



# HR News Special Edition

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## Improving Staff Wellness in APS

This fall we have been developing a Wellness Leadership Team to support staff wellness throughout APS. Our goal is to create a culture of Sustainable Care which allows our staff to find the balance between engaging passionately in their work while simultaneously caring for themselves and ultimately providing more successful learning environments for our students.

### APS Wellness

What is health and wellness? As defined by UC Davis, wellness is an active process of becoming aware of and making choices toward a healthy and fulfilling life. Wellness is more than being free from illness, it is a dynamic process of change and growth. It's a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease.

APS has employee Wellness Coordinators, Rachel Phillips and Frances (Frannie) Warren, who are here to help you live your best life. You can reach out at any time for a one on one to jump start your wellness journey and goals. This can include healthy eating, active living, and mindfulness.

Additionally, a majority of our schools and off site locations have a wellness champion. If you want more information, don't know who your champion is, or want support in serving as a site liaison, email your district wellness team at:

[rmpillips@aurorak12.org](mailto:rmpillips@aurorak12.org)

or

[fmwarren@aurorak12.org](mailto:fmwarren@aurorak12.org).

APS now has two Mindful Sustainable Care coordinators who are available to work with administrators and staff in developing sustainable care supports and plans. Feel free to contact Lisa Vratny-Smith [lvratny-smith@aurorak12.org](mailto:lvratny-smith@aurorak12.org) and Lindsey Dowell Gallegos [lddowell@aurorak12.org](mailto:lddowell@aurorak12.org) for support.



## Educator Stress

The work of educators is to give of themselves and be present for students and staff. Taking care of ourselves is how we sustain this work overtime. The stress related to our work and the struggles and trauma many of our students and families experience can interfere with both of these things.

How do educators know if they are just tired or are experiencing compassion fatigue, burnout, or secondary trauma?

### Tired:

The Webster's dictionary definition of tired is:

1. drained of strength and energy : fatigued often to the point of exhaustion:
2. obviously worn by hard use : RUN-DOWN

Feeling tired is a part of the human condition. We all experience it to some extent on a daily basis. It is normal to feel tired at the end of the day or week, especially when our work requires giving of ourselves. Our feelings of tiredness can range from sleepiness to fatigue to exhaustion. We can feel run down and worn out from physical, mental, or emotional activity, but after rest and sustenance we are able to rebound back to our normal energy level.

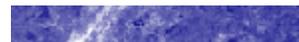
Compassion Fatigue is a serious, but natural consequence of regularly helping people who are suffering and/or traumatized. The experience of compassion fatigue is on a spectrum and might vary according to our life experiences and the time of year. It may feel like a deep physical and emotional exhaustion; a pronounced change in the ability to feel empathy for clients, loved ones and co-workers. People with compassion fatigue often say they have "nothing left to give". In addition, people might begin to feel the trauma of those they are helping and this can lead to vicarious trauma - a type of Post Traumatic Distress associated with helping people with trauma.

(Char Richards, [www.caringsafely.org](http://www.caringsafely.org))

Burnout is associated with feelings of hopelessness and difficulties in dealing with work or doing our job effectively. These negative feelings usually have a gradual onset. They can reflect the feeling that our efforts make no difference or they can be associated with a very high workload or a non-supportive environment. (Proqol, 2018)

Burnout is an extreme circumstance. It describes someone whose health is suffering or whose outlook on life has turned negative because of the impact or overload of their work. Signs and symptoms of compassion fatigue have become chronic and physical illness has developed. Brief interventions no longer help. Psychological and/or medical assistance is necessary.

(Char Richards, [www.caringsafely.org](http://www.caringsafely.org))



## Educator Stress

**Secondary Traumatic Stress** is the emotional duress that results when an individual hears about the first hand trauma experiences of another. Its symptoms mimic those of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Accordingly, individuals affected by secondary stress may find themselves re-experiencing personal trauma or notice an increase in arousal and avoidance reactions related to the indirect trauma exposure. They may also experience changes in memory and perception; alterations in their sense of self-efficacy; a depletion of personal resources; and disruption in their perceptions of safety, trust, and independence. A partial list of symptoms and conditions associated with [secondary traumatic stress](#) includes:

- Hypervigilance
- Hopelessness
- Inability to embrace complexity
- Inability to listen, avoidance of clients
- Anger and cynicism
- Sleeplessness
- Fear
- Chronic exhaustion
- Physical ailments
- Minimizing
- Guilt

## Sustainable Care

Due to the high level of trauma many of our students and families experience, a large number of our APS staff are at risk for experiencing Secondary Traumatic Stress, which can lead to Compassion Fatigue and Burnout. (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network)

**Sustainable Care** is the ability to help others in a compassionate and caring manner that creates a sense of compassion satisfaction and prevents burnout. We are able to engage in our work with passion and commitment while simultaneously caring for ourselves in ways that support our emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being. Sustainable care involves proactive strategies related to self-care, nourishment, and purpose. In order to know what we need to do to care for ourselves, we need to learn to pay attention to our minds, bodies, and emotions. This can be referred to as Mindful Self-Awareness.

- **Self-care:** External activities we do to feel rejuvenated and satisfied with the work of helping others. Examples: exercise, bubble bath, massage, manicure, movie night, time with friends, etc.
- **Nourishment:** Internal activities we do to feel rejuvenated and satisfied with the work of helping others. Examples: meditation, prayer, journaling, reflection, counseling, gratitude practice, time alone, etc.
- **Purpose:** The reason(s) we do the work of helping others. Examples: reminders of why we chose this work and our purpose for continuing to do it, quotes, pictures, notes of gratitude from others, etc.



## Sustainable Care

When we are able to practice sustainable care we can support students and staff in crisis and trauma without becoming part of the trauma. Holding the space with them without becoming overwhelmed for them. We are able to continue our work over time with purpose and passion.

If you are experiencing symptoms of compassion fatigue, burnout, or secondary trauma it is important to seek professional support. One option provided by the district in the Employee Assistance Program (see next page). Additionally, mental health services are included in our district insurance plans.

## Self Reflection

As we reach the end of 2018 and the midpoint of the school year, it is a good opportunity to assess how each of us are doing mentally, emotionally, and physically. Please take time over the break for moments of self-care, nourishment, and refocusing on your purpose for the work you do. Take time to reflect on successes and challenges, make plans for how you want to move forward into 2019, and what you need to sustain your energy and passion.

Sometimes sustainable care can feel like one more thing we are supposed to do. However, our minds and bodies are the one thing we actually have some control over. Taking time to remember that sustainable care allows us to do the work we love with more joy and presence will give us permission to make ourselves a priority on our to-do lists.

“...We are stewards not just of those who allow us into their lives but of our own capacity to be helpful...” ~ *Trauma Stewardship*, JR. Conte



## APS Employee Assistance Program

Aurora Public School's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) program, provided by ComPsych offers up to three (3) no-cost counseling sessions per employee, dependent and household member per issue per year. Local counselors specialize in a variety of issues and their offices are in close proximity to your home or workplace. In addition to face-to-face counseling ComPsych also offers the following:

- Confidential Counseling- no-cost counseling service, staffed by highly trained guidance consultants
- Legal Support- Talk to attorneys by phone and if representation is needed then they will refer you to an attorney in your area. Get a free 30 minute consultation and 25% reduction in customary legal fees
- Financial Information and Resources- Speak with a Certified Public Accountant and Certified Financial Planners regarding a variety of financial issues
- Work Life Solutions - Specialists will provide referrals for customized resources for services such as
  - Child and elder care
  - Relocation
  - College Planning
  - Major purchases
  - Pet care
  - Home repair
- Healthcare Navigation- Provides assistance with healthcare questions, claims and costs

These service are confidential and your employer will not be informed of your participation. Information will only be released with your permission or as required by law for child or elder abuse or in a life threatening situation.

To access services through APS' EAP call 1-888-628-4809 or visit [guidanceresources.com](http://guidanceresources.com) and register using the organization web ID: GALLAGHER