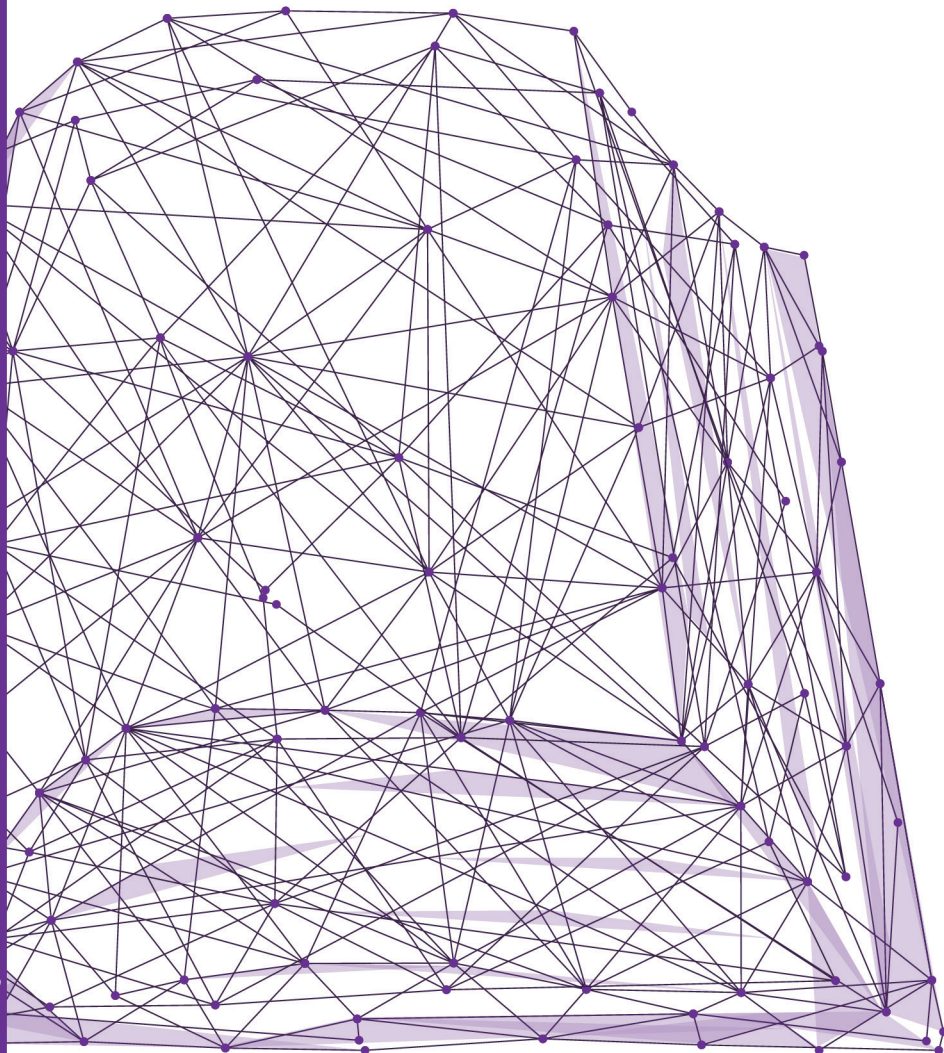


PROMOTING YOUTH WELL-BEING THROUGH HEALTH AND EDUCATION: INSIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES



Wing Yi Chan
Jennifer Sloan
Anita Chandra

RAND Corporation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Putting well-being at the heart of planning, policy making, and resource allocation is emerging as critical to the development of thriving communities and nations. We examined the academic and grey literature to identify theoretical frameworks that integrate health and education. We identified and described policies and programs supporting well-being around the world, and interviewed experts from each location to gain a deeper understanding of them. The report found that although well-being frameworks that integrate education and health exist, few of them have been examined rigorously to reveal how *both* educational and health outcomes can be achieved together. We found that promoting youth well-being was a priority in all the case studies, but that the integration of policy and action varied greatly in effectiveness. Findings from analysis of the frameworks and case studies suggest a variety of recommendations for educators, policy makers, and communities that could significantly improve education through integration with health and well-being.

Lerner's 5Cs of positive youth development and Bronfenbrenner's bioecological systems model guided the selection of the frameworks. The report found that these frameworks address education and health across multiple levels of the human ecology: individual, school, district, and community. Interventions applying theories of intelligence and personality and mindfulness teach students skills to change their attitudes and behaviors. Positive education and social and emotional learning (SEL) guide the development of school and district-level interventions. Finally, the integrated student supports (ISS) model is designed to transform schools into institutions where students, families, and members of the community can receive the full range of human, social, and health services.

Emerging evidence supports the effectiveness of interventions that are guided by these frameworks. However, most evidence indicates only short-term gains because longitudinal studies of more distal improvements are scarce. Further, with the exception of school-based SEL interventions and the integrated students supports model, few interventions have addressed multiple outcomes across both educational and health domains. Of the health-related outcomes, physical health is rarely examined; most studies investigated the impact of interventions on mental and emotional health. Further research needs to identify and test pathways that lead to both short-term and long-term educational and comprehensive health gains in youth. Existing research also identifies issues related to implementation, such as partnership and sustainability, as key factors to influencing an intervention's effect.

While promoting youth well-being was a priority in all the case examples, the quality of integration of policy with an intervention varied greatly. Policies and programs that aimed at changing individual attitudes, emotions, and behaviors showed the strongest evidence of success in improving youth educational and health outcomes. Policies and programs designed to create systematic change have not been as impactful. To effect change beyond the individual level, policies and programs require more human and social capital. Moreover, system-level changes are more difficult to document. To advance the understanding of how well-being can be improved through education and health, policies and programs need to take on a more systems-based approach and go beyond changing individual student outcomes. Research needs to develop more effective evaluation tools that measure the impact of more complex policies and programs.

The review of frameworks that promote both health and educational gains provides some insight into future direction. Taken together with the case examples, there are various recommendations for how these well-being approaches integrating education and health may be tailored, adopted, and implemented. We describe implications for broader youth well-being strategy development, program delivery and implementation, and evaluation. For strategy development, a multi-systems approach that links educational systems and health systems is needed. The literature review of frameworks and analysis of case examples also suggest that school is an effective setting to deliver interventions that aim to support improvements in both education and health. Further, youth well-being strategies needs to consider civic participation as an additional pathway to positive education and health. Some of the case studies have incorporated civic participation as a component; however, it has not been a focus in program development. For implementation, a careful consideration of the host setting including a thorough needs and strengths assessment of all stakeholders is important. Next, a system must be in place to develop a structured protocol and to monitor progress of implementation. More comprehensive evaluation of processes and outcomes is needed to improve implementation.

Drawing from our analysis of the frameworks and examination of the case examples, we conclude with policy and program recommendations relevant for communities and countries looking to improve youth educational and health outcomes in a more focused way. As illustrated by the case examples, partnerships among government ministries is key to developing a multi-systems approach. Developing an evidence-based framework that details the pathways that would lead to better educational and health outcomes needs to be central to any policy development. A clearinghouse to help facilitate data sharing and learning about evidence-based practices is important to designing and implementing effective programs. Rigorous evaluation is needed to assess the quality of implementation and program effectiveness.

