balancing Leadership, Wellness, and School Culture - uLead 2026, Banff Alberta



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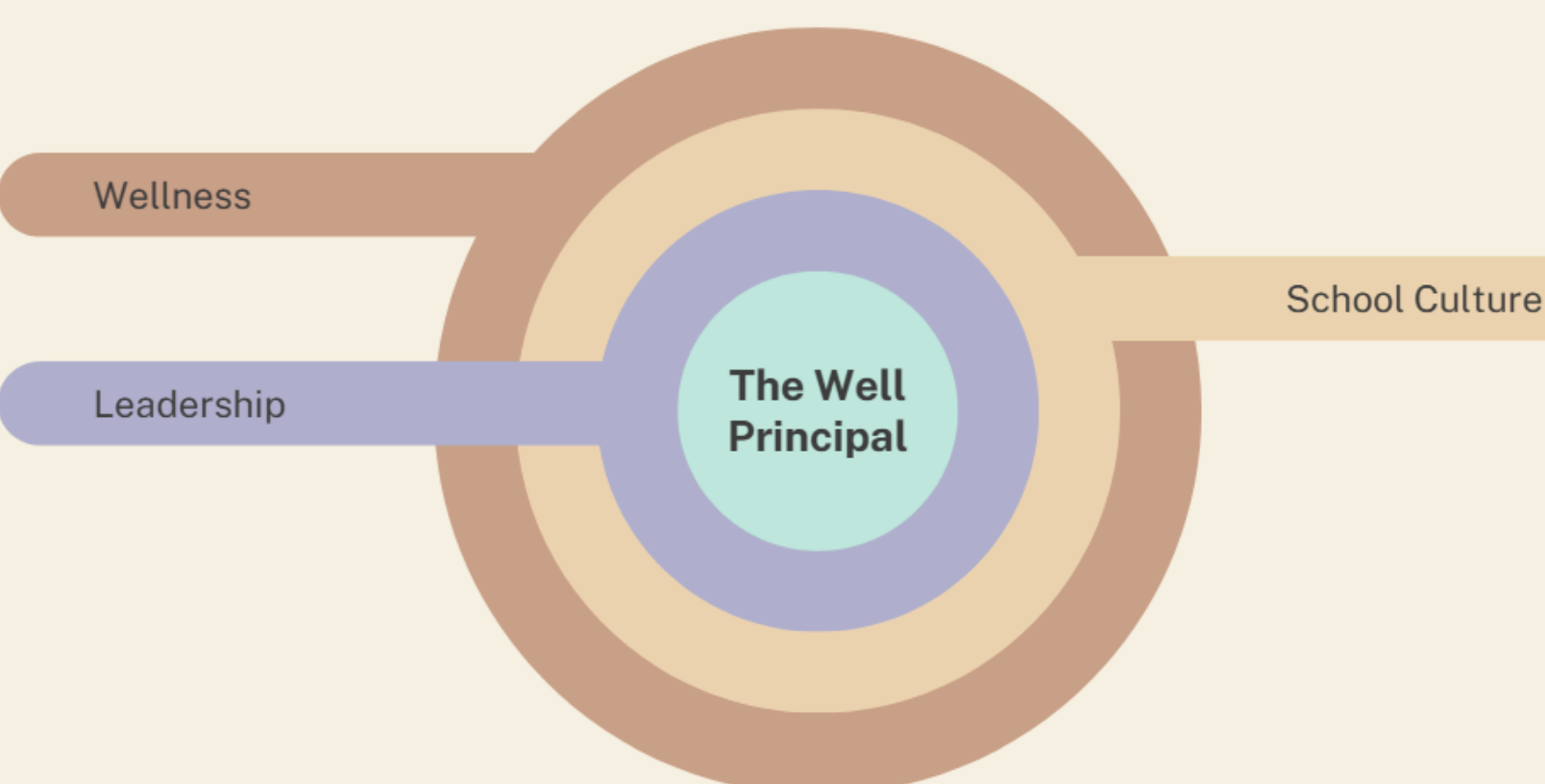
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Introduction & Rationale

As we reimagine school leadership for a post-pandemic and rapidly evolving educational landscape, it is critical to shift the narrative around what it means to lead effectively. Increasingly, school administrator wellness has emerged as a significant global concern (Heffernan et al., 2023), underscoring the need for leadership models that prioritize not only instructional capacity but also the well-being and sustainability of those who lead.

Layers of a Well Principal



Literature Review

Administrator wellness is a critical determinant of school culture and organizational health. Principals who effectively regulate their emotions serve as stabilizing figures within the school, modeling adaptive responses to stress, conflict, and uncertainty. Through consistent self-regulation and reflective practice, administrators communicate norms of psychological safety and demonstrate productive approaches to managing emotional challenges, thereby supporting staff and student well-being (Gilbreathe, 2023).

The consequences of administrator burnout further underscore the importance of wellness. Chronic stress and emotional exhaustion erode relational trust, weaken communication, and diminish perceptions of support, negatively affecting staff morale and instructional consistency. Burnout also compromises operational effectiveness by fostering reactive decision-making and reducing organizational efficiency. Collectively, these effects destabilize school environments and hinder sustained improvement efforts, reinforcing the central role of administrator wellness in maintaining effective schools (Maxwell & Riley, 2017; Phillips & Sen, 2011).

Rising administrator attrition intensifies these concerns. School leaders face increasingly complex roles characterized by heavy workloads, heightened parental expectations, and expanded responsibilities related to student behavior and discipline. Many administrators also experience professional isolation and culture shock, which further undermine career longevity (Heffernan et al., 2023; Kaiser & Thompson, 2021; Kutsyuruba et al., 2022). Together, these pressures highlight the urgent need to prioritize administrator wellness in educational research and practice.

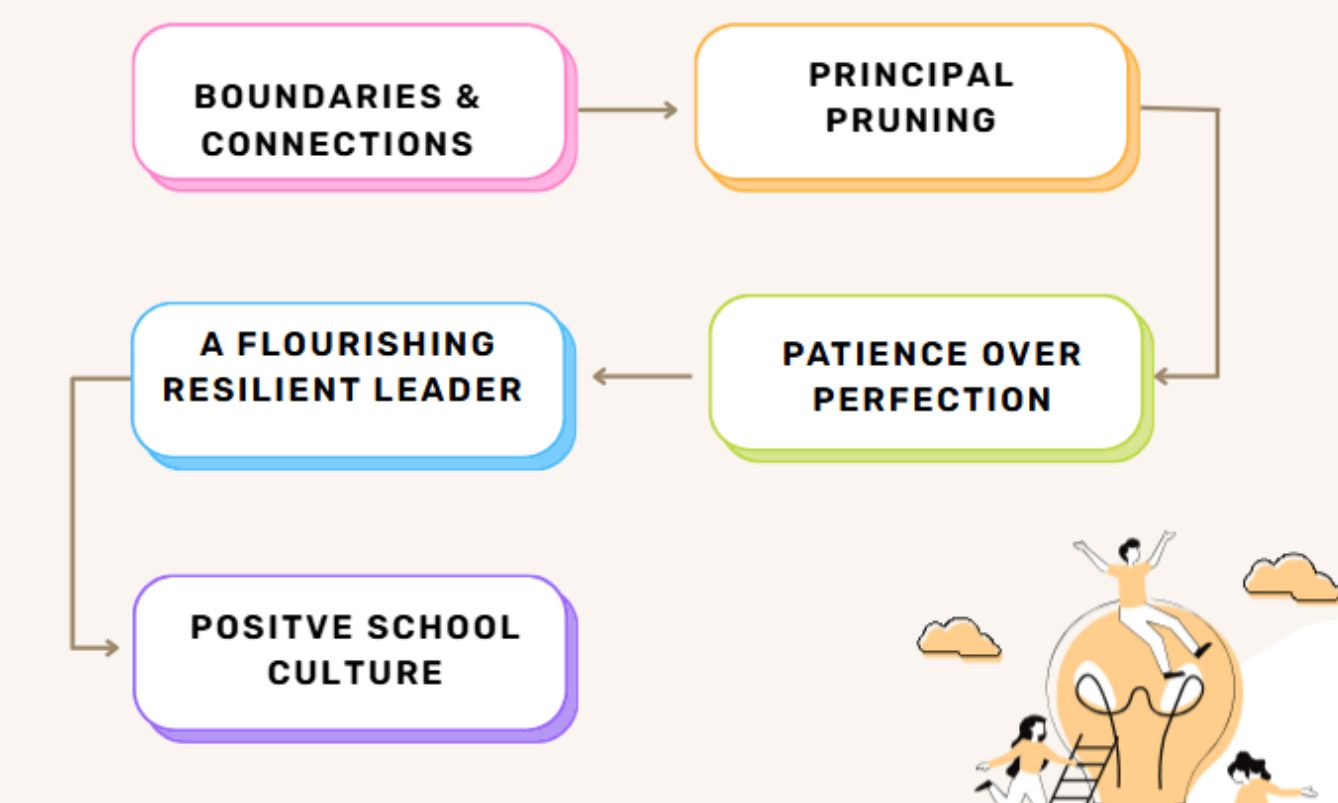
Results & Discussion

Research on school leadership increasingly highlights patience, intentional growth, and wellness-oriented practices as essential to sustaining administrator effectiveness. Flourishing is defined as a state of optimal well-being characterized by positive emotions, engagement, meaning, accomplishment, and strong social relationships (Rosebrock & Breakspear, 2025). For school administrators, flourishing extends beyond the absence of burnout to include thriving both personally and professionally, enabling sustained performance, resilience, and health.

Leaders who prioritize patience over perfection recognize that incremental, consistent improvements can generate meaningful long-term change. Practices such as setting clear boundaries, engaging in principal pruning by eliminating responsibilities before adopting new initiatives, prioritizing self-care, and cultivating supportive professional and personal relationships have been shown to enhance both well-being and leadership effectiveness (Kutsyuruba et al., 2024; Rosebrock & Breakspear, 2025).

By approaching leadership through a wellness-focused lens and allowing time for reflection and growth, administrators are better positioned to sustain resilience, foster positive school cultures, and support long-term organizational improvement. Collectively, these findings underscore the importance of deliberate, wellness-oriented leadership in promoting administrator flourishing and healthy school communities.

BALANCING LEADERSHIP, WELLNESS, AND SCHOOL CULTURE



Conclusion

Administrator wellness and intentional leadership are foundational to thriving school communities. Research shows that flourishing leaders exhibit resilience and optimal engagement rather than simply the absence of burnout—drive higher organizational performance (Rosebrock & Breakspear, 2025). Specifically, practices such as "principal pruning" and reflective self-care significantly enhance leadership capacity (Kutsyuruba et al., 2024). Thus, educational policy must prioritize administrator flourishing not as a luxury, but as a prerequisite for sustainable school environments, where leadership, wellness, and school culture is balanced.

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