SUPPORTING EDUCATORS IN THE AGE OF COVID-19: LEADERSHIP APPROACHES FOR THRIVING EDUCATORS AND SCHOOLS

Matthew Clifford, American Institutes for Research
How are you feeling today?

Thinking metaphorically, choose which image best represents change during COVID-19. You can only choose one answer and be prepared to volunteer an explanation!

Marc Brackett, 2020
www.ycei.org/
How are you feeling today?

Thinking metaphorically, choose which image best represents change during COVID-19. You can only choose one answer and be prepared to volunteer an explanation!

- Frustrated
- Anxious
- Overwhelmed
- Agitated
- Joyous
- Happy
- Bright
- Energized
- Lonely
- Exhausted
- Bored
- Flat
- Satisfied
- Pleasant
- Calm
- Centered

Marc Brackett, 2020

www.ycei.org/
Changes to teaching and learning

Teaching and learning has dramatically changed in 2020, and in response to the pandemic.

- **85 percent of schools closed worldwide** (World Bank, 2020).
- **Online learning is now the primary instructional modality** (AIR, 2020).
- **Learning time is primarily online** (AIR, 2020).
- **Students with disadvantages experience heightened barriers to learning** (World Bank, 2020; AIR, 2020).

We are still determining which new features of schooling might be indelible, and which features may be dropped when we are able to convene in-person classes again.
Changes to teaching and learning

Principals and teachers have made remarkable shifts in their work, in service of students and families. Still, changes generate stress and anxiety. We see some evidence of teacher concerns in national data:

• **Teachers are more stress**, during to COVID-19 (CASEL, 2020).
• **Teachers’ sense of well-being has decreased** (Bintlinff, Holtzman, Barron-Borden, Ko, Thong & Ardell, 2020).
• **Teachers report that they were underprepared to deliver online learning** (Hamilton, Kaufman & Diliberti, 2020).
• **More teachers are considering leaving the profession:** 28 percent of teachers said that they were more likely to retire, which is 8 percent higher than the national average (NEA, 2020).
How can leaders support teachers? Understanding stress

Each of us experiences stress in different ways, and we each have different capacities for regulating stress.

Origins of stress

Self/educator health          Students
Family/Community             Professional context

Guarino, 2020; National Institute for Clinical Application of Behavioral Medicine, 2019
As principals, we should consider the “whole teacher” when considering stress sources and responses.

Teachers are experiencing more distress now. NEA (2020) noted the following stressors during COVID-19 closures:

- Concern for kids and their families;
- Feeling socially isolated from colleagues;
- Anxiety about student learning and service;
- Change in professional mission;
- Changing work routines;
- Rapidly learning and applying new skills;
- Uncertainty about the future.
How can leaders support teachers? Understanding stress

Each of us experiences stress in different ways, and we each have different capacities for regulating stress.

Types of stress

- **Eustress**: Positive stress or pressure to perform well.
- **Acute distress**: Event or experience that is short-lived.
- **Chronic distress**: Events or experiences that occur repeatedly over long periods of time.
- **Historical distress**: The cumulative impact of group trauma across long periods of time.

Guarino, 2020; National Institute for Clinical Application of Behavioral Medicine, 2019
How can leaders support teachers? Understanding stress

Each of us experiences stress in different ways, and we each have different capacities for identifying and regulating stress.

Experiencing distress

- **Primary traumatic stress**: Firsthand stress
- **Secondary traumatic stress**: Hearing about and empathizing with someone who has experienced stress firsthand

Guarino, 2020
How can leaders support teachers? Understanding stress

If stress isn’t regulated well, trauma can result and appear in certain behaviors.

Hyperarousal

• Irritability
• Anger
• Overreacting to small issues
• Panic buying
• Difficulty sleeping
• Obsessive behaviors
• Binging
• Blaming others
• Regressive behaviors (acting childish)
• Heightened startle response
• Racing thoughts

Hypoarousal

• Sleeping a lot
• Ruminating
• Procrastinating
• Not exercising
• Confusion
• Becoming “flat” emotionally
• Physically withdrawing from others
• Forgetfulness
• Spacing out or trouble concentrating
• Debilitating physical conditions (e.g., headaches)

National Institute for Clinical Application of Behavioral Medicine, 2019
How can leaders support teachers? Supporting self-awareness

AIR has developed a diagnostic to help educators think about their own stress levels.

The Educator Context and Stress Spectrum was designed to support teachers and principals in gaining a greater awareness of how their current personal and professional context affects their levels of stress in the time of COVID-19. Although contexts may change from day to day, using this tool carefully can lead to greater appreciation for the challenges at hand and, ideally, can lead to beneficial self-care strategies.

To complete the exercise, print out the PDF, read across the first row. Place a circle around the statement that most aligns with your experience. Circle the one that is most relevant.

No printer? Explore the interactive version online:

https://gtlcenter.org/sites/default/files/Stress_Spectrum.pdf
How can leaders support teachers? Engaging with teachers

As principals, we are in a good position to support individual teachers. Most of us aren’t mental health professionals, though, so we need to know the parameters of our support.

We can be an “emotion scientist”

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Ask teachers about stressors.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Accept emotional responses as information.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Practice emotional intelligence.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Pay close attention to teacher behaviors.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Consider numbers/types of stressors experienced.</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Maintain contact with teachers.</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>See emotional states as changing.</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>Learn more about how to support mental health.</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>Know about district policies, resources, benefits.</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>Tell teachers about how to access resources.</td>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>Connect teachers with mental health professionals.</td>
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We can avoid being an “emotion judge”

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<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Asks about stress when behavior is evident.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>Considers emotions to be permanent</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Is critical of emotional statements or outbursts.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Views emotions as good or bad.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Withdraws or avoids emotional discussions.</td>
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Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, 2020; CASEL, 2020; AIR, 2020
Matthew Clifford, principal investigator
www.air.org
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Resources for principals: CASEL curates educator resources (www.casel.org)

“10 Mental Health Tips for Teachers During the COVID-19 Pandemic,” EverFi: External link advice for work-life balance and remote teaching.

“15 Ways to Reduce Teacher Stress,” Scholastic: External link Tips to help teachers love what they do and enjoy their lives outside the classroom.

ASCD Express, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD): External link newsletter with practical and actionable strategies to help teachers and school leaders with self-care and more.

CARE (Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education), Create for Education and the Garrison Institute: External link programs to help teachers, principals and other educators develop healthy social and emotional behavior.

Care for the Caregiver: Guidelines for Administrators and Crisis Teams, National Association of School Psychologists: External link risks and stressors, warning signs and strategies for self-care for school staff.

“COVID-19 Employee Mental Health Support Audit and Resource Guide,” EAB (PDF, 337 KB): External link guide for evaluating a school’s capability to support the mental health of teachers and staff.

“Don’t Lose Your Head,” NEA Today: External link tips to help teachers keep burnout at bay and maintain grace under pressure inside and outside the classroom.

Educating Through Crisis, National Education Association: External link guide for physical and mental wellness with webinars, financial information and tips to set up a home gym.

The Educator’s Room: External link articles and advice dedicated to improving education and using the wisdom and experience of classroom teachers, with information on the annual Teacher Self-Care Conference. External link

“Educators: You Have Permission to Take Care of Yourselves, Right Now,” Mindful Schools: External link tips for teachers on how to show themselves compassion and self-care with guided practices to relieve stress.
Resources for principals: CASEL curates educator resources (www.casel.org)

“How to Teach and Still Have a Life This School Year,” Scholastic: External link tips, strategies and encouragement for teachers to set boundaries and stay motivated.

Life and Well-being, We Are Teachers: External link curated topics page of videos, articles and tools focused on reinvigorating and inspiring teachers to live more healthfully.

My Well-being, Greater Good in Education: External link strategies and practices for the adults who work with students to help encourage positive school cultures.

Personal Assessment and Reflection Tool, Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) (PDF, 362 KB): External link self-evaluation tool for school leaders, staff and other adults to assess personal strengths in social and emotional learning.

“How Prioritizing Well-being: Mental Health Strategies for Teachers and Students,” EverFi: External link webinar exploring activities, strategies, tips and tricks to help with mental well-being.

Resilient Educator: External link articles for educators with content ranging from self-care to teaching tips and professional development.

“Self-Care for Educators Working From Home,” California Teachers Association (PDF, 1.5 MB): External link activities and strategies for educators to stay connected and healthy while working remotely.

Self-Care Resources, Mindful Teachers: External link tips, reflections, mindfulness practices and more to help with common challenges educators face.

Share My Lesson, American Federation of Teachers: External link articles, lesson plan guides and other content to provide teachers high-quality material for their students.
Resources for principals: CASEL curates educator resources (www.casel.org)

SMART (Stress Management and Relaxation Techniques) in Education, PassageWorks: External link program with virtual workshops delivered over eight weeks to reduce stress and improve mental well-being. Teacher Well-being, The Guardian Network: External link curated stories focused on supporting educators. Teacher Wellness, Edutopia: External link articles, videos and other helpful content about self-care. For Educators, Understood.org: External link articles, tools and resources to help educators navigate different situations.

“What About You? Educator Resilience and Trauma-Informed Self-Care,” Center on Great Teachers and Leaders: External link video webinar on how educators can take care of themselves and their families while maintaining connections to students and colleagues during a crisis.

“Why Teacher Self-Care Matters and How to Practice Self-Care in Your School,” Waterford.org: External link activities and tips for teachers to use inside and outside the classroom.

“World Mental Health Day: 5 Tips for Teacher Well-being,” Teach Starter: External link advice on how to de-stress, maintain physical health and strive for better work-life balance.