

# Supporting Teachers During Times of Change and Stress

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In the following report, Hanover Research discusses teacher stress and the strategies that schools and districts can use to support teachers in challenging situations. In particular, the report identifies causes of teacher stress, coping strategies that teachers commonly use to mitigate the impacts of stress, and specific actions that schools and districts can take to minimize teacher stress. The report also addresses other, broader forms of support that schools and districts can provide for teachers facing heightened challenges.

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

In the following report, Hanover Research discusses teacher stress and the strategies that schools can use to support teachers in challenging situations. In particular, the report identifies causes of teacher stress, coping strategies that teachers commonly use to mitigate the impacts of stress, and specific actions that schools and districts can take to minimize teacher stress. The report also addresses other, broader forms of support that schools and districts can provide for teachers facing heightened challenges. The report has two sections:

- **Section I** discusses strategies and practices that schools use to directly address teacher stress, such as stress management programs and informal emotional support.
- **Section II** addresses other forms of teacher support that seek to mitigate teacher stress by enacting organizational changes that improve teacher working conditions.

### KEY FINDINGS

- **Schools should use a combination of informal emotional support and formal programming to provide teachers with stress reduction support.** Informal emotional support, such as the consistent recognition of teacher successes, validation of teacher challenges and concerns, and encouraging individual coping strategies can be effective and low-intensity ways for schools to promote teacher well-being. More formalized strategies, such as implementing stress management programs, are also effective and can be valuable professional development opportunities. Such programs require greater input from schools, but should be seriously considered nonetheless.
- **Stress management programs should respond directly to teachers' expressed needs.** Consequently, a needs assessment should be the first step in the implementation of such programs, and can be conducted by a school psychologist. Stress management programs are most effective when implemented in a multi-session format and when they do not create additional burdens on teachers' time. Participation should be voluntary and sessions should last between 60 and 90 minutes. Additionally, school psychologists can develop stress management programs that can be counted towards teacher recertification requirements.
- **The ability to communicate and collaborate with colleagues is important for teachers who face heightened stress and challenges.** Schools should facilitate teacher collaboration, such as in teaching teams or professional learning communities. Teacher collaboration reduces the sense of isolation, increases morale job satisfaction, and can reduce the workload that teachers must shoulder by enabling them to compile common resources.

- **Principals play key roles in helping teachers effectively manage stress.** Principals can have a tremendous impact on the atmosphere and culture of a school by providing emotional support for teachers and other staff, as well as by implementing organizational changes that facilitate effective instruction and reduce the intensity of the challenges that teachers face. Principals can also dictate scheduling policies that enable teacher collaboration.
- **In addition to implementing strategies that specifically address issues pertaining to teacher stress, schools should also work to improve the working conditions of teachers to mitigate the sources of teacher stress.** For example, by giving teachers a sense of control and input in major decisions, enabling two-way communication between teachers and administrators, and providing robust support for teachers when dealing with students and families, schools can help to reduce a number of important causes of teacher stress.

## SECTION I: REDUCING TEACHER STRESS

This section discusses strategies that schools and districts can use to help teachers manage and reduce stress caused by school-related challenges. These strategies directly target teacher stress and the manifestations of that stress. In addition to teacher stress reduction strategies used by schools and districts, this section highlights common sources of teacher stress and individual coping strategies that teachers may use.

### INTRODUCTION

Researchers frequently note the high incidence of stress among teachers. According to some studies, “20 and 25 [percent] of teachers frequently experience a great deal of stress,” when teacher stress is defined as “the experience by a teacher of negative, unpleasant emotions (such as tension, anger, or depression) as a result of some aspect of their work.”<sup>1</sup> Similarly, the Gallup State of America’s Schools Report found that 46 percent of teachers indicated they experienced stress “during a lot of the day.”<sup>2</sup> The outcomes researchers associated with teacher stress include burnout, absenteeism, and high teacher turnover, all of which negatively impact the classroom and school environment. For example, the Gallup study found that nearly 70 percent of teachers report not feeling engaged in their work.

In an article in *Principal Leadership*, Debi Kipps-Vaughan suggests that “principals should be particularly concerned about the effect of teacher stress on the academic outcomes for their students,” given that teacher stress negatively impacts the classroom environment and is correlated with diminished student academic and behavioral outcomes.<sup>3</sup> Researchers note that “supporting teachers’ ability to cope with the demands of the classroom and bolstering their own well-being is a necessity, with implications for students’ learning and school success.”<sup>4</sup> As Hills and Robinson argue in a 2010 publication from the National Association of School Psychologists, “a focus on teacher and staff well-being is essential to improving student well-being.”<sup>5</sup>

The strategies and interventions that schools and school leaders can use to directly address the causes and manifestations of teacher stress range widely. In many cases, informal support for teachers—such as through the validation of their work and of the challenges they face—is an effective means for reducing the amount stress that teachers experience. In other cases, supports that address teacher stress in a more systematic or formal way, such

<sup>1</sup> Kipps-Vaughan, D. “Supporting Teachers Through Stress Management.” *Principal Leadership*, January, 2013. p. 12. [http://www.nasponline.org/resources/principals/January\\_13\\_Teacher\\_Stress.pdf](http://www.nasponline.org/resources/principals/January_13_Teacher_Stress.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Klein, R. “American Teachers Feel Really Stressed, and It’s Probably Affecting Students.” *The Huffington Post*. April 9, 2014. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/09/gallup-education-report\\_n\\_5119966.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/09/gallup-education-report_n_5119966.html)

<sup>3</sup> Kipps-Vaughan, D. Op. cit.

<sup>4</sup> Flook, L., et al. “Mindfulness for Teachers: A Pilot Study to Assess Effects on Stress, Burnout, and Teaching Efficacy.” *Mind, Brain, and Education*, 2013. p. 182. <http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/images/uploads/mbe12026.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> Hills, K.J. and A. Robinson. “Enhancing Teacher Well-Being: Put on Your Oxygen Masks!” *Communique*, National Association of School Psychologists. December, 2010. p. 16. Retrieved from EBSCO Education Source.

as through stress management programs or access to school psychologists, function to acknowledge and provide solutions to many of the challenges that teachers face daily in their schools. Oftentimes, schools use a combination of informal and formal supports to improve the well-being of their teachers and to reduce the levels of stress that they experience.

### *SOURCES OF TEACHER STRESS*

In an *Educational Review* article examining past studies that focus on teacher stress, Chris Kyriacou highlights the 10 primary sources of teacher stress. As shown in Figure 1.1, these sources of stress are, for the most part, generalized categories into which more specific stressors may be grouped.

**Figure 1.1: Main Sources of Teacher Stress**

- Teaching pupils who lack motivation
- Maintaining discipline
- Time pressures and workload
- Coping with change
- Being evaluated by others
- Dealings with colleagues
- Self-esteem and status
- Administration and management
- Role conflict and ambiguity
- Poor working conditions

Source: Kyriacou<sup>6</sup>

However, as Kyriacou notes, “the main sources of stress experienced by a particular teacher will be a unique to him or her and will depend on the precise complex interaction between their personality, values, skills and circumstances.”<sup>7</sup>

The results of a 2012 national survey by The Education Forum highlight a number of the sources of teacher stress identified in Kyriacou’s review above. The survey compared teachers in California to teachers in the rest of the United States, and asked teachers questions pertaining to the sources of stress in their work and how that stress manifests.<sup>8</sup> Broadly, the topics covered by the statements included sources of stress, manifestations of stress, and strategies for coping with stress. Figure 1.2 on the following page highlights the top five sources of stress for survey participants, as well as the mean response rating that participants assigned to each stressor.

<sup>6</sup> Bullet points quoted from: Kyriacou, C. “Teacher Stress: directions for future research.” *Educational Review*, 2001. p. 29. Retrieved from EBSCO Education Source.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Richards, J. “Teacher Stress and Coping Strategies: A National Snapshot.” The Education Forum, 2012. p. 302. <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1027918073?accountid=132487>

**Figure 1.2: National Snapshot-Top Five Sources of Stress Among U.S. Teachers**

NON-CALIFORNIA TEACHERS	
SOURCE OF STRESS	MEAN
I feel over committed at work, with too many duties and responsibilities. I often take work home.	3.95
Teaching needy students without enough support is stressful.	3.86
I have little time to relax.	3.84
Teaching students who do not seem motivated to learn is stressful.	3.83
Feeling the constant pressure of being “accountable” is stressful.	3.74

Source: Richards<sup>9</sup>

The manifestations of teacher stress include emotional and physical impacts on teacher’s feelings of well-being and health. Teachers under stress note feelings of physical exhaustion, loss of enthusiasm and confidence in their abilities, and feeling overwhelmed by expectations placed on them. Figure 1.3 presents the top five manifestations of participant stress and their mean response ratings.

**Figure 1.3: National Snapshot-Top Five Manifestations of Stress Among U.S. Teachers**

NON-CALIFORNIA TEACHERS	
MANIFESTATION OF STRESS	MEAN
I feel physically exhausted much of the time	3.65
I am not as idealistic and enthusiastic about teaching as I once was.	3.02
I feel overwhelmed with what is expected of me as a teacher and have doubts about my ability to make a difference in students’ lives.	2.88
I suffer from frequent headaches, stomach pains, and/or high blood pressure.	2.60
Job stress has negatively affected personal relationships in my life.	2.44

Source: Richards<sup>10</sup>

### *INDIVIDUAL TEACHER COPING STRATEGIES*

Often, teachers rely on their own strategies for stress management, as opposed to systematic or formalized programs that their school provides. Kyriacou notes that teacher coping strategies, at the individual level, can be grouped into two categories:<sup>11</sup>

- Direct Action Techniques:** These techniques consist of actions that teachers take to eliminate or mitigate sources of stress. Thus, direct action techniques require that teachers establish “a clear idea of what the source of stress is and then carrying out some form of action that will mean that the demands which are causing the stress can be successfully dealt with in the future or changing the situation in some way so that the demands no long occur. Examples of direct action techniques include effective self-management/organization, new skill development, and collaborations with colleagues.

<sup>9</sup> Table reproduced from: Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Table reproduced from: Ibid., p. 303.

<sup>11</sup> Kyriacou, C. Op. cit., p. 31.

- Palliative Techniques:** These techniques, which can be either mental or physical, are intended to mitigate the feelings of stress that teachers experience, as opposed to eliminating the source of stress. Examples may include efforts to change the way the teachers assess their situation, activities that relieve physical tension, or strategies for reducing teacher anxiety.

Schools can encourage teachers to use direct action and palliative techniques, as well as facilitate activities that enable teachers to more effectively employ low-intensity techniques such as relaxation after work or casual socialization with colleagues to reduce feelings of teacher isolation. Figure 1.4 displays the most commonly used individual coping strategies that teachers use to combat feelings of work-related stress, as identified in Kyriacou’s review of the literature. Notably, these strategies represent a combination of direct action and palliative techniques.

**Figure 1.4: Common Individual Coping Strategies for Teacher Stress**

- Try to keep problems in perspective
- Avoid confrontations
- Try to relax after work
- Take action to deal with problems
- Keep feelings under control
- Devote more time to particular tasks
- Discuss problems and express feelings to others
- Have a healthy home life
- Plan ahead and prioritize
- Recognize one’s own limitations

Source: Kyriacou<sup>12</sup>

The previously mentioned 2012 survey of teachers in the United States identified five common coping strategies used by California teachers and teachers in the other states. Figure 1.5 demonstrates the national results for common teacher coping strategies.

**Figure 1.5: National Snapshot-Top Five Teacher Strategies for Coping with Stress**

NON-CALIFORNIA TEACHERS	
COPING STRATEGY	MEAN
I have good friends and family who are there for me.	4.21
I have a good sense of humor that carries me through challenges.	3.87
Times of solitude help me cope with stress at school.	3.60
I see stress as problem to be solved, and I believe that I can succeed.	3.50
I tend to have a positive attitude no matter what is going on.	3.50

Source: Richards<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Bullet points quoted from: Ibid., pp. 30-31.

<sup>13</sup> Table reproduced from: Richards, J. “Teacher Stress and Coping Strategies: A National Snapshot,” Op. cit., p. 305.



By encouraging teachers to adopt effective individual coping strategies, such as those outlined above, schools and districts acknowledge the need for teachers to address their own well-being in addition to the well-being of their students. Such encouragement serves as a tacit acknowledgement of the numerous challenges and the stressful demands that teachers encounter on a daily basis. Moreover, the encouragement of individual coping strategies for teachers can also function as the foundation for school-wide programs and strategies designed to reduce the aggregate level of teacher stress while at the same time addressing individual needs.

### **SCHOOL-WIDE STRATEGIES FOR REDUCING TEACHER STRESS**

Schools and districts can implement numerous strategies that seek to reduce teacher stress. Many such strategies can be adopted informally and do not necessarily require additional programming or resources. Principals and other administrators are well-positioned to provide support to teachers through effective personal management as well as through conscientious school management.<sup>14</sup>

Many effective strategies for reducing teacher stress do not require schools to implement new programs or high-intensity interventions. Rather, **principals and other administrators can provide valuable support to teachers by modifying the ways in which they communicate with teachers and the ways they approach the challenges that teachers experience.** For example, principals and administrators can provide emotional support for teachers by listening to and validating concerns, highlighting successes, and providing positive feedback. By acknowledging that new initiatives and curricula increase the challenges and the workload that teachers face, and by helping to determine workable solutions, administrators demonstrate to teachers that school leaders understand and support them in their practices.

Administrators can also help teachers by providing more formal support. By encouraging and providing scheduling support that enables teacher collaboration, such as through professional learning communities and teaching teams, administrators provide teachers with support resources that enable them to more effectively shoulder increased instructional demands and other challenges. For example, a study of teachers in Australia found that the support of colleagues helped teachers to overcome challenges in numerous dimensions of their practice. The study results indicated that “colleagial support ameliorates teacher distress associated with inadequate access to facilities, the intrusion of school work into out-of-hours time, student misbehavior, and excessive societal expectations.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Strategies and interventions that seek to minimize stressors caused by institutional and organizational factors are addressed in Section II of this report.

<sup>15</sup> Punch, K. and E. Tuetteman. “Reducing teacher stress: The effects of support in the work environment.” Research in Education, November, 1996.  
<http://search.proquest.com/docview/213172402/fulltextPDF/95FAFFE9A64548A7PQ/4?accountid=132487>

As shown in Figure 1.6, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) compiled a set of recommendations for effective stress support that principals, administrators, and teachers can enact to support one another.

**Figure 1.6: NASP Recommendations for Supporting Teachers in Stressful Times**

ACTION	DESCRIPTION/RATIONALE
<b>Validate the current feelings of teachers</b>	One of the most powerful tools to helping someone through a tough time is to validate how he/she is feeling and to acknowledge how challenging things have become (i.e. "Teaching is becoming more stressful as you are being asked to do more with less; and the student needs are becoming greater.") This opens the dialogue for teachers to feel comfortable discussing their concerns and challenges. It is important to avoid comparing situations (i.e. "Yeah, we all are stressed out and what you are going through is no different than what anyone else is going through") as this can halt a conversation and sends the message you are not truly listening.
<b>Provide emotional support</b>	Listening, validating concerns, highlighting successes (e.g., recognition in a staff meeting), providing mentors for teachers, providing positive parent feedback, or saying a simple "thanks for all you do to make a difference" can help teachers feel validated and appreciated.
<b>Emphasize the importance of maintaining consistent classroom schedules and routines</b>	Consistency promotes a sense of safety and security. When someone is struggling through tough times, we may rush to lessen expectations or create new systems to help accommodate current stressors. While there may be a need to be flexible in how expectations are met, completely modifying or eliminating routines can be unsettling and lead to further feelings of insecurity. Instead, provide physical support as necessary to help teachers maintain these routines. This can include offering to cover a class, walking students to lunch, or asking your school psychologist to work with a difficult student or observe a class and make recommendations.
<b>Maintain behavioral expectations</b>	In addition to consistent classroom schedules and routines mentioned above, behavioral expectations need to remain consistent within a class and school. Validating concerns of students is critical and allows them to be heard. Focus on positive behaviors that maintain a caring and supportive school environment and facilitates feelings of safety and security for staff and students.
<b>Help teachers focus on the positive accomplishments</b>	Many positive accomplishments are occurring daily in every classroom. Encourage teachers daily to highlight one positive accomplishment of themselves or a student in their classroom. Foster resilience by encouraging students to participate in "helping" or mentoring activities. Post these accomplishments on a classroom bulletin board or common area bulletin board.
<b>Support teachers in being flexible and knowing limitations</b>	With increased workloads, teachers must reflect on what they are reasonably able to accomplish. If they are not realistic, two consequences are possible: they may overcompensate and reach burn-out, or they may give up. Encouraging participation in professional learning communities will also allow teachers to formulate common assessments which will help reduce some of the work load in regard to testing competence in subject areas.

ACTION	DESCRIPTION/RATIONALE
<p><b>Provide activities that allow staff and students to connect with each other</b></p>	<p>Often times when people are stressed or overwhelmed, they tend to disengage from those around them. It is these times that connections and relationships with others are even more important. Ask parents to donate dishes for a staff breakfast to promote staff togetherness. Organize a staff activity (tennis game, bowling, bike ride, after school hors d'oeuvres, etc...) that allows staff to relax and enjoy each other outside of the stresses of the school day and build camaraderie. Within their own classrooms, increase cooperative learning activities and/or facilitate an activity where students can help each other during these tough times (e.g. food drive for local food pantry). These activities help to facilitate a sense of control, belongingness, and empowerment.</p>
<p><b>Create opportunities for teachers to support each other</b></p>	<p>Many schools are moving to a team-based system of teaching, planning, and problem solving. This can be accomplished through “partner teachers,” where two teachers actually share students and divide up the work by groups based on learning needs. Partnering can reduce the preparatory work for each class and allow teachers to focus on teaching level-appropriate skills. Another effective approach is to establish “professional learning communities” (PLCs) among teachers. These are teams organized around grade and/or subject area that collaborate on everything from the difficulties of one student to school improvement planning and initiatives. PLCs help with communication about specific students or issues; improve problem-solving and shared responsibility for student success; reduce isolation of teachers; support professional learning that informs good teaching and classroom practice; create new understanding of teaching and learners; help staff to identify issues that may be affecting multiple students and/or require class- or school-wide attention; increase morale and job satisfaction; and create stronger commitment to making significant and lasting changes and higher likelihood of undertaking fundamental systemic change.</p>

Source: National Association of School Psychologists<sup>16</sup>

Additionally, school psychologists can play important roles in providing support for teachers under stress. As the NASP suggests, “although teacher stress management is not a traditional area of service delivery, school psychologists are trained to provide supportive services to all members of the school community, including students and adults.”<sup>17</sup> School psychologists can conduct needs assessments that inform school-wide teacher stress management programming, as is discussed in the following section.

It is important to note that strategies that help teachers reduce their levels of stress and improve well-being are teachable. Research has identified five aspects that are critical to well-being, including **optimism, emotional awareness, goal setting/hope, resilience, and empowerment**.<sup>18</sup> In their 2010 NASP publication, Hills and Robinson note that “studies of adults in the workplace support the notion that hope, optimistic explanatory style, self-efficacy, and resilience can be taught and can contribute significantly to positive

<sup>16</sup> Descriptions quoted, with minor variations, from: “Supporting Teachers’ Ability to Teach in Stressful Times: Tips for Administrators and Teachers.” National Association of School Psychologists, 2009.

[http://www.nasponline.org/educators/Supporting\\_Teachers\\_Under\\_Stress\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.nasponline.org/educators/Supporting_Teachers_Under_Stress_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>17</sup> Kipps-Vaughan, D. “Supporting Teachers Through Stress Management.” Op. cit., p. 13.

<sup>18</sup> Hills, K.J. and A. Robinson. Op. cit., p. 16.

performance in the workplace.”<sup>19</sup> Thus, schools and districts can provide important support to teachers under stress by providing training in these areas.

Moreover, administrators can provide effective stress management support for teachers through professional development opportunities that help teachers to better understand and address the challenges they experience in their practices, especially as they relate to new initiatives and reforms. In an article from *Teacher Education Quarterly*, Margolis and Nagel note that teachers need “acknowledgements of the difficulties of their work” both in day-to-day personal relationships and in systematic professional development efforts that build from teacher experiences.”<sup>20</sup> Due to the potential for such efforts to improve student outcomes and facilitate school reforms, Margolis and Nagel argue that **“investments made in professional development for teachers and administrators that is geared toward increasing awareness and acknowledgement of teacher lived experience will be cost-effective in the long-run.”**<sup>21</sup>

#### *IMPLEMENTING TEACHER STRESS MANAGEMENT PROGRAMS*

In addition to the strategies outlined by the NASP, schools and districts should consider implementing school-wide strategies and programs that are expressly designed to mitigate teacher stress. Some schools do this by providing workshop opportunities that help teachers learn to manage their stress. As Kyriacou notes, “such workshops typically focus on helping teachers to develop a mix of direct action and palliative techniques,” as well as on “helping teachers individually, and the school as a whole, to develop methods of working which will minimize the occurrence of unnecessary sources of stress.”<sup>22</sup>

Stress management programs can lead to numerous positive outcomes, including “improved peer support, reduced levels of somatic complaints, decreased work pressure and role ambiguity, enhanced feelings of personal accomplishment, and improved job satisfaction.”<sup>23</sup> Figure 1.7 on the following page highlights key questions that can provide justification and guidance for the implementation of a teacher wellness/stress management program.

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>20</sup> Margolis, J. and L. Nagel. “Education Reform and the Role of Administrators in Mediating Teacher Stress.” *Teacher Education Quarterly*, Fall, 2006. p. 157.

<http://search.proquest.com/docview/222854024/fulltextPDF?accountid=132487>

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Kyriacou, C. Op. cit., pp. 30-31.

<sup>23</sup> Kipps-Vaughan, D. “Supporting Teachers Through Stress Management.” Op. cit., p. 14.

**Figure 1.7: Clarifying Questions for Implementation of Teacher Wellness Programs**

- Is it important for teachers to be healthy and happy individuals?
- Do we believe that healthier teachers promote healthier and more productive classrooms?
- How is teacher absenteeism effecting classroom instruction?
- Are the teachers experiencing any stressors beyond the norm of an educational workplace?
- Do we believe that there is a level of teacher stress that is impacting the classroom learning environment?
- How can a teacher wellness program communicate to school staff that they are valued?
- How can a teacher wellness program help promote an environment of social support?

Source: Kipps-Vaughan, et al.<sup>24</sup>

It is important to note that “successful implementation of a stress management program is contingent on teachers’ perceived needs and interests.”<sup>25</sup> Consequently, an essential first step for implementing such a program is to conduct a needs assessment. Needs assessments are valuable in that they help principals and other administrators to identify the particular areas in which teachers need support and introduce the potential stress management program to teachers. Using a needs assessment as a means to introduce the stress management program is especially effective because it helps teachers to “know that they have input into the scheduling and topics that will be addressed in the stress reduction program and that the emphasis of the program will be on [their] well-being.”<sup>26</sup> Additionally, it is important to evaluate the impact of stress-reduction interventions and programming so that administrators can modify their strategies to provide more effective support for teachers.<sup>27</sup>

In a 2012 publication from the NASP, Kipps-Vaughan, et. al. note that experience suggests that **“the most popular and nonintrusive format [for teacher stress management programs] is to offer 60- to 90-minute multiple sessions after school for teachers on a voluntary participation basis.”**<sup>28</sup> The activities included in these sessions should respond to the needs reported in the needs assessment, as well as other concerns pertaining to school climate.<sup>29</sup> Because stress management programs should respond to specific teacher needs, the topics covered can vary widely, to include:<sup>30</sup>

- Positive thinking;
- Relaxation techniques;
- Well-living strategies;

<sup>24</sup> Bullet points quoted from: Kipps-Vaughan, D., T. Ponsart and T. Gilligan “Teacher Wellness: Too Stressed for Stress Management?” *Communique*, National Association of School Psychologists, September, 2012. p. 26.  
<http://search.proquest.com/docview/1103076221/fulltextPDF?accountid=132487>

<sup>25</sup> Kipps-Vaughan, D. “Supporting Teachers Through Stress Management.” Op. cit., p. 13.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>27</sup> Hills, K.J. and A. Robinson. Op. cit., p. 18.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

<sup>29</sup> Kipps-Vaughan, D. “Supporting Teachers Through Stress Management.” Op. cit., p. 14.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

- Communication skills;
- Conflict resolution; and
- Problem-solving skills.

School psychologists have the training and experience to effectively provide multi-session stress management programs, and can develop programs for teachers that meet state requirements for recertification.<sup>31</sup> By offering stress management programs that contribute to teacher recertification, schools provide teachers with an incentive to participate in programing that contributes to their well-being as well as their professional practice.

## CURRENT PROGRAMS

Despite the research on reducing teacher stress, it does not appear that many districts actively sponsor programs to support their teachers during new or challenging times. For example, in September 2013 *The Huffington Post* used Twitter to ask teachers about the types of stress-reducing activities or programs offered by their schools. However, the authors received overwhelming responses from teachers that their schools do not address the issue at all.<sup>32</sup>

Below, Hanover briefly discusses three stress related programs for teachers. Notably, all three programs focus on neuroscience and thoughtful processes to develop resilience and help teachers improve their mindset.

### CARE PROGRAM

The CARE program, which stands for Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education, was developed by the Garrison Institute in New York. The program uses neuroscience research to develop the emotional skills of participants, including understanding, recognition, and regulation of emotion, and demonstrates how to “bring mindfulness to challenging situations teachers often encounter.”<sup>33</sup>

The program consists of four day-long workshops across four or five weeks with support provided via phone and internet, or a five-day summer retreat at the Garrison Institute. The sessions include both didactic instruction and experiential activities, and allow teachers to reflect on their practices and discuss new strategies with other participants.

During the sessions, teachers learn to identify and manage their negative emotions that typically result in stress, and are challenged to use this exercise to change their reactions. The workshops include “role-playing and hands-on learning of contemplation practices,

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<sup>31</sup> Kipps-Vaughan, D., T. Ponsart and T. Gilligan, Op. cit., p. 26.

<sup>32</sup> Klein, R. “We asked teachers what their school districts do to help them de-stress, got really sad answers.” *The Huffington Post*. October 8, 2013. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/10/07/teachers-school-districts-destress\\_n\\_4039302.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/10/07/teachers-school-districts-destress_n_4039302.html)

<sup>33</sup> CARE for Teachers. <http://www.care4teachers.org/about-care/>

such as walking meditation, breathing exercises, attention training, visualization, and deep listening.”<sup>34</sup>

The CARE program has been implemented in school districts in several states, and has been adapted for use by teachers of students who have experienced trauma. The effectiveness of the program has been studied by the Prevention Research Center at Pennsylvania State University, as was found to be a “promising tool to help teachers create and maintain a positive classroom learning environment, avoid burnout and attrition, and enjoy and excel in their work.”<sup>35</sup>

### *THE INNER RESILIENCE PROGRAM*

The Inner Resilience Program (IRP) was developed in the spring 2002 as a response to the emotional and psychological effects of the September 11 terror attacks on New York City schools. More specifically, “the aim was to equip school staff and parents with the skills necessary to build back their inner strength and resilience, and to model this way of being for the children in their care.”<sup>36</sup> The program has since expanded from lower Manhattan to districts across the nation.

The IRP consists of weekend residential retreats for school staff, professional development workshops, and individual sessions focused on stress reduction. All programs are designed to offer teachers:

- An understanding of how stress affects health and performance;
- Relaxation techniques and self-care tools to effectively manage stress;
- Opportunities to reflect on the meaning of their work in the company of like-minded colleagues; and
- Techniques to create caring classroom communities that nurture the whole child.<sup>37</sup>

Specifically, the professional development workshops include the following topics:

- Anger Management: Cues, Triggers, and Reducers
- Conflict Resolution in Everyday Life
- Educating the Heart: The Concepts and Skills of Emotional Intelligence
- Self-Care Techniques for Stress Management
- Stress Reduction through Gentle Stretching and Creative Movement
- Talking to Children in a Climate of Uncertainty

<sup>34</sup> Lindenbaum, J. “CARE Program Teaches Educators to Manage their Emotions.” Edutopia. October 28, 2009. <http://www.edutopia.org/meditation-teacher-stress-care>

<sup>35</sup> “Impact.” CARE for Teachers. <http://www.care4teachers.org/impact/>

<sup>36</sup> The Inner Resilience Program. <http://www.innerresilience-tidescenter.org/>

<sup>37</sup> Bulleted points taken verbatim from: “Core Programs.” Inner Resilience Program. <http://www.innerresilience-tidescenter.org/programs.html>

- Towards a New Literacy of Technology and Media: What Schools Can Do<sup>38</sup>

Several research studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of the program on improving the well-being of teachers.<sup>39</sup> Specifically, research found reduced levels of teacher stress, increased attention and mindfulness, and increased trust among colleagues.<sup>40</sup>

### *HEARTMATH RESILIENT EDUCATOR*

The Institute of HeartMath offers a variety of training programs for professionals in all industries. The Resilient Educator program focuses specifically on helping teachers and professors “boost performance, improve school relationships, and strengthen resiliency.”<sup>41</sup> Based on neuroscience research, the program focuses on training educators to:

- Think more clearly and make smarter decisions, especially under pressure;
- Improve communication with staff, students, and parents;
- Understand the relationship between resiliency and overall health, performance, and career longevity;
- Increase vitality and well-being while transforming physiological response to stress;
- Improve classroom climate, the overall learning environment, and esprit de corps; and
- Create a follow-up plan of action for implementing what they learned from the workshop.<sup>42</sup>

The program is delivered through three 1.5 hour presentations, which can be delivered by HeartMath personnel or a Certified Trainer. The Institute of HeartMath offers several training sessions in which a district employee may become certified to provide the Resilient Educator training. Once certified, the Trainer must purchase a participant guidebook for each teacher or individual they train.

<sup>38</sup> Bulleted points taken verbatim from: Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> “Research and Evaluation.” Inner Resilience Program. <http://www.innerresilience-tidescenter.org/evaluations.html>

<sup>40</sup> “Building Inner Resilience in Teachers and their Students: Results of the Inner Resilience Program.” Metis Associates. March 2011. P. 3. Available at: Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> “The Resilient Educator Skills for Personal and Classroom Effectiveness.” Institute of HeartMath. <http://www.heartmath.org/training/educators/resilient-educator.html>

<sup>42</sup> Bulleted points taken verbatim from: Ibid.



## SECTION II: ADDITIONAL FORMS OF TEACHER SUPPORT

This section discusses more generalized strategies for teacher support that extend beyond the specific aim of reducing teacher stress. In particular, this section highlights the factors that impact teacher working conditions in schools, as well as the characteristics that define healthy schools. Finally, this section discusses ways in which schools and districts can support new teachers, who often experience elevated levels of stress and require additional support compared to more experienced teachers.

### IMPROVING WORKING CONDITIONS FOR TEACHERS

In addition to stress management programming, Kipps-Vaughan highlights the importance of efforts to reduce teacher stress at the broader district and school levels by addressing factors that impact the working conditions that teachers experience.<sup>43</sup> By addressing factors that negatively impact school working conditions for teachers, schools and districts can improve both the environment in which learning takes place and reduce the incidence and intensity of the stressors that teachers experience. A paper produced by the National Education Association (NEA) identifies a number of key characteristics that contribute to workplace conditions that enable teachers to be effective educators. The authors note that “factors such as whether the school building is well equipped, whether colleagues provide helpful assistance, or whether there are good support services for students all mediate what any teacher, however talented or well trained, can accomplish,” and, by extension, their levels of satisfaction and frustration with their profession.<sup>44</sup>

Administrators play important roles in determining the work conditions that prevail in the school. In particular, the NEA highlights the role of the principal as “the broker of school workplace conditions.”<sup>45</sup> In addition to presiding over the school and ensuring that teachers have the material support that they need in order to educate effectively, strong principals are able to engage “both experienced and novice teachers in productive work experiences, thus increasing the interdependence of all teachers and the coherence of the work they do together.”<sup>46</sup>

Figure 2.1 on the following page highlights some of the key elements that constitute the working conditions that teachers experience in schools, as well as select examples of factors that contribute to each element.

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<sup>43</sup> Kipps-Vaughan, D. “Supporting Teachers Through Stress Management.” Op. cit., p. 12.

<sup>44</sup> Johnson, S.M. “The Workplace Matters: Teacher Quality, Retention, and Effectiveness.” National Education Association, July 2006. p. 2. <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED495822.pdf>

<sup>45</sup> “Best Practices Brief: Workplace Conditions,” National Education Association, July 2006. p. 5. [http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/mf\\_wcbrief.pdf](http://www.nea.org/assets/docs/mf_wcbrief.pdf)

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

**Figure 2.1: Defining Elements of School Working Conditions for Teachers**

- **Physical:** Buildings, equipment, other resources
- **Organizational:** Structures that establish and govern teachers' role in school and their relationships with their colleagues (e.g., workload, degree of autonomy, structure of supervision)
- **Sociological:** Status of teachers in the school, their roles, and the compositions of the student body and teacher corps
- **Political:** The role teachers are afforded in determining the direction of the school, such as participation in important decision making processes
- **Cultural:** How teachers perceive their position in the school; the commitment, values and behavioral norms of the school
- **Psychological:** Perceived meaningfulness of teacher work, perceived opportunities for professional development/growth
- **Educational:** Curriculum and assessment policies

Source: National Education Association<sup>47</sup>

As Kyriacou notes, “a very important development in reducing teacher stress comes from the need to think more in terms of what characteristics make for healthy organizational functioning” that enables school and district leaders to “develop individual and organizational practices to come into line with these, so that staff stress can then be reduced almost as a by-product” of improved school working conditions. Figure 2.2 highlights key characteristics of healthy schools, many of which are contingent on effective school leadership.

**Figure 2.2: Characteristics of Healthy Schools**

- Good communication between staff
- A strong sense of collegiality
- Management decisions based on consultation
- Consensus established on key values and standards
- Whole school policies in place
- Role and expectations clearly defined
- Teachers receive positive feedback and praise
- Good level of resources and facilities to support teachers
- Support available to help solve problems
- Policies and procedures are easy to follow
- Red tape and paperwork is minimized
- Additional duties are matched to teachers' skills
- Building environment is pleasant to work in
- Senior management makes good use of forward planning
- Induction and career development advice is given

Source: Kyriacou<sup>48</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Johnson, S.M. Op. cit.

Notably, there are numerous ways that schools can improve working conditions, many of which serve to directly minimize the incidence of stressors that negatively impact teachers. As shown in Figure 2.3, the NEA highlights 10 factors that principals and schools can address to both limit the causes of stress for teachers and to provide general organizational support that helps teachers manage what stress is inevitable in their profession.

**Figure 2.3: Factors That Improve Working Conditions for Teachers**

FACTOR	DESCRIPTION
<b>Appropriate and Fair Teaching Assignments</b>	Appropriate teaching assignments are essential to teacher success. Excessive or out-of-field loads can be unmanageable, contributing to teacher stress and turnover. Additional, large class sizes make it more difficult for teachers to be effective, creating unsatisfactory working conditions.
<b>Collaborative Work with Colleagues</b>	A variety of studies have found that students benefit from teacher collaboration and that teachers also benefit from collaboration. It is notable that “some school administrators deliberately arrange teaching assignments to align the preparation periods of teachers who need time to work together.”
<b>Extra Support for New Teachers</b>	New teachers may require support beyond that required by more experienced teachers. Mentoring programs enable new teachers to work with more experienced colleagues and can have positive effects on their satisfaction with the profession (increasing retention). More comprehensive “induction programs,” which may include mentoring components, have been shown to be more effective than mentoring alone. For further discussion of support for new teachers, see the following subsection.
<b>Supports for Working with Students</b>	Research suggests that “strong and effective professional communities among teachers enable them to respond to the diverse needs of today’s students while upholding high standards for their performance.” Instead of leaving teachers to deal with challenging student demands on their own, professional communities enable teachers to collaborate to address new and changing student needs.
<b>Curricular Support in an Era of High Standards</b>	Because the curriculum is so central to the work that teachers do, it is important that they receive the support of their school, which should provide “professional development that supports them in teaching that curriculum.” Notably, “research suggests that teachers expect, but often do not have, a curriculum that is well developed, aligned with standards, and flexible.” Moreover, curriculum design should avoid overprescribing—or scripting—lessons and materials, which minimizes teacher control over the materials they teach.
<b>Sufficient Resources and Materials</b>	Schools should provide teachers with the necessary resources that enable them to effectively teach the curriculum. Importantly, “most teachers report having to spend their own money if they are to succeed, or even survive, in the classroom.”
<b>Assessments for Accountability</b>	Evidence increasingly shows that test-based accountability measures (high-stakes testing) negatively impacts instruction and teacher retention. Teachers have often cited high-stakes testing and other accountability pressures among the top reasons for leaving the profession.
<b>Ongoing Professional Development</b>	Professional development should be connected to classroom practices. Professional learning communities can also “contribute to teachers’ ongoing development and satisfaction.”
<b>Expanded Influence and Career Growth</b>	Although teachers are typically wary of favoritism—selecting lead or master teachers can be challenging—there can be value in establishing a carefully constructed career ladder for teachers (with teacher input). Programs that facilitate peer review/mentoring have been successful in “the assistance they offer new and experienced teachers and in the opportunities for influence they provide master teachers.”

<sup>48</sup> Bullet points quoted from: Kyriacou, C. Op. cit., p. 29.

FACTOR	DESCRIPTION
<b>Safe, Well-Equipped Facilities</b>	The physical condition of schools and their facilities/resources has a significant impact on teachers' perceptions of their efficacy; "a school facility that is carefully maintained signals respect for those who teach and learn there."

Source: National Education Association<sup>49</sup>

Figure 2.4 displays improvement benchmarks for 11 dimensions of the school workplace, indicating common undesirable conditions that negatively impact teachers, as well as goals for improvement.

**Figure 2.4: NEA Benchmarks for School Workplace Conditions**

DIMENSION	UNDESIRABLE CONDITIONS	IMPROVEMENT GOALS
<b>Teaching Assignments</b>	Out-of-field or split assignments; excessive teaching load or class size	Appropriate teaching assignments; fair and manageable teaching load and class size
<b>Working Relationships Among Teachers</b>	Working in isolation from colleagues	Working collaboratively with colleagues
<b>Support for New Teachers</b>	Sink-or-swim induction	Ongoing observation of, interaction with, and advice from experienced colleagues
<b>Support for Students</b>	Little assistance for students or for teachers in working with students; inadequate family and community support	Collective teacher responsibility for student achievement, comprehensive student support services, school-family-community partnerships
<b>Curricular Support</b>	Under- or over-prescribed curriculum, often not aligned with standards	Complete, aligned curriculum that can be used flexibly
<b>Resources and Materials</b>	Routine shortages of instructional supplies; teachers spend their own money for essentials	Sufficient resources and materials; teacher stipends for extras
<b>Assessment</b>	Excessive focus on tested topics and test-taking skills	Standardized tests, as one part of a comprehensive assessment strategy
<b>Professional Development</b>	A miscellaneous selection of one-shot workshops	Coherent, job-embedded assistance that meets individual teachers' instructional needs
<b>Professional Influence and Career Growth</b>	Having the same influence on the first day and last day of one's career	Progressively expanding influence and increasing opportunities for career growth
<b>Facilities</b>	Inadequate, unsafe, decrepit buildings for some schools	Safe, well-maintained facilities for all schools
<b>Principal Leadership</b>	Insufficient attention to work-place conditions and interdependent aspects of teacher's work	Actively brokers workplace conditions; encourages teacher interdependence and collective work

Source: National Education Association<sup>50</sup>

### *SUPPORT FOR NEW TEACHERS*

The need to provide additional support, including stress management support, for new teachers is widely acknowledged in the research pertaining to teacher well-being and retention.<sup>51</sup> In addition to the stresses that more experienced teachers face and which are

<sup>49</sup> Johnson, S.M. Op. cit., p. 2.

<sup>50</sup> Quoted from: "Best Practices Brief: Workplace Conditions," Op. cit. p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> Note that this section does not provide a comprehensive review of practices for supporting new teachers, as such a review is beyond the scope of this report. Rather, Hanover highlights emotional support practices that are designed to improve the well-being of new teachers and reduce the levels of stress that they experience.

inherent to the profession, new teachers often struggle with the demands of a new school and a lack of experience, contributing to high levels of stress. In a 2000 WestEd article, Stansbury and Zimmerman suggest that:

The first years of teaching are especially stressful as beginning teachers face the emotional challenges of adapting to a new workplace and new colleagues—from simply figuring out where things are located to learning policies and procedures, finding kindred spirits, and, generally speaking, getting the lay of the land.<sup>52</sup>

As with other dimensions of teacher support, principals are strongly positioned to provide effective support to new teachers. The state of Washington’s Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction identifies various practices that principals can implement to provide the supports that new teachers need, as shown in Figure 2.5.

**Figure 2.5: Practices for Principals to Support New Teachers**

- **Become familiar with the district’s new teacher induction plan and the role the principal plays in it.**
  - Principals need to know exactly what their responsibilities are for things like mentor selection, new teacher and mentor training, orientation, monitoring of mentoring activities, professional growth planning, etc.
- **Place new teachers in situations that give them a high probability of success.**
  - Ensure that the process of assigning students to classes gives a new teacher an appropriate group of students.
  - Ask veteran staff to fill extracurricular positions that would prove difficult for a beginning teacher, and limit extracurricular assignments for the new teacher.
- **Share expectations for instructional practices, grading, and student achievement.**
- **Communicate the school’s culture—the history, traditions, legends and myths, heroes and heroines—as well as policies and procedures.**
  - Staff can be helpful with this, too. Handbooks and school scrapbooks help to communicate things that might not otherwise be learned.
- **Establish a welcoming culture for new teachers.**
  - Letters to the new teacher, posters welcoming him/her to the school, and a social event that helps him/her meet other staff are just some strategies that make this possible.
- **If the principal plays a role in mentor selection, identify the best mentors. Quality mentors:**
  - Are committed to the role of mentoring.
  - Are accepting of the beginning teacher.
  - Can articulate the elements of effective instruction.
  - Have good interpersonal skills in a variety of contexts.
  - Model continuous learning.
  - Communicate hope and optimism.

Source: Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction<sup>53</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Stansbury, K. and J. Zimmerman. “Lifelines to the Classroom: Designing Support for Beginning Teachers.” WestEd, 2000. p. 4. [http://www.wested.org/online\\_pubs/tchrbrief.pdf](http://www.wested.org/online_pubs/tchrbrief.pdf)

<sup>53</sup> Bullet points quoted from: “Supporting New Teachers: Ideas for Principals.” Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, 2003. <https://www.k12.wa.us/BEST/Administrators/pubdocs/SupportingNewTeachers-IdeasforPrincipals.pdf>

In particular, mentoring programs enable new teachers to collaborate with and learn from experienced colleagues, and can be effective forms of support for new teachers. Among other virtues, mentorship programs incorporate new teachers into the teaching corps, mitigating the potential sense of isolation that they may otherwise experience, and provide opportunities for new teachers to learn from the specific experiences of their mentors. In one study, former teachers who left the profession in their first five years noted that certain supports they lacked that would have been valuable include:<sup>54</sup>

- Daily time to interact with mentors and other teachers;
- Mentoring characterized as non-judgmental, constructive and compassionate; and
- A support group of teachers with whom they could “vent” and who could provide motivation during tough times.

As Stansbury and Zimmerman note, “more experienced colleagues can play an important role, serving as a sounding board and assuring beginners that their experience is normal, offering sympathy and perspective, and providing advice to help reduce the inevitable stress.”<sup>55</sup>

In addition to providing new teachers with emotional support, mentorship programs can also empower new teachers in their instructional practice, mitigating some of the sources of heightened stress that they may face, such as unfamiliarity with school policies or curricula. For example, Lake Washington School District outside Seattle, WA, offers the “New Teacher Support Program” to pair all first-year teachers with “a consulting teacher to serve as a confidential mentor and instructional coach.”<sup>56</sup> These coaches provide support and training in the areas highlighted in Figure 2.6.

#### **Figure 2.6: Lake Washington School District New Teacher Mentoring Supports**

- Assistance with classroom set-up and development of organizational systems
- Ideas and support for creating and implementing successful classroom management systems
- Curriculum and content support
- Information and tips for professional communication
- Developing lesson and unit plans designed to provide differentiated learning to all students
- Developing and maintain grading systems and complete required district reporting
- Analyzing student work to guide instruction

Source: Lake Washington School District<sup>57</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Bullet points quoted from: Protheroe, N. “The Principal’s Role in Supporting New Teachers.” Principal, National Association of Elementary School Principals, November/December, 2006. p. 36. <http://www.naesp.org/resources/2/Principal/2006/N-Dp34.pdf>

<sup>55</sup> Stansbury, K. and J. Zimmerman, Op. cit., p. 4.

<sup>56</sup> “New Teacher Support Program.” Lake Washington School District. <http://www.lwsd.org/About/Pages/New-Teacher-Support-Program.aspx>

<sup>57</sup> Bullet points quoted from: Ibid.

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