



**AMERICAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION**
SERVICES, INC.

For additional information, contact:
Kenneth Polishchuk
202-336-5945
kpolishchuk@apa.org

MAY 2022

Supporting Educator Mental Health and Well-Being

Throughout COVID-19, educators continue to face unique challenges and pressures due to the everchanging landscape of the current educational system. Much of this upheaval also extends to their personal lives, including the loss of loved ones and colleagues, resulting in a great deal of stress and trauma. Like with many other aspects of the pandemic, racial disparities have also been evident among the education workforce, with educators of color being disproportionately impacted.

In spring 2020, when COVID-19 first emerged, educators were seen an essential part of the response. Many parents, who were forced to home-school their children for the first time, empathized with the immense work that teachers do every day. Although most parents are generally satisfied with the performance of their local schools since the beginning of the pandemic,¹ educators have been at the center of both public health debates and cultural flashpoints. Several COVID-19 variants have caused further upheaval, uncertainty, and confusion, and many school districts have been engulfed in highly partisan battles related to vaccinations, mask mandates, and curriculum on the history of racism, sex education, and LGBTQ+ rights. Some of this has resulted in increased physical and verbal aggression towards educators from both students and parents.² In aggregate, this has taken a toll on teacher well-being and willingness to persist in the profession.

Educators are stressed and burnt out

Teacher turnover was a concern even before COVID-19, especially in schools that are historically under-resourced.³ Since the start of the pandemic, significant numbers report frequently experiencing job-related stress and large majorities find their jobs to be much more stressful as compared to before the pandemic.⁴ Teachers who taught primarily low-income students and/or students with learning disabilities were the most likely to report feeling burnt out.⁵ Furthermore, the pandemic has been especially challenging for new educators first entering the classroom. Despite these difficulties, large majorities of teachers still intend to remain in the profession, but many—including those who had not planned on doing so prior to the pandemic—are considering leaving.^{6 7}

Educator well-being leads to student success

Teacher well-being is intrinsically linked to that of their students. Research shows that burnout and stress impact teachers' ability to manage classroom behavior, build close relationships, and provide effective instruction.⁸ High levels of teacher burnout or exhaustion can lead to increased stress among students and lower academic outcomes.^{9 10} Data show that when teacher morale, confidence, and enthusiasm about teaching are high, students are more interested and engaged in the classroom.¹¹

Educators need more mental and emotional health support

Since the start of the pandemic, there has been much necessary discussion about the best way to provide social and emotional supports to students. However, for these efforts to be successful, it is critical that the social and emotional needs of educators are also addressed.¹² Providing teachers with social and emotional supports has been shown to benefit students and school communities. Schools with teachers and administrators who have strong personal social and emotional skills have better school climates and increased social, emotional, and academic development of their students.¹³

Despite the current challenges, teachers remain resilient, committed to their students, and hopeful about their own future in the profession.¹⁴ Many believe that they can grow as teaching professionals and that students can learn through effective teaching and hard work. As school districts and policymakers look to recover from the pandemic, investing in the mental and emotional well-being of the educator workforce will be essential.

Policy Recommendations

Establish and operate educator well-being and mental health programs.

- Provide more access to telehealth counseling.
- Build support networks and peer-to-peer mentorship programs.
- Provide training and support systems for educators that focus on coping with stress, building resilience, mindfulness, self-care, and wellness strategies.
- Offer counseling services, either school-based or through community partnerships.

Educators should also be provided opportunities to have their voices heard and perspectives included in decision-making.

- Conduct regular engagement surveys, interviews, and/or focus groups with educators, to help monitor how well they are doing physically, emotionally, mentally, and professionally, and to identify what supports and programs are needed.
- Conduct annual school, state, and national anonymous reporting surveys on the extent and types of stressors that educators and all school personnel experience and recommend solutions.

Along with providing more training on social and emotional learning and trauma-informed teaching practices, teacher preparation programs must also recognize the social and emotional needs of educators themselves.

- Integrate skills and best practices on coping mechanisms, stress management, and wellness in educator preparation curricula and courses.
- Include psychologists, counselors, and social workers on educator-preparation program advisory councils and work with them to help educator-preparation faculty learn practical ways to support teachers' social and emotional needs in the school setting.

Improving the mental health and well-being of students would also help educators in reducing stress and burnout and boosting morale.

- [Increase funding for federal programs and pass legislation](#) that would improve the overall commitment to mental health and wellness promotion in schools by growing the school-based mental health workforce and enhancing school climate.

References

- 1 Axios-Ipsos poll: No widespread COVID school backlash (Nov. 9, 2021). Retrieved from: <https://www.axios.com/2021/11/09/axios-ipsos-poll-covid-schools>.
- 2 McMahon, S.D., Anderman, E.M., Astor, R.A., Espelage, D.L., Martinez, A., Reddy, L.A., & Worrell, F.C. (2022). Violence Against Educators and School Personnel: Crisis During COVID. Technical Report. American Psychological Association. Retrieved from: <https://www.apa.org/education-career/k12/violence-educators-technical-report.pdf>.
- 3 Gray, L., and Taie, S. (2015). Public School Teacher Attrition and Mobility in the First Five Years: Results From the First Through Fifth Waves of the 2007-08 Beginning Teacher Longitudinal Study (NCES 2015-337). U.S. Department of Education. Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics. Retrieved from <http://nces.ed.gov/pubsearch>;
Ronfeldt M, Loeb S, Wyckoff J. How Teacher Turnover Harms Student Achievement. *American Educational Research Journal*. 2013;50(1):4-36. doi:10.3102/0002831212463813; Desiree Carver-Thomas and Linda Darling-Hammond, "Teacher Turnover: Why It Matters and What We Can Do About It" (Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute, 2017), available at https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Teacher_Turnover_REPORT.pdf.
- 4 Kurtz, H. (May 14, 2021). Teachers Are More Stressed Out Than Ever, Even Amid Promising Developments, Survey Shows. Education Week. Retrieved from: <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/teachers-are-more-stressed-out-than-ever-even-amid-promising-developments-survey-shows/2021/05>.
- 5 National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD) policy brief. (July 2021). Supporting student with learning and attention issues during covid-19. Retrieved from: <https://www.nclld.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/FINAL-NCLD-Policy-Brief-July-2021.pdf>.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Diliberti, Melissa Kay, Heather L. Schwartz, and David Grant, Stress Topped the Reasons Why Public School Teachers Quit, Even Before COVID-19. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2021. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1121-2.html.
- 8 Tolan, P., Elreda, L. M., Bradshaw, C. P., Downer, J. T., & Lalongo, N. (2020). Randomized trial testing the integration of the Good Behavior Game and MyTeachingPartner™: The moderating role of distress among new teachers on student outcomes. *Journal of school psychology*, 78, 75-95; Roberts, A., & Kim., H. (2019, May 6). To promote success in schools, focus on teacher well-being. Washington, DC: Brookings Institute. Retrieved from: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plusdevelopment/2019/05/06/to-promote-success-in-schools-focus-on-teacher-well-being/>; Sparks, S. D. (2017, June 7). How teachers' stress affects students: A research roundup. Education Week. Retrieved from: <https://www.edweek.org/education/how-teachers-stress-affects-students-a-researchroundup/2017/06>.
- 9 Sparks, S.D. (July 7, 2017). How Teachers' Stress Affects Students: A Research Roundup. Education Week. Retrieved from: <https://www.edweek.org/education/how-teachers-stress-affects-students-a-research-roundup/2017/06>.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Will, M. (Jan. 6, 2021). As Teacher Morale Hits a New Low, Schools Look for Ways to Give Breaks, Restoration. Education Week. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/as-teacher-morale-hits-a-new-low-schools-look-for-ways-to-give-breaks-restoration/2021/01>.
- 12 NCLD, July 2021.
- 13 Mark Greenberg, Joshua Brown, and Rachel Abenavoli, "Teacher Stress and Health: Effects on Teachers, Students, and Schools" (University Park, PA: Bennett Pierce Prevention Research Center at Pennsylvania State University, 2016), available at <https://www.prevention.psu.edu/uploads/files/rwjf430428-TeacherStress.pdf>; Greenberg, Brown, and Abenavoli, "Teacher Stress and Health; Kaiser Permanente Thriving Schools, "Social Emotional Health," available at <https://thrivingschools.kaiserpermanente.org/school-employees/social-emotional/>.
- 14 NCLD, July 2021.