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School reform to enhance the well-being of children and teachers

**Perspectives and initiatives regarding "well-being" in education policy
【Introduction】**

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*This research is part of "Research on School Innovation to Enhance the Well-being of Children and Teachers in Japan" (FY2025–2027; Project Leader: Fumio Fujiwara, Director, Department for Educational Policy and Evaluation Research, NIER).

For an overview, please refer to the NIER website: https://www.nier.go.jp/05_kenkyu_seika/seika_digest_r07.html

References to well-being in educational policies

【The 4th Basic Plan for the Promotion of Education】 (Cabinet decision in 2023)

Rather than viewing well-being and academic ability as opposites, it is important to realize that academic ability, learning environment, family environment, and connections with the community are all elements that support individual well-being, and that measures should be taken to improve these environments.

In order to enhance the well-being of children, it is necessary to ensure the wellbeing of teachers, and it is important that schools become places that enhance the well-being of teachers. Teachers should experience the growth of children, have a relationship of trust with guardians and local communities, feel psychological safety in the workplace, and have a positive working environment. In addition, it is important to ensure the well-being of all members of the school, including teachers, staffs, and support personnel. These things will maintain the foundation and environment for learning in a good condition and will become the basis for improvement in the well-being of learners, which in turn will lead to the well-being of families and the community.

【Central Council for Education: "Comprehensive Measures to Develop an Environment for Securing High-Quality Teachers Supporting 'Japanese-Style School Education in the Reiwa Era' (Report)" 】 (2024)

It is important to review teachers' traditional work practices and address excessive working hours, not only protect their health but also enhance their well-being by improving the quality of their daily lives and enriching their teaching career paths.

Flexible [working] systems are desirable because teachers can autonomously consider and deal with their own well-being. Therefore, promoting teachers' well-being is essential.

The Concept of Well-being

Currently, education policies around the world, including Japan, aim to improve the well-being of children and teachers. However, Well-being is a normative, interdisciplinary, and multidimensional concept; consequently, no clear international consensus has yet been reached regarding its conceptual definition or constructs. For this reason, The concept of well-being is sometimes described as a “wicked problem concept” .

“Indeed, wellbeing is considered a ‘wicked problem’ because it is a complex and contested concept (Bache, Reardon, & Anand, 2016). If we consider that, as Bache et al. (2016) explain, a ‘wicked problem’ is a problem that lacks definition and a definitive or objective answer, then wellbeing fits the definition.”

(Svane, Denise, Evans, Neus, and Carter, Margaret (2019) Wicked wellbeing: examining the disconnect between the rhetoric and reality of wellbeing interventions in schools. Australian Journal of Education, 63 (2). pp. 209-231.)

Indeed, regarding individual components such as stress, substantial theoretical and empirical research has already been accumulated, leading to the view that the necessity for reintroducing the comprehensive concept of well-being is not necessarily high. However, the concept of well-being is not merely a collective term bundling existing indicators. It possesses the function of visualizing the current state from a normative perspective of “well-being,” sometimes exposing problematic situations. Furthermore, it serves as an analytical framework capable of analyzing the underlying structural factors and promoting improvement.

A Study of School Innovation to Enhance the Well-being of Children and Teachers in Japan (FY2025-2027) (Overview)

In Japan, well-being research targeting children and teachers is also progressing. Empirical studies examining relationships with school organizations, leadership, and work environments have been accumulated by researchers such as Tsuyuki (2023; 2024) and Kambayashi (2021). However, there remains considerable scope for further consideration in terms of organizing theoretical frameworks, conducting policy analysis based on international comparisons, and advancing policy research grounded in Japan's unique educational system and cultural context (Uchida, 2025). Therefore, this study aims primarily to analytically clarify what policy and institutional interventions can contribute to enhancing the well-being of children and teachers, and will explore the following research questions.

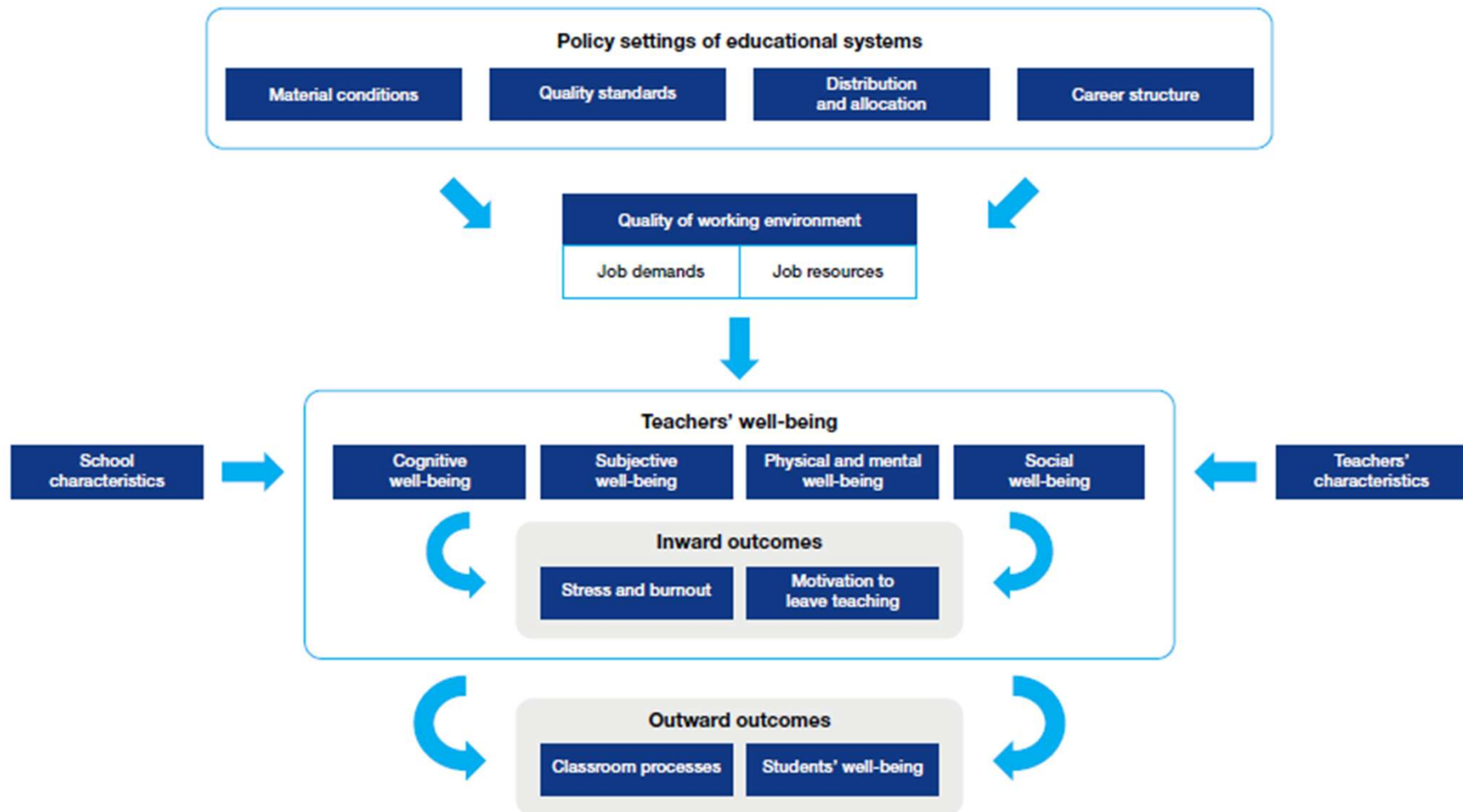
RQ1. Under what theoretical frameworks and policy objectives has the concept of well-being been introduced in education policy? [Literature Review]

RQ2. How do Japanese children and teachers interpret and experience well-being within the school context? [Interview Study]

RQ3. What factors enhance the well-being of children and teachers? What interrelated structures exist between their respective well-being? [Questionnaire Survey]

RQ4. What role does the concept of well-being play in the educational policies of other countries, and what measures are being implemented? [Comparative Study]

Conceptual framework for teachers' occupational well-being



(Source) Viac, C. and P. Fraser (2020), "Teachers' well-being: A framework for data collection and analysis", OECD Education Working Papers, No. 213. This study defines teachers' occupational well-being as "teachers' responses to the cognitive, emotional, health and social conditions pertaining to their work and their profession." It also indicates that "Dimensions are closely related but also distinct as they each encompass a particular set of indicators related to the well-being of teachers at work. Each dimension can be considered both as an outcome and as an enabling condition with respect to other dimensions and ultimately with teachers' overall levels of stress and future work engagement."

OECD's *Teaching Compass*: Reimagining Teachers as Agents of Curriculum Change (2025)

Teacher well-being for thriving professionals = “A dynamic state of fulfilment, integrating intellectual stimulation, socio-emotional support and physical security, grounded in a sense of professional purpose”

Table 5. Examples of teacher well-being dimensions and constructs

Categories of teacher well-being	Physical well-being	Cognitive well-being	Social and emotional well-being
Examples of dimensions and constructs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • working conditions • work-life balance • physical health & safety 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • intellectual engagement • sense of ownership • professional growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • self-worth & recognition • resilience & self-compassion • empathy, trust & collaboration

- Physical well-being highlights the central role played by working conditions, work-life balance and the physical safety as well as comfort of educational settings. Fair salaries, manageable workloads and supportive leadership arrangements are crucial in boosting educators’ motivation and ensuring their long-term commitment to teaching
- Cognitive well-being foregrounds teachers’ mental and intellectual health, spanning how they engage in critical thinking, problem-solving and decision-making. Three interwoven constructs sustain cognitive wellbeing.
- Socio-emotional well-being is the pulse of a flourishing teaching force; it shapes how educators connect with colleagues, leaders, parents, and – most importantly – students, while nourishing the inner resources they need to thrive.

How to Interpret the Results of the TALIS

TALIS (Teaching and Learning International Survey) is an international survey focusing on the working conditions of teachers and school principals and the learning environment in schools. It collects internationally comparable data based on self-reports from teachers and principals regarding opportunities for professional learning, teaching and management practices in schools, and other aspects. The survey aims to contribute to educational analysis and the consideration of education policy. In this regard, TALIS is the first OECD international survey primarily focused on teachers and school principals.

However, the OECD cautions that while self-reported data allows for capturing respondents' beliefs and perceptions, its interpretation may be influenced by cultural backgrounds and response tendencies. Furthermore, recognizing that education policies and regulations vary across countries, TALIS reports present the context of each country's education policies and institutional characteristics throughout the report wherever possible (OECD, Reader's Guide, 2025).

Given these characteristics of TALIS, interpreting the data requires analysis based on the relationships between indicators and the policy and institutional contexts of each country, rather than simple comparisons based on numerical values or international rankings.

WB-related indicators in TALIS 2024(lower secondary)

dimensions	constructs	item	OECD average	Japan
Physical well-being	working conditions	During your most recent complete calendar week, did you spend in total on tasks related to your job at this school?	41.0h	55.1h
	work-life balance	My job leaves me time for my personal life.	47.1%	24.7%
	physical health and safety	I experience stress in my work.	48.6%	52.4%
		My job negatively impacts my mental health.	28.0%	31.4%
		My job negatively impacts my physical health.	23.1%	29.5%
Cognitive well-being	intellectual engagement	I often feel happy while I teach.	94.0%	88.4%
		I generally teach with enthusiasm.	96.3%	94.2%
		The interesting challenges of teaching give me satisfaction.	89.8%	91.8%
	sense of ownership	This school provides staff with opportunities to actively participate in school decisions.	78.2%	74.0%
		I have autonomy in designing and preparing lessons.	93.1%	88.4%
	professional growth	Overall, the professional learning activities I participated in had a positive impact on my teaching.	55.2%	39.6%
		I do not have time due to other commitments or responsibilities.	63.4%	85.6%
		Get students to believe they can do well in school work.(self-efficacy)	85.3%	28.3%
	Reduce achievement gaps among students .(self-efficacy)	59.3%	18.2%	
Social and emotional well-being	self-worth and recognition	All in all, I am satisfied with my job.	89.4%	78.8%
		The advantages of being a teacher clearly outweigh the disadvantages.	73.9%	71.9%
		I am satisfied with my performance in this school.	92.0%	53.6%
		I am satisfied with the salary I receive for my work.	38.7%	28.6%
		Apart from my salary, I am satisfied with the terms of my teaching contract/employment.	68.4%	37.3%
		Intention to leave teaching within the next five years (excluding retirement).	16.6%	8.0%
	support-relationships	Teachers can rely on each other in this school.	85.8%	76.9%
		There is a collaborative school culture which is characterised by mutual support in this school.	82.4%	80.7%
		The principal provides useful feedback to teachers and staff.	77.2%	68.8%
		Teachers are valued by students in this school.	70.7%	54.2%
Teachers are valued by parents/guardians in this school.		65.4%	45.0%	
	Teachers are valued in the media in this country/region.	19.8%	9.2%	

Note:Based on OECD (2025) Teaching Compass: Reimagining Teachers as Agents of Curriculum Change, pp. 29-32, we extracted well-being-related indicators from TALIS 2024. The questions presented here include those that can be classified as either work environments affecting well-being or well-being outcomes. Please note that this table does not represent an official compilation by the OECD. The figures generally represent the percentage of teachers who report positive responses using a 4-point scale (e.g., "Strongly agree," "Agree"). The translations of the items were performed by the author.

Well-being of Japanese teachers

(1) Physical well-being

Compared to other OECD nations, Japanese teachers work exceptionally long hours, which severely compromises their work-life balance. However, the proportion of teachers reporting fatigue or stress does not necessarily show a significant difference compared to the OECD average.

(2) Cognitive well-being

Compared to OECD countries, Japanese teachers maintain similarly high levels of intellectual. However, they lack sufficient time to pursue ongoing professional learning, and their sense of the positive impact of professional learning and their self-efficacy are low.

(3) Socio-emotional well-being

Compared to OECD countries, Japanese teachers report somewhat lower job, approximately 80% of teachers are satisfied. However, satisfaction with outcomes and the sense of being valued and recognized by society, parents, and the media are low. Intent to leave the profession is relatively low.

Currently, initiatives such as “further promoting the improvement of the environment surrounding teachers,” “the steady implementation of the current curriculum guidelines and consideration of the next generation curriculum guidelines,” “promoting education utilizing ICT,” and “enhancing teachers' qualifications and capabilities” are being advanced. Given these policy trends, it is essential to further advance policy research on the ideal school structure and necessary conditions for realizing the well-being of Japanese teachers—defined as a state enabling them to fully exercise their professional functions—within the context of Japan's educational system and culture.

(Source) Based on *Teaching Compass: Reimagining Teachers as Agents of Curriculum Change*, pp. 29-32, OECD (2025), we extracted well-being indicators from TALIS 2024 we extracted well-being indicators from TALIS 2024 and analyzed the results. Please note that this is not an official analysis by the OECD.

The relationship between teachers' well-being and children's well-being

Educational systems must be designed to foster a mutually reinforcing relationship between children's academic achievement and well-being, and between teachers' well-being and children's well-being.

The relationship between teachers' well-being and children's well-being must be understood through at least two mechanisms. One is the mechanism whereby individual teachers' well-being influences children's well-being through classroom interaction and the learning environment. The other is a school-level mechanism whereby school-wide well-being simultaneously determines both teachers' and children's well-being.

(1) A model showing that teachers' well-being creates a more supportive learning environment and influences children's well-being

"...teachers with higher levels of work engagement showed higher-quality emotional support and instructional support, while teachers with higher levels of burnout potentially evidenced lower-quality instructional support." (Chan, S. W., Pöysä, S., Lerkkanen, M.-K., & Pakarinen, E. , 2023)

(2) A model showing that school well-being influences children's well-being

"School well-being has been defined as a psychologically, socially, physically and economically safe school community and environment for all actors in school community." (Ukskoski, T., & Lerkkanen, M.-K.,2024)

Annual Trends in Elementary School Students' Responses Regarding “Self-Esteem” in the National Assessment of Academic Ability

< 戻る 全国学力・学習状況調査 | 児童生徒質問調査アーカイブ | 回答の経年変化

小学校

中学校

質問のカテゴリ

挑戦心、達成感、規範意識、自己有用感、幸福感等

質問項目

自分には、よいところがあると思いますか

※This slide is based on the screen of the web tool “Japan’s Education in Data: ‘National Assessment of Academic Ability’” provided by the Education Data Science Center. On this site, users can visualize annual trends by selecting individual survey questions. This slide focuses on “self-esteem”. Note that while this question can be interpreted as an indicator related to children and students’ well-being, it is important to recognize that this single item does not represent overall well-being.

回答の項目

- 1 当てはまる
- 2 どちらかといえば、当てはまる
- 3 どちらかといえば、当てはまらない
- 4 当てはまらない
- 98 その他
- 99 無回答

回答の年次推移



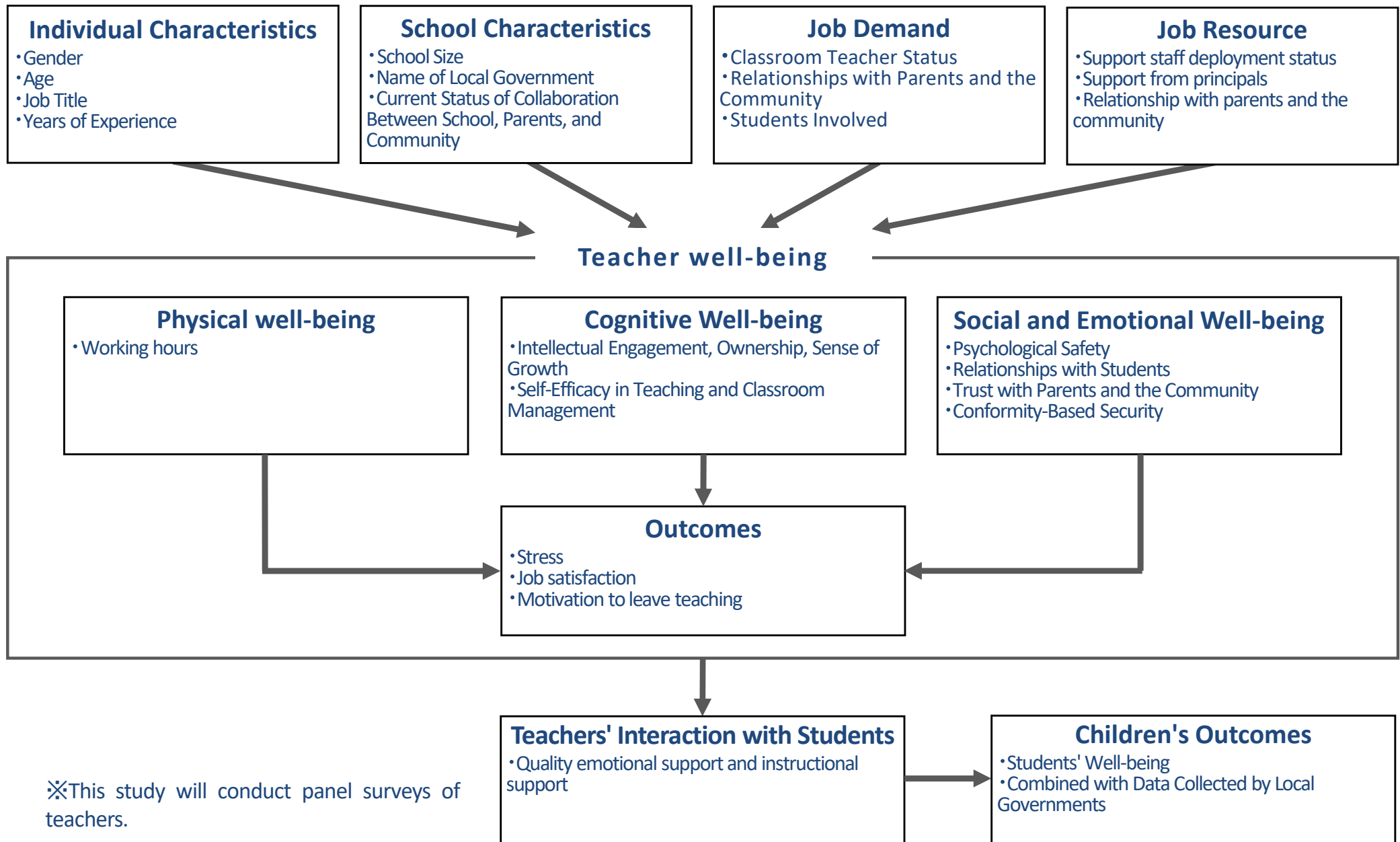
※ 本ツールでは、調査実施日に教科に関する調査を一つ以上実施し、かつ質問調査を実施した児童（生徒）を対象として集計した値を表示しています。

国立教育政策研究所

(Source) National Institute for Educational Policy Research, Center for Educational Data Science: “Japan’s Education in Data: The National Assessment of Academic Ability (<https://www.nier.go.jp/edsc/edp/data/zenkokugakuryoku/index.html>)

*The Education Data Science Center is building the “Public Education Data Platform,” a platform for sharing survey data, research findings, and best practices in the field of education that are useful for national and local government policies and practices.

Framework of the Questionnaire Survey for This Study



✂ This study will conduct panel surveys of teachers.

International Comparative Study on Well-being in Education Policy

【Research Questions】

- (1) How is the concept of well-being positioned within the overall education policies of various countries? Furthermore, how is the concept of well-being understood within the education policies of each country?
- (2) In the education policies of each country (elementary and secondary education), to which policy areas is the concept of well-being applied? What measures are being implemented?
- (3) In the education policies of each country (both overall and in the elementary and secondary education sectors), by what indicators and through what methods is the concept of well-being measured and verified?

【Countries Surveyed】

United States, United Kingdom, Finland, Canada, Germany, France, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea, China

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