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Most Teachers Report High Levels of Stress, Study Finds

By Alix Mammina on April 26, 2018, 2:42 PM

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Most teachers experience high levels of burnout and stress—and that may be affecting their students' achievement, **a recent study found**.

The study, conducted by researchers at the University of Missouri and published in *Journal of Positive Behavior Interventions*, measured the levels of stress, burnout, and coping abilities of 121 teachers at elementary schools in a Midwestern school district, as well as the effects of teacher stress and coping on student outcomes.

The results are particularly interesting given that teachers in several states have recently walked out of their classes to **fight for higher pay and better working conditions**—issues that undoubtedly impact stress levels.

For this study, each teacher completed self-report measures on their levels of burnout, stress, efficacy, and coping, answering questions like, "How stressful is your job?" and "How well are you coping with the stress of your job right now?" on a scale of zero to 10. Teachers reported their students' behavior by filling out checklists for each of their students, while students themselves completed a standardized test to gauge academic achievement.

Almost all of the teachers—93 percent—reported high stress levels, while only 7 percent were categorized as "well-adjusted." The teachers who reported the highest levels of stress and lowest levels of coping were also associated with the worst student outcomes, which included lower math scores and higher disruptive behaviors.

This corroborates **several other recent studies** that found that when teachers are stressed, their students' well-being and achievement tend to decline.

While the study didn't explore the factors affecting high teacher stress, a **similar survey released** by the American Federation of Teachers and the advocacy group the Badass Teachers Association offers a few explanations. The 2017 AFT/BAT survey found that teachers find their work stressful 61 percent of the time, as compared to the general public, which found work stressful 30 percent of the time. The survey pointed to several factors that could have influenced these high levels of teacher stress, including high rates of workplace bullying, limited influence in administrative decisions, and a lack of respect from the media and elected officials.

How can schools address teacher stress? The University of Missouri study suggested screening teachers to find those most in need of support, equipping educators with stress-management and coping skills, and fostering positive environments in schools.

A recent *Education Week Teacher* special report explored the benefits of instilling social-emotional competencies in classroom teachers. In one piece from the series, my **colleague Madeline Will noted**, "As schools across the country put more of a focus on social-emotional learning for their students, experts have come to realize that teachers' social-emotional competencies, especially their stress-management skills and their ability to regulate their emotions, are a vital piece of that puzzle."

Photo by caio triana.

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Dr. Conde • 2 years ago

How about paying teachers a professional salary commensurate with their education and experience instead of expecting them to have multiple degrees and certificates and on-going professional development training often paid for out of their salaries as a requirement of licensure to teach? Teachers do not get paid enough for their value because they are typically women. How about we stop treating teachers like glorified baby sitters while piling on custodial and administrative tasks and somehow expecting them to stay hours beyond their day to do their actual job? Bet that would really help with stress. How about we don't normalize have two or three jobs and instead get the teacher's full attention by paying what the labor is worth commensurate to what men make for jobs requiring similar levels of education? How about we stop denigrating teachers as idiots for taking the job in the first place, since it's so poorly paid and respected, and then blaming them on the back end for low scores on pathetic standardized tests, signifying control and little about the capacity of children and adolescents. How about we actually enable experienced teachers to experience growth with financial gain instead of having to leave the profession or become administrators, or worse, have administrators who are not at heart teachers and teacher advocates. How about we properly resource schools just as we would any office? Would we have an office with no paper? No copy machine? Broken computers or not enough for the staff so they had to share? No toilet paper so you had to bring your own from home? If you care about your children and everyone's children you pay taxes and support their teachers. And you support public schools, not rich scammers and charter school operators

13 ^ | ▾ 1 • Reply • Share >



dangerdare → Dr. Conde • 2 years ago

AGREED!!!!

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ThisUsersOpinion → Dr. Conde • 2 years ago • edited

I agree. I have an advanced graduate degree, and am working on my second. I make \$30,000 to 100,000 LESS than say a business man with only a single master's degree.

Many teachers are far more educated than most professions and must continue their education, mostly at their own expense. Teachers are licensed, and have to renew those licences every couple of years (depends on state). Yet, were are maligned, judged, and treated as lower class citizens.

I work in a small city that just elected out a long-term mayor who publically stated that the city's teachers were overpaid. He said this as he was being identified as one of the state's highest paid mayors (in one year, due to a salary change HE insituted, he was given a \$34,000 a year raise, added to his \$6,000 a year clothing allowac, and the city car he was given to use for personal and professional use). And, he only has a bachelor's degree.

We are entrusted to teach people's children, yet treated as if we have little value. The first cuts made to a budget (local, state, federal) is to education. The first cuts made in schools are to teachers. We are expected to do so much with less and less.

It is a shame that the US claims that education is important, but does not does not show it. It is stressful to be blamed when students do not succeed according to a test. It is stressful when I am taking on extra jobs to pay off my excessive student loans. It is stressful when I am blamed for budget shortfalls when I ask for a livable wage that commensurates with my education. It is stressful to have school committees tell me in negotiations, "We think you deserve so much more, but do not have the money to pay it," while then go

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1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

**Mademoiselle** → Dr. Conde · 2 years ago

I actually had a principal write in my evaluation my first year that the environment in my classroom needed improvement because I had empty shelves. Well, I'm not a believer that I should have to pay for school supplies out of my own pocket (my salary is for me to pay my own bills, my salary should not be expected to be charity!)

If you want my classroom to be decorated, PAY FOR IT!!!! What other job expects the employees to buy supplies out of their own pockets in order for the company to run???? It is madness.

4 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

**monique** → Mademoiselle · 2 years ago

It most definitely IS madness! That principal is OUT OF LINE, not to mention OUT OF TOUCH! Administrators, that DO THEIR JOB, should be encouraging & assisting, NOT criticizing!

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

**monique** → Dr. Conde · 2 years ago

I agree with ALL of your comments, but must add to 1 sentence: "commensurate to what men & WOMEN make for jobs requiring similar levels of education". The recent strike, by Arizona teachers is hopefully a "wake up call" to make people "stand up & take notice"!

Paraprofessionals should also strike. Their jobs are invaluable to classroom teachers & the WHOLE school system. Working for low pay & many with no health insurance, it's deplorable!

These practices have been going on for decades & MUST CHANGE!

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**Julie Reader** · 2 years ago

Agreed. How about we find a way to help parents parent and teach kids some respect for teachers and school.

3 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

**WPlotkin** · 2 years ago · edited

The article notes,

"The survey pointed to several factors that could have influenced these high levels of teacher stress, including high rates of workplace bullying, limited influence in administrative decisions, and a lack of respect from the media and elected officials."

Given this information, I believe that the proposed follow-up article, on how teachers can change reactions to stress, is a sign that the article author (or blog editor) supports the system that produces the powerlessness characterized by the presence of these factors, or is defeatist. Would it not be better to have an informed discussion of the causes of these factors, and of why previous attempts to correct them (if any) have failed?

Pay rates are, indeed, one cause and effect of this powerlessness.

5 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

**RPennington** · 2 years ago

Unfortunately, the tone of this article reinforces the idea that it is the teachers' fault that the kids scores are low. One more thing teachers need to do to "fix themselves". As other commenters have posted, how about we work to reduce the stress by dealing with the underlying issues at hand? I haven't read the actual studies, but correlation isn't causation. Maybe it's the low achievement that caused the stress.... (along with other issues of deprofessionalized treatment of teachers).

6 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›

**monique** → RPennington · 2 years ago

Kids scores are LOW because Bill Gates, other billionaires, the U.S. president, state governors, & Pearson Co. took ALL public schools hostage, mandated & dictated "Common Core", while intentionally EXCLUDING teachers, most with Masters degrees, from ANY & ALL DECISION MAKING on curriculum/testing, for the past 4 decades.

During my last few years before retiring, I REFUSED to take ANY RESPONSIBILITY for my students' test scores, not that I didn't do everything to prepare them for the ridiculous, unnecessary & inappropriate tests, given TOO MANY TIMES, every year!

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**Conn McQuinn** · 2 years ago

This shouldn't be surprising. The factors that cause stress and the impacts of stress on performance are well-documented. Any person in any

profession will perform more poorly if subjected to chronic stress. It compounds in a situation like a classroom, where the students will perceive and pick up on the teacher's stress, just as a good teacher will recognize and be impacted by the students' stress. The idea of helping teachers develop resiliency is a good one, since their mental and emotional health will directly impact the students, but it's not a substitute for addressing the underlying issues causing the stress in the first place.

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Tommy Terd · 2 years ago

Badass Teachers Association:

Now THERE'S a real professional name.

Keep up the good public relations campaign!

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Pam Hansen · 2 years ago

How about turning ti around -- classes with the poorest behaviors cause teachers the most stress?

4 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Larisa Hepker · 2 years ago

I must agree. The research clearly describes some of the reasons teachers feel such a high level of stress, (primarily aspects of education that are beyond teacher control), yet places the "solution" squarely back on teacher shoulders. With our high levels of stress and massive work hours, isn't this a bit much? As a special educator of 18+ years, I've never received a cost of living raise, had my caseloads more than doubled, and yearly have additional responsibilities without any previous responsibilities being removed. When my husband lost his 8-month battle with cancer several years ago, I had to come to terms with all the hours I spent away from home trying to keep up with the multiple demands of the job. Those are hours I will never have back with the love of my life. I have to assume other teachers are making like sacrifices. A little dignity and respect for what we do would go a long way. Being able to live without the fear of my car breaking down and not being able to pay for it would go a good deal farther.

5 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



stolaf · 2 years ago

As a teacher who has spent nearly four decades working with students, let's cut the c**p and like the little boy who exclaimed, "That the emperor is wearing no clothes!", place the blame for the unbelievably high stress levels among teachers squarely where it belongs. I am referring to, of course, to the egregious lack of support from our administrators. They would rather throw us under the bus, than stand up to parents and demand that parents take responsibility for their children's disruptive discipline problems.

Most of us teachers knew from the beginning that no one in this country was ever going to reach salary levels commiserate with our education, but we did expect to work as a team with our administrators and we expected our administrators to support us.

3 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



ThisUsersOpinion → stolaf · 2 years ago

I agree. We also did not expect to have departments of education (state and federal level) to try to undermine us, to set us up to fail, and to make everything harder.

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monique → stolaf · 2 years ago

Well said, & congrats for "making it" 40 years!

That's a feat!

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



ThisUsersOpinion · 2 years ago

"The teachers who reported the highest levels of stress and lowest levels of coping were also associated with the worst student outcomes, which included lower math scores and higher disruptive behaviors.

This corroborates several other recent studies that found that when teachers are stressed, their students' well-being and achievement tend to decline."

Maybe the cause-and-effect relationship is misconstrued. Instead of once again blaming teachers, - stressed teachers is the cause for lower achieving students - even passively, the study needs to dig deeper. Could it be the teachers with the most difficult student populations (those with special needs who historically perform lower even those with moderate disabilities who are in general education classrooms' those with behavioral issues either due to a disability, parenting issues, or other causes) are the most stressed BECAUSE they are tasked with trying to reach these students, and are then blamed when the student does not succeed?

How does this study know what came first? As a special education teacher whose students do not make the same levels of growth due to their disabilities and whose students sometimes possess extremely difficult behaviors to manage as part of their diagnosis. I see it

their disabilities, and whose students sometimes possess extremely difficult behaviors to manage as part of their diagnosis, I see it differently.

While I know these students are not going to be the school's superstar achievers, I celebrate every milestone, every example of growth, every improvement no matter how small or shortlived. Yet, I have people, - administrators, colleagues, parents - who question why my students are not doing even better. THAT is what stresses me out.

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Mademoiselle · 2 years ago

Teaching is a nightmare job. I worked 50-60 hours per week, but per my contract I was paid for 37.5 hours a week (the hours I was required to be in the building). After 5 years I burned out, and now I work an hourly job so that if they want me to work more, guess what? My employer actually has to pay me more (what a novel concept!!!!) Salaries are just a way for employers to make you work infinity hours, essentially making you a minimum-wage or below minimum wage worker. I now work 40 hours a week, no unpaid overtime, and am so much happier with the extra 10-20 hours a week that are mine again.

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Kristi Schertz · 2 years ago

The results of this study do NOT show that most teachers have high burnout. If you click on the actual study, 60% have high stress and high coping skills but low burnout. EdWeek needs to do a better job.

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