

Preventing Educator Burnout: Supporting the Well-Being of Pre-Service and First-Year Teachers Post COVID-19

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted teacher training. Because of partial school closures, social distancing, and the rapid move to online teaching, trainee and first-year teachers have had vastly different learning experiences from previous cohorts (Royal Society of Chemistry, 2021). COVID-19 significantly disrupted the preparation of pre-service and first-year teachers. Many pre-service and first-year teachers, post-COVID, need more emotional and physical capacities to deal with the demands of teaching. Post Covid-19 studies have reported that pre-service and first-year teachers have experienced extreme burnout, an enduring state of mental, emotional, and physical exhaustion induced by chronic stress leading to negative sentiments toward one's professional self-efficacy (Maslach, 1982; Schaufeli et al., 2009; Herman et al., 2018). Pre-service and first-year teachers need support through induction, professional development, and social-emotional coping strategies to ensure their students' success.

Keywords: Burnout, Pre-Service Teacher, First-Year Teacher, Social Emotional, Professional Development

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The effects of the coronavirus (COVID-19) have significantly impacted the teaching profession and teacher training. The rapid spread of COVID-19 has led to teacher preparation programs changing how they prepare pre-service teachers (Gomez-Braton et al., 2021). These changes included shifts to virtual placements, virtual instruction, and limited actual classroom practice. Pre-service and first-year teachers experienced months away from the classroom, resulting in an inability to develop essential teaching skills such as behavior management and face-to-face instruction. The remote teaching experience meant teachers and their students lost out on the face-to-face interactions that are significant for observing students' understanding and building rapport. This has led to pre-service and first-year teachers needing more confidence in their teaching ability (Royal Society of Chemistry, 2021). Studies have reported that pre-service and first-year teachers are experiencing burnout, a psychological syndrome emerging as a prolonged response to chronic interpersonal stressors on the job. The three critical dimensions of this response are overwhelming exhaustion, cynicism, detachment from the job, and a sense of ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment.

This three-dimensional model places the individual stress experience within a social context and involves the person's conception of self and others (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). The National Association of Schoolmasters Union of Women Teachers (NASUWT) in the U.K. surveyed NASUWT members from mid-December 2021 to early January 2022. The survey resulted in 11,857 teacher responses revealing that 90% of teachers have experienced more work-related stress in the last 12 months; 91% report that their job has adversely affected their mental health in the last 12 months; 64% report that their job has adversely affected their physical health in the last 12 months; 52% say that workload has been the main factor for increased work-related stress, followed by the consequences of the pandemic (34%), and many worried about pupil behavior (24%), pupil wellbeing (24%), pupil academic performance (22%) and finances (11%).

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In addition, 22% of those teachers polled had seen increases in alcohol and caffeine consumption since becoming a teacher, 11% used antidepressants to cope with teacher burnout factors, and 9% even blamed teacher stress on the breakup of a marriage or relationship. With such staggering data, a fundamental transformation of how teachers are supported must change (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014). K-12 and Educator Preparation Programs (EPP) must implement programs and strategies such as induction, ongoing professional development, and social-emotional support to better prepare teachers for the demands of teaching.

Induction

According to a 2019 National Education Association (NEA) policy brief titled, *Advancing the Teaching Profession: Investing in Comprehensive Induction and Teacher Mentoring*, "numerous studies demonstrate that implementing comprehensive induction cuts new teacher turnover rates in half. Comprehensive induction is a sound investment to address teacher recruitment and retention." As COVID-19 began spreading "across the country, many school districts suspended in-person instruction in March 2020" (Association, 2021). For aspiring and new educators, the pandemic interrupted student teaching, teacher residencies, and induction programs, leaving thousands of new teachers unprepared to meet the needs of students. In addition, these aspiring teachers need the critical support they need to succeed. This situation further exacerbates the teacher shortage and the ability to attract, retain, and train new teachers (Association, 2021). While there are many educational priorities, supporting teachers new to the profession is paramount (NEA, 2021). According to Julie Sheldon, the induction coordinator of Walnut Valley Consortium and co-chair of the Greater Los Angeles Induction Leadership Committee, the purpose of induction is to provide new teachers in their first and second years of teaching with mentorship so that they are more effective in their classrooms and get support in those most challenging years. About 500,000 (15%) of teachers in the U.S. leave the profession every year, with as many as 41.3% of all teachers in the U.S. leaving the profession after five years. This high turnover rate disproportionately affects high-poverty schools and seriously compromises the nation's capacity to ensure all students have access to skilled teaching (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2014). Induction theorists have identified the benefits of induction programs, including teacher socialization, adjustment, development, and assessment. Each of these areas intends to support the growth of beginning teachers (e.g., Feiman-Nemser 2001; Ganser 2002). Research suggests that teachers with appropriate support and training become more confident in positively impacting student success. This, in turn, contributes to their likelihood of staying in the profession, thus increasing teacher retention rates. Quality programs for all beginning teachers are essential. Research shows that beginning teachers who participate in induction programs are nearly twice as likely to stay in the profession as those who do not (Bacon, 2020).

Professional Development

Our education system is in a real crisis. This problem has had drastic implications on current educators who are now leaving the profession and the next generation avoiding entering it (Perna, 2022). The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future [NCTAF] (2007) reported that by a teacher's fifth year in the classroom, 46% of the nation's teachers are expected to leave the profession. Teachers who experience stress and burnout leave the profession at higher rates. With such predictions, our education system is in trouble. Burnout is a factor that might impact educators' mental health and stability. Teaching is among the most demanding professions (Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021). Due to rising demands, a lack of support and professional development, and unreasonable expectations from district administrators, teachers frequently quit their jobs during their first three to five years. As a result, there is an ongoing cycle of hiring and firing teachers every year. For new teachers to become effective practitioners typically takes three to seven years. The Educator Burnout Survey is a survey created to determine pre and in-service teachers' perceptions of teacher burnout. A total of sixty-eight pre-and-in-service teachers responded, shedding light on their teacher preparation and perceptions of preparedness geared toward educator burnout. One survey participant responded by sharing:

"I feel very confident in my training as a teacher coming out of the student teacher program. However, I was not prepared to deal with being in leadership dealing with my character being put into question by parents. I strongly hope we can educate students before they graduate on how to deal with mental health as a teacher and a leader. Nothing prepared me to deal with the stress of being judged by parents who have issues with each other and sometimes your decision making."

The degree of support teachers perceive they will receive early in their careers significantly impacts their perception of long-term job success (Cells et al., 2022). Cells et al. 2022, found that teachers perform better when they feel supported by professional development, time for collegial discussion, and autonomy, leading to more educator retention. Burnout eventually sets in when employment becomes unpleasant, unfulfilling, and unrewarding. Several factors can contribute to such unwanted feelings, including lack of support, scarce resources, job detachment, and feelings of lack of accomplishment within the profession.

It is helpful to understand the elements connected to teacher burnout to create schools that support teachers' job satisfaction and provide high-quality education. Programs for teacher training play a significant role in determining whether instructors stay in the profession for more than the first five years. Many districts provide teachers with training between years one and three of their careers. However, research has revealed that this process should be ongoing. Professional development provides a continuum for growth in educators. Specifically, ongoing professional development keeps teachers abreast of new findings in education, curricular modernization, and technology advancements that support student achievement. Teachers and administrators can grow their abilities in both the classroom and leadership through professional development, thus equipping them to be more proficient at their jobs.

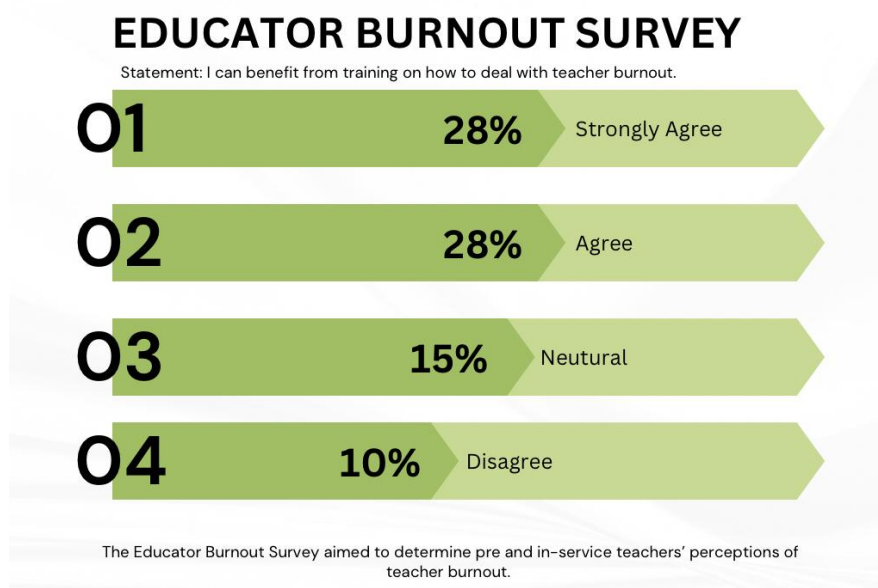


Figure 1: Educator Burnout Survey snippet created by Professors Opara-Nadi and Bennett.

Post the COVID-19 pandemic, the teaching profession has dramatically changed how career-seekers view it. The pandemic exposed gaps and weaknesses in our country's education systems and practices, but more importantly, it showed the need to support educators with grace and investment. COVID-19 exposed the critical need for educators and administrators to have a more personal framework concerning professional development that includes the teacher's well-being and does not solely concentrate on the academic needs of students. Numerous issues have affected the educational system, ranging from curriculum revisions to closures brought on by pandemic illnesses that have spread widely (Owusu-Fordjour et al., 2015). These worries have only grown due to the current teacher shortage and numerous public health problems. Many educators in America still find it challenging to deal with the COVID-19 stress's lasting emotional impacts. Educators must now have the skills to teach students who are immersed in technology, including social media, gaming, and virtual realities. Teachers are now "expected to have knowledge, skills, and ethics to conduct online teaching, which calls for more flexible and dynamic post-pandemic teacher education" (Zhu & Liu, 2020).

What does that look like in terms of professional development for first-year teachers? Should teacher preparation programs shift their instructional practices to address teacher burnout early? A more robust approach to teaching is evident; fortunately, this new era of teacher candidates is more likely to meet the demands of students in terms of relatability. However, these teachers will need a support system even with this advantage—a system designed to discuss today's challenges in the classroom and the world around us. So much professional development in education is developed to support instruction, not the instructor. "The research states that teachers experience higher satisfaction rates and lower levels of burnout when given time to plan and collaborate with their peers" (Cells et al., 2022). Several teachers complete the coaching process during their onboarding yet need extra help considering their skill sets and experience. Additional direction and coordinated effort through a veteran educator have aided teacher retention (Cells et al., 2022).

Social and Emotional Coping Strategies Post COVID

K–12 educators were under extreme pressure and faced unusual obstacles throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. COVID-19 did not exempt educators from losing loved ones and colleagues. The past year has seen

educators particularly overwhelmed with stress, trauma, and burnout due to swiftly adapting to distant learning and balancing the pandemic's effects on their personal lives (Steiner et al., A., 2021). Educator Preparation Programs (EPPs) have provided the support needed for teacher candidates to succeed in the classroom. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, EPPs focused on ensuring teacher candidates possessed the proper dispositions, academic knowledge, and ability to develop engaging lessons to promote intellectual growth. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic has not only affected teacher candidates' effectiveness in the classroom but also impacted the social and emotional well-being of teacher candidates in the form of added stress. Causes of stress can include a lack of resources, class behavioral problems, or pressure relating to standardized test expectations, to name a few (Waterford, 2021). Still, they all lead to the same outcomes: weakened physical and emotional well-being. The switch to virtual instruction was a very stressful and unfamiliar experience for most educators. Unfortunately, there was no early notice or rapidly prepared training and minimal backing from unprepared schools and districts. Stress affects teachers' occupational health in numerous ways, including increasing job dissatisfaction and burnout and reducing their commitment to the profession (Jepson & Forrest, 2006; Klassen et al., 2013). Therefore, providing support for the well-being of teacher candidates post-COVID-19 must be intentional and strategic.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has emphasized the importance of intentionally cultivating the social-emotional competence of adults in schools (Review of Research Second Step Sel for adults – Microsoft). According to McCarthy et al., listening to teachers' voices, providing self-care options at school, experiencing expressions of gratitude, and understanding trauma care are four strategies to support teachers and improve their well-being (McCarthy, 2022). These strategies can also be used to improve the well-being of teacher candidates post-COVID-19. Historically, the voices of teacher candidates have not been included in the conversation about their needs in terms of social-emotional well-being. EPPs and districts can support teacher candidates by having meaningful conversations about what candidates are feeling and how best to assist. Allowing candidates to express their feelings and providing support strengthens and encourages the community.

Along with meaningful conversations, look for authentic moments to express gratitude to teacher candidates. Speak specifically about what candidates are doing well. Celebrate the candidates' effective classroom management, development and delivery of engaging lessons, and their student's academic growth. Each spoken word of gratitude helps to build the confidence of teacher candidates who have yet to have traditional field experiences due to COVID-19.

Implementing SEL skills in the workforce will be crucial as school districts look to recuperate from the pandemic (COVID-19 webinars, 2015). Additionally, EPPs and districts can support teacher candidates by creating designated areas and time for self-care. Caring for oneself is a significant part of an educator's psychological well-being (Yang et al., 2009). The designated areas would give candidates opportunities to relax and recharge. A quiet room with comfortable seating and soft lighting would create a calming environment. Incorporating time to utilize the designated area would benefit the teacher candidate and the students they serve. As revealed in the research, teaching consistently ranks among the highest-stress professions, second only to nursing (Gallup, 2017), with 41 percent of educators leaving the profession within the first five years (Ingersoll et al., 2018). The added stress of the pandemic, the unprecedented shift to virtual learning, and the isolation experienced by teacher candidates have left them traumatized. As stated by McCarthy et al., "The pandemic introduced trauma into the educational landscape in a way that many in the current generation of educators had not experienced" (McCarthy, 2022). To support the well-being of teacher candidates, EPPs and districts must acknowledge the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic as traumatic and provide resources to candidates as they work to overcome their trauma. Resources could include a therapy group or access to professional counselors. Supporting the well-being of teacher candidates can improve outcomes for candidates and the students they will encounter. Teachers who develop their SEL skills improve their students' well-being (Penn State University, 2019).

Educator Burnout Survey

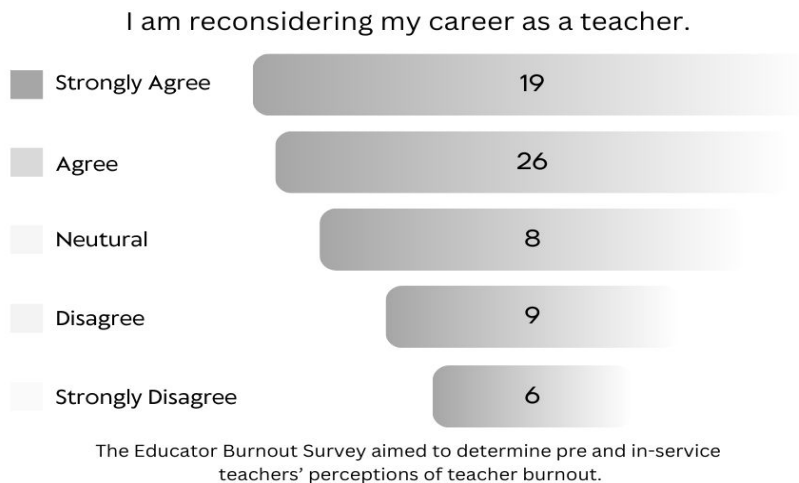


Figure 2: Educator Burnout Survey snippet created by Professors Opara-Nadi and Bennett.

Conclusion

Education is one of the most demanding careers among all other professions (Gu and Day, 2007). Although considered vital in leading the educational and instructing cycle in any academic environment, educator burnout and educator anxiety are concerning factors that lead to educators leaving the profession each year (Scheopner, 2010). In response to an Educator Burnout survey question (Figure 2), more than sixty percent of in-service teachers said they are seriously considering leaving their jobs as educators. Although educators have become the center of consideration in academic institutions due to their significant role in the lives of pre-K-12th grade students, education is considered one of the most stressful and challenging occupations. A recent National Foundation for Educational Research analysis revealed that teachers are more likely to suffer job-related stress than other professionals. Most of the time, one in five teachers feel tense about their job, compared with one in eight workers in similar professions.

Education is a career with a high probability of stress-related illnesses such as chronic fatigue and prolonged anxiety. (Ryu and Kim, 2020). In numerous nations, educators quit their instructing career and seek another job outside school, primarily because of different setting-specific elements like low wages, poor career circumstances, absence of managerial help, high-paying substitutes outside of school, and family-related worries (Liu & Onwuegbuzie, 2012; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Preservice and beginning teachers need support to ensure they are prepared to face the demands of teaching. Induction programs and ongoing professional development can aid new teachers in enhancing their pedagogy and classroom management skills. Also, providing new teachers with social-emotional support and strategies to cope with stressful situations can provide teachers with ways to foster self-care and a stronger sense of self-efficacy. Research shows that school leaders who protect teachers' time, invite their input, and support their mental health and well-being through comprehensive programs see higher satisfaction levels (Walker, 2021). Research notes that high stress levels have led to 25% to 50% of teachers leaving the profession within their first five years of teaching (Algozzine et al., 2010). The significant impact of COVID-19 on the education community should be further researched to provide educator preparation providers and K-12 districts with evidence-based literature to prepare better and support teachers.

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APPENDIX A

Educator Burnout Survey

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This survey aims to determine pre-service teachers' perceptions of teacher burnout during the internship. The survey should take no more than 10-15 minutes and will be used to analyze your perceptions and opinions about pre-service teacher burnout during the internship. We expect no risk or discomfort for any participants of this study. Please note participation is entirely voluntary, and the information obtained in this study may not directly benefit you. All information obtained during this study is private. We protect people's privacy by withholding their names and other personal information from all persons not connected to this study.

Demographics (Please circle):

Age: 18-25 26-35 36-45 46-55 older than 55

Gender: Male Female

Content area taught: College Grad Some College High School/GED Other

Type of Internship: Pre-service teacher Resident Teacher

Internship School Community: Rural Urban Suburban

Please rate your level of agreement with each statement that most closely reflects your opinion on Teacher Burnout.

(1) Strongly Disagree	(2) Disagree	(3) Neutral	(4) Agree	(5) Strongly Agree
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	Question	1	2	3	4	5
1	I am confident in my teaching abilities.					
2	I have anxiety about teaching.					
3	Time management has been difficult.					
4	I have thought about quitting.					
5	I often struggle to make it through the day.					
6	I feel overwhelmed with the expectations and responsibilities of teaching.					
7	Meeting deadlines is a struggle.					
8	I dread reporting to my school every day.					
9	I have received training on how to deal with teacher burnout.					
10	My mental health has suffered during student teaching.					
11	I am reconsidering my career as a teacher.					
12	I have the support I need to be successful during student teaching.					
13	Concerns about COVID-19 affect my ability to teach.					
14	I can benefit from training on how to deal with teacher burnout.					
15	I often want to give up.					
16.	I love teaching.					
17.	Anxiety about teaching is not an issue for me.					
18.	I am eager to report to my school each day.					
19.	I am organized.					
20.	I am prepared to teach each day.					