



# Trends Shaping Education Spotlight 14

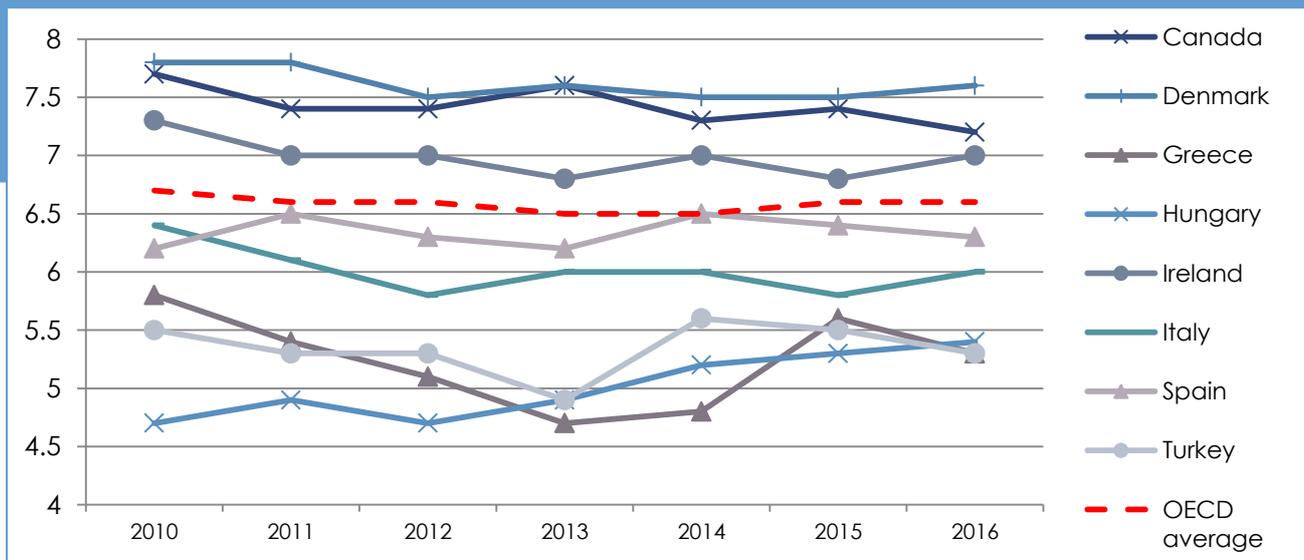
## Good vibrations: Students' well-being

Over the past century, technological development and better access to services has resulted in significant improvements to quality of life. Despite this, however, levels of stress, anxiety and depression are rising. Education can play a role in supporting well-being during and beyond schooling.

### Life satisfaction

Across OECD countries, almost 25% of people experience more anger, worry and sadness than enjoyment, rest and smiling or laughter every day (OECD, 2015a). Factors that impact well-being are myriad, and vary from water quality to positive social networks and relationships. In OECD countries, average self-reported life satisfaction has remained stable between 2010-2016 (Figure 1). The highest rates of life satisfaction are in Australia, Canada, the Netherlands and the Nordic countries (Denmark, Finland Norway and Sweden), while the lowest rates are found in countries such as Greece, Hungary and Turkey.

Figure 1: Life Satisfaction (from scale of 0-10) in OECD countries



Note: OECD average calculation includes available data for all member states.

Source: Author, with data from in Helliwell, J., R. Layard and J. Sachs (2017), *World Happiness Report 2017*, Sustainable Development Solutions Network, New York. "Online data" appendix for Chapter 2, available at: <http://worldhappiness.report/>.

## Students' well-being

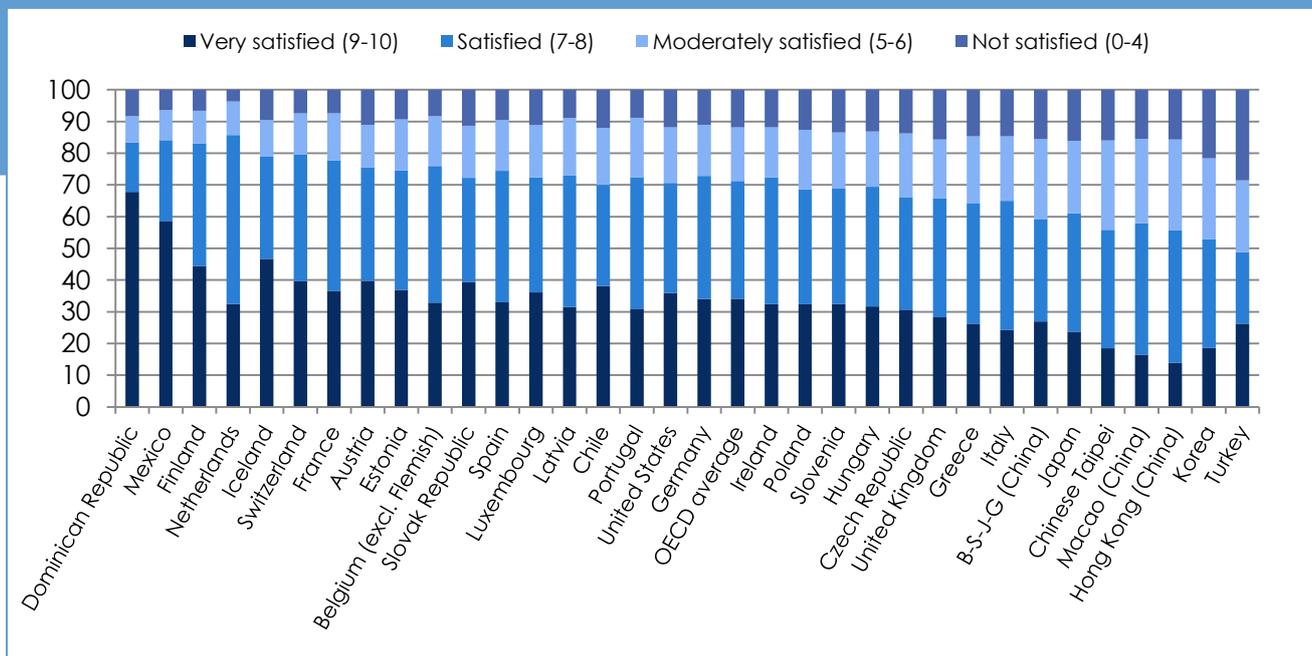
Schools are increasingly concerned not only with students' academic performance but also with students' well-being. Educators refer to this as the need to develop a "whole child" perspective in education, with a balanced focus on cognitive, social, and emotional skills (OECD, 2015b).

Education has the potential to positively impact well-being through enhancing cognitive, social and emotional skills.

This is important for a number of reasons: Students with higher levels of well-being tend to have better self-esteem, more satisfaction with their schools and life, and healthier relationships with others (Park, 2004). The OECD's 2015 Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) reveals a positive relationship between sense of belonging at school, satisfaction with life and academic performance (OECD, 2017).

In the 2015 PISA edition, students from a range of countries were asked to report their level of satisfaction with life. As illustrated in Figure 2, OECD countries with the highest levels of student reported life satisfaction on average were Finland, Mexico and the Netherlands. Average satisfaction with life was lower in Korea, Japan and Turkey.

Figure 2: Life satisfaction among 15-year-old students



Note: Countries and economies are ranked in descending order of their students' average satisfaction with life.

Source: OECD (2017), Figure III.3.1. Life satisfaction among 15-year-old students, in *PISA 2015 Results (Volume III): Students' Well-Being*, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris.

From a lifetime perspective, enhancing well-being during schooling years might be particularly relevant (Choi, 2018). Changes in brain structures of children and adolescents have long-term implications for cognitive functioning, emotion regulations, motivation, and

social interactions (Giedd, Keshavan, and Paus 2008). Emotionally healthy children have higher odds of growing into adults who are happy, confident, and enjoy healthy lifestyles.

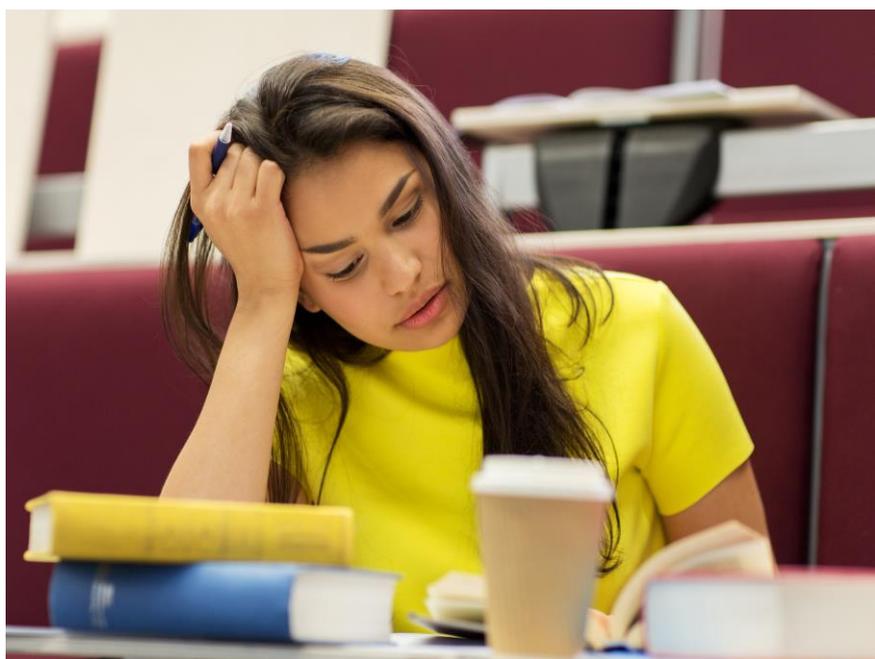
Students' well-being includes subjective, emotional and cognitive functioning. It can be considered as a combination of each of the components, enabling a balance between areas of functioning that might be comparatively better than others (Hascher, 2003). Schooling has a large impact on such balance: the school environment, the level of student engagement, and the connectedness or relationships students have with their peers and teachers are all decisive factors of students' well-being (Choi, 2018).

### Well-being in tertiary education

Part of the long run effects of well-being during early years can be observed among tertiary education students. Positive and negative experiences during the schooling years may affect the likelihood that they will pursue and complete tertiary education later in life. For example, analysis using the data from the Canadian Youth in Transition (YITS) study found that student's self-efficacy and self-esteem, which are measures of their social and emotional skills, are positively associated with future tertiary education completion and income levels at age 25. Similar results have been found in research conducted in other OECD countries including Belgium and Sweden (OECD, 2015b).

Anxiety and depression are more common among university students than the general population. In a study conducted in the US including both domestic and international students, the prevalence of any depressive or anxiety disorder was approximately 15% for undergraduates and 13% for graduate students (Eisenberg et al., 2007). Comparatively, the World Health Organisation (WHO) estimates that, across 17 countries, the average rate of depression is 1 in 20 or 5% of the general population (WHO, 2012).

Additionally, tertiary students may be particularly susceptible to stress as, for many, it is their first time living away from home. New sleeping and eating habits, as well as increased academic competition and new concerns associated with financial pressures and finding new support networks are common stressors among college students. Additionally, research has highlighted the experiences of international students, who along with being away from home are also immersed in a new language and culture, and are particularly prone to stress, depression and anxiety disorders (Yeh and Inose, 2003).



## Risk factors for well-being

A range of factors may place certain students at greater risk for poor well-being. These include individual factors (e.g. personal experiences), parental factors (e.g. parental educational attainment), and environmental factors (e.g. learning environments). Many of these factors are related to one another, often leading to a snowball effect.

Research suggests that experiential factors, especially those in childhood, play an important role shaping brain development and neural circuits crucial for the development of social and emotional behaviour (Davidson and McEwen, 2012). Students with stressful early life events such as maltreatment may be exposed to higher levels of cortisol, hindering brain development. Studies of orphans with social deprivation in Romania further found enduring significant cognitive impairment many years later (Nelson et al., 2007).

### Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC)

HBSC, a network of international researchers in collaboration with the World Health Organisation (WHO), conducts a cross-national study about the health, well-being, social environment and health environment of 11, 13, and 15 year old students across Europe and North America. Findings highlight the importance of social support, through family or friends, and the influence of school and school-related stress on well-being.

For more information: <http://www.hbsc.org/>

## Sleep deprivation

According to the National Sleep Foundation, children need at least 9-11 hours of sleep, and teenagers need 8-10 hours of sleep each night.

An example of an individual risk factor when considering student well-being is sleep deprivation. Sleep deprivation in students is linked to a reduced ability to concentrate, poorer academic performance, symptoms of anxiety, depression and even suicide. While all students may have a similar

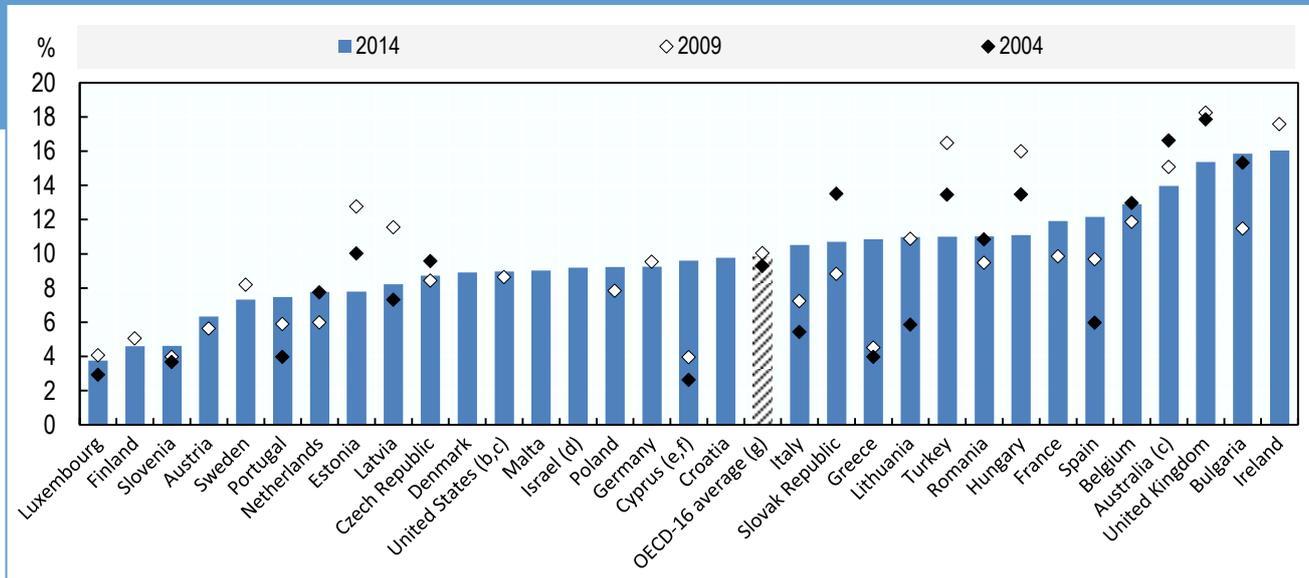
likelihood of suffering from sleep deprivation, the greatest risk is found among teens, largely due to biological processes involved in regulating sleep during adolescence (Carskadon, Acebo and Jenni, 2004). Teens may also feel anxious about school, have their sleeping habits disrupted by technology use, or feel the social pressure to stay up later than before, leading to an increased risk of sleep deprivation and irregular sleep patterns. However, sleep deprivation is by no means only limited to teens, with studies in Korea showing students as young as ten do not get adequate amounts of sleep (Yang et al., 2005).

## Financial constraints

Parental financial constraints can also negatively impact a child's well-being. For example, unemployed parents tend to experience lower life satisfaction employed adults, and are more likely to have detrimental relationships within their families as well as poorer subjective physical health (McKee-Ryan et al., 2005). Parental unemployment thus affects children through exposure to psychological stress and an increased likelihood of reduced access to factors that support health, such as nutritious food (WHO, 2014). Within OECD countries, one

in seven children lives in poverty, and almost 10% live in households where no parent is employed (OECD, 2015). Countries where children are most likely to live in a jobless household include Bulgaria, Ireland and the United Kingdom (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Children in jobless households, 2004, 2009, and 2014



Source: OECD Family database (n.d.), [www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm](http://www.oecd.org/els/family/database.htm).

Note: Unweighted mean average for the 16 OECD countries for which data are available at all three time points

## Online risks

Technology has the potential benefit of helping people expand their social networks and find continuing support, but there are also risks involved with its use. For example, studies have shown that individuals with pre-existing feelings of isolation feel more alone with higher rates of Internet and technology usage (Valkenburg and Peter, 2007). According to PISA data, extreme Internet users – those students spending 6 hours online or more daily – report 0.4 points (scale 0-10) lower life satisfaction on average across OECD countries in comparison to less active users. They also score an average of 30 score points lower than others across tested subjects (OECD, 2017).

The kind of online activity can also make a difference. For example, students who are often online to play games may have less strong social ties than students who are online using an instant messenger or a texting platform throughout the day (Cotten, 2008). Data from participant students in PISA suggests an important bias in these regards: boys are more likely to play videogames than girls, and the same can be said about socioeconomically disadvantaged students in comparison to those better-off (OECD, 2017).

Technology mirrors and magnifies aspects of our lives, including more negative aspects of school life, such as bullying. About 19% of students report being bullied at least a few times a month on average across OECD countries (OECD, 2017). This risk increases online with the growth of social media and online communications, via messages, comments or nasty rumours, which increases anxiety and depression rates and lowers academic performance.

## Protective factors for well-being

Just as risk factors for well-being are interrelated and amplify one another, protective factors, within and outside the school, are also linked.

### Healthy relationships with parents and teachers

A well-known protective factor for students' social and emotional well-being is children's close and healthy connection with parents. Research reviews consistently show that parental involvement in the form of discussions, role modelling, intellectual stimulation, or participation in school events strongly impacts students' well-being (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003). Communication with parents can facilitate self-disclosure and prevent students from participating in risky behaviours (HSBC, 2014).

35% of parents in PISA 2015 declared that their working conditions hindered participation in their children's school activities

Parental interest in children's activities at school is correlated with children's higher academic motivation and increased satisfaction with life (OECD, 2017).

As shown in Figure 4, children reporting their parents show interest in their school activities are much more likely to seek top grades at school and be satisfied with life. They are also much less likely to report feeling lonely at school and not satisfied with life.

Figure 4: Parents' interest in their child's activities at school and well-being



Note: The figure reports a logarithmic transformation of the odds ratios of the outcome (e.g. wanting top grades at school) related to parents' interest. The logarithm transformation makes the values of odds ratios below one and above one comparable in the graph. All values are statistically significant.

Source: OECD (2017), Figure III.3.1. Parents' interest in their child's activities at school and well-being, in PISA 2015 Results (Volume III): Students' Well-Being, PISA, OECD Publishing, Paris.

Similarly, positive interactions with teachers strongly impact students' well-being. Students in classes with supportive teachers are almost two times more likely to feel that they belong at school than those in classes without such teachers in PISA 2015. This is relevant, as students who feel like an outsider at school are three times more likely to be unsatisfied with their life than those who do not (OECD, 2017).

## Being active outside school

Students who participate in club activities perform better academically, and students who participate in sports – particularly team sports (Beets et al., 2009) – had more positive teacher ratings of social competence and even higher levels of psychosocial maturity (Fletcher, Nickerson and Wright, 2003). Structured leisure activities may also help students improve educational outcomes as well as avoid risky or anti-social behaviors that may negatively impact their well-being, such as drug and alcohol use (Eccles et al., 2003).

Volunteering can contribute to overall well-being: volunteering has been documented to foster cooperation and interpersonal trust, and regular volunteers are more likely to report higher levels of well-being. It provides individuals with new knowledge and skills, and those who volunteer feel more satisfied overall as a result of their participation. As well as these personal benefits, volunteering contributes to economic performance: it accounts for 2% of total GDP on average across OECD countries (OECD, 2015a).

### Volunteering Makes a Difference

Introduced in 2010, The French Civic Service is an example of a voluntary commitment students can make to improve the lives of others and themselves. Students of ages 16-25 can volunteer in France or abroad and are paid approximately 600 euros a month for their 6-12 months of service. Students are placed in a range of sectors including health, environmental protection, dissemination of sciences, and promotion of Francophone and European citizenship. This popular programme allows students not only to give back, but also to add experience to their CVs before beginning their careers.

For more information: <http://www.service-civique.gouv.fr>

## Social networks



Social networks of peers and adults, either in-person or virtual, can also serve as a protective factor to help students cope with adverse situations. Socialising with friends outside of school is positively associated with life satisfaction, sense of belonging at school, happiness and self-esteem (OECD, 2017). The Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC) survey found that adolescents who had higher quality social networks also had better perceived health and overall well-being.

The survey notes, however, that such networks also bring potential negative effects on physical and mental health, such as bullying or participation in risky behaviours such as smoking and drinking (HBSC, 2014).

## Creating supportive environments in schools

Improving student well-being requires safe and supportive physical and emotional environments. This works best when teachers, parents, and communities come together to help students better understand and manage their emotions and relations with others, within and beyond the classroom.

### Teaching and learning about emotions

Social and emotional learning (SEL) is increasingly being integrated into school curricula, activities and assessment guidelines as a central part of this perspective (OECD, 2015b). SEL's objective is to support students by teaching basic social and emotional skills such as recognising their own emotional states and those of others, expressing feelings through words, and how to manage unhappy feelings.

Students participating in these programmes strengthen social and emotional skills such as stress-management and decision-making, have more positive attitudes towards school, and higher academic performance (Durlak et al., 2011). Other studies have linked SEL programmes to improved student autonomy, relatedness and satisfaction with their schools overall (Tian, Chen and Huebner, 2013).

SEL programmes are ideally delivered between early childhood and adolescence. They have been shown to be adaptable and appropriate for a wide range of school contexts including rural, suburban and urban schools (OECD, 2015b). In a review of SEL programmes,

Parental involvement and positive student-teacher interaction through hands-on work experiences support effective SEL (OECD, 2015b).

results showed that current classroom teachers and staff can integrate interventions within routine educational practices (Durlak et al., 2011). Involvement of other actors can also strengthen their impact.

Another trend is the implementation of mindfulness exercises. Mindfulness is similar to meditation; however, rather than trying to remove stressful or negative thoughts, participants work to become more attentive and non-judgemental of their current feelings and thoughts. Mindfulness can be helpful in educational settings because effective learning and teaching hinges upon relationships and interpersonal and intrapersonal experiences (Benn et al., 2012). Thus, students and teachers alike can experience a range of emotions in the classroom that may inhibit their ability to learn or teach effectively.

#### Collaborative for Academic, Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL)

CASEL, a group of researchers and educators based at the University of Illinois (USA), has developed an overview of programmes, interventions and best practices at different levels of schooling.

CASEL has identified five interrelated sets of cognitive, affective, and behavioural competencies for student well-being including: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

Through its District Resource Centre, CASEL provides online guidance and resources for initiating, developing, implementing, and assessing implementation of SEL programmes. Resources for parents, school leaders and teachers are also available.

For more information: [www.casel.org/](http://www.casel.org/)

Mindfulness interventions include exercises on breathing, body scans, movement, and sensorimotor awareness (Napoli, Krech and Holley, 2005). Meta-analyses show that regular mindfulness practice can improve cognitive performance as well as physical and psychological health and overall well-being (Zenner, Herrnleben-Kurz and Walach 2014, Weare, 2013, Burke, 2009).

Mindfulness training may be especially beneficial to disadvantaged students. A study of lower-income minority children found that after a five-week intervention, teachers reported improved attention, self-control, participation in activities, and caring/respect for others. These improvements continued after the intervention (Black and Fernando, 2014).

Mindfulness exercises can also be beneficial for others too. Teachers report feeling less stressed after mindfulness programmes ((Roeser et al., 2013). Stressed parents, particularly those with children who have special needs, may similarly experience reduced anxiety and stress after participating in mindfulness training (Benn et al., 2012).

### Bringing it all together: the importance of context

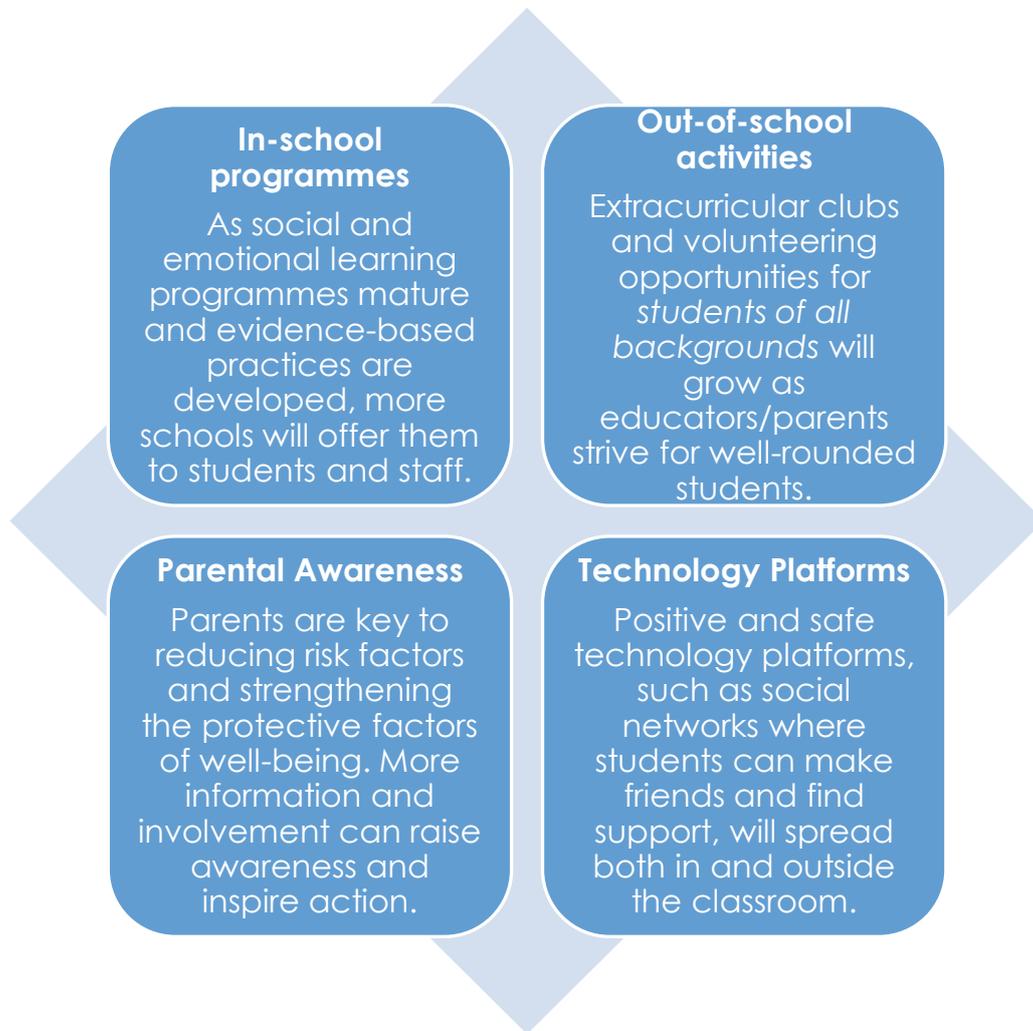
Strategies to improve well-being need to be carefully adapted to context to be effective. Protective factors like healthy relationships and out of school activities are often mediated by socioeconomic status and work-life balance. For example, children's access to extracurricular activities can depend on where they live and the family budget. Similarly, the working hours of parents have a big impact on their availability to participate in the school activities of their children. Ensuring all children's well-being requires broad cross-sectoral interventions that reduce these obstacles.



One interesting example is after-school and all-day schooling programmes, including those covering the summer period. These programmes can help improve school climate, reduce potential risks of unhealthy behaviour and raise academic performance. Positive effects are larger for disadvantaged students, who can access more tailored support and compensate for risk factors linked to their socioeconomic and cultural status. Extended schooling can also facilitate better work-life balance, particularly for single parent families, and increase labour opportunities for both parents – especially for women that would otherwise find barriers to access full time employment (Fischer and Klieme, 2013; Durlak, Weissberg and Pachan, 2010).

## Towards the future

Schools, policy-makers, parents, and communities are increasingly motivated to support child well-being. To this end, action can be taken by bringing multiple actors together within and outside the school.



### Future thinking questions:

1. What is the responsibility of schools in fostering child well-being? How can they better adapt to children's needs and help parents also support positive well-being behaviours in the home?
2. How can education utilise emerging technology platforms in a safe and positive way to help students form beneficial support networks? Conversely, how can they also prevent anti-social online behaviours such as cyber-bullying?
3. Are there potential approaches to utilise and strengthen positive synergies between schools and the broader community when it comes to improving social and emotional learning and life satisfaction?

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**For more information**



<b>Contact</b>	<b>Tracey Burns (<a href="mailto:tracey.burns@oecd.org">tracey.burns@oecd.org</a>)</b>
<b>See</b>	<b>OECD (2016), <i>Trends shaping education 2016</i>, OECD Publishing</b>
<b>Visit</b>	<a href="http://www.oecd.org/edu/cei/spotlights-trends-shaping-education.htm">www.oecd.org/edu/cei/spotlights-trends-shaping-education.htm</a> <a href="http://www.oecd.org/edu/cei">www.oecd.org/edu/cei</a>

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