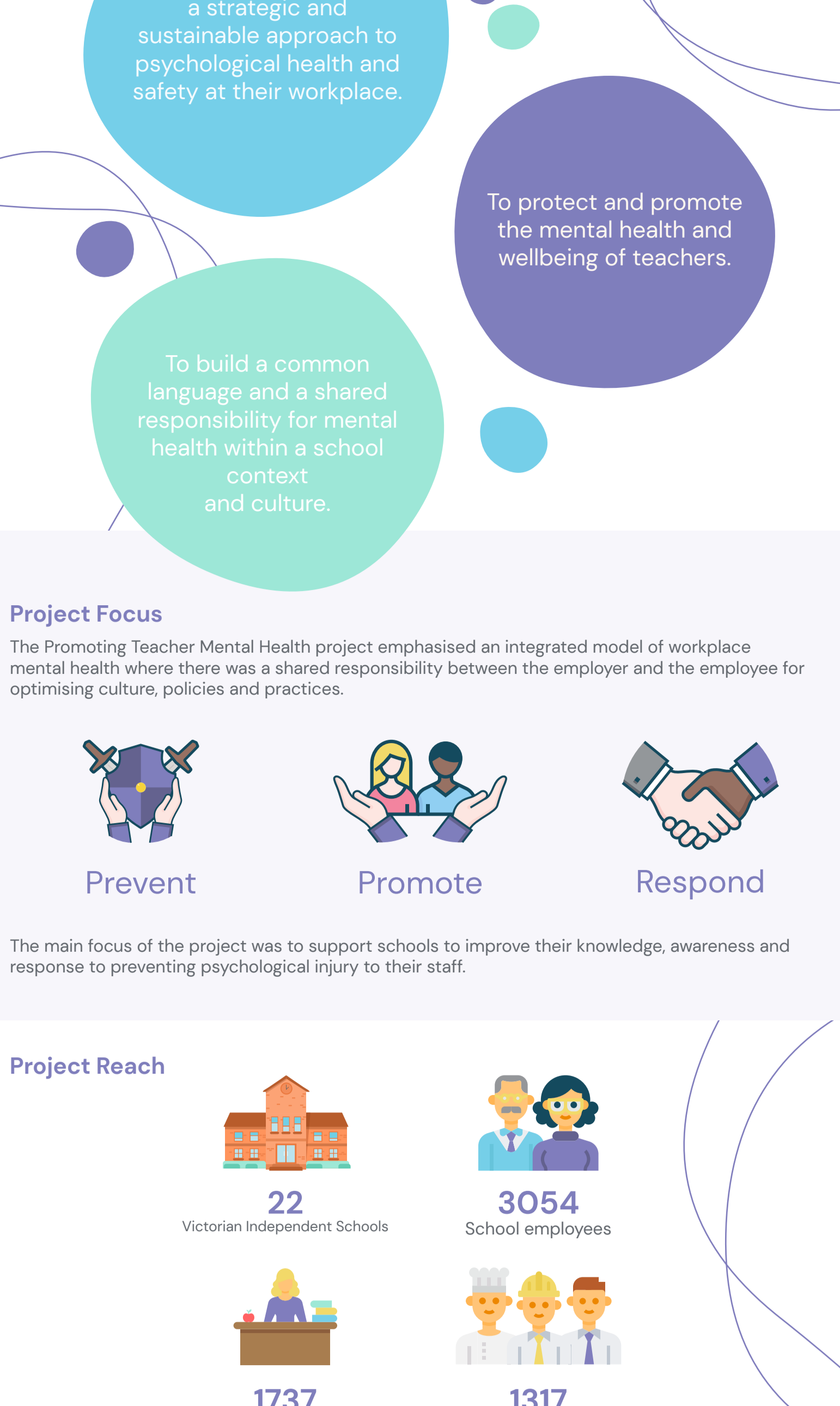


# Promoting Teacher Mental Health

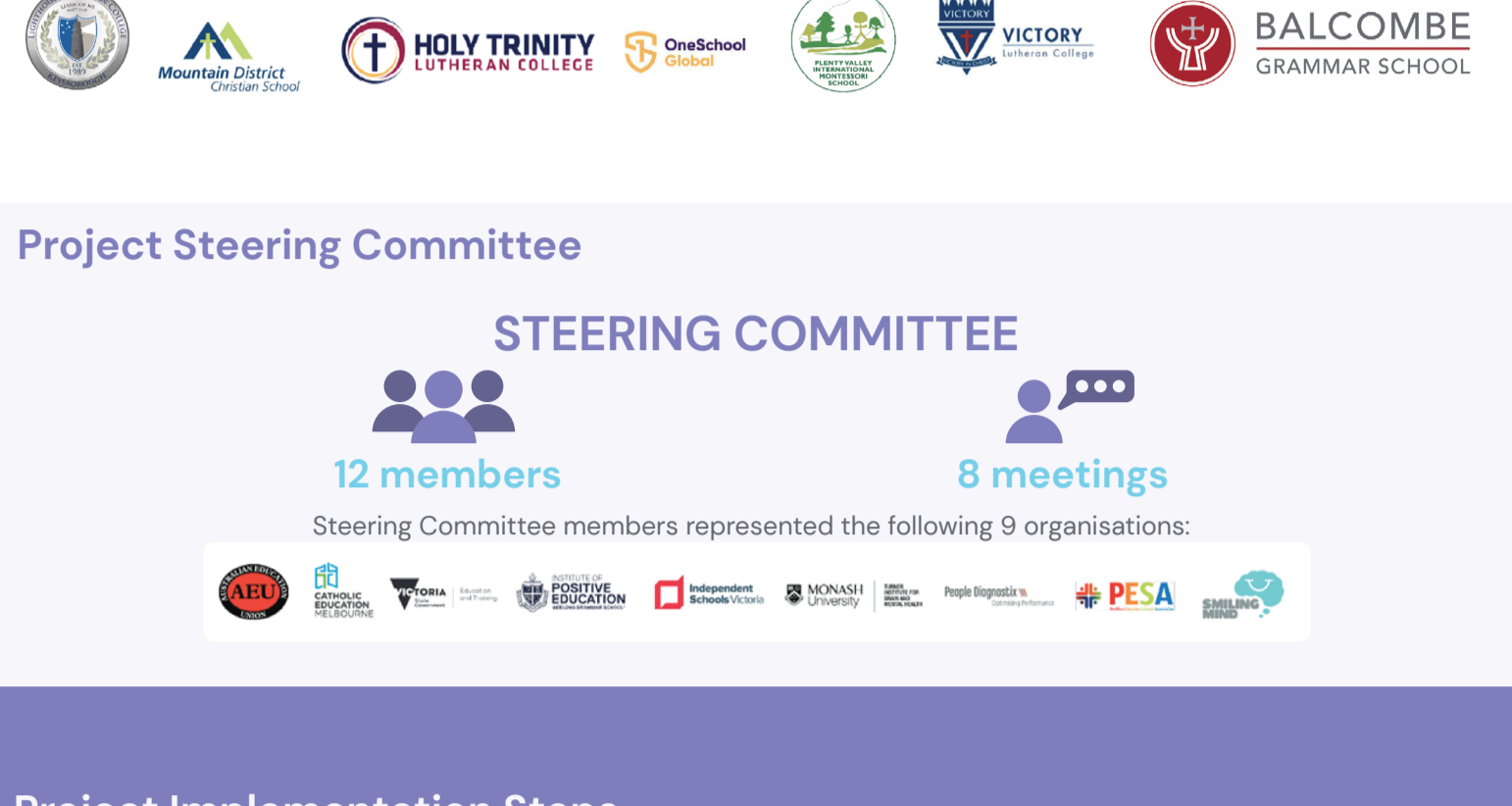
Co-creating mentally healthy work environments for school teachers

## Project Purposes



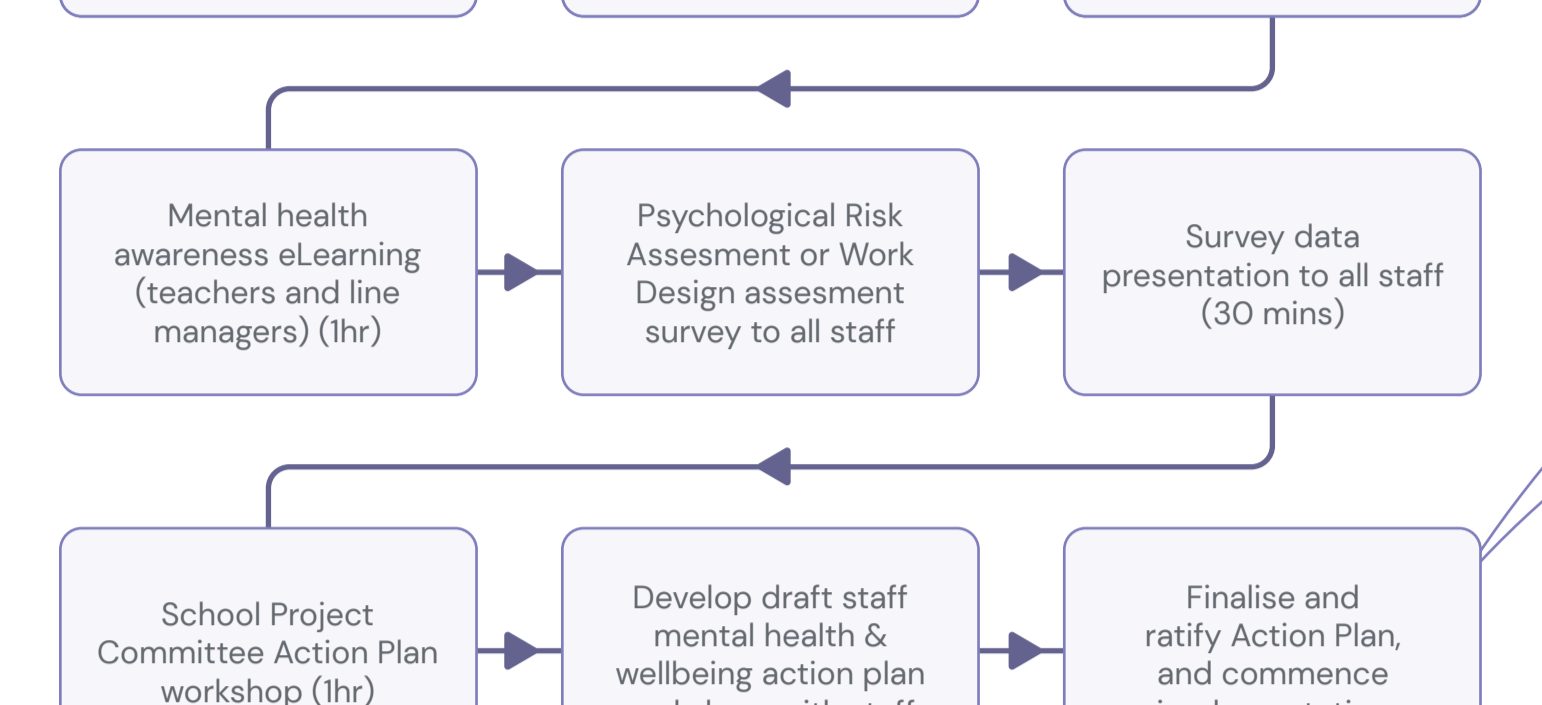
## Project Focus

The Promoting Teacher Mental Health project emphasised an integrated model of workplace mental health where there was a shared responsibility between the employer and the employee for optimising culture, policies and practices.

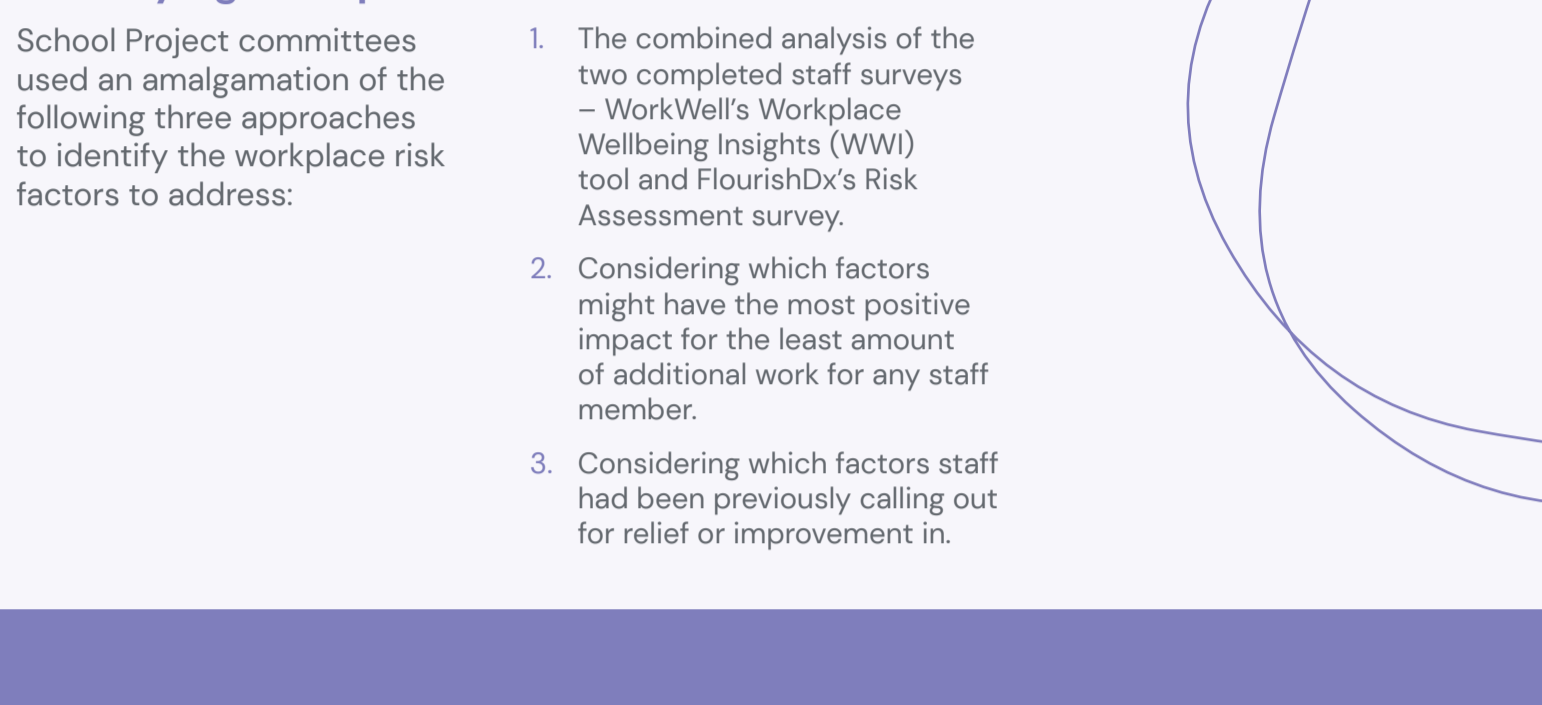


The main focus of the project was to support schools to improve their knowledge, awareness and response to preventing psychological injury to their staff.

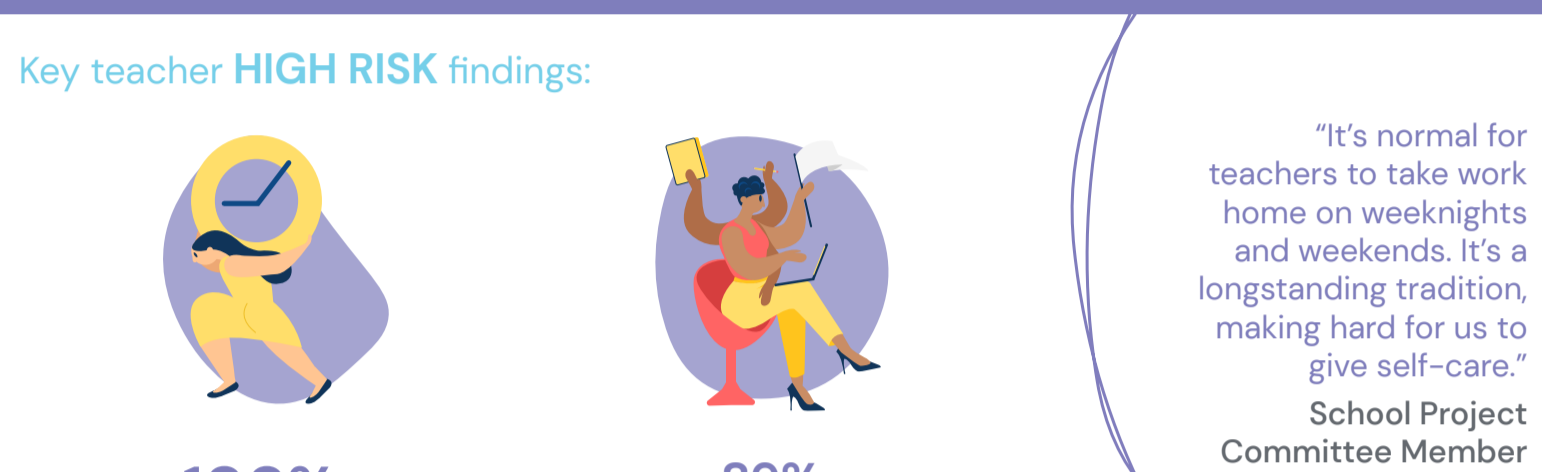
## Project Reach



## Participating Schools

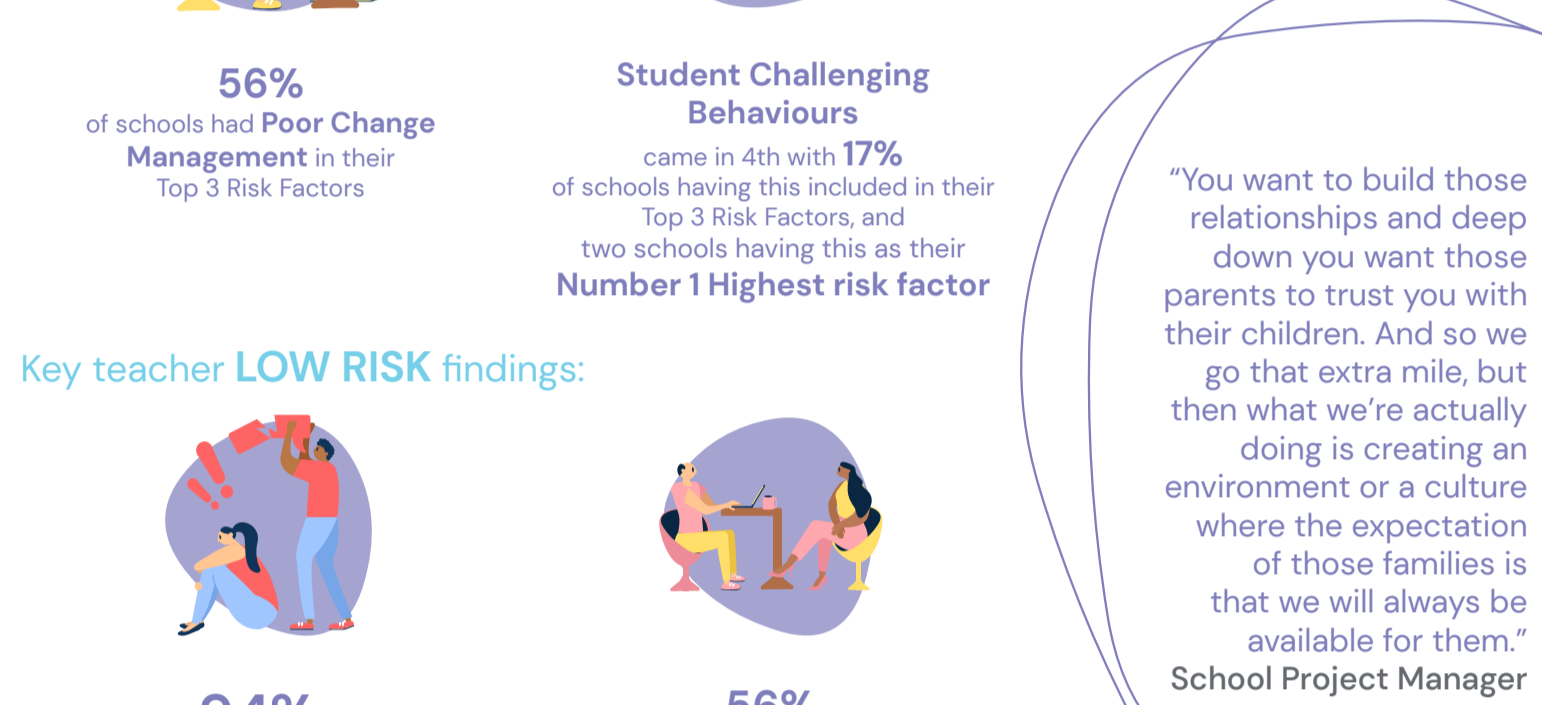


## Project Steering Committee



## Project Implementation Steps

Each of the 22 participating schools went through the following key nine steps to complete the project.



## Identifying Workplace Risk Factors

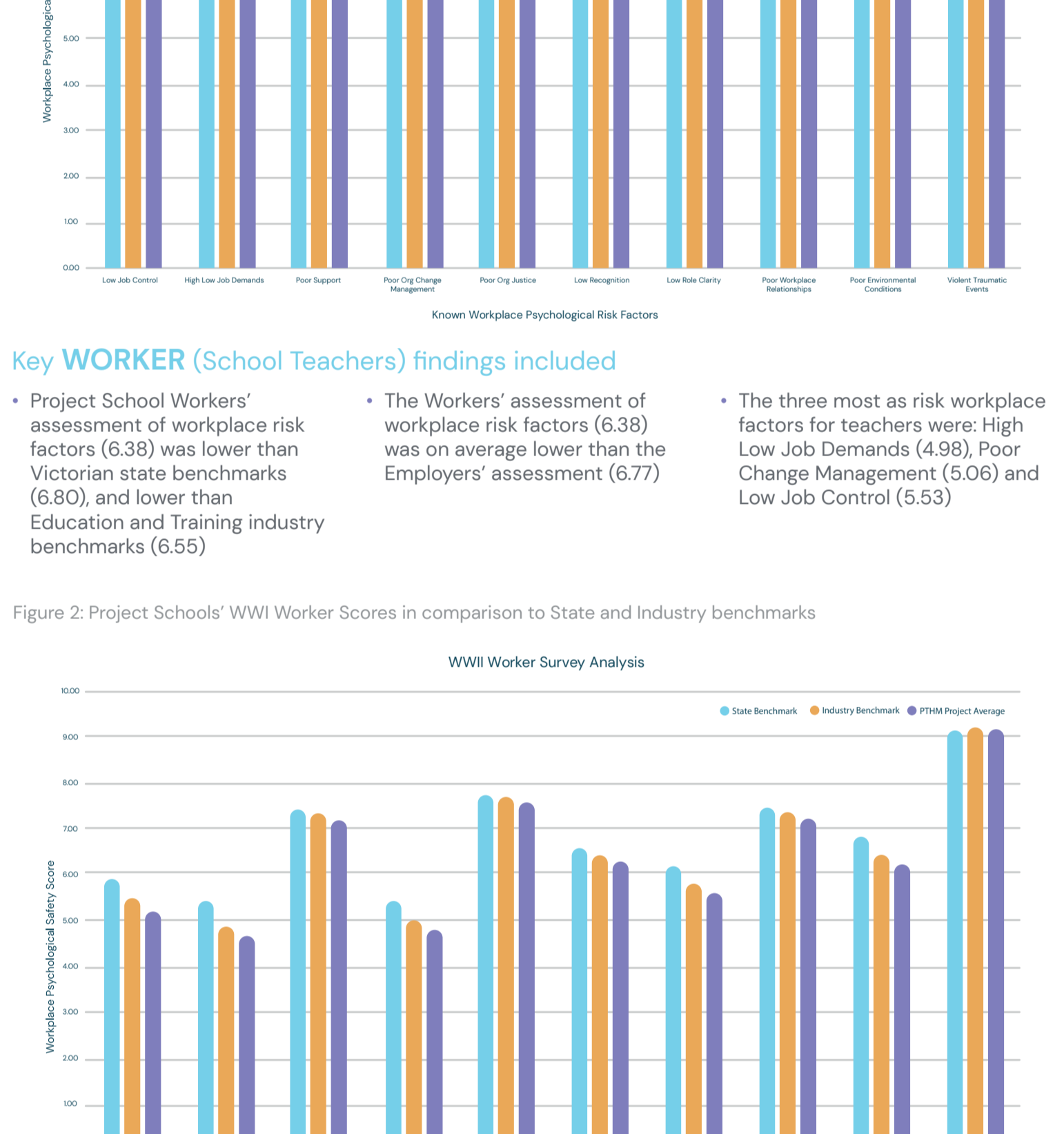
School Project committees used an amalgamation of the following three approaches to identify the workplace risk factors to address:

- The combined analysis of the two completed staff surveys – WorkWell's Workplace Wellbeing Insights (WVI) tool and FlourishDx's Risk Assessment survey.
- Considering which factors might have the most positive impact for the least amount of additional work for any staff member.
- Considering which factors staff had been previously calling out for relief or improvement in.

## State of Project Schools' Psychological Health

18 schools completed FlourishDx's Work Design or Risk Assessment survey tool which ranked 12 key psychosocial workplace risk factors.

### Key teacher HIGH RISK findings:



"It's normal for teachers to take work home on weeknights and weekends. It's a longstanding tradition, making hard for us to give self-care."  
School Project Member

"You want to build those relationships and deep down you want those parents to trust you with their children. And so we go that extra mile, but then what we're actually doing is creating an environment or a culture where the expectation of those families is that we will always be available for them."  
School Project Manager

Across the schools, both of these categories posed very low levels of psychological risk which was most encouraging.

The risk factor of Student Challenging Behaviours was extremely varied across the different schools – with 17% of schools having it listed within their Top 3 Risk Factors and 22% of schools having it listed within their Lowest 3 Risk Factors. Whilst Student Challenging Behaviours referred to behavioural difficulties, for many schools it was linked to meeting students individualised learning needs and the high proportion of students with diagnosed learning difficulties.

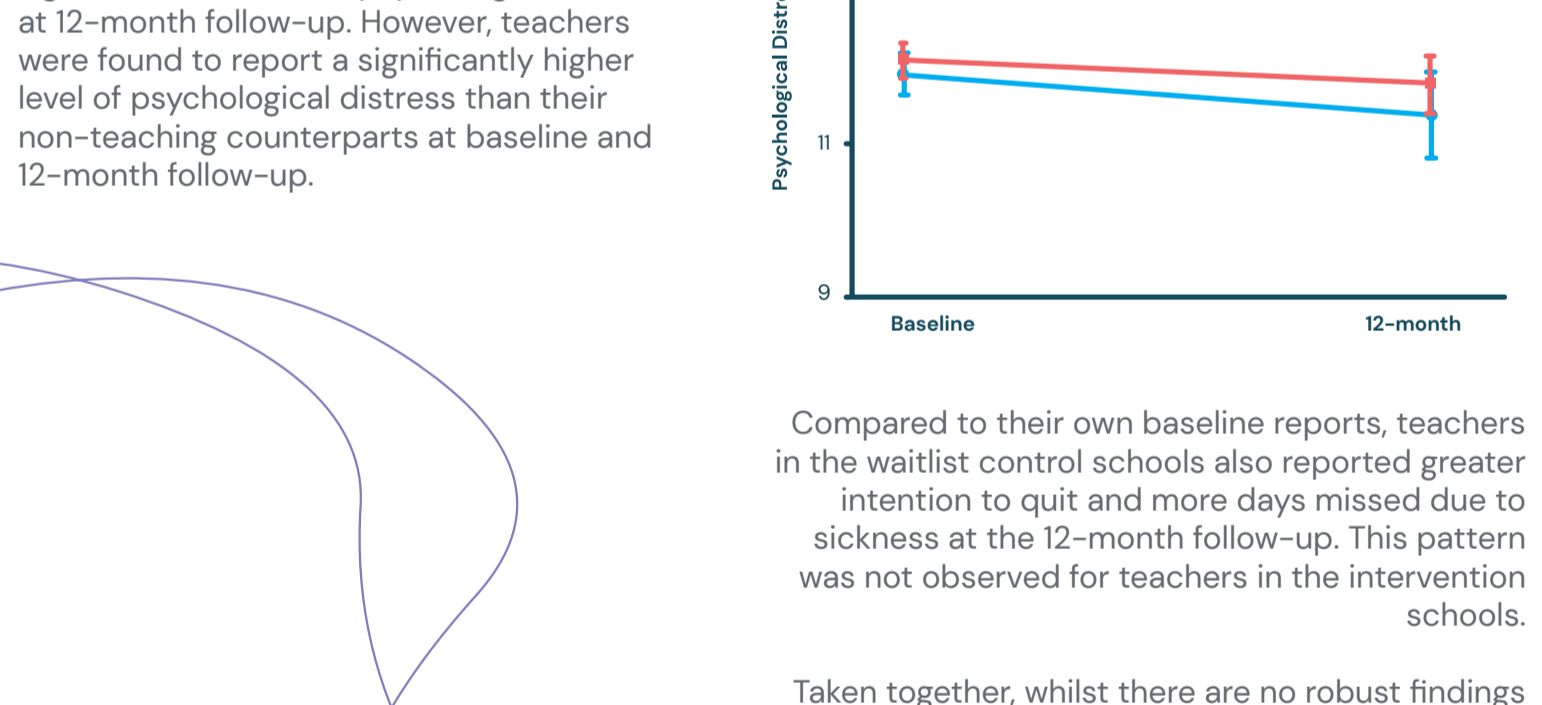
## State of Project Schools' Psychological Health

14 participating schools completed WorkWell's Workplace Wellbeing Insights (WVI) survey to assist them to identify key workplace risk factors.

### Key EMPLOYER (School Leaders) findings included:

- Project School Leaders' assessment of workplace risk factors (6.77) was lower than Victorian state benchmarks (6.85), and lower than Education and Training industry benchmarks (6.88)
- The three most at risk workplace factors were: Low Job Control (6.15), Low Recognition (6.35), High Low Job Demands (6.36)

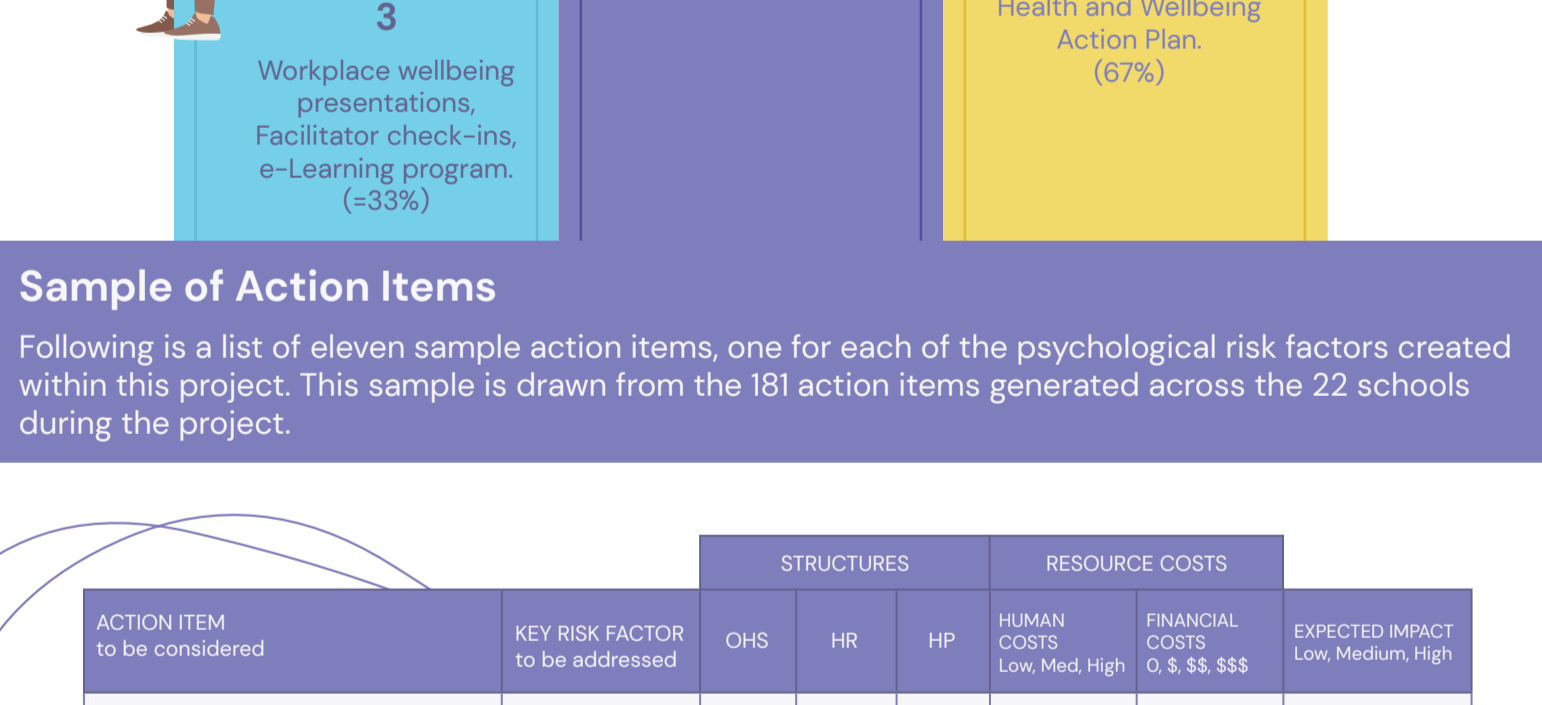
Figure 1: Project Schools' WVI Employer Scores in comparison to State and Industry benchmarks



### Key WORKER (School Teachers) findings included:

- Project School Workers' assessment of workplace risk factors (6.38) was lower than Victorian state benchmarks (6.80), and lower than Education and Training industry benchmarks (6.55)
- The Workers' assessment of workplace risk factors (6.38) was on average lower than the Employers' assessment (6.77)
- The three most as risk workplace factors for teachers were: High Low Job Demands (4.98), Poor Change Management (5.06) and Low Job Control (5.53)

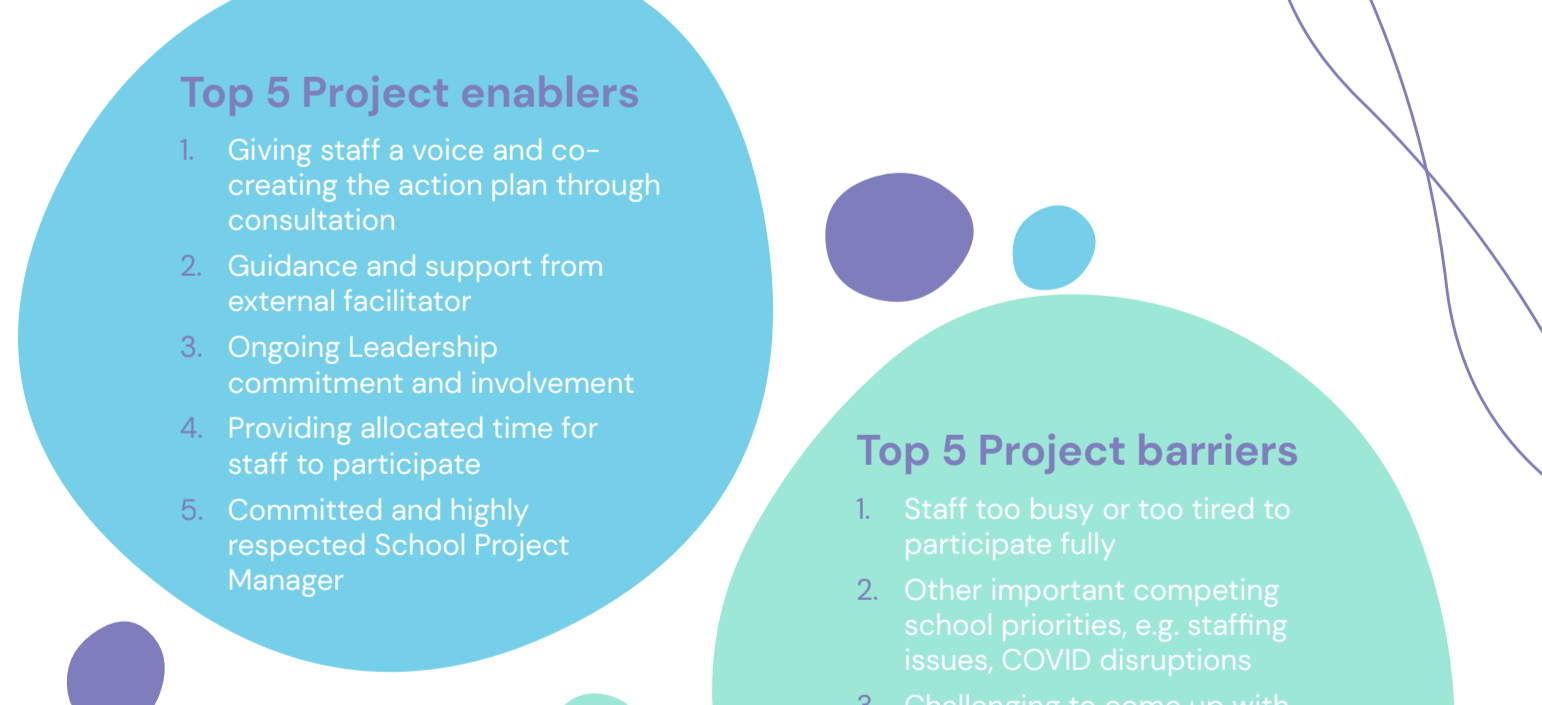
Figure 2: Project Schools' WVI Worker Scores in comparison to State and Industry benchmarks



Interestingly, despite two very different Risk Assessment tools, and a similar, but not identical cohort of participants, the same Top 3 Risk Factors presented in both surveys for teachers: Work Overload, Job Autonomy and Poor Organisational Change Management.

Taken collectively, these results from more than 600 Victorian Independent School teachers suggests there are reasons for concern regarding the psychological health of teachers, and that the three key levers to address in developing policy changes and mental health action plans are to improve Work Overload and perceptions of Change Management.

## Key Project Deliverables



## Key Project Outcomes



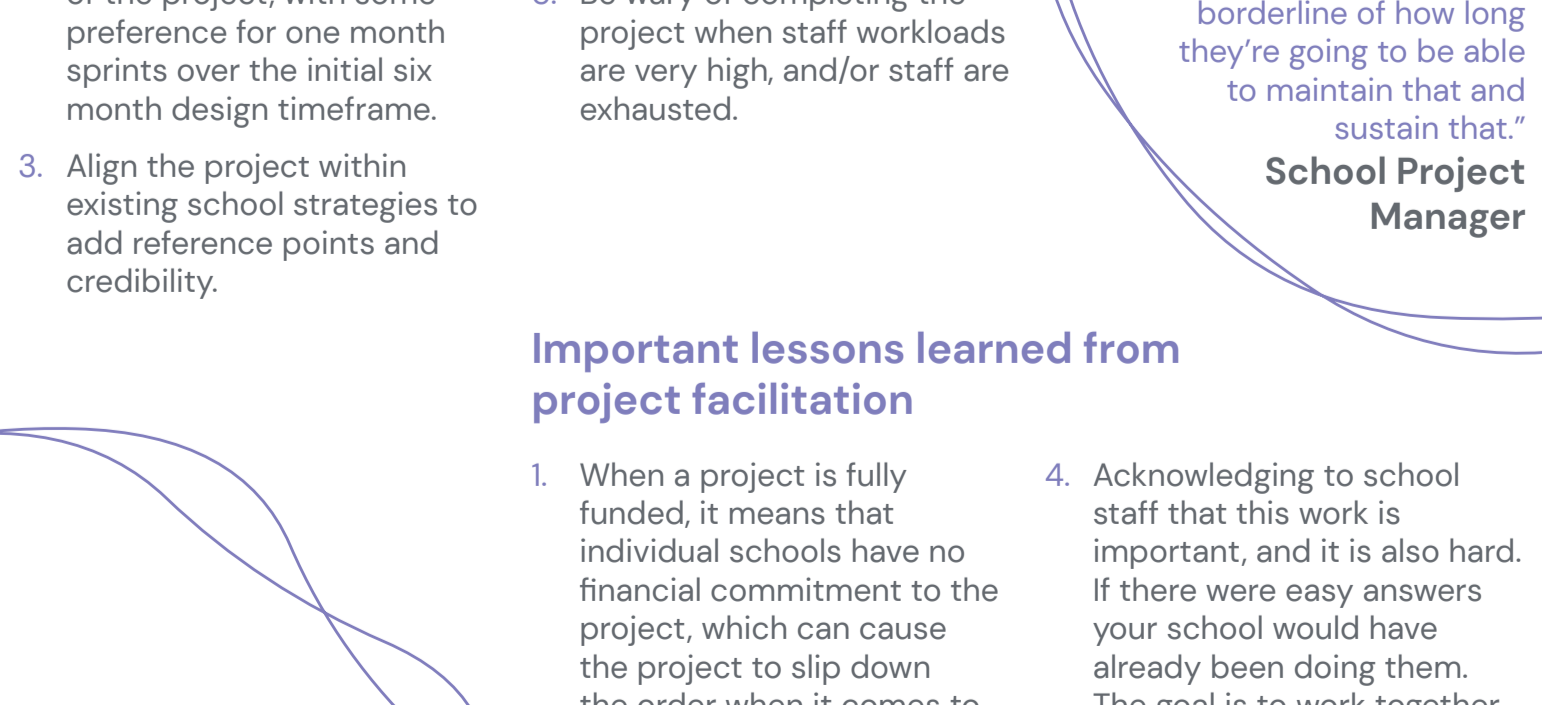
Teachers in the intervention schools commenced the project with a higher psychosocial safety climate than teachers in the waitlist control schools. Although teachers' report showed a trend in the direction favouring the intervention schools over time, there was no clear evidence of the project's intervention producing greater improvement in teacher-reported psychosocial safety climate in the intervention schools, compared to teachers in the waitlist control schools at the 12-month follow-up (6 months post-intervention).

Overall, teachers in both intervention and waitlist-control schools reported a non-significant decrease in psychological distress at 12-month follow-up. However, teachers were found to report a significantly higher level of psychological distress than their non-teaching counterparts at baseline and 12-month follow-up.

Compared to their own baseline reports, teachers in the waitlist control schools also reported greater intention to quit and more days missed due to sickness at the 12-month follow-up. This pattern was not observed for teachers in the intervention schools.

Taken together, whilst there are no robust findings suggesting that the intervention provided superior outcomes for teachers, teachers and schools that have received the intervention appear to maintain their pre-existing strengths during times of rapidly changing work conditions, expectations and disruptions caused by COVID-19 between 2021 and early 2022.

## Most useful components of the project



## Sample of Action Items

Following is a list of eleven sample action items, one for each of the psychological risk factors created within this project. This sample is drawn from the 181 action items generated across the 22 schools during the project.

ACTION ITEM to be considered	KEY RISK FACTOR to be addressed	STRUCTURES			RESOURCE COSTS			EXPECTED IMPACT
		OHS	HR	HP	HUMAN COSTS (Low, Med, High)	FINANCIAL COSTS (0, \$, \$\$, \$\$\$)	Low, Medium, High	
Give staff greater flexibility to book outside appointments and to be able to leave school during recess/lunch and non-contact periods	Job Control	✓			Low	0	Medium	
Introduce a weekly lunch gathering opportunity for staff (rotate days) to promote relationships	Relationships: Colleagues			✓	Low	0	Medium	
Review with staff and provide updated details to staff and parents on the parent-teacher-child conversations protocol	Relationships: Parents & Teachers	✓	✓		Medium	0	Medium	
Inform staff of the system for monitoring the allocation of students with special needs	Relationships: Students & Teachers		✓		Low	0	Medium	
Review with staff and provide updated information on reporting expectations	Role Clarity		✓		Low	0	Medium	
State and share expectations of staff meetings including dates, and starting and finishing times	Work Overload		✓	✓	Low	0	Low	
Each term provide a comfortable, open forum for staff discussions	Workplace Change Management		✓	✓	Medium	0	Medium	
Identify and address work environment issues that may negatively affect team communication	Workplace Environment		✓	✓	Medium	0	Medium	
Provide meeting schedules for the term ahead prior to the end of the previous term	Workplace Justice		✓	✓	Low	0	Medium	
Celebrate staff achievements (aim to do this in a way that is warmly received by the particular staff member)	Workplace Recognition		✓	✓	Low	0	Medium	
Establish effective colleague debriefing and mentoring structures	Workplace Support		✓	✓	Medium	0	Medium	

## Top 5 Project enablers

- Giving staff a voice and co-creating the action plan through consultation
- Guidance and support from external facilitator.
- Ongoing Leadership commitment and involvement
- Providing allocated time for staff to participate
- Committed and highly respected School Project Manager

## Top 5 Project barriers

- Staff too busy or too tired to participate fully
- Other important competing school priorities, e.g. staffing issues, COVID disruptions
- Challenging to come up with workable, reasonable, and specific action items
- Lack of understanding and in-depth analysis of project surveys
- Staff turnover

## Features of the FlourishDx Workplace Mental Health App

### Individual user features:



### Organisation user features:



## Important lessons learned from participating schools

- Allocate staff meeting time and schedule all project components prior to project commencement.
- Consider the overall duration of the project, with some preference for one month sprints over the initial six month design timeframe.
- Align the project within existing school strategies to add reference points and credibility.
- School leaders regularly mentioning and recommending the value of the project adds to staff engagement.
- Be wary of completing the project when staff workloads are very high, and/or staff are exhausted.

"Workload is a big issue, lots of things that are added on, but nothing has been taken off. Many teachers are doing two to three hours every night once they get home. It's kind of bordering on how long they're going to be able to maintain that and sustain that."  
School Project Manager

## Important lessons learned from project facilitation

- When a project is fully funded, it means that individual schools have no financial commitment to the project, which can cause the project to slip down the order when it comes to other competing projects or priorities.
- The commitment, time, and leadership skills of the individual School's Project Manager is vital to the success of the project.
- Schools need help generating possible action items to mitigate the potential risks. An Item Bank of suggested items and an external, independent facilitator can greatly assist this process.
- Acknowledging to school staff that this work is important, and it is also hard. If there were easy answers your school would have already been doing them. The goal is to work together to ensure your workplace is as safe and mentally healthy as possible for all staff.
- Taking a conservative approach to detailing the list of possible action items is helpful, making sure the project feels achievable and hence setting the project up for success.

## Future directions

- To develop a refined system which takes into account the learnings from this large-scale pilot, to support schools to create mentally healthy work environments.
- To offer termly community of practice conversations in 2023, courtesy of Independent Schools Victoria (ISV), where existing School Project managers can share and discuss progress and challenges as they roll-out their individualised Action Plans.
- To share an extensive set of possible Action Items with a wide-range of schools to support their ability to address key psychosocial risks.
- To sustain and scale the intervention, the guidance and support from an external consultant appears to be a vital ingredient. Due to the sensitive nature of discussions, a neutral and understanding consultant can defuse emotions and provide objectivity to action planning.
- To strengthen the confidence and competence of each individual School Project Manager face-to-face training to build literacy and competence using the available tools held six months prior to starting the intervention would be ideal.
- To allow schools to appropriately prepare and schedule staff meetings – it is suggested that schools need to understand the time commitments of the project 6-12 months prior to commencement, so that staff can be primed, and key meetings and events scheduled.
- FlourishDx to develop school specific data comparison groups to help schools understand how they are going compared with peers.
- FlourishDx to develop predictive analytics to help schools understand the likelihood and consequence of harm due to independent and cumulative exposure to various psychosocial hazards.

