

Article

School Renewal and School Well-Being: A Case Study

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Abstract

In this longitudinal case study, we examined school well-being during the change process. We operationalized the change process as the school renewal model and viewed school well-being from the perspective of the PERMA (positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment) model. We found that all elements of the PERMA model were manifested in the school renewal process and that the school renewal process was not dominated solely by conflict and tension, as the literature typically suggests about the change process. The findings of the study suggest the possibility of reframing tension as productive rather than detrimental in the school renewal context. This study also advances the construct of school well-being as an organizational property.

Keywords: school renewal; school well-being; implementation integrity; the PERMA model

1. Introduction

School change is usually depicted as being associated with conflict and tension. In this article, we focus on the intersection of school renewal (a model for school change) and school well-being, investigating how the school renewal process transpires from the perspective of the well-being model of PERMA (positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment). In other words, what motivates this study is the desire to understand how well-being is manifested in the school change process, in this case, the school renewal process. We want to understand the dynamic relationship between school renewal and school well-being and provide guidance for the school renewal process. Therefore, this study lies at the intersection of school change and school well-being, with school change being operationalized as the school renewal process and school well-being viewed from the model of PERMA.

We contextualize the study by reviewing the literature on well-being in schools, introducing the school renewal model, and raising questions about school well-being during the school renewal process. We then describe the case study method and present the results on school well-being during the school renewal process using the PERMA framework. We also discuss the implications of the findings by debunking the myth of the dominance of conflict and tension in the change process and by emphasizing the school renewal process's association with various elements of school well-being. The case study was conducted in a Midwest state in the US.



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2. Literature Review

2.1. Conceptualizing Well-Being

The concept of well-being has been discussed across disciplines from philosophy to psychology. The *APA Dictionary of Psychology* defines well-being as “a state of happiness and contentment, with low levels of distress, overall good physical and mental health and outlook, or good quality of life” (APA, 2020).

Current theoretical discussions have distinguished two forms of well-being: subjective well-being (SWB) and psychological well-being (PWB). From the measurement perspective, Andrews and McKennell (1980) conceptualized SWB as comprising both cognitive components (e.g., life satisfaction) and affective components (e.g., happiness). Empirical evidence has shown that SWB is closely related to indicators of health, social relationships, and work performance (Diener, 1984; Diener et al., 2018). In contrast, psychological well-being involves a broader conception that includes eudaimonic elements such as purpose in life, autonomy, and personal growth (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, 1989).

2.2. Literature on Well-Being in Schools

Teacher Well-Being. Teacher well-being has emerged as a critical issue in contemporary educational research, driven by persistent concerns related to burnout, stress, and teacher attrition. Empirical research consistently demonstrates that teachers’ well-being is closely associated with their physical and mental health, instructional quality, and professional commitment (Diener et al., 2018; Hascher et al., 2021).

The literature identifies several key antecedents of teacher well-being. At the individual level, psychological resources play a central role. Teacher self-efficacy and resilience have been repeatedly shown to buffer stress and reduce burnout, particularly in demanding instructional environments (Brown, 2012; Hascher et al., 2021; McCallum et al., 2017). Other non-cognitive attributes, including emotional intelligence and perceived control, further contribute to teachers’ emotional regulation and professional satisfaction (Grenville-Cleave & Boniwell, 2012; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Vesely et al., 2013).

Work-related demands constitute a second major domain. Increasing accountability pressures, role overload, and emotional labor have intensified teachers’ stress and exhaustion, often leading to burnout and withdrawal intentions (Brasfield et al., 2019; Curry & O’Brien, 2012). These findings suggest that teacher well-being is not solely an individual concern but is deeply embedded in organizational conditions and policy contexts.

Finally, relational factors within schools have gained growing attention. While teacher–student relationships are well documented as central to teacher well-being (Spilt et al., 2011), far fewer studies examine adult relationships in schools. Emerging evidence indicates that supportive leadership and collegial trust can enhance teachers’ sense of belonging and emotional security (Lester et al., 2020; Scaletta & Hughes, 2022). Nevertheless, the role of principal–teacher relationships remains underdeveloped in the teacher well-being literature.

Principal Well-Being. In contrast to the extensive evidence linking principal leadership to organizational effectiveness and student achievement (Hallinger, 2011; Wu & Shen, 2022), relatively limited attention has been devoted to principals’ well-being. As principals’ roles have expanded—particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic—workload intensification, role ambiguity, and emotional demands have contributed to heightened stress and burnout (DeMatthews et al., 2021; Ghamrawi & Al-Thani, 2023; E. J. Su-Keene et al., 2024).

Much of the existing research on principal well-being is grounded in the job demands–resources (JD–R) model, which explains how excessive job demands undermine well-being unless balanced by adequate resources (Bakker & Demerouti, 2014). Longitudinal evidence confirms that sustained workload, long working hours, and diminished sense of control significantly reduce principals’ well-being and increase burnout risk (Marsh et al., 2023).

Systematic reviews further identify core dimensions of principal well-being that closely mirror the PERMA framework, including positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, accomplishment, and physical health (Doyle Fosco, 2022).

Given structural constraints that limit the feasibility of workload reduction, many studies emphasize individual coping and self-management strategies, such as mindfulness, emotional regulation, sleep hygiene, and positive psychology interventions (Collie et al., 2020; E. Su-Keene & DeMatthews, 2022; Sytsma, 2009). Peer support has also been proposed as a protective mechanism, drawing on models from healthcare professions (Shapiro & Galowitz, 2016). However, principals frequently report professional isolation, raising questions about the sustainability and accessibility of peer-based supports (Collard, 2003; O'Neill & Glasson, 2019). Overall, principal well-being research remains fragmented and largely individual-focused, with limited attention to relational or organizational dynamics within schools.

Well-Being of the Principal–Teacher Relationship. Beyond individual well-being, an emerging but underexplored domain concerns the well-being of the principal–teacher relationship. Leadership research consistently shows that principals exert their greatest influence through teachers' motivation, capacity, and working conditions (Leithwood et al., 2020). Integrated leadership models further demonstrate that the alignment of principal and teacher leadership positively affects organizational processes and student outcomes (Sebastian et al., 2017).

Despite these insights, few studies explicitly link principal–teacher relationships to well-being. Existing evidence suggests that relationship-oriented leadership behaviors—such as inclusion, trust, and emotional support—significantly shape teachers' emotional experiences and staff morale (Cherkowski, 2012; Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993). Conversely, negative or mistreating leadership behaviors are associated with anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and depressive symptoms among teachers (Blase & Blase, 2002; Blase et al., 2008).

Cognitive mismatches between principals' self-perceptions and teachers' evaluations further complicate relational well-being. When principals view their leadership more positively than teachers do, organizational effectiveness tends to decline (Tosh & Doss, 2019), though the implications for well-being remain largely unexplored. Qualitative studies indicate that, while principals often express concern for teacher well-being, school-level well-being initiatives frequently prioritize students, revealing a persistent gap between leadership intentions and implemented practices (Ghamrawi & Al-Thani, 2023).

Conceptualizing leadership well-being as a relational construct highlights the emotional and professional quality of interactions between principals and teachers. This perspective extends beyond individual stress or resilience, emphasizing mutual trust, shared purpose, and integrated leadership as foundational to sustainable school well-being.

The PERMA Framework and School Well-Being. Among contemporary well-being models, Seligman's PERMA framework has become particularly influential in educational research. PERMA conceptualizes well-being as a multidimensional construct encompassing Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment (M. E. Seligman, 2011). Empirical validation studies show a strong association between PERMA measures and subjective well-being (Butler & Kern, 2016; M. Seligman, 2018).

The PERMA framework has been widely applied in school contexts across cultures, with consistent findings that well-being is positively associated with physical health, work engagement, and organizational commitment among teachers and school leaders (Kern et al., 2015). Related whole-school well-being models similarly emphasize multidimensional structures integrating emotional, social, and organizational components (Konu & Rimpelä, 2002; Soutter, 2011; Soutter et al., 2011).

Importantly, PERMA provides a conceptual bridge between individual and relational well-being. The dimensions of relationships and meaning are particularly salient for understanding interactions in the school, while engagement and accomplishment align with leadership integration and professional efficacy. As such, PERMA offers a robust theoretical foundation for examining well-being as both an individual experience and a relational property of school organizations.

2.3. Conflict and Tension in the School Change Process

In education, scholars have consistently treated conflict and tension as central elements of the change processes (Fullan, 1993, 2001; McQuillan, 2008). Essentially, change requires perturbations that disrupt established routines, roles, and meaning systems (Beabout, 2012). Pressure is therefore necessary to prevent stagnation and to unsettle established practices, roles, and assumptions. However, pressure alone does not lead to meaningful change. Change also requires support that helps the principal, teachers, and others make sense of new demands, reconstruct their work, and sustain a sense of belonging within the school community during periods of change. One central issue in educational change is, therefore, how the tension between pressure and support is addressed.

From the outside, individual schools are recognized as unique organizations. Over time, school systems have been organized as highly differentiated structures in order to respond to diverse student populations, educational objectives, and political expectations (Cohen et al., 2018). However, in the context of school reform, schools are often required to commit to standardized assessment systems with uniform criteria and quality benchmarks in order to secure external funding and to respond to pressures associated with accountability and market mechanisms (Cohen & Moffitt, 2010; Harris, 2010). As a result, conflict becomes a structural dilemma of educational change rather than a temporary disturbance (Cohen et al., 2018). To cope with these external pressures, school organizations continually engage in efforts to “bridge” and “buffer” competing demands. In practice, for example, principals have to navigate between conflicting value orientations, such as pressure versus support and autonomy versus accountability, thus leading to conflict and tension.

However, in practice, decades of school reform have repeatedly failed (Cuban, 1990; Shen, 2023). The problems are not only that many reforms failed to achieve their stated goals but also that the conflicts and tensions generated by successive “waves of reform” accumulated over time and produced fatigue and emotional disengagement among teachers and school leaders (Hargreaves & Goodson, 2006). Reforms that rely heavily on external drivers, policy cycles, performance targets, and technical solutions tend to amplify conflict and tension rather than resolve them.

2.4. Facilitating Educational Change

Because conflict and tension are inherent in educational change, scholars have long emphasized that meaningful school improvement requires not only pressure but also facilitation and support throughout the change process (Fullan, 1993, 2001). Early facilitation research conceptualized change facilitators as individuals who assist educators in navigating the complexities of implementation and organizational change (Hall, 1979; Hall & Hord, 1984; Hord et al., 1984). Rather than viewing change as a one-time event accomplished through mandates, workshops, or policy directives, this line of research emphasized that implementation is developmental, relational, and organizational in nature (Hall & Loucks, 1978; Hall & Hord, 2001). However, traditional facilitation models often assumed a relatively well-defined innovation and a desired direction for implementation (Louis, 1980; Hall & Hord, 2001). Facilitators were therefore expected to help schools adopt and use these innovations more effectively.

More recent research has expanded the understanding of facilitation beyond technical implementation support. Facilitators are increasingly described as critical friends, organizational partners, and collaborative leaders who help educators reflect on existing practices and navigate local challenges through dialogue and collective learning (Schwarz, 2005; Tajik, 2008). O'Brien et al. (2014), for example, highlighted the role of facilitators in guiding school self-evaluation processes by organizing professional dialogue, supporting reflection on practice, and coordinating improvement efforts within schools. Recent studies further emphasize facilitators' role in supporting collaboration, professional learning, and organizational capacity building across schools and professional networks (Prenger et al., 2021; Poortman et al., 2022).

Leadership has long been viewed as central to educational change and school improvement (Fullan, 2001). Within the educational change literature, instructional leadership has been one of the most influential approaches to understanding leadership for school improvement (Hallinger, 2003). A recent report from UNESCO described instructional leaders as change agents who support instructional improvement through professional learning, collaboration, feedback, and organizational support (Childress et al., 2020).

The early instructional leadership literature emphasized leadership practices that support teaching and learning through attention to curriculum, instruction, and professional practice (Hallinger & Murphy, 1985). Hallinger (2003) pointed out that instructional leadership should be understood not simply as instructional management but as a form of leadership that supports and guides educational change. From a research perspective, earlier instructional leadership research also tended to conceptualize the principal as the primary source of leadership for learning and emphasized relatively top-down approaches to school improvement (Barth, 2003; Leithwood, 1994). More recent studies increasingly conceptualize instructional leadership as a distributed process focused on student learning, organizational improvement, and the development of teacher capacity and commitment for school improvement (Marks & Printy, 2003; Spillane et al., 2003; York-Barr & Duke, 2004; Murphy et al., 2007; MacBeath & Dempster, 2009; Hallinger et al., 2020).

2.5. The School Renewal Model

For the last three decades, educational policy in the US has been dominated by the school reform model, a model that is deeply rooted in loose coupling theory. From this perspective, the educational system is viewed as loosely coupled, and classroom instruction is weakly linked to district, state, and federal policy structures. As a result, reform efforts have largely focused on tightening the loose coupling through externally driven mechanisms such as curriculum standards, state-wide testing, and accountability systems. These approaches assume that stronger alignment and external pressure will compel improvements in teaching and learning. While reform policies have succeeded in strengthening coherence at the higher system level, research has repeatedly shown that such efforts often struggle to penetrate the instructional core, leading to compliance-oriented behaviors, surface-level change, and limited impact on sustained classroom practice (Shen, 2023, 2026).

In contrast, the school renewal model is grounded in the theory of the bifurcated educational system, developed via large-scale modeling using national data, and it describes the educational system as consisting of two tectonic plates: a state–district–school plate and a classroom plate. Rather than attempting to tighten loose coupling through external controls, the renewal model focuses on bridging the bifurcation by strengthening professional capacity, instructional leadership, and teacher leadership within schools. Central to this approach is a win–win conception of principal and teacher leadership, in which leadership is win–win rather than zero-sum, and improvement is co-constructed rather than imposed. Through the high-integrity implementation of a change initiative focusing on the unique

situation of the school, the school renewal model emphasizes continuous improvement, internal accountability, and long-term sustainability—positioning principals and teachers not as passive recipients of reform but as active agents of renewal (Shen, 2023, 2026). Please see Table 1 for a comparison of the school reform and school renewal models.

Table 1. School reform model versus school renewal model.

The “Reform” Model	The “Renewal” Model
Shifting focus	Focus on students and their achievement
Driven by the reform agenda	Continuous school improvement
Externally driven	Balance between internal and external influences
The research, development, dissemination, and evaluation (RDDE) model	The dialogue, decision, action, and evaluation (DDAE) model
Implementation fidelity	Implementation integrity
Implementers as passive receivers	Implementers as active developers
External accountability	Internal responsibility and professionalism

3. Connecting the Literature Review and the Study

This study lies at the intersection of school change and school well-being and has the following characteristics: First, this study focuses on school well-being under the renewal model, providing a case study with a longitudinal perspective. Second, this study uses the PERMA framework to consistently capture various aspects of school well-being. Given that the school renewal model is built on the win–win leadership relationship between the principal and teachers and that school well-being is under-explored, as indicated by the literature, it is constructive to inquire into what elements are present and how these elements manifest in a school that engages in the school renewal process. The following research questions guided this study: Are the five elements of the PERMA framework manifested in the school renewal process? If so, how?

As will be discussed later, the case used for the study is an elementary school that joined a grant project titled “High-Impact Leadership (HIL) for School Renewal,” partnering with a state-wide initiative called “Reading Now Network” and others with a focus on improving literacy via the school renewal model. The school was in the project for 2.5 years. The project treated the school as a unit for change. The project and each school mutually agreed upon a school renewal facilitator who worked with the principal and school staff on a school renewal process—conducting school renewal rounds based on data, developing renewal initiatives unique to the school, and monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the renewal initiative. Please see Zheng et al. (2024) for more details of the school renewal process of the grant project. Among others, the school renewal model emphasizes the win–win relationship between the principal and teacher leadership and implementation integrity. The case study provides an opportunity to study the relationship between one particular form of school change (the renewal model) and school well-being.

4. Method

4.1. Case Selection

We narrowed our selection of case study schools from the pool of 75 in a grant project by first contacting all principals and asking them about their interest in participating in the research. We heard back from 19 principals. We then reviewed the 19 schools and excluded those that had under ten staff members, those that had new principals, or those whose artifact submissions indicated that they were not conducting school renewal cycles. Our selection criteria yielded nine schools. The research team then consulted the results obtained from the Orientation to School Renewal survey and used the best-case strategy

to choose the school that had the most amount of data and was among the schools with the highest scores on the Orientation to School Renewal survey. As a result, Prospect Elementary was selected as the best case to study school renewal and school well-being. We collected data between spring 2022 and spring 2023. The team of researchers included project directors who oversaw the entire project and ensured that the project delivered on promised outcomes. The primary data collector worked on the project but had no formal role in oversight or accountability.

4.2. Data Collection

Interviews. We conducted interviews with the principal, teacher leaders, and the school renewal facilitator using the principles of the ethnographic approach (Spradley, 1979). Each interview contained both standard and informant-specific elements about their professional backgrounds, perceptions of conditions at Prospect, involvement in HIL, and strategies for engaging in HIL activities. After each interview, we recorded notes about issues to follow up for next time. In sum, we conducted 42 interviews. The 42 interviews comprised 9 interviews with the principal, a total of 24 interviews with six teachers, and 9 interviews with the school renewal facilitator. All interviews were conducted at a time and location convenient for the participant. Before each interview, the researchers confirmed that the interview was still convenient and that the participants had sufficient energy. The interviews ranged in length from 25 to 60 min but typically lasted 45 min.

Observations. We complemented the interviews with observations of key HIL activities, including staff meetings, HIL leadership team meetings, professional development sessions, and HIL summits. During observations, we recorded “scratch notes” and then elaborated these notes each evening using our “head notes” (Emerson et al., 2011). Later in the study, as people became more familiar and comfortable, we audio-recorded sessions. Altogether, we conducted 8 full days of observations during which time we produced 613 double-spaced pages of field notes.

Documents. We collected documents from many sources, including locally produced and HIL-produced artifacts. The documents totaled several hundred pages. Data from the observations and documents are integrated throughout the findings.

Teacher Surveys and Student Achievement Data. As part of a larger study, we conducted a battery of school leadership surveys with teachers in the school, at the beginning and end of the grant project. Two validated and published instruments were used to collect survey data: “Orientation to School Renewal” (Shen et al., 2020, 2024) and “Learning-Centered School Leadership” (Shen et al., 2018). Both instruments have a high level of reliability, with Cronbach’s $\alpha = 0.97$. Both instruments also have high levels of factorial validity and concurrent validity for student achievement. “Orientation to School Renewal” has seven subscales, including continuous school improvement, implementation integrity, and internal responsibility and professionalism. “Learning-Centered School Leadership” also has seven subscales, including distributive and empowering leadership, real-time and embedded instructional assessment, and data-informed decision-making. The pre- and post-survey results augmented the qualitative data on school well-being. We also analyzed the school-level academic achievement before, during, and immediately after the project as an indicator of “achievement” in the PERMA framework.

4.3. Data Analysis and Integration

Creating a strong case description that would serve as a foundation for later analysis and integration was our first priority (Wolcott, 1994). We organized the case descriptions into segments based on the topic of discussion. This “topical coding” (Saldaña, 2014) proved valuable later and served as a catalyst for more analytic work.

In addition to topical coding data, we also wrote descriptive narratives for each informant. Another member of the research team read through each case while referencing the original transcripts. While reading and referencing, the team member wrote analytic memos that captured insights, raised points for discussion, and posed any unanswered questions. After completing the case descriptions, we sent each informant the case description for review and asked for a final interview. We thoroughly revised the case descriptions based on team member and informant feedback.

We then used the coding paradigm (i.e., basic conditions, tactics, or consequences) from Strauss (1987) to think about our individual case descriptions more analytically. The coding paradigm and our deep case knowledge helped us to surface a set of findings organized using the PERMA model. Reading through the case descriptions with the PERMA model in mind helped us to see how the case aligned with PERMA's different elements. We were able to reorganize each of the case descriptions using the elements of the PERMA model as a coding scheme. We then began integrating the re-organized individual case descriptions through writing. Writing helped us interrelate categories and identify gaps in understanding that forced us to return to the data. In fact, we remained closely engaged with the data throughout the writing process, as we started each new writing session by reading through an original case description and one transcript, document, or field note. We then wrote an analytic memo that captured the insights. Thus, writing and revision of the balancing matrix were carried out simultaneously, as we remained closely engaged with the data while integrating the tactics used across implementation stages into a coherent scheme to present the findings. The analysis was based primarily on data collected from the principal and the facilitator and secondarily on teacher interviews, observations, and the teacher survey. Its purpose was to shed light on how the school renewal process contributed to broader organizational well-being.

5. Results

5.1. Study Background

At the time of the study, John Peterson had been the Prospect principal for a few years (all names are pseudonyms). Before becoming principal, John Peterson was a teacher at Prospect. During his tenure of teaching, John Peterson formed many close friendships with his colleagues, and he regularly saw his teaching colleagues outside of school. His friendships were tested when he became principal, as this redefined both his relationships with the teachers and the teachers' perceptions of what the Prospect principal should do. John Peterson was the principal for the whole duration of the grant project.

Prospect teachers expected the principal to pay only scant attention to what they were doing in their classrooms, but John Peterson resisted these expectations. He wanted to be an instructional leader that helped the teachers hone their skills and improve their craft by supporting and challenging them. John Peterson felt that the tension between pressure and support was necessary for teacher growth, but balancing the two for maximum impact was difficult. He explained, "If I provide too much support and not enough tension, they stay status quo."

Early in his tenure, John Peterson underestimated how difficult changing the status quo could be. His efforts to become more involved in classrooms led to considerable teacher resistance, including union activity. These conflicts tested his resolve and left him feeling discouraged and unsure about how he should proceed. By the time HIL arrived, John Peterson still expressed interest in research-based best practices in professional learning sessions and staff meetings, and he had begun to merely hope that the teachers would enact change, rather than providing them with the direct support and pressure he had

once envisioned. With the above as the background, we present the findings using the PERMA framework.

5.2. Building “Positive Relationships”: Janet Fairbanks Came to Prospect Elementary School

Janet Fairbanks came to Prospect as a facilitator of school renewal as part of the arrangement of the HIL grant project. Her primary responsibility in this role was to help guide the Prospect Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) through the cycles of school renewal while also enacting the principles of HIL couched in appreciation for what the school had already accomplished in educating students well. The Prospect ILT consisted of the principal John Peterson, literacy coaches, and six teachers who received training from the HIL project, and initiated and led the renewal process in the school with the support of other staff.

Janet Fairbanks described how her first priority as facilitator was to “build the relationship with people so [that] they don’t look at you as an outsider. They look at you as a confidant. Someone who listens. Someone who bounces ideas off.” This meant that Janet Fairbanks did not engage John Peterson and other members of the ILT in HIL activities right away. She knew that she would have to build positive relationships if HIL were to be successful. She spent the first five months “building relationships” because “you can’t jump in” without first becoming familiar with the teachers. In order to build these relationships, Janet Fairbanks relied on establishing trust with the teachers through kind and pleasant interactions with them.

5.3. “Engagement”: Enacting the Phases of the HIL School Renewal Process

The next few sections describe how the HIL facilitator, Janet Fairbanks, used the HIL School Renewal Process to expand the leadership practices across the school from the principal to instructional coaches and to teachers. First, Janet Fairbanks empowered the principal (John Peterson) to exercise greater hands-on instructional leadership. Janet Fairbanks provided constant encouragement and practical guidance that enabled John Peterson to become more involved in classrooms and interact with the teachers more frequently about instructional matters. Second, Janet Fairbanks and John Peterson used these classroom visits to surface data about current instructional practices that then served as the foundation for the instructional leadership of the school’s literacy coaches. Third, the teachers enacted new practices and then had the opportunity to lead professional development sessions and give testimonials to the staff. Thus, improving instructional leadership at Prospect became a win-win situation that left all educators—and especially John Peterson—feeling more encouraged about their work and emboldened to continue improving their craft.

5.4. “Engagement” Through Empowering Greater Principal Instructional Leadership

In the fall of 2021, Janet Fairbanks helped John Peterson construct an ILT, plan and conduct ILT meetings, interpret performance data, identify a target growth area (writing process instruction), and develop a Gold Standard Implementation Guide (GSIG) that articulated research-based best practices as well as systems support that would help spread these practices schoolwide.

In the spring of 2022, Prospect Elementary School—led by John Peterson and Janet Fairbanks—entered into Phase IV of the HIL School Renewal Process. Specifically, John Peterson and Janet Fairbanks began progress monitoring by visiting classrooms to ensure that the teachers were enacting the best practices identified and highlighted in earlier renewal phases.

John Peterson knew that this would be a challenge. In his first few years as principal, he had encountered considerable pushback from the teachers when he tried to provide more

hands-on instructional leadership. Janet Fairbanks told John Peterson that, in previous years, he had committed “assumicide.” According to Janet Fairbanks, John Peterson had assumed that the teachers understood and responded appropriately to his expectations for instruction, but he had not actually monitored classrooms or otherwise earnestly endeavored to find out whether his assumptions were accurate. Janet Fairbanks insisted that implementation required oversight because, “What gets monitored gets done.”

Even though John Peterson desired to be more active in teachers’ classrooms in order to support best instructional practices, the thought of monitoring still intimidated him, and he admitted feeling “a hundred percent sneaky” when he and Janet Fairbanks began visiting classrooms regularly. Janet Fairbanks could sympathize with these feelings, but she would not let John Peterson use his discomfort as a reason to retreat. Instead, Janet Fairbanks helped him implement several strategies that would help alleviate some of the challenges. First, Janet Fairbanks and John Peterson told the teachers that they would be visiting ahead of time. They also informed teachers that the purpose of the visits was not to inspect the instruction of individual teachers but rather to gather information about schoolwide instructional trends and then provide support to help the school provide consistently excellent writing process instruction.

Despite efforts to build relationships with the teachers and establish their purpose for the visits, initially, the teachers did not want John Peterson or Janet Fairbanks to visit their classrooms. Even so, John Peterson and Janet Fairbanks persisted, primarily because Janet Fairbanks continued to stress to John Peterson that he could not become the instructional leader that he aspired to be without some pushback from the teachers. In other words, working through challenging situations with teachers was part of instructional leadership.

For the purpose of empowering John Peterson and maximizing school well-being, it was important to alleviate teacher resistance to the greatest extent possible. In addition to the strategies listed above, Janet Fairbanks and John Peterson established expectations for the visits. For instance, Janet Fairbanks never went on monitoring walks without John Peterson. They also let teachers know ahead of time the specific writing practices that they would be focusing on. Third, they framed these visits as “affirmation walks” and would leave an “affirmation note” with the teacher describing a practice that they observed and appreciated during the visit.

At the conclusion of each visit, Janet Fairbanks and John Peterson compared their affirmation notes, and, through this comparison, Janet Fairbanks concluded that John Peterson’s notes were not really affirming. Specifically, Janet Fairbanks said that John Peterson “would point out something that [teachers] probably should be working on” rather than noticing and appreciating a practice that she had observed. Janet Fairbanks believed that this was a missed opportunity to “just say, ‘Hey, what a great job you did here! You’re an awesome teacher!’” According to both John Peterson and Janet Fairbanks, Janet Fairbanks’ feedback changed the way that John Peterson wrote notes and built positive rapport with teachers.

Over time, informing the teachers of the purpose and focus of the visits, conducting these visits often, and affirming aspects of teacher instructional practice opened the door to more substantive engagement with the teachers about their writing instruction. During the visits, in addition to looking for elements of teacher practice that they could affirm, John Peterson and Janet Fairbanks also looked for evidence that indicated that the teachers’ practice aligned with expectations for implementing writing process instruction. To help them achieve a better understanding of the aggregate practices of writing process instruction at Prospect, John Peterson distributed student writing journals for the teachers to use to document their writing process instruction.

During the visits, John Peterson and Janet Fairbanks inspected these student journals to determine how much progress Prospect teachers were making in implementing writing process instruction. Reading through the student journals helped them make a key discovery—the teachers worked with students through planning and drafting but rarely documented teacher or peer feedback. They also found little or no evidence of the teachers asking students to revise and publish their writing.

5.5. “Engagement” Through Enlisting the Literacy Coaches and Empowering Their Instructional Leadership

Through her insistence and practical guidance on conducting classroom observations, collecting classroom data, and analyzing that data, Janet Fairbanks bolstered John Peterson’s instructional leadership and influence. Importantly, however, these efforts strengthened the instructional leadership of other key stakeholders rather than suppressing it.

For instance, the literacy coaches’ influence on teachers’ instruction expanded as a direct consequence of the work that Janet Fairbanks and John Peterson had accomplished. At the next staff meeting, Janet Fairbanks and John Peterson reported their generalized observations about their findings across classrooms, and they unveiled a plan to address the apparent roadblock. During the meeting, John Peterson commended the teachers for engaging the early stages of the writing process and encouraged them to see the process all the way through to publishing. Prior to the meeting, John Peterson met with the two literacy coaches to ask for their assistance in promoting revision and publishing in their one-on-one work with teachers. The coaches readily agreed, and, at the staff meeting, John Peterson explained how the two coaches (who were already heavily engaged with teachers in their classrooms) would be focusing on revision and publishing.

5.6. “Engagement” Through Elevating Teacher Leadership

In addition to empowering both the principal and the literacy coaches, Janet Fairbanks’ guidance and support in the context of the HIL School Renewal Process greatly enhanced the instructional leadership of the teachers.

John Peterson and Janet Fairbanks sought to get the teachers more involved in leading the effort to ensure high-quality writing process instruction schoolwide. They enlisted teachers with expertise in teacher feedback, peer feedback, revision, and publishing to lead professional learning sessions and present at staff meetings. The teachers soon felt more empowered and committed to the effort to improve writing process instruction.

Meanwhile, the visits continued, and, with Janet Fairbanks’ constant encouragement, John Peterson was able to strike a good balance between support and expectations for growth. The two literacy coaches began working closely with Prospect teachers to provide feedback to students about their writing, which the students could then use to revise their writing before publishing it. By the end of the school year, classrooms and hallways were filled with published student writing.

Both John Peterson and Janet Fairbanks reported that the teachers started to welcome the visits. The teachers frequently stopped them in the hallway to discuss what they were doing in their classrooms and to express a desire that they soon visit to observe their writing instruction.

Janet Fairbanks interpreted these occasions as evidence that the teachers were becoming “more comfortable” with repeated visits, provided that she adhered to the spoken and unspoken rules of the “affirmation walks” described above. More powerfully still, the teachers had become much more comfortable with writing process instruction, and they felt the tangible effects of their efforts. They spoke openly and often about how they had seen their students’ writing skills improve considerably. By the start of the next year, they

were enthused about writing instruction, and they were eager to find a new area of growth to concentrate on.

5.7. *“Positive Emotions” and “Meaning” at Prospect Elementary*

The Prospect Elementary case exemplifies how the school renewal process can help empower the principal and teacher, leading to increased school well-being. With the help of the facilitator, Janet Fairbanks, and in the context of the school renewal process, John Peterson was able to overcome the formidable obstacles that prevented him from being an instructional leader and working closely with teachers concerning their instructional practices. Janet Fairbanks captured her support in the context of the history at Prospect Elementary nicely:

For a long time, how you survived at Prospect was to resist any change . . . And then they would beat the principal down and the principal would give up. So then there was no change. And they tried that same tactic with John Peterson, but I kept saying, “Nope, Nope, Nope, Nope, Nope, Nope. Let’s fight this. Let’s be there. Let’s say this is not optional.”

Thus, Janet Fairbanks’ constant encouragement, along with the resources and main practices of the renewal process, helped empower John Peterson to become an instructional leader that he would likely not have become otherwise.

However, this is more than a case of principal empowerment leading to principal well-being. This case exemplifies how, with the facilitator’s constant encouragement, the school renewal process can lead to a win-win situation. School leadership is not a zero-sum game. On the contrary, school renewal led to an increase in school leadership roles for teachers, literacy coaches, and the principal. Teacher leaders selected the instructional focus, identified research-based best practices, led professional development sessions, and encouraged their colleagues. Literacy coaches became centrally involved in the effort to promote writing process instruction through more substantive and focused interactions with teachers. The principal improved his instructional leadership by communicating expectations skillfully, monitoring classrooms thoughtfully, and addressing opportunities for improvement boldly. Thus, at Prospect, leadership became a schoolwide practice, leaving everyone more empowered and better off.

The principal, instructional coaches, and teachers had more positive emotions and a clearer understanding about their professional work and about each other. The discouragement, resentment, and frustration that was evident early in the case had almost entirely disappeared. Furthermore, through the school renewal process, teachers and instructional coaches had fundamentally transformed their working relationships and how they integrated their work activities. Such transformation suggests a profound change in the meaning that people made through their experience.

The following observation highlights the positive emotion and meaning that the school ultimately experienced. At the end of the year, the HIL project hosted a summit meeting that all project schools attended. The summit facilitators tasked all school ILTs to work together to design a poster that summarized their school renewal work. Unaided by Janet Fairbanks and with only modest input from John Peterson, Prospect teachers on the ILT shared words that they thought characterized their experience. One of the lead teachers recorded the words as the others called out: “Authentic,” “Hardworking,” “Rigorous,” “Effective,” “Supportive,” “Process,” and “Network.” When it was time to share thoughts with the other schools, the main teacher stood up in front of the group and explained how challenging and occasionally difficult the work had been, but how it had led to positive emotion and meaning, contributing to school well-being.

5.8. “Accomplishment” at Prospect Elementary

As mentioned previously, in partnership with the Reading Now Network, the HIL project focused on ELA, and one of the accomplishments at Prospect Elementary was an improvement in writing instruction. The state accountability test showed that the school’s ELA proficiency rate increased significantly from 2019 to 2023, using 2019 as the baseline and 2023 as the end point to correspond to the participation in the HIL project, while the same statistics for the whole state decreased over the same period. Survey data also illustrated that the teachers perceived improvement in school leadership. Teacher survey data indicated a 0.4-point increase on the instrument “Orientation to School Renewal” and a 0.6-point increase on the instrument “Learning-Centered School Leadership”, both based on a 6-point scale, from the pre- to the post-teacher survey of the HIL project.

6. Discussion

In this case study, we examined how the intersection of the school renewal model and well-being transpired from the perspective of the PERMA model. The case clearly illustrates how the key features of the PERMA model are manifested in the school renewal process. The findings have implications for understanding the change process, particularly from the perspectives of the PERMA framework and the school renewal model.

First, this case study illustrates that the renewal process in the school studied is not dominated solely by conflict and tension, as the literature typically suggests about the change process. The findings, based on both qualitative and quantitative data, indicate the presence of all five elements of the PERMA model—positive emotion, engagement, relationship, meaning, and achievement—in the school renewal process. Therefore, the school change process is not solely dominated by conflict and tensions, as the literature typically depicts. Well-being elements can also manifest in the change process, the school renewal process in this case. Therefore, from an implementation standpoint, well-being can be part of the change process, rather than just conflict and tension.

Further, the findings of this study suggest the possibility of reframing tension as productive rather than detrimental. In this case study, tension was not eliminated but rather reframed through the school renewal process as an inherent component of the change process. Classroom observation, instructional expectations, and accountability for practice initially generated tension. However, the tension was consistently accompanied by affirmation, transparency, and support. As a result, tension functioned as a catalyst for engagement rather than for apathy and disengagement. When embedded within a renewal-oriented framework characterized by a win-win leadership relationship, internal accountability, and integrated school leadership, tension can coexist with—and even contribute to—the five elements of the PERMA model—positive emotion, engagement, relationship, meaning, and achievement. This insight offers a reframed understanding of the relationship between change, tension, and well-being, and it points to the importance of leadership practices that deliberately balance tension with support.

Second, the weight and sequence of the manifestation of the five PERMA elements show variability in this case study. Regarding the weight of the five elements, engagement, relationship, and achievement are prominent in the results, while positive emotions and meaning are also present albeit to a lesser extent. Regarding the sequence of the five elements, relationship and engagement appear to precede the themes of positive emotions, meaning, and achievement. The well-being themes of relationship and engagement appear very early on. Therefore, the weight and sequence of the manifestation of the elements of the PERMA model most likely vary from case to case. In other words, the profile of the elements of the model varies. This supports the flexibility of the school change process as far as implementation is concerned.

Third, school well-being could also be an organizational trait, with the construct well-being expanded from the individual level to the organizational level. This case study advances the construct of school well-being as an organizational trait rather than merely an aggregation of individuals' well-being. By viewing well-being at the school level and examining how the PERMA elements manifested collectively, the findings illustrate how well-being is manifested through organizational processes embedded in the school renewal model. The five well-being elements emerged not as isolated individual experiences but as features of how leadership was enacted, how instructional improvement was initiated and coordinated, and how meaning was collectively constructed around school renewal efforts. This organizational perspective extends the existing well-being literature, which has largely focused on individual stress, burnout, or resilience, by demonstrating how the five elements of the PERMA model are manifested in the case and can foster a shared sense of well-being at the school level. As such, the findings demonstrate that school well-being can be intentionally cultivated through the school renewal process.

Fourth, the findings from the case study also provide new insights into the change facilitation process and instructional leadership. Regarding change facilitation, the case study provides the following insights into change facilitation under the school renewal model: the unit of facilitation is the school, although facilitation entails working with individuals; change facilitation aims to foster sense-making by both the principal and teachers; and facilitation should focus on both the content (writing instruction) and process (engaging in the school renewal process). Regarding instructional leadership, the case study indicates that, in order for instructional leadership to be effective, school well-being elements, particularly positive emotion, engagement, and relationships, must be in place as precedents.

Finally, the findings paint a picture of the possibilities for well-being elements in the type of school change process characterized by the school renewal model. The dominance of conflict and tension in the school change process tends to be associated with the school reform model. The school renewal model, built on a set of theoretical insights and practices different from the school reform model, paints a picture of the possibilities for the well-being elements in the PERMA model. The school renewal model seems to be an effective approach to school change. This is not to say that working through the phases of school renewal completely resolved all conflict at Prospect. Rather, the HIL School Renewal process assumes that, wherever people are doing important work, challenges and conflicts will emerge. The HIL School Renewal Process provides a principled framework for working through these challenges effectively and fairly.

This study is not without its limitations. First, this study primarily conducted secondary analyses of qualitative and quantitative data to address the issue of school well-being. It is likely that some data on school well-being were not collected. The insights obtained from this study are confined by the single-case design, and the findings should be treated as context-bound heuristics. Future studies with a specific focus on school well-being during the change process with a large sample will yield even richer findings on the relationship between school renewal and, on the one hand, school well-being in general and, on the other hand, the elements in the PERMA framework in particular. Second, as an in-depth case study of one elementary school, the findings are context-specific and may not be directly generalizable to schools operating under different policy, cultural, and organizational conditions. For example, the presence of an experienced and highly relational school renewal facilitator may have amplified positive outcomes related to the five elements of the PERMA framework and, thus, limits the generalization of the findings. It remains unclear to what extent similar well-being effects would emerge in contexts where facilitation capacity, external support, or implementation integrity is weaker. Replication

across diverse school settings and levels would strengthen claims about the broader applicability of the relationship between school renewal and well-being. However, these limitations do not negate the meanings and implications of the findings. The longitudinal nature of the data provide new insights into the relationship between the school change process—the school renewal model in this case—and school well-being, and these insights have implications for facilitating the school renewal process.

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