

Teachers Emotional Well-Being During and After a Global Pandemic

THE EDUCATOR'S ROOM

DECEMBER 2023

Part I: Executive Summary:

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, education has been at a crossroads in helping combat learning loss, spending federal funds, and the mental health of educators. In 2022, according to the National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP), scores in math and reading dropped, with reading seeing the most significant drop in 30 years (NAEP, 2022[1]). Not only did the pandemic affect students' academic performance, but as we can see, students' and teachers' mental well-being suffered. While some schools have embraced social-emotional learning[2] for educators, the resources for educators are lacking. Research has shown that stress can negatively affect the physical health of educators, and there are correlations between poor teachers' wellness and mental health linked to lower-quality student learning environments[3].

Starting in 2020 through 2023, the Teacher Self-Care Conference and The Educator's Room conducted a 12-question survey of 1,596+ teachers and school staff on their emotional well-being in response to the concerns of teaching during a pandemic. Our mental health survey was shortened to six questions, and we used a random sample of an additional 400 educators from around the United States to respond to our public survey.

According to Martin Seligman, well-being is defined as “a construct with five elements that count toward it- positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, achievement.[4]” For this survey, we used teacher well-being as the positive emotion teachers feel about their job, engagement with their peers, student relationships, and personal achievement in their roles. This white paper focused on teacher well-being in their current roles during and after the Covid-19 pandemic.

Part II: Background:

Teachers want to work in safe and welcoming schools and allow them to educate children. When schools do not have all three, educators' mental health suffers. Teaching is a difficult job, and working conditions are a strong indicator of the emotional well-being of the educators working in these environments. Teachers experience high stress levels, contributing to burnout, and unfortunately, many leave the profession[5]. When COVID-19 hit the United States, the subsequent online learning debates about schools re-opening and the fears from educators about catching COVID-19 all affected teacher wellness and anyone who worked in schools in 2020 and beyond.

In the subsequent years during and after COVID-19, educators have experienced a backlash from parents and society over laws around wearing mask-wearing, the war on books written by people of color, debates around critical race theory, and a dwindling teacher workforce.

As communities look for ways to address schoolwork conditions, educators from around the country. The survey consisted of twelve questions plus one open-ended question. Data was collected over three years, with more than 1,500+ educators completing the survey after outreach on social media and email lists of educators. What's New in 2024?

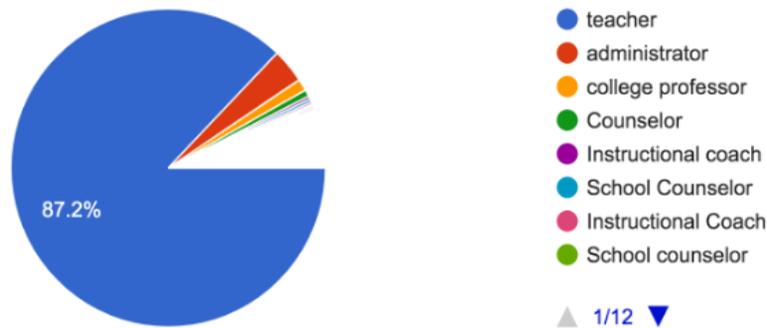
Part III: Demographics

Eighty-seven percent of respondents worked as teachers within schools. While the remaining 13 percent worked in roles such as administrators, college professors, counselors, instructional coaches, school counselors, school psychologists, and more.

Chart 1

What is your job in education?

1,596 responses



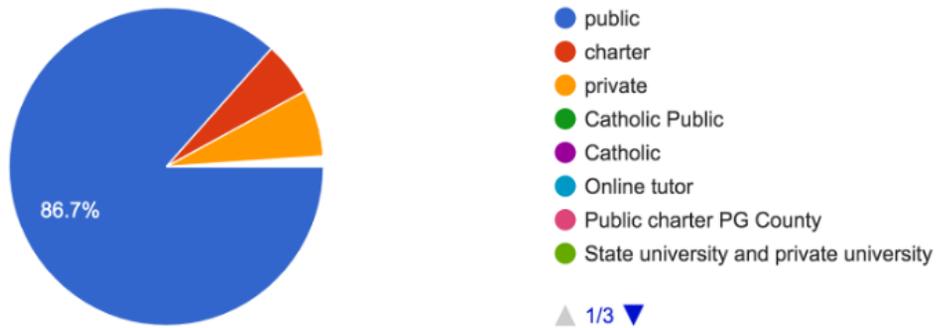
Every state in the United States was represented in the survey responses, with respondents from Canada, British Columbia, France, Indonesia, Japan, and London.

Throughout the survey, there was a diverse identification of where teachers work. An overwhelming number of respondents (86.7%) work in public education, with 6.8% working in private schools and 5.5% working in charter schools. A few participants worked in non-profits, early childhood education, universities, and Catholic Schools.

Chart 2

Do you work in a public, charter, or private school?

1,596 responses



Part IV: The Problem

Even before COVID-19, teacher shortages were a concern[6]. But coming after the COVID-19 pandemic, we are now at alarming levels, leaving schools understaffed when learning loss concerns student performance. With government agencies, parents, leaders, and school districts asking policymakers to address the well-being of our teaching workforce, solutions are needed to meet this challenge.[7]

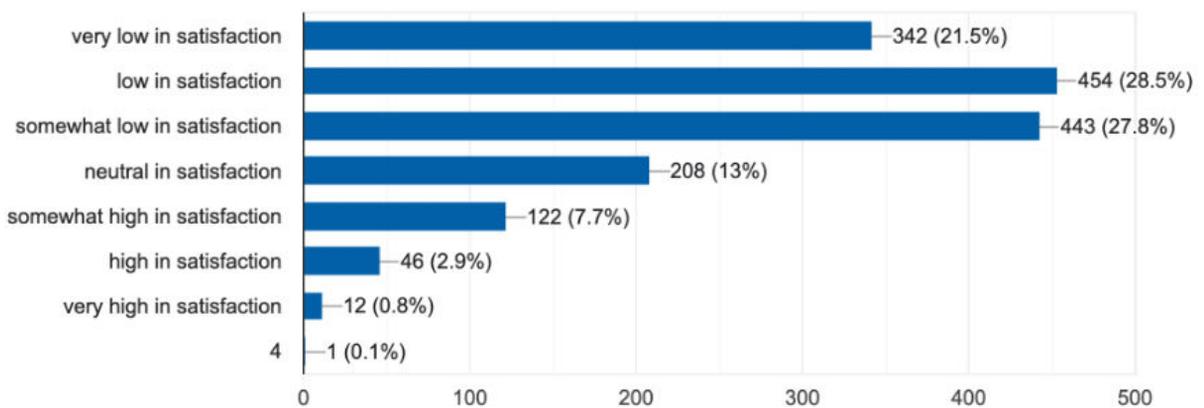
Part V: Survey Results

In response to the question, how do you rate your current emotional well-being as an educator, over 77.8% rated either “very low,” “low,” or “somewhat low.” Thirteen percent of respondents rated themselves as neutral in responding. Only 11.4% of respondents rated themselves as “somewhat high,” “high,” or “very high” in their responses.

Chart 3

How do you rate your current emotional well-being as an educator?

1,594 responses



In response to the question, how confident do you feel in your current role, with a scale of 1 being “not confident” and four being “very confident, 8% (128 respondents) answered “not confident,” 33.9% (541 respondents) answered somewhat confident, 41.6% (664 respondents) answered “confident,” and 16.4% (262) answered “very confident.” When assessing the current stress level as an educator, 90.7 % rated their level of stress as “somewhat high,” “high,” or “extremely high.

When assessing the current stress level as an educator, 90.7 % rated their level of stress as “somewhat high,” “high,” or “extremely high. When rating what stresses them out, respondents could cite multiple reasons. The highest rated were: 85.3% (1361 respondents) claimed demands of the job, while another 84.6% (1350 respondents) cited the COVID-19 pandemic, 54.5% (850 respondents) cited politics outside the classroom, (48.4%) cited lack of emotional support from administrators and 41% cited resources.

Chart 4

Please rate your current stress level as an educator.

1,596 responses

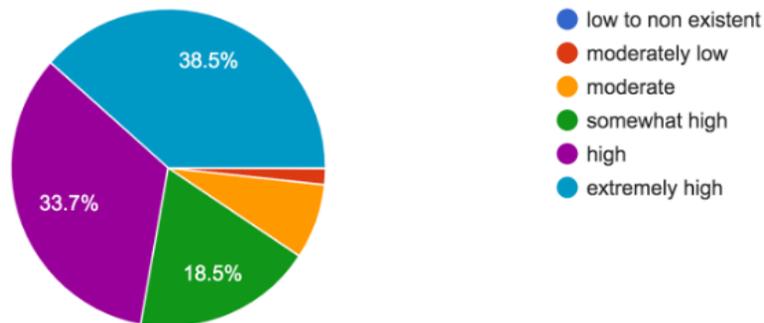


Chart 5

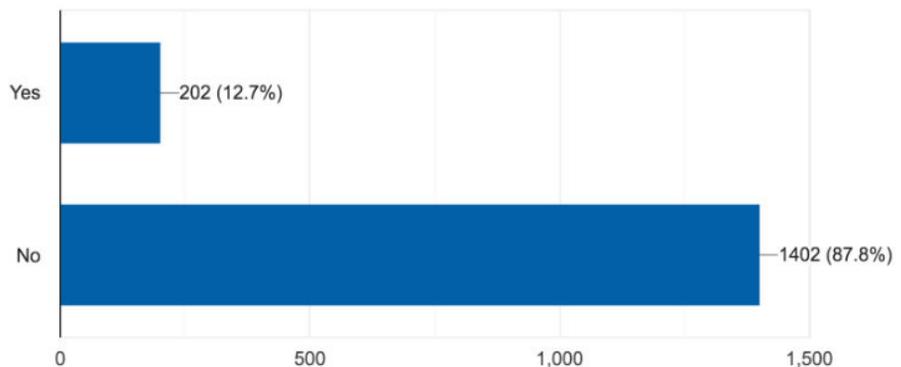


Over 87.8% of respondents worked in a school district without a policy around the emotional well-being of teachers in that district. However, 12.7% of teachers have a district with a policy.

Chart 6

Does your school district have a policy around the emotional well-being of teachers?

1,596 responses



With the question, “Did the decision on how your school district [started the 2020-2021 school year] impact your mental health?” there were several themes that came through the respondent’s survey.

Many educators felt the districts did not communicate clearly or openly with teachers on how the reopening would be structured. A comment from the survey revealed that the teachers were learning with the public how they would reopen the schools; some even changed mid-week, leaving many educators scrambling at the last minute. One frustrated educator commented on her experience with the reopening,

“...My district did not communicate the plan until two weeks before school started. I was told to prep my classroom as normal and a week before our start date I was told that I would be the full-time virtual teacher for multiple grades. I had no prep time and didn’t know what I would be teaching until the day of our resource handout. I’ve had to start taking medications for my mental health and need to seek therapy but do not have time.” Another commented, *“Absolutely. Our district’s decision to return as a hybrid without the physical, emotional, or mental resources made available for teachers and students has made me consider leaving the profession. I’ve started to see a therapist to help with the stressors this year.”*

Part VI: Recommendations

Any movement towards improving educator well-being will require federal, state, and local levels to work together to change policy, direct funds to support policy, and work with educators throughout our schools.

- There should be continued research that dives into the causes, effects, and ramifications of educator well-being in both public, private, and parochial, along with how leaders deal with their mental health.
- The federal government, school districts, and state agencies must prioritize teacher well-being in policy and through employee benefits.
- There needs to be further development for a teacher wellness scale that can assess teachers on areas of concern (i.e., job demands, lack of administrative support, political landscape, effects of COVID-19 pandemic, etc.) and push support to the most needed work.

END NOTES

- [1] Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), 2022 Reading & Math Assessments.
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- [7] Amy N. Farley & Leah M. Chamberlain (2021) The Teachers are Not Alright: A Call for Research and Policy on Teacher Stress and Well-Being, *The New Educator, 17*:3, 305-323, DOI: [10.1080/1547688X.2021.1939918](https://doi.org/10.1080/1547688X.2021.1939918)

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