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Preventing Burnout in School-Based Behavioral Health Clinicians: Organizational Strategies for Mitigating Work-Related Mental Health Impairment

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Walden University

College of Management and Human Potential

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Virginia W. Lee

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Walden University
2026

Abstract

Preventing Burnout in School-Based Behavioral Health Clinicians: Organizational
Strategies for Mitigating Work-Related Mental Health Impairment

by

Virginia W Lee

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Psychology in Behavioral Health Leadership

Walden University

February 2026

Abstract

This is a qualitative case study on Organization X that used the Baldrige Framework to investigate employee burnout, a growing concern associated with staff turnover, reduced job satisfaction, depression, and disengagement. The goal was to examine how organizational leaders assess the effectiveness of burnout prevention strategies, identify organizational factors and leadership practices that either mitigate or increase burnout, and discover key factors that contribute to burnout. Semi-structured interviews, guided by the Baldrige Framework, were conducted with three leaders at Organization X. The themes resulting from interviews included burnout, open-ended communication, team cohesion, real-time protection, ethical leadership and authenticity, restoring norms, crisis-aware leadership, leadership cohesion, and chronic absenteeism. Ten evidence-based recommendations include improving supervision, expanding professional development, embedding trauma-informed care, increasing paraeducator pay, and implementing empowering leadership. mentorship programs, wellness initiatives, and access to green spaces are also emphasized as strategies to mitigate burnout. Based on these results, practitioners can be more informed to reduce mental health burnout and promote customer-focused excellence, as well as reduce mental health burnout through evidence-based insights and community engagement.

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Section 1a: The Behavioral Health Organization

Organization X is a K-12 school. It is a learning community where students, teachers, families, and local partners come together to support the growth of every child. Rooted in collaboration, their mission is to empower students with the skills and confidence they need to thrive in a rapidly changing world through meaningful instruction, innovative learning experiences, and a curriculum that evolves with the times.

Organization X is in New England and services approximately 4,000 students in the 2023-2024 school year. The student body is comprised of 38.6% White, 32% Hispanic or Latino, 3.2% Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and 4.4% of two or more races. Approximately 48% of students identify as female, while 52% identify as male. The age group consists of individuals aged 5 to 18 in publicly funded educational settings. Organization X's key market segments are school-linked services for students in publicly funded grades PreK through grade 12 educational settings, which include special education (15.8%), English language learners (ELL, 4.7%), and economically disadvantaged students who are offered free and reduced lunch (36%) and wraparound supports.

Organization X serves students with disabilities, approximately 22% of whom require specialized services or have a 504 plan for conditions like mental health, ADHD, and medical conditions. Section 504 regulations require a school district to provide a "free appropriate public education" (FAPE) to each qualified student with a disability who is in the school district's jurisdiction, regardless of the nature or severity of the disability. One member of the school mentioned that under Section 504, FAPE provides

both regular and special education, as well as related aids and services, designed to meet the student's individual educational needs. Law 504 requires care to be based on mental health diagnoses when providing services to schools and is divided into four tiers: behavioral health clinicians, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech therapy services, all of which are provided through Organization X.

The school's support system for students encompasses psychology, behavioral services, and tiered interventions. School psychologists and special education staff primarily conduct evaluations for individualized education plans (IEPs), 504 Plans, and triennial reviews, while also participating in Lunch Bunch groups and intervention programs. Their work primarily supports Grades 3–6, although services may be extended to other levels as needed.

Behavioral services are overseen by a board-certified behavior analyst (BCBA), who manages a caseload of 50 students, well above the recommended 20. The BCBA also supervises 10 behavior technicians, providing approximately 70 hours of biweekly oversight, including seven hours of direct supervision per week.

Within the tiered intervention model, Tier II services are led by guidance counselors and social workers, who facilitate small group supports and skill-building. Tier III services, which focus on students with more intensive needs, are directed by a BCBA. Social workers further contribute through lunch groups, parent training sessions, and case management responsibilities tied to the Department of Children and Families.

At Organization X, the belief, or theory of action, is simple yet powerful: When students feel safe, supported, and truly connected, they are more willing to take the kinds

of risks that lead to real learning and growth. By fostering strong, respectful relationships among students, educators, and families, the school creates a space where everyone feels they belong. This sense of trust and community does not just boost academic success, it nurtures mental health, emotional well-being, and the confidence students need to thrive in school and in life. Organization X increases educational and performance objectives while instilling values of integrity, responsibility, respect, and fairness. The organizational administration and staff must clearly delineate and periodically update educational performance objectives and evaluate their attainment.

Organization X is addressing the growing need for school-based mental health and behavioral support, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. This goal creates an increased need for social workers and school psychologists to partner with behavioral health agencies, which can secure grant funds and utilize them to hire counselors and wellness staff. Organization X also provides staff healthcare and wellness programs benefits to over 500 employees, works with brokers, insurers, and consultants, and participates in regional self-insurance trusts.

Practice Problem

The practice problem of this capstone study is burnout in behavioral health clinicians in school settings, a leading cause of work-related mental health impairment that can be prevented in Organization X. School counselors play a crucial role in supporting the academic, emotional, and mental well-being of students, especially within public education systems. However, they are increasingly facing significant levels of job-related stress and burnout. Recent research highlights how growing demands for direct

student services are contributing to overwhelming caseloads, emotional fatigue, and professional overload (Le, 2024). The longer counselors remain in the field, the more vulnerable they become to burnout.

This concern aligns with the World Health Organization's (WHO, 2019) classification of burnout because of chronic workplace stress that has not been effectively managed. Given the vital role school counselors play, promoting strategies to prevent burnout and foster professional self-efficacy must be a priority for educational leaders, policymakers, and school systems aiming to protect both counselors' well-being and the students they serve.

Employee burnout has three facets: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. Maslach and Freudenberger coined that term in the 1970s (Freudenberger, 1974; Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Several studies have identified key contributors to burnout. Heavy caseloads and a lack of perceived organizational support are strong predictors of counselor exhaustion (Schilling et al., 2021). Similarly, Burnout diminishes the capacity to provide direct student services, the core of a counselor's role (Mullen & Gutierrez, 2016). Systemic factors such as insufficient administrative support, unrealistic role expectations, and being tasked with disciplinary responsibilities that fall outside the traditional scope of counseling as major organizational contributors to burnout (Fye et al., 2020). Burnout among school counselors has significant implications for student outcomes and the effectiveness of school support systems. Counselors experiencing burnout are less likely to deliver comprehensive services, particularly to students facing behavioral and social-emotional

challenges who are often in the most in need of consistent, targeted support (Troy, 2022).

Crucially, research also points to protective factors. Job resources, such as professional autonomy, supervision, and emotional support, can help mitigate stress associated with intense behavioral casework (Bardhoshi and Um, 2021). These resources enhance counselors' sense of self-efficacy, which in turn helps buffer the negative effects of burnout. Without intervention, the consequences are far-reaching. Burnout not only affects counselors' ability to perform their roles effectively but also increases turnover rates. When counselors leave, those who remain face even heavier burdens, perpetuating a cycle of stress and depletion in school counseling departments or Organization X. Organization X is experiencing a decline in staff retention rates, and behavioral health professionals are experiencing increased stress. The research questions were thus

- RQ 1: How do leaders perceive the effectiveness of burnout prevention strategies implemented within their organization?
- RQ 2: What organizational factors and leadership practices do leaders identify as influential in mitigating or exacerbating burnout?
- RQ 3: What are the major factors influencing burnout in behavioral health professionals at Organization X?

Purpose

The purpose refers to the reason the organization exists and should inspire and guide its values. The values are integral to the organization's culture, which encompasses shared beliefs and norms. The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST, 2021) core values are to act with integrity, value people, collaborate, and focus on

excellence.

This qualitative case study aimed to understand employee burnout, which can lead to staff turnover, low personal fulfillment, depression, quiet resignation, and cognitive avoidance. Interviewing leadership using the Baldrige Framework in Organization X will help improve the implementation of best practices, thereby helping prevent burnout among its behavioral health staff. The NIST (2021) defined the organization as having a stated purpose and a mission. An organization's vision, culture, values, mission, core competencies, competitive environment, strategic challenges, threats, advantages, and opportunities all impact its operations (NIST, 2021).

This study aimed to drive continuous improvement within Organization X by identifying best practices, innovative approaches, and emerging trends in mental and behavioral health. Using the Baldrige Framework, the findings support informed decisions on resource allocation, program development, and customer care strategies to enhance service delivery, clinical outcomes, and operational efficiency. Guided by the Baldrige Framework's focus on customer-focused excellence and societal contribution, this capstone aims to reduce mental health stigma through evidence-based insights and community engagement. It also fosters a learning organization culture within Organization X by promoting knowledge sharing, staff involvement, and continuous development, aligning with Baldrige's values of people and organizational culture.

I conducted numerous interviews with leadership at Organization X and, with Organization X's permission, collected data to study employee burnout in the behavioral health department. I examined the key requirements for current and future organizational

success, as well as the needs, opportunities, and constraints that management systems face (NIST, 2021). I gathered information on organizational retention rates and initiatives designed to prevent employee burnout.

Significance

The potential value of this project is to explore and better understand employee burnout amongst behavioral health professionals in school settings, which can lead to staff turnover, low personal fulfillment, depression, quiet resignation, and cognitive avoidance in the workforce. Happier staff lead to positive outcomes in students' academic achievement and mental well-being, particularly when quality professionals are present in Organization X.

This study is significant because it will fill a gap in the understanding of employee burnout among behavioral health professionals in the academic setting. Ethical leadership can prevent employee burnout by creating an environment where employees feel valued and empowered, work in a stable environment, and students achieve their full potential. The results of this study will help academic school settings prevent burnout and promote positive social change through transparent communication, staff participation in decision-making, fair workload distribution, team-building gatherings, flexibility within the unit, mindfulness practices, and engagement in well-being initiatives with clinicians (Speicher & Francis, 2023).

Summary

Organization X is committed to preparing students for success in an ever-evolving world. Through effective instruction, a dynamic curriculum, and a wide range of

enriching experiences, the organization seeks to inspire students to reach their full potential. Serving approximately 4,000 students in New England's public education system, Organization X also provides critical services. However, like many educational systems nationwide, Organization X is facing a growing challenge: burnout among behavioral health clinicians and school counselors. Burnout, a condition officially recognized by the WHO (2019) as the result of prolonged, unmanaged workplace stress, has become a leading contributor to mental health strain and professional turnover within school settings. Research indicates that counselors providing more direct services experience increased caseload stress, emotional exhaustion, and eventual burnout (Le, 2024). The longer professionals remain in these high-stress roles without adequate support, the more susceptible they become to emotional fatigue, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment.

This qualitative benchmarking case study aimed to explore leadership perspectives on employee burnout at Organization X, focusing on its contribution to staff turnover, decreased job satisfaction, and broader symptoms, including quiet resignation and cognitive avoidance. By examining these factors, the study aimed to identify systemic gaps and implement evidence-based strategies that promote organizational well-being and resilience. To guide this inquiry, the Baldrige Framework for Excellence was used as a strategic tool. This nationally recognized model supports organizations in evaluating their leadership, workforce engagement, core values, and operational systems. Applying the Baldrige criteria enables Organization X to benchmark its practices against high-performing, peer institutions, including Blue Ribbon Schools, to identify and adopt

proven strategies that improve both employee well-being and student success. Ultimately, this study aims to promote sustainable change, grounded in data-informed decision-making and aligned with the Baldrige principles of customer-focused excellence and societal responsibility. As education remains a cornerstone of national development, investing in the well-being of school counselors and behavioral health professionals is essential for maintaining a stable workforce and ensuring that every student has access to the support they need to thrive.

Section 1b: Organizational Profile

Organization X's key market segments are public education students in grades pre-K-12, including special education students (approximately 22% of whom receive specialized services) and 504 Plan Students who need accommodation for mental health, ADHD, and medical conditions. They also provide support for ELLs, and economically disadvantaged students are offered free and reduced lunch and other wraparound supports. These groups define the district's instructional and operational service delivery. Clients and other customer groups include parents and guardians, students, and district employees, such as teachers, paraprofessionals, administrative staff, behavioral health clinicians, Human Resources personnel, technology staff, and leadership. Vendors and service providers to the district include technology companies, curriculum publishers, and transportation companies, which are not necessarily affiliated with Organization X as employees. Expectations include high-quality service, fair policies, responsive communication, and ethical partnerships.

Stakeholder groups include the Board of Education, the State Department of Education, teachers' unions and bargaining units, the Regional Education Service Center, higher education partners, nonprofits, and local employers. The Board of Education sets policy, approves the budget, and ensures accountability. The Department of Education ensures compliance, funding, and accreditation. Teachers' unions ensure collective representation for both certified and non-certified personnel. The regional education service center provides shared services, training, and innovation projects. Nonprofits/community organizations offer mental health, family support, and after-school

programs, including social services. Finally, local employers and industry partners ensure work-based learning, alignment, and the establishment of advisory boards.

Organizations are increasingly expected to foster transformational partnerships, long-term, trust-based alliances that provide an integrated, end-to-end service experience rather than isolated, transactional interactions (NIST, 2021). This shift reflected rising expectations from not only customers but also employees, communities, partners, and stakeholders, who demand fairness, inclusivity, and equity in every aspect of service delivery. Ensuring that all customer segments are treated equitably and without discrimination is no longer an option; it is essential for building trust across communities and strengthening public confidence in institutions. As organizations strive for excellence, this focus on respectful, ethical, and inclusive engagement becomes a cornerstone of sustainable success and societal value.

Organizational Profile and Key Factors

Organization X is to provide a high-quality, comprehensive, and meaningful education for all students so that they become productive and successful citizens; to enable students to grow academically, socially, and emotionally by encouraging them to accept responsibility and understand the consequences of their decisions; to enable students to pursue independent thought and research through both assigned and self-initiated projects; and to enable students to explore the world's cultural heritage through experiences that help broaden social awareness.

Providing curricular and co-curricular activities will allow students to grow aesthetically, emotionally, intellectually, physically, and socially through interaction with

others. To provide appropriate programs and services for students with special intellectual, physical, and emotional needs.

The vision is to create a learning environment that fosters academic excellence, creativity, diversity, and continuous growth. The core values of Organization X are student-centered learning, equity and inclusion, accountability and transparency, teaching and learning innovation, collaboration, and community partnership.

The primary educational services include K-12 education, special education services, college career-readiness programs, and social-emotional learning (SEL) support. A superintendent, Board of Education, parent-teacher associations, and advisory committees manage Organization X. The workforce includes administrators, principal, assistant principal, teachers, school counselors, counselors, paraeducators, school psychologists, secretaries, social workers, cafeteria workers, custodians, coaches, registered nurses, physical therapists, occupational therapists, paraprofessional staff, fiscal staff, administrative staff, technology staff, and human resources. Organization X's key partners are local government and community agencies, higher education institutions, and business and industry partners.

Organization X offers emotional wellness services in schools through counseling, BCBA services, social work, crisis intervention, SEL curricula, anti-bullying programs, on-site nursing staff, health screenings, and chronic condition management. Special education includes IEPs, paraprofessional support, resource rooms, and ELL. The gifted and talented program includes enrichment and acceleration options. The core K-12 curriculum is aligned with state standards and includes advanced placement (AP), career-

readiness coursework in career and technical education (CTE), internships, Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) preparation, and a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) workshop. Health services readiness includes on-site nursing staff, health screening, and chronic condition management.

Organizational Background and Context

The practice problem of this capstone study is burnout in behavioral health clinicians in school settings, a leading cause of work-related mental health impairment that can be prevented in Organization X. School counselors who are providing more direct services reported higher caseload stress, burnout, and overload. The longer a counselor is in the school system, the more likely they are to experience burnout (Le, 2024). This study is significant because it will fill a gap in the understanding of employee burnout among behavioral health professionals in the academic setting.

Organization X serves a diverse population of 4,000 students across three to four elementary schools, one middle school, and one high school. There is increasing racial and ethnic diversity, reflecting state patterns. There are growing numbers of students with disabilities (receiving special education services), and the proportion of ELLs and economically disadvantaged students. These demographic shifts necessitate a cultural response to teaching and learning, as well as the equitable allocation of resources.

The community setting is a mix of middle-income and working-class households. There are high expectations for academic quality and college readiness. There are active and varied levels of engagement in school affairs, which tend to be stronger at the elementary level. As a suburban school district, Organization X benefits from strong

community ties but faces limited municipal funding.

Organization X operates under the mandates of the State Department of Education. Federal policies include Every Student Succeeds Act, IDEA, and Title I-IV funding provisions. The district is responsible for meeting mastery test and SAT benchmarks. The annual compliance audits for special education, Title funding, and curricular standards have been completed. Organization X is governed by an elected Board of Education responsible for policymaking, budgeting, and superintendent evaluation. The superintendent leads strategic implementation and oversees all schools and departments. Administrative leaders are responsible for curriculum, pupil services, business operations, and technology.

The governance structure strikes a balance between accountability and autonomy, although alignment issues occasionally arise between the strategic vision and school-level practices, particularly in areas such as technology adoption and instructional consistency. The mission is “To provide every student with a high-quality education that nurtures individual potential, fosters academic excellence, and cultivates the skills necessary for lifelong success and responsible citizenship.” The strategic vision is state-aligned strategies that include raising achievement and reducing performance gaps, promoting digital inclusion and technology integration, and fostering a safe, supportive, and inclusive environment.

Behavioral health is increasingly recognized as a critical need. Organization X supports this initiative through the collaboration of BCBA, school counselors, social workers, school psychologists, and para-technicians at each school. There are tiered

mental health supports available through the multi-tiered system of support (MTSS) and crisis response protocols in accordance with state safety requirements.

Summary

The behavioral health logic model outlines a multi-tiered approach to improving student mental health outcomes while promoting staff well-being. School counselors and community partners implement tiered interventions and trauma-informed training, leading to increased access, reduced suspensions, and improved academic outcomes. Grant-funded wellness centers foster a culture of care and reduce behavioral incidents. To prevent staff burnout, the model incorporates evidence-based strategies, including flexible work arrangements, emotional intelligence training for leaders, mindfulness practices, and ongoing wellness assessments (Ahmad et al., 2025; Gumina, 2021). High-quality supervision and access to mental health services are critical. The Hexagonal Wheel of Wellness (Kim, 2022) promotes reflective self-care, enabling staff to maintain both personal and professional wellness.

Supporting staff well-being across physical, emotional, and occupational domains is essential. Evidence-based practices include resilience workshops, protected time for supervision and learning, and the use of tools such as the Professional Quality of Life Scale and the Maslach Burnout Inventory to monitor clinician stress and burnout. Benchmark staffing standards (e.g., a 250:1 counselor-to-student ratio) and partnerships with interns or external providers are recommended.

In conclusion, implementing evidence-based organizational strategies is crucial for Organization X to enhance workforce engagement, mitigate burnout, and reduce staff

turnover among behavioral health professionals. Prioritizing staff well-being through comprehensive support not only promotes resilience and job satisfaction but also enhances the overall quality and sustainability of mental health service delivery. By aligning organizational practices with research-informed approaches, Organization X can advance both organizational continuity and improved student outcomes.

Section 2: Background and Approach—Leadership Strategy and Assessment

Burnout among behavioral health clinicians in school settings has emerged as a significant organizational challenge in Organization X. Internal interviews with participants revealed that behavioral health staff reported emotional exhaustion, workload strain, and professional dissatisfaction. These concerns align with previous research indicating that school counselors are experiencing increasing burnout due to high caseloads, inadequate administrative support, and role overload (Fye et al., 2020; Le, 2024; Mullen & Gutierrez, 2016). Insufficient organizational support and high behavioral caseload demands are significant predictors of counselor burnout (Bardhoshi & Um, 2021; Schilling et al., 2021). Without intervention, burnout contributes to attrition, exacerbating counselor shortages and increasing the pressure on remaining staff (Troy, 2022). The WHO (2019) recognized burnout as a workplace syndrome caused by chronic unmanaged stress, underscoring the urgency for organizational-level prevention strategies. The reported stress and turnover among clinicians represent evidence that burnout, a form of organizational stress, is escalating, warranting immediate attention and systemic intervention.

Supporting Literature

I reviewed scholarly literature reviews on burnout in school settings. A literature review is a scholarly endeavor where researchers gather, analyze, and synthesize relevant data to gain a deeper understanding of a topic (Seuring et al., 2021). Burnout among behavioral health staff in schools is deeply linked to systemic weaknesses, including underfunded infrastructure, a lack of inter-agency coordination, and insufficient early

intervention mechanisms (Hoover & Bostic, 2021). School counselors experience high levels of emotional exhaustion and burnout, particularly when overwhelmed by role conflict, perceived stress, and inappropriate non-counseling duties (Fye et al., 2020). Behavioral health clinicians, particularly school counselors, experience burnout due to high caseloads, inadequate supervision, personal trauma histories, and unsupportive work environments (Brown et al., 2024; Sylvester-Nwosu et al., 2024). Burnout negatively affects job satisfaction and the ability to deliver student services directly. As schools increasingly function as primary mental health providers, unaddressed stressors on staff, such as high caseloads, limited training, and administrative burden, can lead to emotional exhaustion and reduced service quality. Further, behavioral health clinicians working with trauma-affected youth are highly vulnerable to burnout and emotional fatigue due to the intensity of their work (Deblinger et al., 2024).

The literature emphasizes the importance of support for school counselors. School counselors who receive both clinical and administrative supervision experience lower burnout, especially in terms of reduced feelings of incompetence and increased personal fulfillment (Zalewski, 2022). Supportive, relational supervision is important for promoting clinician well-being and reducing the risk of mental health deterioration among professionals (Johnson et al., 2020). Effective self-care and workplace alignment in areas such as control, fairness, and meaningful work are crucial in sustaining counselor well-being, reinforcing the need for institutionalized supervision and tailored support systems to improve counselor effectiveness and retention (Zalewski, 2022).

Comprehensive, policy-driven reforms can also mitigate burnout risk by

enhancing workforce support, aligning resources, and implementing collaborative care models (Childs et al., 2024; Hoover & Bostic, 2021). There is a need for administrative awareness, proper counselor-to-student ratios, and self-care strategies such as therapy, relaxation, and time management to protect counselors' well-being and professional longevity (Sylvester-Nwosu et al., 2024). For instance, structured self-care interventions, such as the PRACTICE framework (praise, relaxation, affect regulation, cognitive coping, taking time to journal, in vivo mastery, connecting with others, and enhancing well-being) help buffer clinicians from the psychological toll of vicarious trauma, reinforcing the need for proactive, trauma-informed wellness programs to maintain professional resilience and service quality (Deblinger et al., 2024).

Behavioral health clinicians, particularly psychologists and neuropsychologists, reported high levels of emotional exhaustion despite overall job satisfaction (Labrecque et al., 2024). Burnout was driven primarily by emotional fatigue, work overload, and a lack of control over administrative tasks. However, protective factors such as self-compassion, work-life balance, and flexible work environments can significantly reduce burnout and enhance mental health and job satisfaction. The study emphasized the importance of self-care and supportive organizational practices in sustaining clinician well-being.

Burnout among behavioral health clinicians compromises patient care, staff well-being, and organizational effectiveness (Via et al., 2022). Emotional fatigue, depersonalization, and reduced safety can arise if burnout is not addressed proactively. This study illustrated that engaging staff in developing wellness protocols enhances the

effectiveness, relevance, and resilience of interventions. The findings underscored the importance of implementing preventive, data-driven strategies, particularly in high-stress environments, to mitigate turnover, compassion fatigue, and mental health risks among clinicians.

Elementary school counselors experience burnout largely due to role ambiguity and the assignment of tasks outside their professional scope, such as administrative duties (Rhames et al., 2025). This mismatch between training and actual job expectations leads to emotional exhaustion and frustration. However, counselors reported higher job satisfaction when their roles aligned with preventive, student-centered counseling work. The study emphasized that clarifying counselor roles and educating administrators were key to reducing stress and promoting counselor well-being.

Mental health counselors face mounting burnout due to global stressors, including climate anxiety, workplace violence, and PTSD (Francesco & Rizzo, 2024). These overlapping challenges heightened emotional strain, risking counselor exhaustion and decreased effectiveness. The authors advocated for emotional management education, including mindfulness, meditation, and somatic practices such as tapping, as crucial tools to enhance resilience, reduce stress, and support mental well-being in high-stress clinical environments.

School counselors were at high risk of burnout and compassion fatigue due to chronic exposure to vicarious trauma and emotional demands (Lipika, 2024). Symptoms such as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment were often driven by systemic pressures like workload, client crises, and limited

resources. The review supported the use of integrated, mindfulness-based, and emotional regulation interventions, such as Acceptance and Committed Therapy (ACT) and Compassion Fatigue Therapy, to mitigate burnout and promote sustainable mental health among school-based professionals.

School psychologists were highly susceptible to burnout, particularly emotional exhaustion, due to large caseloads and high evaluation demands (Schilling et al., 2021). However, factors such as longer tenure, older age, and support from supervisors or professional associations were associated with higher personal accomplishment and a reduced risk of burnout. The study emphasized that organizational support, manageable workloads, and early self-care training are essential for preventing burnout and sustaining the school psychology workforce.

Burnout among behavioral health professionals is worsened by a lack of structured clinical supervision and excessive job demands. Supportive organizational practices such as manageable workloads, early self-care training, and relational supervision were critical for maintaining clinician well-being and preventing mental health decline. These measures helped sustain a resilient and effective workforce in the school settings.

Sources of Evidence

Another Organization Y that serves a diverse community of approximately 11,700 students, with around 59% identifying as Hispanic or Latino, 22% as White (non-Hispanic), 10% as Black/African American, 7% as Asian, and 2% as multiracial or of other backgrounds. 15% of students receive special education services, highlighting the

need for strong academic and behavioral support systems.

Organization Y uses MTSS to identify students who may require additional support. The school also provided trauma-informed training for staff. Accessible health care is available for high school students. Organization X hosts a mental health awareness night that provides support and education to all bilingual staff, making them feel welcome.

Organization Y may benefit from adopting the Baldrige Framework to enhance its strategic planning, measurement, and analysis of performance results, as well as its systematic quality improvement efforts. The framework emphasizes data-driven indicators across multiple domains, reflecting a holistic approach to student and staff well-being (Public Act 21-35).

Organization Y uses a comprehensive benchmarking framework to evaluate and enhance its behavioral health and SEL systems. This multidimensional framework enables Organization X to benchmark performance against best practices, identify areas for improvement, and support strategic planning through evidence-based decision-making in K–12 school settings. The Baldrige excellence framework provides a comprehensive roadmap for organizational development that points out main areas of improvement, like leadership, strategy, customer focus, measurement, analysis, knowledge management, workforce, and operations (Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2021).

I then interviewed the leadership of Organization X. The following sections cover strategies based on the Baldrige Framework.

Leadership and Strategy

Monthly leadership meetings and Key Performance Indicators (KPI) reviews offered a proactive forum for identifying emerging workload and process challenges. This transparency ensured that leadership remained attuned to operational pressure points and could respond promptly. The annual presentations further reinforced organizational commitment by building trust through visible accountability and continuous improvement planning. These structures signal to staff that their experiences and stressors were not invisible but actively addressed.

Customer Focus

By conducting parent workshops and managing expectations, the district reduced undue pressure placed on school-based behavioral health staff. When families understand their shared role in student success, it shifts responsibility and reduces the emotional labor clinicians bear when navigating conflict with parents. This balanced partnership helps protect clinicians from the chronic emotional exhaustion that arises from feeling unsupported in the face of unrealistic demands.

Equity

Through subgroup comparisons and dedicated diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives, the district fosters fairness and psychological safety. These practices help reduce moral distress among staff, especially when they witness marginalized students receiving inadequate support. Seeing equity-driven practices in action validates the work of behavioral health professionals and reinforces their professional purpose, a known protective factor against burnout.

Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management

Behavioral, SEL, and crisis response data tracking provide a critical feedback loop for leadership and staff. The use of real-time data enables more efficient resource allocation and helps ensure that behavioral health teams are neither overextended nor underutilized. Early detection of stress patterns, such as rising behavioral incidents or caseload imbalances, triggers responsive action plans, which reduce burnout risk through timely support. Continuous improvement via performance data. Use of surveys to assess staff and student well-being

Workforce

Investments in trauma-informed training and professional development significantly boost staff coping capacity. These initiatives enhance clinicians' sense of self-efficacy, reduce feelings of helplessness during crisis intervention, and foster a growth-oriented mindset. When staff feel skilled, empowered, and resilient, they are less susceptible to emotional exhaustion and professional disillusionment.

Operations

Monitoring the efficiency and timeliness of crisis response workflows addresses a major source of operational stress. By streamlining services and reducing bureaucratic delays, the system frees staff to engage in meaningful, therapeutic interactions rather than battling inefficiencies. This operational clarity improves staff role satisfaction and reduces depersonalization symptoms.

Results

Outcomes tracked across key metrics, including behavioral incident trends, SEL

progress, attendance rates, parent engagement, and staff confidence, and a clear picture of both system health and workforce resilience. These indicators validated the positive impact of the district's strategy and provided real-time evidence that staff wellness is not only prioritized but also measurably improving.

Leadership Strategy and Assessment

How Leaders in the Organization Govern and Lead

Organization X maintains a structured governance model through its Board of Education, which provides oversight and strategic direction for the district. The Board is comprised of a presiding chairperson, a vice chairperson, a secretary, an assistant secretary, and additionally elected or appointed members. This governing body operates in accordance with established bylaws and is responsible for setting educational policy, ensuring fiscal accountability, and promoting academic excellence across the organization.

Within the Board of Education, various standing and ad hoc committees have been established to support the execution of its responsibilities through focused deliberation and informed decision-making. Among these, the Operations Committee plays a critical role in overseeing financial stewardship and operational planning. Specifically, the committee is tasked with reviewing and advising on the fiscal year 2025–2026 budget, monitoring the status and use of the Environmental, Social, and Governance and Capital Reserve accounts, and evaluating funding opportunities, including grants aimed at supporting the district's special education programs.

These committees operate as extensions of the Board's commitment to

transparency, stakeholder engagement, and strategic governance. They ensure that complex operational and financial decisions are made with careful analysis and in alignment with the district's broader educational mission.

The educational philosophy of Organization X is founded on the fundamental conviction that the inherent dignity and intrinsic worth of every child must remain central to all educational endeavors. Grounded in the belief that the primary purpose of education is to equip young individuals with the knowledge, skills, and character necessary to assume meaningful and productive roles in both school and society, the district is committed to fostering each student's holistic development.

The Board of Education shall maintain and regularly update a comprehensive manual of policies that serves as the foundational framework for governing the school system. These policies shall always align with applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations, thereby ensuring legal compliance and institutional integrity.

Moreover, all Board policies shall derive their legitimacy and directional purpose from the Board-adopted Purposes, Goals, and Objectives, which collectively address both student learning outcomes and the operational effectiveness of the school system. These policies are conceived as essential instruments to support informed, consistent decision-making across all levels of governance.

All employees are expected to uphold a professional standard of conduct that fosters respect and civility toward colleagues, students, and members of the public. Any employee determined to be a responsible party for sexual harassment in violation of Title IX may be subject to disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

Strategy and Key Strategic Challenges

There are some features of Strategic Implementation. MTSS frameworks implemented by school psychologists and counselors have demonstrated effectiveness in reducing chronic absenteeism and suspensions. A tiered Response-to-Intervention model that reduces truancy by escalating supports, resulting in measurable improvements in attendance and disciplinary outcomes across Tier 1 to Tier 3 (Kearney & Graczyk, 2014).

Community mental health partnerships, such as those that provide TIC and SEL training, enhance teacher efficacy and confidence (Weist et al., 2022). Schools that employ multi-tiered, trauma-sensitive frameworks have seen improvements in school climate and the implementation of sustainable, equity-centered care management (Berger, 2019).

Finally, clinician and staff burnout can be reduced through structured wellness protocols incorporating high-quality supervision, including emotional validation, professional development, and collaborative reflection. Schools with embedded supervisory support systems reported significantly lower rates of mental health provider attrition and stress (Bohnenkamp et al., 2023).

Organization X Strategic Plan

Organization X has an established, comprehensive strategic plan that focuses on student success, social-emotional development, and instructional innovation. These align with the Department of Education. Stakeholder engagement includes the usage of advisory councils, public forums, and parent-teacher associations to ensure strategic objectives are inclusive and community-informed. Organization X has leveraged 21st-

century learning environments, including a nationally recognized educational marketplace, to integrate STEM, inquiry-based learning, and real-world skills into instructional learning. Strategic efforts are supported through teacher coaching, data team meetings, and continuous improvement cycles. Organization X was an early adopter of mobile technology integration, utilizing apps and digital platforms to streamline administration and enhance communication (Richardson et al., 2021).

The district's 3-year workforce plan prioritizes equity, support, and retention to align with educational goals. It sets a 20-student BCBA caseload limit, a 1:500 school psychologist-student ratio, and a 70% retention goal for psychologists and social workers. The plan includes flexible leave models and addresses paraeducator pay and retention as part of an equity-driven strategy to ensure consistent, high-quality student support.

How Organization X is Likely to Address Behavioral Health

Tiered Support Structure

- Tier 1 (Universal): School counselors deliver classroom guidance lessons that focus on SEL (Social-Emotional Learning), mental wellness, and coping skills.
- Tier 2 (Targeted): Group counseling, check-ins, and skill-building for students showing early behavioral or emotional concerns.
- Tier 3 (Intensive Clinical Support): Individual counseling for students with significant mental health needs. Collaboration with external clinical partners or community-based therapists. Referrals for psychiatric services are made when school-based intervention isn't sufficient. Supports for students under

IEP/504 Plans requiring emotional-behavioral services.

Integration with Community Mental Health Partners

Organization X collaborates with regional behavioral health agencies to provide crisis stabilization (post-hospitalization support), suicide risk assessments, trauma-informed care training for staff, and wraparound support involving families and caregivers.

School-Based Behavioral Health Services

This is likely to include a School Social Worker and/or a BCBA embedded in intervention teams. Students with chronic absenteeism, trauma exposure, or self-harm risk are prioritized for clinician-level support.

Counseling Staff Credentials

Counselors are typically state-licensed and trained in:

- Brief solution-focused therapy
- Cognitive Behavioral Interventions (CBT in Schools)
- SEL and de-escalation techniques

Leaders need to address paraeducator pay differentials and retention as part of the equity strategy. When leaders are supported and prioritize their well-being, organizational performance and workplace climate improve. High health literacy within organizations further promotes healthy, psychologically supportive environments (Murphy, 2025).

A Growing Need for Bilingual Teachers

The need for bilingual educators has never been more pronounced. These teachers not only offer instruction in students' first languages but also serve as cultural navigators,

advocates, and academic mentors. Agility, Assimilation, and Bilingual Imperative, Multi-tiered systems integrating mindfulness, emotional literacy, and wellness training across staff roles lead to sustained improvements in job engagement and school climate (Kim, 2022; Beames et al., 2023).

Key Strategic Challenges Facing Organization X

Organization X faces several critical challenges that impact coherence and the implementation process, including fiscal constraints and inadequate resource allocation. Behavioral health is increasingly recognized as a critical need. Organization X supports this initiative through the collaboration of BCBA analysts, school counselors, social workers, school psychologists, and para-technicians at each school. There are tiered mental health supports available through the MTSS and crisis response protocols in accordance with state safety requirements.

Fluctuations in funding have led to staffing trims and restricted program expansions. Capital improvements, such as technology upgrades or building repairs, compete with instructional improvements (Richardson et al., 2021). Persistent achievement gaps also persist among economically disadvantaged students, and ELLs pose challenges in district-wide proficiency objectives. There are efforts to promote inclusive education with increasing attention to co-teaching models and differentiated instruction.

Further, the district faces retention challenges in high-need subject areas (e.g., special education, STEM), emphasizing statewide shortages. These gaps limit the ongoing leadership in implementing long-term strategies at the building level. Leadership

needs to empower school psychologists, school counselors, BCBA's, and school social workers to take data-informed leadership roles in redesigning service delivery. Use real-time student data to create a cross-disciplinary leadership team (psychologist, BCBA, SPED teacher, administrator) to assess caseload sustainability. Engage principals early to discuss resource allocation by tier (I, II, III).

Ensure workforce planning aligns with the district's educational mission and student performance goals. Set a 3-year workforce plan targeting a 20-student BCBA caseload max, a school psychologist and student ratio of 1:500 (APA recommended), and a retention goal of 70% for school psychologists and social workers within 2 years, and flexible models for maternity and medical leaves.

Organization X must balance educational priorities with public accountability pressures, often creating tensions around school board decisions and long-term goal setting. Organization X prides itself on digital innovation. However, disparities in student access to devices, broadband infrastructure, and digital literacy persist, especially in lower-income households. The district's decentralized implementation model can lead to inconsistencies across the schools and strategic initiatives. The sustainability of initiatives depends on key individuals, such as principals and lead teachers, who can foster vulnerability to leadership turnover.

Clients/Population Served

Most school districts, including Organization X, require explicit parental or guardian consent before collecting any behavioral health information about a student. This is typically done through enrollment forms, special education evaluations (IDEA or

504 plans), school-based mental health referrals, Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act, and Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act-compliant consent documents, and other relevant documentation. These forms authorize school psychologists, counselors, or contracted clinicians to access or share mental health information with outside providers. Without consent, staff are legally prohibited from initiating or sharing behavioral data.

The behavioral health data may also be gathered through universal SEL screeners, behavioral RTI/MTSS interventions, and interviews conducted by school counselors and school psychologists. These data are recorded in confidential student records maintained by the Student Services or Pupil Personnel Services department and used for intervention planning and are only shared as permitted. The student population size is approximately 4,000 students. The setting is suburban–rural, a mix of middle-income families. The age range is Pre-K through 12th grade. The ethnicity is predominantly White, with growing representation from Hispanic, African American, and Asian students. Organization X has dedicated special education services and behavioral intervention teams that require interdisciplinary collaboration (Psych, BCBA, and Social Work). Ten years ago, there were 10 neurodivergent students. Now, there are 60 students, as leadership indicated. The child must meet one of the 13 federal disability classifications under IDEA:

- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Deafness / Hearing Impairment
- Emotional Disturbance
- Intellectual Disability

- Multiple Disabilities
- Orthopedic Impairment
- Other Health Impairment (e.g., ADHD)
- Specific Learning Disability
- Speech or Language Impairment
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Visual Impairment
- Developmental Delay (ages 3–9)

The disability must negatively impact the student's ability to access or make progress in the general education curriculum. This must be documented through evaluations.

Organization X follows a team process that includes referrals from teachers, parents, or specialists when a student is suspected of needing special education services. A Planning and Placement Team Meeting was conducted to review and determine if an evaluation is needed. A Comprehensive Evaluation includes cognitive, academic, behavioral, and developmental assessments. The PPT reviews results and decides if the student qualifies under IDEA. If eligible, an individualized plan is created with specific goals, accommodations, services, and placement.

Once eligible, students may receive specialized instruction, speech-language therapy, occupational and physical therapy, counseling and social work services, behavioral support (BCBAs), and extended school year as appropriate. The age group served ranges from 3 to 21 years old. Demographics: Services are provided regardless of race, income, or language status. English Language Learners with disabilities receive

dual support.

Measurement-Based Care in school mental health aligns closely with the Baldrige Framework's "Voice of the Customer" principles by emphasizing continuous listening, utilizing feedback, and assessing satisfaction to improve service delivery (Center for School Mental Health, 2020). Measurement-Based Care improves clinical outcomes by integrating regular progress monitoring and client feedback into behavioral health interventions (Center for School Mental Health, 2020). This creates a transparent, student- and family-centered approach that enhances engagement and personalizes care.

Workforce and Operations

Organization X actively gathers information through Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meetings, where families, educators, and specialists collaborate on student needs. Emotional Wellness Information and Support Initiative, providing accessible resources and reflecting evolving emotional well-being needs.

Organization X emphasizes respectful, meaningful connections among students, staff, and families, fostering trust and psychological safety. Collaboration between general education and special services ensures shared responsibility for student success. The Department of Special Services demonstrates a highly structured, collaborative communication model, particularly through. Formal meetings engage families, educators, and specialists in shared decision-making regarding student eligibility for services and the development of IEPs. This process reflects two-way, personalized communication, ensuring families are informed, consulted, and empowered to advocate for their children.

Continuous communication among special education, general education staff, and

service providers (e.g., speech therapists, social workers) ensures consistent messaging and cohesive support strategies for students. Periodic updates to wellness resources demonstrate responsiveness to stakeholder needs. IEP development and review cycles incorporate family feedback to adapt support strategies.

The Baldrige framework underscores the importance of valuing employees and fostering environments that support engagement and high performance (Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2021). The Baldrige Framework focuses on key areas, including leadership, strategy, customer focus, and workforce engagement, which are essential for addressing organizational performance challenges. Engagement is a dynamic process influenced by factors such as motivation and the relationship with a care provider, which are also shaped by the engagement itself. Levels and expressions of engagement vary over time and form a positive feedback loop with the intervention's effects (Bijkerk et al., 2024).

Organization X demonstrates how intentional relationship-building, interdisciplinary collaboration, and structured support systems not only enhance student outcomes but also create conditions that protect behavioral health professionals from burnout. Applying similar principles, such as fostering connection, reducing isolation, clarifying roles, and emphasizing strengths, is essential for organizations seeking to mitigate burnout among those providing emotional and mental health support.

The district emphasizes intentional relationship-building, collaboration across disciplines, and individualized support through mechanisms like the PPT and the creation of IEPs. This structured, student-centered approach reflects core practices that can

directly influence professional well-being in behavioral health roles. Organization X focuses on cultivating respectful and supportive relationships, which aligns with research indicating that meaningful connections with clients and colleagues can reduce emotional exhaustion and compassion fatigue among behavioral health workers. When professionals witness tangible, positive impacts from their work, such as improved student outcomes and family engagement, their sense of purpose and job satisfaction increase, buffering against burnout.

Organization X also embodies collaborative, team-based support. This is an interdisciplinary model, where educators, psychologists, social workers, and other specialists work together, reducing isolation, a known contributor to burnout. This shared responsibility for student outcomes fosters emotional support among staff and offers opportunities for peer consultation, helping mitigate feelings of overwhelm.

Further, the use of formal processes like PPT meetings and IEP development provides clarity, structure, and defined roles, which research shows can alleviate role ambiguity, a significant stressor linked to burnout. Professionals are less likely to experience frustration when expectations and processes are clearly defined and transparent.

There is also an emphasis on inclusion and strengths-based perspective. This is a focus on integrating students into the general education environment with appropriate support reflects a strength-based, inclusive philosophy that can also extend to staff. When organizations foster cultures that emphasize growth, inclusion, and support for all,

including their workforce, they cultivate environments where burnout is less likely to thrive.

Analytical Strategy

By interviewing leadership at Organization X, the study aimed to benchmark best practices, identify gaps, and promote systemic changes to better prevent burnout and support organizational well-being. Multiple interviews were held with leadership. The XYZ participants are to understand the workforce engagement, client information, key strategic challenges, governance, and leadership strategy. Increased burnout may be caused by vicarious trauma and heavy caseloads. Interviewing the leadership team was valuable for assessing challenges, generating insights, improving collaboration, and driving positive organizational change (Kabeyi, 2019).

The Baldrige Excellence Framework provided a comprehensive roadmap for organizational development, identifying key areas for improvement, including leadership, strategy, customer focus, measurement and analysis, knowledge management, workforce development, and operations (Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2021).

Leaders were interviewed as part of the data collection. The interviews used open-ended questions to address burnout in Organization X, with at least five conducted via Zoom. Then, it was transcribed using Zoom transcriber and note-taking. Data on the practice problem were gathered from academic and professional literature, work websites, and the Department of Education. I conducted a literature review of scholarly sources to identify causes of burnout amongst school psychologists, BCBA's, and school social workers. The data would help to improve the organization. Open-ended questions

played a crucial role in qualitative research by enabling in-depth exploration of topics, fostering rapport with participants, facilitating hypothesis formulation, and enhancing the researcher's understanding of the research (Westland, 2022).

These findings aligned with national trends indicating that school counselors are experiencing increasing burnout due to high caseloads, inadequate administrative support, and role overload (Le, 2024; Fye et al., 2020; Mullen & Gutierrez, 2016).

This study applied a qualitative case study approach, using the Baldrige Excellence Framework to explore organizational factors contributing to burnout and to identify targeted interventions to mitigate its impact within Organization X. The research was rooted in the seminal conceptualization of burnout which frames burnout as a multidimensional syndrome comprising emotional exhaustion, characterized by the depletion of emotional and psychological resources due to job demands (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). Depersonalization: development of cynical, detached, or dehumanizing attitudes towards clients or coworkers. Reduced Personal Accomplishment: feelings of professional inefficacy and lack of achievement.

Burnout is particularly prevalent among behavioral health professionals, where emotional labor, high caseloads, and educational system pressures exacerbate psychological strain. The literature demonstrated a growing scholarly consensus that burnout is not solely an individual-level issue but is deeply embedded in organizational systems, leadership practices, and workplace culture.

Organization X faced key challenges, including budget constraints, staffing shortages, and equity gaps. Behavioral health needs were rising, yet funding limited the

number of staff, including BCBAAs and school psychologists. Achievement gaps persisted for ELL and low-income students, and digital access remains unequal. Staff turnover in special education and Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) hinders long-term planning. The district's decentralized model caused inconsistent implementation. To improve, Organization X should establish cross-disciplinary leadership teams, implement real-time data tracking, adopt a three-year workforce plan, expand digital equity, and utilize standardized protocols. Emphasizing data-informed planning and measurement-based care will strengthen service delivery and student outcomes.

Through leadership interviews, this study leveraged the Baldrige model to benchmark Organization X's strategies against established best practices, with the aim to:

- Understand the institutional contributors to burnout.
- Identify leadership behaviors that either exacerbate or alleviate burnout.
- Recommend evidence-based, organizational-level interventions such as mindfulness, meditation, and somatic practices like tapping as crucial tools to enhance resilience, reduce stress, and support mental wellness in high-stress clinical environments (Francesco & Rizzo, 2024).
- Protective factors like self-compassion, work-life balance, and flexible work environments can significantly reduce burnout and improve mental health and job satisfaction (Labrecque et al., 2024).
- Compensation remained a critical factor. Sustained reform required Organization X not only to value wellness but to structurally prioritize mental

health in job design, compensation, and professional recognition.

- Effective approaches involved training in Psychological First Aid, which equips staff to recognize distress and provide initial support, especially during crises (McCabe & Everly, 2014). Ensuring paid time off for mental health appointments, embedding support networks into daily practice, and normalizing access to professional care are crucial to a resilient organizational culture (Simms et al., 2023).
- Although wellness programs played a role in supporting mental health, they are insufficient as standalone interventions for addressing systemic burnout among mental health professionals. Research emphasized the need for organizations to redesign the structure of work itself, including protecting employee time, managing workloads, and providing genuine access to mental health services (Deady et al., 2024; Punnett, 2022).

Summary

Leadership within Organization X encompassed roles across curriculum, student services, business operations, and technology, with a key focus on student well-being. The organization's funding was primarily derived from taxpayer dollars, with the budget process involving the Superintendent, the Finance Office, the Board of Education, and input from department heads and school administrators. Final approval is required from the town council and through a public referendum. Strategic Focus Areas were to ensure daily operations, cluster services by grade level and tiered support, prioritize behavioral health and staff well-being, use evidence-based self-assessments for clinician tracking,

schedule regular supervision, professional learning, and team meetings

Leadership Practices & Workforce Engagement: Organization X conducted monthly leadership meetings and Key Performance Indicator reviews to proactively address workload and process challenges. Strategies included hosting resilience and cultural workshops, supporting work environments to mitigate burnout, and applying knowledge management techniques for improved decision-making.

Section 3 analyzed Organization X's leadership strategies, workforce engagement in behavioral health, and knowledge management. The section is guided by principles from the Baldrige Performance Excellence Framework, which emphasizes employee value, engagement, and high performance (Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2021).

Section 3: Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management Components of the Organization

The practice problem of this capstone study is burnout in behavioral health clinicians in school settings is a leading cause of work-related mental health impairment that can be prevented in Organization X. School counselors play a crucial role in ensuring the health and well-being of students, but school counselors across the United States are experiencing job stress and burnout (Le, 2024). School counselors providing more direct services have reported higher caseload stress, burnout, and overload. The longer a counselor is in the school system, the more likely they are to experience burnout. WHO (2019) classified burnout as a product of prolonged workplace stress that is undermanaged.

This qualitative study was conducted to understand employee burnout, which can possibly lead to staff turnover, low personal fulfillment, depression, quiet resignation, and cognitive avoidance. This study focused on the leadership of Organization X and utilized the Baldrige Framework to enhance the organization's performance and reduce staff burnout. The research questions for the study are:

- RQ 1: How do leaders perceive the effectiveness of burnout prevention strategies implemented within their organization?
- RQ 2: What organizational factors and leadership practices do leaders identify as influential in mitigating or exacerbating burnout?
- RQ 3: What are the major factors influencing burnout in behavioral health professionals at Organization X?

Analysis of the Organization

Professional development is embedded in the organizational routine through structured weekly sessions, including Tuesday professional learning communities and staff meetings. These forums cultivate a culture of collaborative fidelity, where each member actively contributes to shared goals and continuous improvement. The ethos of “walk the walk” reflects a leadership model rooted in authenticity and action, reinforcing alignment between values and practice.

By creating space for educators to openly share challenges, the district fosters psychological safety and mutual accountability. The guiding principle is clear: To effectively serve students, systems must first invest in those who serve them. Leadership indicates that staff meetings, strategically initiated and structured by the leadership, serve as a key organizational mechanism for fostering interdisciplinary collaboration and cultivating a culture of shared responsibility, embodied in the principle of “every adult for every child.” By setting clear parameters and nurturing positive working relationships, leadership ensures that these meetings function as inclusive, purpose-driven forums. Staff engagement is actively monitored through structured assessments, including the use of anonymous surveys, which promote honest feedback and inform responsive leadership actions. This approach reflects a commitment to participatory leadership, psychological safety, and continuous improvement in school climate and professional well-being.

School counselors possess specialized SEL expertise that extends beyond student support into leadership behaviors that shape a collaborative and emotionally attuned

school culture (Bunten, 2025). As social-emotional leaders, they influence students' emotional regulation, empathy, and relationship skills while simultaneously supporting teacher well-being and instructional efficacy (Bunten, 2025). When integrated into distributed leadership structures, counselors enhance decision-making, promote data-driven practices, and promote organizational coherence, thereby strengthening educational quality, fostering inclusive climates, and reinforcing strategic collaboration with school leadership (Bunten, 2025). The organization fosters an effective and supportive workforce environment.

Engaging the Behavioral Health Workforce to Reduce Burnout

Weekly interdisciplinary meetings encourage open dialogue and relational trust. Principals and supervisors foster engagement by modeling transparency and active listening, reducing staff isolation and depersonalization. Anonymous staff engagement surveys are used to assess workforce morale, track engagement trends, and capture burnout indicators in a confidential manner. Behavioral and SEL data are analyzed to ensure equitable workload distribution and early identification of high-stress environments. Weekly Professional Development (PD) and trauma-informed training build self-efficacy and help clinicians develop resilience strategies to manage emotional exhaustion.

Practices such as meditation and tapping are recommended for promoting internal regulation and reducing stress. Mental distress reduction needs to be mediated by increased self-care and moderated by mindfulness practice. Mindfulness fosters greater

appreciation of employees through enhanced empathy, compassion, and emotional intelligence (Voderlin et al., 2021).

The “every adult for every child” approach cultivates a team-based support system among counselors, psychologists, and social workers to alleviate emotional burdens and foster a sense of camaraderie. Improved response timeliness and workflow organization help minimize stress caused by unpredictability and administrative bottlenecks.

Knowledge Management

Organization X holds weekly Tuesday meetings, fosters collaborative fidelity, and shares struggles that align strongly with this research, where engagement grows when educators feel part of a mission-focused team. It championed collaborative professional development and leadership modeling to enhance engagement. Structured meeting rhythms (like Tuesday meetings) and interdisciplinary collaboration increase cohesion, while anonymous feedback fosters psychological safety and trust. Research consistently finds that structured, ongoing professional development, when paired with visible and participatory leadership (“walk the walk”), significantly improves workforce engagement. When leaders actively participate in staff initiatives, such as professional learning communities, they foster a culture of trust and shared responsibility. For example, in a study where principal leadership promoted collaborative professionalism and psychological safety, over 70% of respondents reported engaging “often” or “very often” in all assessed cultural leadership behaviors, indicating a strong trend toward values-driven, relationship-oriented leadership (Hefferman & Pierpoint, 2022). On

average, principals spent the largest portions of their time on administrative tasks (25.9%) and management tasks (22.5%), compared with significantly lower allocations for curriculum/teaching tasks (13.3%), staff support (13.3%), and student interactions (13.4%).

Leadership That Models Collaboration and Communication Boosts Engagement

The leadership assigns meeting structures, fosters relationships, and supports “every adult for every kid,” directly paralleling this evidence of strategic leadership. A 2023 study by Wang et al. explored how teacher leadership and collaborative Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) impact teacher identity and professional agency. The findings indicate that structured and intentional professional development (like weekly interdisciplinary meetings and PLCs) significantly strengthens engagement by promoting shared purpose, teacher voice, and community trust. Their study confirmed that leaders who establish structured meeting rhythms, set clear expectations, and model involvement (e.g., in PLCs or team learning) increase engagement and reduce staff turnover.

Organizational Knowledge Assets

The organization is deeply committed to maintaining a safe and supportive operating environment for all staff and students. First and foremost, Organization X emphasizes proactive communication by encouraging all staff members to promptly report any safety concerns or facility-related issues, such as spills, broken railings, or other hazards, so they may be addressed swiftly and effectively. Timely reporting is crucial to ensure that such matters are resolved before transitions or movement within the

building, thereby mitigating risk.

Once a concern is identified, Organization X collaborates closely with the Facilities Department to either execute repairs or reroute staff and students as needed to maintain safety. Routine maintenance is also a priority; Organization X conducts regular walkthroughs in partnership with the Director of Facilities to identify and address potential risks before they escalate.

To maintain fiscal responsibility and control costs, Organization X initiates the budgeting and pricing process in the fall, well in advance of the subsequent fiscal year, as confirmed by leadership. This process spans from July 1 to June 30. This forward planning is extremely challenging, as it requires forecasting needs and pricing several months in advance of actual procurement activities in July. When Organization X is prepared to place orders, staff actively compare vendors to secure the most competitive pricing. Whenever feasible, Organization X collaborates with its preferred vendors to negotiate or secure lower prices. Given that over 70 educators submit individualized supply requests, Organization X strategically consolidates high-volume items to leverage bulk-purchasing discounts. Upon delivery, these items are distributed equitably according to the initial requests. Organization X strives to respond creatively within available resources while distinguishing between essential “needs” and discretionary “wants,” deferring the latter to the following fiscal year.

In terms of physical resources, Organization X adopts a fiscally responsible “refresh” model for classroom items such as rugs and furniture. For example, replacing rugs in all 50 classrooms in a single fiscal year would represent a significant financial

burden. Instead, organization X systematically refreshes approximately 5–8 rugs annually. This approach ensures the continued safety and quality of classroom materials while maintaining budgetary stability.

Equally important is the emotional and relational safety of the Organizational X workplace. As organizational leaders, the leadership team and staff are intentional about setting a culture of respect and inclusion. Organization X upholds the principle that every individual, regardless of their role, plays a vital part in the success of our collective mission. By fostering a climate of mutual respect and professionalism, the leadership team ensures that high-quality work is achieved in a supportive and collaborative environment.

The organization maintains a high level of preparedness for emergencies and disasters through structured planning, consistent communication, and routine practice. Regular drills are conducted throughout the academic year to ensure that all staff and students are familiar with the appropriate response protocols for various emergency scenarios. These exercises are designed not only to reinforce procedural knowledge but also to build confidence and readiness across the school community.

To further strengthen emergency preparedness, the organization has established a School Safety Committee composed of diverse stakeholders, including administrators, educators, and support staff. This committee plays a critical role in coordinating safety protocols, refining emergency communication strategies, and ensuring a unified response during actual events. Through collaborative planning and continuous review, the committee fosters a culture of safety, clarity, and shared responsibility.

Information Technology Infrastructure

The organization prioritizes the security and protection of sensitive and privileged data through robust cybersecurity measures and oversight. A dedicated Systems Analyst oversees all aspects of digital infrastructure, ensuring that data management practices align with best practices and evolving cybersecurity standards. The organization ensures the reliability and integrity of its information systems through both technical maintenance and routine data verification. Organization X's primary student data platform is managed by a qualified Information Technology (IT) specialist, who is responsible for system performance, troubleshooting, and the implementation of updates to maintain functionality and data security. To further ensure data accuracy, families are required to review and verify their students' information annually.

Organization X manages its organizational assets, information, and IT with collaboration across teams, student services delivery, confidentiality, compliance (i.e., FERPA, HIPAA), IT infrastructure, and knowledge management systems. MTSS framework supports students with academic, behavioral, and mental health needs through three tiers: universal screening (Tier 1), targeted interventions (Tier 2), and individualized support (Tier 3). The three tiers of MTSS offer a progressive continuum of support: Tier 1 includes universal screening to evaluate all students' academic, behavioral, and social-emotional competencies (Marsh & Mathur, 2020). Tier 2 delivers targeted interventions for students identified as at risk (Marsh & Mathur, 2020). Tier 3 involves individualized and intensive support, including functional behavior assessments, individualized behavior intervention plans, and coordinated services with internal and

external mental health professionals (Marsh & Mathur, 2020).

School professionals (counselors, psychologists, social workers) coordinate services, but teachers play a key role in recognizing early signs of mental health issues and connecting students to appropriate support, due to their daily classroom interaction (Marsh & Mathur, 2020). Effective collaboration and clear role identification are essential for timely mental health intervention.

Organizational Knowledge Assets Management is a structured documentation system, such as IEP platforms, which can track behavioral and psychological assessments. BCBAs, school psychologists, and social workers contribute to formal reports and behavioral intervention plans, creating knowledge. The shared behavior data systems support consistent data collection across staff. Promotes institutional memory and rapid onboarding.

Information Management complies with FERPA and HIPAA standards for storing and safeguarding student information and records. Platforms such as Google Workspace for Education or Microsoft Teams for Education are utilized. IT Infrastructure uses an Integrated Student Information System (SIS) and a Digital communication system (Zoom) that helps school psychologists, BCBA, and social workers connect with families virtually. School-issued devices are available for staff and students, providing access to data and resources. Enables better communication and real-time data sharing.

Collaboration between school-based BCBAs and mental health specialists in supporting students with social, emotional, and behavioral (SEB) present challenges (Pollack et al., 2024). While both groups expressed strong willingness to collaborate, the

study highlights ongoing barriers and challenges in practice, emphasizing the need for a deeper understanding of their unique roles and the development of systems that foster effective interdisciplinary partnerships (Pollack et al., 2024). Interdisciplinary Collaboration in team-based approaches like Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, MTSS, Individualized Education Program, and 504 meetings that foster collaboration. BCBAs, school psychologists, and social workers who work with the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act often participate in weekly student support teams. Enables better communication and real-time data sharing.

Knowledge Management

Knowledge management (KM) is defined as the capacity to manage information, including gathering knowledge from internal and external sources, transforming it into new strategies or ideas, and implementing and preserving it (Idrees et al., 2023).

Knowledge Management is responsible for a company's efficiency, effectiveness, and innovation. KM is an organizational capability encompassing the collection of knowledge from both internal and external sources (Idrees et al., 2023). KM is positioned as a central factor in enhancing a company's operational efficiency, strategic effectiveness, and capacity for innovation, with its underlying competitive advantage.

The organization manages information and knowledge assets by maintaining staff handbooks, procedure manuals, and onboarding resources. Centralizing curriculum documentation on digital platforms makes it accessible to all educators. Institutionalizing knowledge through professional learning communities and collaborating meetings at organization X. Keeping Board meeting minutes publicly accessible and internally

accessible. This ensures an easier transition for all staff across school years.

Knowledge is shared through mentorship programs that pair seasoned staff with new staff at Organization X. Cross-functional teams share knowledge across supportive and instructional services. Ongoing professional development is closely tied to data, including test scores and behavioral trends. Digital curriculum tools would include lessons, instructional resources, and guidance. These approaches build a culture of a “learning organization” across Organization X.

Knowledge management facilitates Peer Support and Continuation in Professional Learning Communities, and internal knowledge bases promote shared strategies and collaboration, such as new ABA interventions at Organization X. This would result in smooth onboarding and transition processes. A Cross-disciplinary team. This results in a sense of community and reduced emotional burden through shared responsibility at Organization X.

Streamlined Data Access reduces the administrative burden, which can cause burnout among behavioral health professionals in Organization X. Centralized student data systems, such as those for IEPs, behavior tracking, and attendance, allow behavioral staff and ancillary staff to have expedited access to the necessary information. Reliable data reduces repetitive tasks. Reporting tools facilitate compliance with state and federal mandates, including Section 504 and the IDEA. This allows for more time spent on direct student support and less on paperwork.

Summary

This summarizes how structured professional development, such as weekly PLCs

and staff meetings, fosters a culture of collaborative fidelity and continuous improvement within the organization. Leadership models that emphasize authenticity and action, the “walk the walk”, promote alignment between organizational values and daily practice. By prioritizing psychological safety and mutual accountability, the district ensures that educators feel supported in addressing challenges. The central principle emphasizes that investing in staff well-being and professional development is crucial for delivering effective student support.

Leadership uses strategically structured staff meetings to promote interdisciplinary collaboration and a culture of shared responsibility, guided by the principle “every adult for every child.” By fostering inclusive and purposeful dialogue and using tools like anonymous surveys to gather honest feedback, the leadership demonstrates a commitment to participatory leadership, psychological safety, and ongoing. This model promotes staff well-being and student support through consistent leadership, interdisciplinary collaboration, and data-driven practices. Regular meetings, anonymous surveys, and professional development build trust, reduce burnout, and support emotional resilience. Mindfulness and streamlined crisis protocols further enhance staff capacity, empathy, and service efficiency.

Organization X effectively manages its knowledge assets, information, and IT infrastructure to support student services and interdisciplinary collaboration. Using frameworks like MTSS, the organization provides tiered academic, behavioral, and mental health support. Staff collaborate through structured systems (e.g., IEP platforms, SIS, Google Workspace), ensuring compliance with FERPA/HIPAA regulations.

Teachers play a crucial role in identifying students' needs early on. Studies (Marsh & Mathur, 2020; Pollack et al., 2024) highlight the importance of role clarity and team-based approaches (Positive Behavioral Intervention Supports (PBIS), IEP/504 meetings) to foster effective collaboration among BCBAAs, school psychologists, and social workers.

KM at Organization X strengthens efficiency, innovation, and collaboration by centralizing curriculum resources, maintaining key documentation, and fostering mentorship and cross-functional teamwork. Professional learning communities and digital tools promote ongoing development based on data-driven insights. KM practices also address staff burnout by streamlining data access, centralized systems for IEPs, behavior tracking, and attendance, reducing repetitive tasks and administrative workload. This allows behavioral health professionals more time for direct student support, easing emotional strain and enhancing job satisfaction. Overall, knowledge management fosters a resilient, learning-focused, and supportive organizational culture.

Section 4: Results—Analysis, Implications, and Preparation of Findings

The practice problem of this capstone study is burnout in behavioral health clinicians in school settings, a leading cause of work-related mental health impairment that can be prevented in Organization X by understanding the signs and symptoms. Burnout is a chronic mismatch between high workload, limited resources, and a lack of autonomy, reward, and recognition (Maslach & Leiter, 2008). The community has poor relationships and a lack of workplace support, experiences unfairness, discrimination, or glass ceilings, and values the pride you take in doing well (Maslach, 2021).

School counselors play a crucial role in supporting the academic, emotional, and mental well-being of students, especially within public education systems. However, they are increasingly facing significant levels of job-related stress and burnout. Growing demands for direct student services are contributing to overwhelming caseloads, emotional fatigue, and professional overload (Le, 2024). The longer counselors remain in the field, the more vulnerable they become to burnout. Without intervention, the consequences are far-reaching. Burnout not only affects counselors' ability to perform their roles effectively but also increases turnover rates. When counselors leave, those who remain face even heavier burdens, perpetuating a cycle of stress and depletion within school counseling departments and the school as a whole.

Organization X is experiencing a decline in para educator retention rates, as indicated by interviews with participants. This qualitative case study aimed to understand employee burnout, which led to staff turnover, low personal fulfillment, depression, quiet resignation, and cognitive avoidance. Interviews with leadership using the Baldrige

Framework in Organization X helped improve the implementation of best practices, thereby contributing to the prevention of burnout among its behavioral health staff. The interviews also helped answer the following research questions:

- RQ 1: How do leaders perceive the effectiveness of burnout prevention strategies implemented within their organization?
- RQ 2: What organizational factors and leadership practices do leaders identify as influential in mitigating or exacerbating burnout?
- RQ 3: What are the major factors influencing burnout in behavioral health professionals at Organization X?

This study aimed to drive continuous improvement within Organization X by identifying best practices, innovative approaches, and emerging trends in mental and behavioral health. The findings support informed decisions on resource allocation, program development, and customer care strategies to enhance service delivery, clinical outcomes, and operational efficiency.

Analysis, Results, and Implications

Organization X offers family and community engagement events, communication portals, a special education parent advisory council for students with special needs, and conducts annual school climate surveys for feedback. School-based mental health professionals, including school psychologists and social workers, experience higher levels of role strain and burnout in schools where leadership may not be able to provide support for mental health programming (Domitrovich et al., 2020).

Educators and behavioral health staff play a pivotal role in mitigating the effects

of emotional neglect in school systems (Varghese, 2025). But staff want more training on trauma response, self-care, and crisis de-escalation. This training introduces “relational resilience” and “trauma sensitivity” as protective strategies embedded into professional support frameworks. Further, mental health professionals, including BCBAAs and school psychologists, often face barriers to full inclusion in schoolwide SEL planning, often being siloed into crisis-response roles or reactive interventions rather than proactive SEL efforts. BCBAAs are also frequently overburdened in inclusive school environments, often serving compliance functions rather than engaging in proactive behavior support (Dada & Banerjee, 2022). High caseloads, time pressure, and a lack of interdisciplinary planning time are core contributors to burnout among behavior analysts working in school systems. A misalignment between BCBAAs’ training and their real-world applications in K–12 education may also lead to decreased job satisfaction and increased turnover intentions (Dada & Banerjee, 2022).

One key finding was that burnout may not be addressed in strategic planning, despite staff retention being documented as a goal in the Baldrige Strategy section. Staff burnout impacts the student experience through reduced engagement, absenteeism, and a decline in the quality of instructional materials in the Baldrige Customers section. However, Organization X strives to provide a high-quality, comprehensive, and meaningful education for all students, enabling them to become productive and successful citizens. The goal is to help students grow academically, socially, and emotionally by encouraging them to take responsibility and understand the consequences of their decisions. Their goals are also to enable students to pursue independent thought

and research through both assigned and self-initiated projects and explore the world's cultural heritage through experiences that help broaden social awareness. Providing curricular and co-curricular activities allows students to grow aesthetically, emotionally, intellectually, physically, and socially through interaction with others. To provide appropriate programs and services for students with special intellectual, physical, and emotional needs. The core values of Organization X are student-centered learning, equity and inclusion, accountability and transparency, teaching and learning innovation, collaboration, and community partnership.

With these core values, families' voices are taken into account at Organization X. With a 25% response rate on family surveys, more than double the national average of 11%, this high level of engagement reflects more than just numbers; it reflects a genuine culture of partnership between home and school. These responses offered insight into something deeper: how students feel, how they think, and whether they feel seen. Questions like "Does your child want to come to school?" or "Is your child expressing their thoughts clearly?" pointed to an organization that values student voice not just as a metric, but as a measure of well-being and belonging.

Teachers are also included in engagement at Organization X. There is an emerging culture of risk-taking, where educators are encouraged to try new strategies, adapt based on student feedback, and prioritize what's best for learners, even if it means stepping outside traditional routines. Tools like the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) were being used not only to identify challenges but also to build proactive, emotionally supportive environments that meet students where they are.

DESSA is used as an SEL tool to promote self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. This shows a system that is not just collecting data; it was responding to it with humanity. There was a belief that education is not only about academic growth but also about building connection, confidence, and care for students, behavioral health professionals, teachers, and families.

During interviews with participants in Organization X, I reviewed the website and board minutes, coded for thematic themes, and applied the currency, relevance, authority, accuracy, and purpose (CRAPP) and specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and timely (SMART) criteria to analyze the metrics. The Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timely (SMART) Check is a straightforward, practical tool for assessing the trustworthiness of a literature summary (Van Kempen, 2025). The chronic absenteeism rate was an early indicator of unmet behavioral and emotional needs. School climate survey data measures students' perceptions of mental health support, bullying, and emotional safety. Student services ratios measured counselor-to-student or psychologist-to-student ratios. MTSS implementation provides a proactive, tiered system of behavioral support.

Organizations have turned to tools like DESSA, 5-character traits, and PBIS to better support students' behavioral and emotional needs. Educators across the board reported that the DESSA was easy to use and practical. Teachers and counselors found it especially helpful for understanding students' strengths and for guidance in SEL instruction. The PBIS or MTSS framework provided tiered support for all students, with the greatest success typically observed in reading, math, and behavioral areas. More

interventions for Tier III. These tools helped Organization X identify who will need support and accommodate them accordingly. School psychologists and school counselors reported that these tools help them feel less reactive and more proactive, enabling them to support students more effectively from the outset. Educators felt more comfortable when they were given the right tools to monitor students' emotional well-being. Educators preferred DESSA as a practical and effective tool (Nickerson et al., 2020).

The evidence demonstrated strong endorsement of tools such as the DESSA and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) in schools, not only for identifying issues but also for creating safer, more responsive academic environments (McDaniels et al., 2025). One of the biggest challenges was not the tools themselves but how consistently they were used. Some schools collect valuable data but struggle to act on it because staff were not adequately trained, or the follow-up systems are weak.

The Baldrige framework underscored the importance of valuing employees and fostering environments that support engagement and high performance (Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2021). The Baldrige Framework focuses on key areas, including leadership, strategy, customer focus, and workforce engagement, which are essential for addressing organizational performance challenges. Organization X demonstrated how intentional relationship-building, interdisciplinary collaboration, and structured support systems not only enhance student outcomes but also create conditions that protect behavioral health professionals from burnout. Applying similar principles, such as fostering connection, reducing isolation, clarifying roles, and emphasizing strengths, was essential for organizations seeking to mitigate burnout among those

providing emotional and mental health support. Emphasis on inclusion and a strength-based perspective focuses on integrating students into the general education environment with appropriate support that reflects a strength-based, inclusive philosophy, which can also be extended to staff. When organizations foster cultures that emphasize growth, inclusion, and support for all, including their workforce, they cultivate environments where burnout is less likely to thrive.

The Organization's Workforce-Focused Results

At Organization X, staff are not just employees, they are valued contributors to the system's success. From behavioral health professionals, educators, and administrators, people here are empowered to lead, learn, and grow. The district builds the structure to support improvement. Staff reported feeling more capable, supported, and engaged. Professional learning is part of the culture. Educators are encouraged to take risks, lead teams, and utilize data to drive meaningful student impact.

The climate among staff is also rooted in mutual trust and shared vision. Leadership is not top-down; it is relational. People feel safe speaking up, trying new ideas, and being honest in their reflections. That kind of trust comes from systems that value listening and learning at every level. Perhaps most powerfully, leaders are being developed from within. Instead of searching for talent elsewhere, Organization X invests in its own people. It is about building a school culture where leadership is practiced daily. The result is an organization where people come to contribute, to shape, and to lead, which is the natural outcome when governance, ethics, and engagement are fully aligned.

When school counselors have access to organizational resources, such as

professional development, emotional support, a positive school climate, and simple acknowledgment of their efforts, they're not only more engaged at work (Um & Bardhoshi, 2025) but also more effective in their roles. They also develop a stronger sense of who they are as professionals. That identity fuels their energy, purpose, and resilience in tough moments.

But when those supports are missing, burnout can take hold, not because counselors are weak, but because the system is not holding them up. Maslach's 1981 framework defined burnout through three core dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment. Organizational reforms that prioritize clinician well-being as a foundational element of quality care are the solution.

The goal for Organization X is to use data to guide staffing allocations and interventions. The recommendation is to develop a real-time staffing dashboard, including feasible caseload size, service hours, intervention types by tier, and retention metrics, and formalize MTSS district wide. Additionally, brief satisfaction and workload surveys (2 minutes/month) can be used to spot burnout early and analyze why one psychologist stayed and what the differences are between the two. The goal is to build and retain a capable and engaged workforce. The recommendation is to gradually reduce the BCBA caseload from 50 to 20 via additional full-time or part-time hires. Other strategies are to hire an additional counselor or social worker for the middle school, offer retention bonuses, implement peer mentorships, use hybrid service models such as telepsychology for diagnostic testing or virtual check-ins by school social workers during

peak months can improve service delivery and efficiency, expand leadership programs, increase SEL instruction, and launch a mental health resource portal for parents.

The goal is to deliver high-quality services, ensure smooth daily operations, and organize support by grade level and tier of need. One school psychologist and one school social worker should be assigned to Grades 3–5, while another team supports Grades 6–8. Paraeducators should be used more strategically by training them to manage Tier I behavioral supports, allowing specialists to focus on Tier II and Tier III interventions. Moreover, a clear IEP testing calendar should be created for each school, including buffer weeks to accommodate emergencies.

To support continuous improvement, a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) will be reviewed quarterly with leadership and relevant models. Timely completion of IEP evaluations will serve as a compliance benchmark. Parent satisfaction will be monitored to improve service satisfaction. Staff well-being will be assessed through annual improvements in burnout indicators, using anonymous surveys, focus groups, and well-being audits. Mental health literacy will be measured by the percentage of students and staff who complete mental health awareness training. A reduction in behavioral incidents, such as office referrals and suspensions, will serve as another key metric. Counseling access will be measured by an increase in the number of students utilizing Tier 2 and Tier 3 mental health services. Attendance data will focus on reducing chronic absenteeism. Lastly, student engagement and sense of belonging will be evaluated through improved scores on well-being and school climate surveys.

Organization X should support staff well-being across five key dimensions:

physical, emotional, social, intellectual, and occupational. Offering workshops on resilience, cultural awareness, and mutual support can significantly reduce the risk of burnout and related challenges. Utilizing Evidence-Based Self-Assessment tools can help track clinicians' well-being and performance over time. To protect clinicians' time and maintain the quality of care, Organization X should schedule regular sessions for clinical supervision, professional development, and team meetings.

The Organization's Leadership and Governance Results

Organization X maintains a structured governance model through its Board of Education, which provides oversight and strategic direction for the district. Within the Board of Education, various standing and ad hoc committees support the execution of its responsibilities through focused deliberation and informed decision-making. Among these, the Operations Committee plays a critical role in overseeing matters related to financial stewardship and operational planning. Specifically, the committee is tasked with reviewing and advising on the fiscal year budget, monitoring the status and use of the Environmental, Social, and Governance and Capital Reserve accounts, and evaluating funding opportunities, including grants that support the district's special education programs.

These committees operate as extensions of the Board's commitment to transparency, stakeholder engagement, and strategic governance. They ensure that complex operational and financial decisions are made with careful analysis and in alignment with the district's broader educational mission.

The educational philosophy of Organization X is founded on the fundamental

conviction that the inherent dignity and intrinsic worth of every child must remain central to all educational endeavors. Grounded in the belief that the primary purpose of education is to equip young individuals with the knowledge, skills, and character necessary to assume meaningful and productive roles in both school and society, the district is committed to fostering the holistic development of each student.

The Board of Education maintains and regularly updates a comprehensive manual of policies that serves as the foundational framework for governing the school system. These policies shall always align with applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations, thereby ensuring legal compliance and institutional integrity.

All Board policies shall derive their legitimacy and directional purpose from the Board-adopted Purposes, Goals, and Objectives, which collectively address both student learning outcomes and the operational effectiveness of the school system. These policies are conceived as essential instruments to support informed and consistent decision-making processes across all levels of governance.

At Organization X, 68% of the community participates in governance processes, reflecting strong stakeholder connection and legitimacy. Ethical behavior is internalized (normalized) and becomes part of daily culture. There is a high level of trust among leadership, staff, families, and external stakeholders. Survey data indicate that relationships are strong, with upwards of 80% of respondents reporting trust between groups. A value-aligned culture where ethics and integrity are part of the daily rhythm.

Trust enables lower-level staff to act with autonomy and alignment, thereby reducing the need for extensive oversight. Trust also fosters a willingness to speak up,

report issues, and hold one another morally accountable. This, in turn, fosters an ethical culture and enhances stakeholder confidence.

The ethical climate plays a crucial role in mitigating burnout among workers and enhancing work engagement, ultimately helping to reduce turnover intentions. Since all these variables have been reported to be present in clusters of workers, these aforementioned factors could impact entire workplace organizations, and their improvement could lead to a better work environment overall, in addition to improving the individual factors considered (Borelli et al., 2023).

The organization is meeting legal, regulatory, and accreditation expectations, even exceeding the credibility levels they anticipated. However, what truly stands out is the consistently modeled and practiced ethical culture. It's how decisions are made, how trust is built, and how leadership is lived.

As employees burn out, they may become detached, reducing their participation in governance or oversight roles, which undermines the very trust and ethical culture you aim to sustain.

Weak ethics and a culture of distrust, overbearing moral demands, poor leadership, and a lack of inclusion all contribute to higher burnout, which in turn erodes trust, compliance, and organizational legitimacy. Emotional exhaustion is linked with organizational cynicism (negative orientation), which undermines trust, engagement, and adherence to normative behavior. (Atalay et al., 2022).

High participation metrics (such as 68%) may not accurately reflect meaningful influence or psychological safety. If employees feel their voices do not truly matter, the

symbolic process can increase frustration and burnout (a divergence between appearance and experience).

Personality traits contribute to leadership effectiveness, while the skills-based approach focuses on the tangible knowledge and abilities leaders must acquire (Truehill, 2025). In the context of K–12 education, effective leadership is not innate but developed through the mastery of three core administrative skills: technical, human, and conceptual (Truehill, 2025). These competencies enable educational leaders to manage school operations, engage with their communities, and navigate the complexities of educational environments.

Within K–12 institutions, school leaders are expected to maintain order and uphold ethical standards, particularly during periods of disruption or institutional change. As such, ethical leadership becomes essential for educational leaders to exemplify moral character in their interactions with faculty, staff, and students, fostering environments built on trust, clarity, and integrity (Truehill, 2025).

Findings Related to Individuals, Organizations, Communities, and/or Systems

The Chronic Absenteeism Rate served as an early indicator of unmet behavioral and emotional needs, with student absenteeism significantly exceeding acceptable levels. Attendance challenges reflected deeper systemic issues, including a performance-driven culture, increased stressors on educators, and unclear accountability at home. To address these concerns, Organization X should consider offering two mental health days for both students and staff. Chronic absenteeism remains a nationwide issue, impacting school performance, student well-being, and overall organizational effectiveness.

School Climate Survey data measured students' perceptions of mental health support, bullying, and emotional safety. The results highlighted a growing mental health crisis, with both students and staff feeling emotionally overwhelmed, contributing to a negative school climate. Student Services Ratios, such as counselor-to-student and psychologist-to-student ratios, further revealed gaps in support capacity. The implementation of MTSS provided a proactive, tiered framework for addressing behavioral and emotional needs more effectively across the school community

Organizations have turned to tools like DESSA, 5-character traits, and PBIS to better support students' behavioral and emotional needs. Educators across the board reported that the Devereux Student Strengths Assessment (DESSA) is easy to use and practical. Teachers and counselors find it especially helpful for understanding students' strengths and for guidance in SEL instruction.

The Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) and MTSS frameworks provided tiered support for all students, with the greatest success typically observed in reading, math, and behavioral areas. On the other hand, there was a need for more targeted interventions at the Tier III level to support students with the most intensive needs. These frameworks helped Organization X identify which students required additional support, allowing staff to accommodate those needs in a structured and responsive manner.

School psychologists and school counselors reported that these tools help them feel less reactive and more proactive, enabling them to support students more effectively from the outset. Educators felt more comfortable when they were given the right tools to

monitor students' emotional well-being. Educators preferred DESSA as a practical and effective tool (Nickerson et al., 2020).

The evidence demonstrated strong support for tools such as the DESSA and the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) in schools, not only for identifying issues but also for creating safer, more responsive academic environments (McDaniels et al., 2025).

One of the biggest challenges was the tools themselves, specifically how consistently they were used. Some schools collect great data but struggle to act on it because staff aren't trained, or the follow-up systems are weak.

Individual or team-level performance data was not publicly available. Outcome attribution was rarely direct in reports. Organization X utilizes internal case management logs, intervention success rates, staff observations and feedback, and SEL progress (as measured by DESSA) as key evaluation tools.

When behavioral staff cannot see clear links between their interventions and student progress, it leads to professional dissatisfaction and burnout. Supporting behavioral staff with protected planning time, collaborative review of SEL data, and clear attribution of success can reduce burnout and improve both staff and student outcomes.

Financial and Marketplace Results

From a Baldrige perspective, the financial results show that Organization X had adequate resource investment (high per-student expense) and transparency, but the challenge lay in assuring that this investment translates into strong, improving outcomes and that the financial planning is resilient and stable (leadership, strategy, workforce

implications). Frequent budget uncertainty could erode workforce morale, impede strategic initiatives (such as trauma-informed care programs), and hinder operational efficiency. The strength indicators suggested that a low student-teacher ratio is a plus, indicating a capacity for stronger individualized support. Transparent performance reports and the public availability of data demonstrated a commitment to accountability and continuous improvement. The organization's mission statement aligned with the "whole child" approach, emphasizing the importance of addressing students' academic, social, emotional, and physical needs.

Moreover, the instability of the budgeting environment, marked by frequent cuts and restorations, presents a systemic challenge. It not only threatens the continuity of critical programs (such as trauma-informed care) but also risks undermining workforce morale, eroding stakeholder trust, and impeding long-term planning. According to participants, the 2025–2026 budget plan was restored following the town meeting and referendum. Without this restoration, clinicians would have faced increased caseloads due to staffing limitations, thereby contributing to higher burnout levels. Research consistently links excessive workload and inadequate staffing to emotional exhaustion, reduced professional efficacy, and increased turnover among behavioral health professionals.

Analysis, Results, and Implications

The interviews were manually transcribed into Google Sheets using Excel, ensuring accurate documentation of participant's responses. Following transcription, the data were systematically coded through thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns

and core themes. The thematic construction process was iterative and reflexive. I moved beyond surface-level observations to interrogate the contextual and emotional meanings embedded in participants' narratives. Each theme was carefully identified, refined, and reviewed to ensure it authentically represented the lived experiences of the leadership, behavioral health clinicians, and aligned with the study's core aims. In analyzing the data, I examined the grouped codes to develop overarching themes that reflect deeper patterns relevant to the research questions. These themes were not simply an aggregation of codes but the result of critical interpretations, revealing the nuanced interplay of experiences and insights shared by participants.

RQ 1: How do Leaders Perceive the Effectiveness of Burnout Prevention Strategies Implemented Within Their Organization?

Theme 1: Restoring Norms

Participants noted behavioral team isolation, and those teams (e.g., BCBAs) are working without broader staff engagement. One participant stated, “After the major incident, we worked to realign our expectations and norms.” Further, participants noted artificial success in silos. They stated that teams appear effective in isolation but lack meaningful cross-functional impact. As one participant stated, “It looks good on paper, but the classrooms are still overwhelmed.”

Theme 2: Team Cohesion

Under this theme, participants mentioned collegial emotional support. They said that peer support helps staff process stress and emotional burden. One participant expressed, “Collegial support is what gets us through, someone who just gets it.”

Participants also responded to the importance of action-oriented interdisciplinary teams. Teams (e.g., child study teams) meet regularly to develop collaborative plans. “She genuinely asked us, ‘What should we be doing?’ and what stood out was that she listened. It wasn’t just a question; she truly wanted to understand and act on what we said,” one participant reflected. one statement

Theme 3: Leadership Facilitation

Participants mentioned using functional problem-solving to focus on practical, hands-on solutions to real issues. One participant shared, “The team meets every six days and reviews each student’s behavior plan.” This theme contributes to understanding organizational recovery, burnout repair, and re-establishing coherence after disruption, all of which are critical in trauma-informed school leadership and team-based service delivery.

RQ 2: What Organizational Factors and Leadership Practices Do Leaders Identify as Influential in Mitigating or Exacerbating Burnout?

Theme 4: Real-Time Protection

Organization X has parallel care for adults and students. Recognizing and addressing the emotional needs of both staff and learners, one participant expressed, “We can’t support students if our staff feel neglected or burned out.” Another part of real-time protection was positive child development through safe environments. Three participants emphasized that ensuring physical and emotional safety is foundational to growth and development. Finally, in-the-moment child protection was emphasized. One participant said, “What can we do right now to ensure she’s emotionally safe? What strategies or

actions are taken to protect a child during escalation?”

Theme 5: Open-Ended Communication

Open-ended communication is the use of dialogue that invites broad, reflective responses. One participant shared that, instead of telling others what to do, they asked, “How are you experiencing this?” shifting the focus to understanding rather than directing.

Parent inclusion with an open mindset was also noted. Participants engage parents with a nonjudgmental, collaborative approach. One participant noted that parents came in with open minds, ready not only to listen but to actively engage and contribute to the conversation

Theme 6: Ethical Leadership and Authenticity

Integrity in leadership means that leaders' actions align with their stated values and expectations. One participant noted, "She doesn't just talk about restorative practices; she uses them with staff and students." Whole-child, whole-family support was also mentioned, with emphasis on holistic support that includes both student and family needs. One participant said, "We reached out to the family to make sure they had resources too." Staff also hold shared responsibility for every child in the building. One participant expressed, "Every one of these kids is our kid, not just the ones on our roster." Lastly, leadership scale and visibility were noted. One participant said, "She knows kids by name-- 750 of them."

Theme 7: Crisis-Aware Leadership with Strong Communication

Under this theme, layered communication strategies were emphasized.

Communication escalates from app alerts to phone calls, emails, and meetings. Two participants similarly noted that they start with a care emergency, then a phone call, then an email. Another important aspect was intimate first contact, prioritizing personal communication (e.g., phone call) before formal steps. Two participants noted the importance of calling participants before sending them a meeting invite. Further, there is a written follow-up with families, ensuring communication is documented and clarified via email. One participant said, “The follow-up email summarized what we agreed on during the call.” Additionally, escalating concerns trigger team meetings. Recurring issues lead to a coordinated, interdisciplinary team response. Three participants noted that after a third call, the parents are brought into a team meeting. Finally, communication within the workforce includes emails, meetings, and real-time conversations as part of team coordination. One participant noted, “We used a team email thread and a check-in to address the issue quickly.”

RQ 3: What are the Major Factors Influencing Burnout in Behavioral Health Professionals at Organization X?

Theme 8: Chronic Absenteeism

Participants noted the impact of absenteeism on outcomes. Three participants stated that access to behavioral and physical health services helps stabilize attendance.

Theme 9: Staffing Instability

Staffing instability was noted in support roles. Short-term contracts and high turnover hinder sustained support. One participant responded, “Our para-educator left after 10 months due to the grant ending.” Thus, reliance on external funding can lead to

inconsistencies in service delivery. One participant stated, “We’ve had three different para-educators this year, all grant-based.”

Theme 10: Burnout

There were references to staff feeling overwhelmed, supported, or emotionally affected. Three participants noted how behavioral health clinicians are exhausted. Further, there is behavioral team isolation. Teams (e.g., BCBA) were working without broader staff engagement. According to one participant, “The BCBA team hasn’t coordinated with the classroom staff as often.”

The identified themes illuminated the profound human capacities for resilience, relational care, and ethically grounded leadership. The analysis presented a holistic and nuanced understanding of the challenges behavioral clinicians face, as well as the restorative practices that sustain and enrich their professional lives.

Potential Implications for Positive Social Change

The Baldrige framework underscored the importance of valuing employees and fostering environments that support engagement and high performance (Baldrige Performance Excellence Program, 2021). The Baldrige Framework focuses on key areas, including leadership, strategy, customer focus, and workforce engagement, which are essential for addressing organizational performance challenges.

Implementing evidence-based organizational strategies is crucial for Organization X to enhance workforce engagement, mitigate burnout, and reduce behavioral health staff turnover. Prioritizing staff well-being through comprehensive support not only promotes resilience and job satisfaction but also enhances the overall quality and sustainability of

mental health service delivery. By aligning organizational practices with research-informed approaches, Organization X can advance both organizational continuity and improved student outcomes.

Organization X demonstrated how intentional relationship-building, interdisciplinary collaboration, and structured support systems not only enhance student outcomes but also create conditions that protect behavioral health professionals from burnout. Applying similar principles, such as fostering connection, reducing isolation, clarifying roles, and emphasizing strengths, was essential for organizations seeking to mitigate burnout among those providing emotional and mental health support.

Organization X would benefit from integrating and offering Trauma-informed therapy, recognizing that trauma deeply impacts people's lives, and healing begins with feeling safe, seen, and supported. Trauma-informed care is more than just a clinical approach; it's a shift in how we understand and respond to the needs of individuals who have experienced trauma (Yadav et al., 2024). Using the Baldrige Excellence Framework, trauma-informed principles can be embedded into the Leadership, Workforce, and Operations categories:

- Leadership: Trauma-informed leaders promote psychological safety, model emotional resilience, and support open communication, key drivers in preventing emotional exhaustion and disengagement.
- Workforce: When staff are supported through trauma-aware practices, they are more likely to remain engaged, reducing turnover and burnout.
- Operations: Integrating trauma-informed strategies into systems and processes

helps create sustainable routines that prioritize both client and staff well-being.

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) outlines six core values that guide trauma-informed practice:

- Safety
- Trustworthiness and transparency
- Peer support
- Collaboration and mutuality
- Empowerment, voice, and choice
- Consideration of cultural, historical, and gender factors

The SAMHSA collaborative care model not only improves clinical outcomes but also helps individuals reclaim hope, build resilience, and move forward with strength and dignity (Yadav et al., 2024).

My suggestions (creating spaces for staff connection, peer support, inclusive culture, trauma-informed care) align strongly with the ‘Workforce’ and ‘Operations’ categories and are scientifically supported. Implementing them may help improve workforce engagement.

Figure 1*Improvement Strategy for Organization X*

Another cure for burnout in organizations is to provide people with opportunities to connect on non-work-related topics, such as establishing a Slack or Teams channel, supporting collaborative projects that energize the team, and linking them to the organization's mission (Moss, 2021).

Behavioral health clinicians found strength in not worrying alone, leaning on colleagues, whether in formal supervision or informal chats with more experienced team members (Najmabadi et al., 2024). These connections helped them feel less isolated and more capable. Workplaces actively encouraged staff well-being by integrating short self-care activities into team meetings, creating a culture where it's okay to take a break (Najmabadi et al., 2024). Training opportunities also helped keep professionals up to date and offered them spaces to reflect and find support.

To move toward excellence, the district should:

- Strengthening the connection between strategic initiatives and student outcomes
- Ensure financial planning stability that supports long-term goals
- Develop a culture of data-driven continuous improvement
- Engage the community and staff more deeply in co-creating the path forward

Organization X has the foundational pieces of an effective organization, but to deliver on its mission, it must align its intentions, investments, and impact more coherently.

Organization X should support staff well-being (physical, emotional, social, intellectual, and occupational). Workshops on resilience, cultural, and mutual support can reduce substantial risk. Use Evidence-Based Self-Assessment to track clinicians. Protect clinicians' time by scheduling regular sessions for supervision, professional development, and team meetings.

The Job Demands–Resources (JD-R) framework reminds us that people thrive when their job gives them more than it takes (Um & Bardhoshi, 2025). And school counselors, often at the emotional front lines of student support, especially need that balance. Mindfulness isn't just a wellness buzzword; it's a powerful personal resource that can change the way people experience their work (Lyddy et al., 2025).

By blending the well-established JD-R model with the growing science of mindfulness, the researchers found something striking: Mindful employees aren't just less burned out, they're more engaged, more authentic, and more connected to a deeper sense of meaning at work.

The takeaway is clear: mindfulness isn't just self-care, it's strategic care.

Organizations investing in mindfulness training and contemplative leadership practices aren't just being kind; they're being smart. They're building cultures that help people stay well, work well, and lead well, especially in emotionally demanding professions like education, counseling, and healthcare.

Ethical leadership can prevent employee burnout (EBO) by creating an environment where employees feel valued and empowered, work in a stable environment, and students achieve their full potential. The results of this study will help academic school settings prevent burnout and promote positive social change through transparent communication, staff participation in decision-making, fair workload distribution, team-building gatherings, flexibility within the unit, mindfulness practices, and engagement in well-being initiatives with clinicians (Speicher & Francis, 2023).

Transformational Leadership, characterized by motivation, inspiration, and personal support, can significantly reduce teacher burnout (Garcia et al., 2024). Principals who adopt this style help alleviate emotional exhaustion, reduce depersonalization, and enhance teachers' sense of personal accomplishment. In contrast, transactional and passive-avoidant leadership styles tend to increase detachment and lower morale among teachers. By investing in transformational behaviors, such as coaching, mentoring, and empowering staff, school leaders can create a healthier and more motivating work environment (Garcia et al., 2024).

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

This qualitative study sought to understand how school-based behavioral health

professionals, specifically BCBA's, school psychologists, and school social workers, personally experience and make sense of burnout in the day-to-day realities of Organization X. These professionals play vital roles in supporting student mental health, behavior intervention, and crisis response. Yet, despite their importance, their voices may be left out of the conversation when it comes to shaping organizational wellness strategies.

Grounded in the Baldrige Excellence Framework, this study examined not only individual stress but also how large organizational systems, including leadership engagement, staff support structures, and strategic priorities, impact professional well-being and sustainability. The goal is not to evaluate or criticize but to inform improvement-oriented strategies that better support the resilience and retention of non-teaching staff.

While burnout among educators has been widely studied, there's far less research on behavioral health roles within schools. These professionals often work behind the scenes, across multiple buildings, with growing caseloads and limited voice in leadership decisions. Understanding their experience is critical to developing systems that not only serve students well but also care for the staff who serve them.

Leaders are busy, cautious, and sometimes protective of their public image, especially when topics like staff burnout might reflect systemic weaknesses. Securing time for interviews may require persistence and flexibility, and responses may tend to be positive or diplomatic. This study aims to bridge that gap, bringing together the voices of practitioners and leaders to inform a more inclusive and sustainable model of

organizational wellness.

From a Baldrige standpoint, the key gaps were in Strategy, Workforce, Operations, and Results. Leadership must integrate workforce wellbeing, trauma-informed practices, the JD-R framework, and improved instructional/operational design for continuous improvement.

Section 5: Recommendations and Conclusions

In the previous section, I discussed the importance of implementing evidence-based organizational strategies for Organization X to foster a resilient, engaged workforce, particularly in behavioral health. When staff well-being is prioritized through intentional support systems and a culture of care, it not only enhances their job satisfaction but also improves the quality, continuity, and impact of mental health services offered to students. Research strongly supports the idea that workforce engagement and emotional sustainability are closely tied to workplace practices rooted in empathy, connection, and clarity. Organization X demonstrated that investing in relationship-building, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration, and establishing support systems leads to improved student outcomes while also protecting staff from the emotional toll of burnout. These principles, connection, role clarity, and strength-based approaches create environments where staff feel valued, seen, and supported, which is crucial for those working with emotionally intensive individuals. Organization X should support staff well-being (physical, emotional, social, intellectual, and occupational). Workshops on resilience, cultural, and mutual support can reduce substantial risk. They can use evidence-based self-assessment to track clinicians. Additionally, it is important to protect clinicians' time by scheduling regular sessions for supervision, professional development, and team meetings.

Recommendation 1: Employee Retention Strategies

To strengthen talent-attraction strategies, organizations must develop a deeper understanding of the diverse preferences within their multigenerational workforce while

also recognizing the unique needs of each individual employee (Mishra et al., 2024). This personalized approach can enhance the employer's brand and make the organization more appealing to a broader range of candidates. Building long-term relationships with candidates is equally important. Even those who are not hired can become valuable future employees, clients, or advocates (Mishra et al., 2024). By creating a positive candidate experience, organizations nurture a sustainable talent pipeline and expand their professional work.

Job satisfaction is shaped by various factors, including relationships with supervisors, the quality of colleagues, compensation practices, and the physical work environment. One of the most effective ways to enhance employee retention is through comprehensive training and development, which builds skills, fosters growth, and strengthens employee engagement (Igbinoba et al., 2022). Reward strategies, such as competitive pay, also play a crucial role in attracting and retaining talented staff.

Supportive supervision is also important. Poor supervision contributes to dissatisfaction and turnover, while strong leadership improves job satisfaction and helps reduce attrition (Igbinoba et al., 2022). Additionally, involving employees in decision-making processes enhances motivation and fosters a sense of ownership in the workplace.

Retention strategies should address employees' diverse needs by fostering a positive, supportive environment that encourages long-term commitment. Over time, these strategies not only reduce turnover costs but also enhance the organization's reputation, which is closely linked to employee performance and overall job satisfaction (Igbinoba et al., 2022). Furthermore, a strong onboarding experience plays a critical role

in shaping employee engagement. When new hires feel welcomed and supported from the outset, they are more likely to remain satisfied and committed over time, which can lead to improved retention (Mishra et al., 2024).

Recommendation 2: Implementation for Employee Satisfaction Surveys

A systematic and data-informed approach to collecting and interpreting employee feedback, particularly through structured surveys, plays a crucial role in fostering a positive workplace culture and enhancing broader organizational effectiveness (Deloitte, 2021). This practice enables leaders to identify emerging concerns, recognize patterns in employee engagement, and implement targeted interventions based on empirical insights.

Recommendation 3: Focus on Professional Development

Continuing professional development is essential for behavioral health clinicians, as it enables them to maintain their competence and uphold high standards of care throughout their careers (Kloosterman, 2014). This process is not limited to formal training but represents a continuous commitment to learning and growth. While professional development is a collective expectation within the field, it ultimately rests on the individual's responsibility to stay informed and skilled (Kloosterman, 2014). By doing so, professionals are better equipped to meet the evolving needs of clients, fulfill their professional obligations, and contribute to public safety and trust in behavioral health services (Kloosterman, 2014).

Anonymous staff engagement surveys are used to assess workforce morale, track engagement trends, and capture burnout indicators in a confidential manner. Behavioral and SEL data are analyzed to ensure equitable workload distribution and early

identification of high-stress environments.

Recommendation 4: Support Structural Changes with Clear Goals and Metrics

To support employee mental health effectively, organizations must integrate well-being measures into their existing engagement surveys, ensuring that the questions used are thoughtfully designed to capture key aspects of mental health (Croft et al., 2024). This requires organizational commitment not only to data collection, but also to the analysis and use of that data to guide meaningful change. One promising method is a concise four-question module that regularly measures job satisfaction, sense of purpose, happiness, and stress (Croft et al., 2024). This approach enables organizations to track trends, address concerns early, and assess the impact of well-being initiatives on productivity, retention, and recruitment (Croft et al., 2024).

These well-being champion networks rely on volunteer employees who promote mental health awareness and act as bridges between staff and leadership. Their success depends on system-level support, including policies and resources that recognize and integrate the role into existing responsibilities (Croft et al., 2024). Research shows that well-being champions who receive strong support from their managers are more engaged in planning and motivating colleagues, underscoring the importance of leadership in sustaining these initiatives.

Recommendation 5: Trauma-Informed Practices

A key area where Organization X can deepen its commitment is by implementing trauma-informed care. Trauma-informed therapy goes beyond a set of techniques; it reflects a broader shift in understanding how trauma shapes individual behavior and

healing (Yadav et al., 2024). Healing, as they argue, begins when individuals feel safe, seen, and heard, not just in therapy rooms, but in every interaction and environment (Yadav et al., 2024)

SAMHSA (2014) offers a clear and compassionate framework to guide trauma-informed organizational practices. These six core values are: safety; trustworthiness and transparency; peer support; collaboration and mutuality; empowerment with voice and choice; and attention to cultural, historical, and gender factors. These values remind us that care is not only clinical, but it is also relational, cultural, and systemic. For Organization X, embedding trauma-informed practices and nurturing a culture of collaboration can transform not only service delivery but also the lived experience of every professional and student within its care.

Trauma-informed leadership has been shown to reduce the conditions that lead to burnout and to support the development of growth opportunities following crisis experiences. Leaders and those in leadership roles can better prepare organizations to navigate future traumatic events through targeted training and skill development (Olson et al., 2020). Leadership in this context is not a solitary endeavor; rather, it is a collaborative team effort that requires members to be dependable, resilient, and adaptable to both change and crisis. Effective leadership plays a crucial role in managing organizational trauma, fostering systemic recovery, and guiding the organization through a process of healing and post-traumatic growth (Thom, 2022).

Trauma-informed care in organizational contexts can be understood through a progressive four-phase model designed to guide institutions toward more supportive,

responsive, and sustainable workplace environments. Each phase offers strategic actions that organizations can adopt to recognize, mitigate, and address the effects of trauma on both employees and organizational outcomes (Choitz & Wagner, 2021).

Awareness is the first step for any organization seeking to foster sound employee relationships and enhance interpersonal skills with clients or customers. In this phase, an organization becomes aware of the prevalence of trauma and its impact on workers, clients, and business outcomes. Employee satisfaction surveys are a key tactic for understanding how employees perceive their workplace and work relationships.

In the sensitivity and second phase, an organization begins to understand trauma-informed principles, causes, expressions, and possible ways to overcome trauma-related problems that affect workers and businesses. One-on-one discussions, performance reviews, and team meetings are effective platforms for communicating with employees. Any actions taken in response to employee satisfaction surveys should preserve confidentiality. In the response phase, an organization begins to implement policy and procedural changes that affect culture and eliminate trauma triggers. In the last phase, an organization begins implementing trauma-informed practices and monitors the impacts of policy and practice changes. These practices help build self-efficacy and enable clinicians to develop resilience strategies for managing emotional exhaustion.

Recommendation 6: Mentorship Program

Implementing a structured mentorship program for new staff in work settings supports both professional development and smoother integration into the workplace. Drawing on insights from Diab and Green (2024), mentorship is recognized as a vital

component of professional growth. Experienced staff serve as mentors, offering guidance on working effectively with youth and fostering a supportive environment. This approach not only accelerates new employees' adaptation to their roles but also reinforces the organization's commitment to building a skilled and confident workforce.

Recommendation 7: Empowering Leadership

Empowering leadership involves leaders intentionally sharing power to foster employee autonomy, active participation, informed decision-making, and personal responsibility. This leadership style is characterized by behaviors such as open communication, delegation of authority, and encouragement of independent thinking (Semedo et al., 2022). In organizational research, empowering leadership has become increasingly relevant due to its positive impact on individuals and teams.

Studies have shown that when employees feel self-determined, they tend to be more committed to their organization, experience greater job satisfaction, and report lower levels of emotional exhaustion (Semedo et al., 2022). These outcomes are often linked to a reduced intention to leave the organization. In particular, the empowerment profile marked by empathy, self-awareness, and leading by example has been associated with the highest levels of intrinsic motivation among employees (Semedo et al., 2022).

This leadership approach aligns closely with principles of job enrichment, as it enhances the meaning and value of tasks. Empowering leadership supports the fulfillment of fundamental psychological needs in the workplace. Employees feel a sense of competence as they develop skills and experience personal agency; they feel relatedness through being respected and acknowledged; and they experience autonomy by being

included in decisions and having their perspectives valued. Collectively, these factors contribute to a more engaging, meaningful, and satisfying work environment (Semedo et al., 2022).

When organizational leadership is effectively supported, and leaders are empowered to maintain their own well-being, overall organizational functioning improves. This promotes a positive work environment. Organizations that achieve high levels of health literacy are more likely to foster healthy workplaces and support employees' psychological well-being (Murphy, 2025).

The Empowering Leadership Questionnaire (ELQ) has emerged as one of the most widely utilized instruments for assessing empowering leadership behaviors within organizational settings. Comprising 38 items across five dimensions, coaching (11 items), leading by example (5 items), informing (6 items), participative decision-making (6 items), and showing concern/interpersonal support (10 items), the Empowering Leadership Questionnaire (ELQ) offers a comprehensive framework for evaluating leadership practices that foster autonomy, engagement, and capability among team members (Schermyly et al., 2025).

Recommendation 8: Access to Outdoor and Green Spaces and Plant Installations

The configuration and environmental conditions of office spaces significantly influence employee well-being, satisfaction, and productivity. Research indicates that higher numbers of employees in enclosed office spaces are correlated with increased psychosocial stressors and environmental dissatisfaction, which are further linked to psychosomatic symptoms, irritability, and diminished focus and work performance

(University of Rochester Medical Center, 2022). One of the primary environmental stressors is noise, which has been consistently linked to elevated stress levels, decreased motivation, increased distraction, and impaired performance outcomes.

Access to outdoor and green spaces is widely acknowledged to yield positive psychological and physiological effects, providing the basis for nature-based workplace interventions that aim to enhance employee health cost-effectively (University of Rochester Medical Center, 2022). Complementarily, the introduction of indoor plants has demonstrated multiple benefits. Empirical studies have revealed that plant installations contribute to improved thermal comfort, enhanced perceived environmental quality, increased psychological well-being, reduced visual fatigue, and improved air quality (University of Rochester Medical Center, 2022).

Recommendations 9: Mindfulness & Somatic Practices

Practices such as meditation and tapping are recommended to promote self-regulation and reduce stress. Mental distress reduction needs to be mediated by increased self-care and moderated by mindfulness practice. Mindfulness fosters greater appreciation of employees through enhanced empathy, compassion, and emotional intelligence (Voderlin et al., 2021).

Recommendation 10: Adequate Caseloads and Adequate Para-educator

Compensation

Leadership needs to empower school psychologists, school counselors, BCBAs, and school social workers to take data-informed leadership roles in redesigning service delivery. Use real-time student data to create a cross-disciplinary leadership team

(psychologist, BCBA, Special Education teacher, administrator) to assess caseload sustainability.

Ensure workforce planning aligns with the district's educational mission and student performance goals. Set a 3-year workforce plan targeting a 20-student BCBA caseload max, a school psychologist and student ratio of 1:500 (APA recommended), and a retention goal of 70% for school psychologists and social workers within 2 years. And flexible models for maternity and medical leaves. Leaders need to address paraeducator pay differentials and retention as part of the equity strategy.

Recommended Implementation and Evaluation Procedures

Developing a thoughtful dissemination plan to share with organizational leaders is essential to ensuring recommendations are communicated with clarity, depth, and alignment with strategic priorities. A well-structured plan not only promotes shared understanding but also fosters buy-in across leadership levels. By implementing retention initiatives, conducting satisfaction surveys, empowering leadership, incorporating mindfulness practices, managing caseloads effectively, providing para-educator compensation, and implementing trauma-informed practices, the organization demonstrates a proactive commitment to the well-being and effectiveness of its behavioral health team and educators. Supporting organizational staff in this way enhances their capacity to lead with clarity, resilience, and empathy, qualities that directly influence staff morale, students, stakeholders, behavioral health clinicians, educators, and organizational cohesion. Investing in organizational wellness improves the overall organization.

Recommendations for Future Studies Addressing Similar Topics

This study represents a single-case design, with data collected exclusively from participants in Organization X. While the findings offer valuable insights into localized experiences, their limited scope restricts generalizability. Future research should expand on this foundation by exploring the potential drawbacks and benefits of implementing trauma-informed practices, self-compassion interventions, work-life balance strategies, and leadership approaches that emphasize employee retention and empowerment. Additionally, evaluating the impact of employee satisfaction assessments and professional development initiatives may offer a more comprehensive understanding of their role in enhancing the behavioral health workforce. Such investigations are crucial for developing evidence-based strategies to enhance workforce sustainability and prevent professional burnout in high-stress behavioral health settings (Choitz & Wagner, 2021; Thom, 2022)

The Plans to Disseminate This Work to The Organization

The purpose of this study was twofold: to support my scholarly pursuit of a topic relevant to Organization X and to contribute to improved changes that may benefit behavioral health clinicians and Organization X. Upon completion of the capstone study, I will present an overview of the findings and scholarly recommendations. This meeting will serve as a foundation for discussing the dissemination of the research to the leadership team at Organization X. As outlined in this implementation plan, dissemination will be delivered through a PowerPoint presentation and an informative executive summary that includes the research methodology, key findings, and

recommendations. The focus of the presentation will be on the importance of leadership in engaging in a strategic planning process to navigate the course for necessary improvement, enhance future performance, and prevent burnout.

Summary and Conclusions

This single-case study, grounded in the Baldrige Excellence Framework, examined how organizational systems such as leadership, support structures, and strategic priorities impact the well-being of behavioral health staff in Organization X. While limited in scope, the study highlights the often-overlooked challenges faced by school-based behavioral health professionals, including demanding caseloads, limited voice in leadership, and emotional strain.

Unlike educators, behavioral health staff often operate behind the scenes across multiple school buildings, with growing caseloads and limited influence in decision-making. Their voices are essential in shaping systems that not only meet student needs but also sustain the professionals delivering those services. This study sought to bridge that gap, bringing together practitioner and leadership perspectives to inform a more inclusive and resilient model of organizational wellness.

A theme emerging from the findings is the importance of trauma-informed leadership, which has the potential to transform an organization's culture when applied intentionally. A progressive four-phase model for trauma-informed care in organizational contexts was proposed, aiming to create supportive, responsive, and sustainable environments that prevent burnout and promote staff well-being.

By integrating trauma-informed leadership, effective retention strategies, efficient

caseload management, and comprehensive wellness initiatives, the organization can foster a more supportive and sustainable environment. Prioritizing staff well-being enhances morale, reduces burnout, and strengthens the overall capacity to serve students effectively. Investing in organizational wellness is not only beneficial but also essential for long-term success.

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