

TEACHER BURNOUT: SYMPTOMS, CAUSES, AND REDUCTION STRATEGIES



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WHAT IS TEACHER BURNOUT?

"Burnout is a state of chronic stress that leads to exhaustion, detachment, [and] feelings of ineffectiveness."- Psychology today

Symptoms of burnout include but are not limited to:

- Exhaustion
- Detachment
- Depression
- Feelings of isolation
- Feelings of ineffectiveness
- Fatigue
- Sleep issues
- Anxiety
- Weight fluctuation

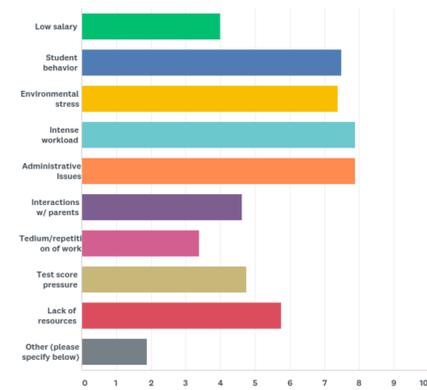
According to Alexandra Robbins with Edweek, Teacher burnout is not a mythical unexplainable contagion, but instead a rational response to "insufficient classroom resources, support staff and administrative support; lack of input into decisions; unpaid overtime; high-stakes testing; and lack of disciplinary and other policy enforcement."

Inquiry Question: What is Teacher burnout, what are its causes, and how can administration work with teachers to reduce burnout levels?

TPEP Criterion 8: Exhibiting collaborative and collegial practices focused on improving instructional practice and student learning



Teachers were asked to rank causes of potential burnout based off their own experiences, with 1 being a low contributor, and 10 being a high contributor:



CAUSES OF TEACHER BURNOUT

While there are a few main causes of teacher burnout that have been highlighted such as overwork, low support, and financial instability, the graph above shows us that there are a myriad of other reasons for teacher burnout as well. Everything from testing pressures, to Admin issues can cause teachers to fall under the burnout umbrella.

The most commonly cited reasons for teacher burnout in the pre-covid era were variations of overwork, pressure from administration, no support from administration, and poor pay. Post-covid we have seen an uptick in things such as online learning, parental conflict, and health related anxieties.

Looking at these causes, it is easy to see where symptoms such as feelings of isolation, anxiety, fatigue, and depression come from. When teachers are left out to dry by administration, given excessive outside the classroom work, and get into conflicts with parents on a regular basis, you are likely to have high rates of burnout.

COMPARATIVE BURNOUT RATES

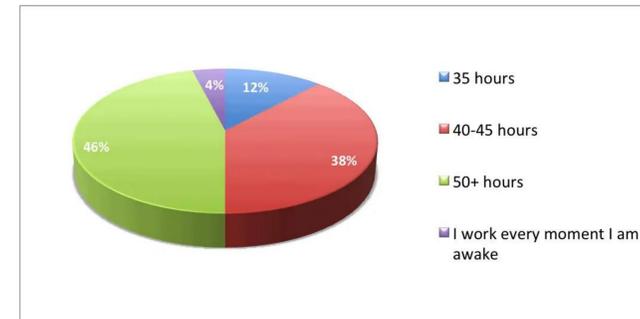


Here we can see that not only are teachers burning out at higher rates than other professionals, but female teachers are also being burnt out at even high rates than male teachers.

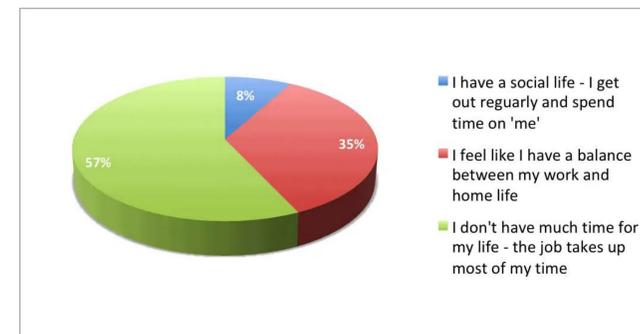
HOW BURNT OUT ARE TEACHERS?

The organization "Not waiting for superman" has had nearly 13,000 teachers take their teacher burnout assessment survey. It is currently believed to be the largest compilation of data regarding teacher burnout and demoralization. It is important to note this was a voluntary assessment, taken by teachers who sought it out. This means that there is a bias towards teachers who are already burnt out taking the test, over teachers who may be satisfied. However, it is currently the best statistical analysis that has been done regarding teacher burnout and demoralization. These are their findings:

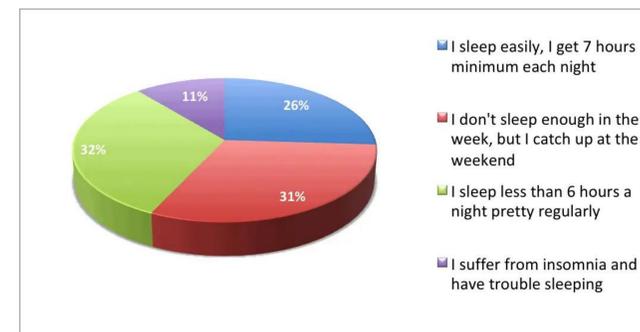
How Many Hours do you Work on Average Each Week?



What kind of social life do you have?



How do you sleep on the average day?



While this survey goes much deeper, and its findings are more extensive than the three charts above, its results are very clear. Teachers on average tend to be overworked, under socialized, and poorly rested. The survey has diagnosed around 85% of its participants as working unsustainably, and at risk of health issues as a result.

Here is a direct link to the study if you wish to see the rest of their findings:



WHAT CAN WE DO GOING FORWARD?

There are two main angles regarding how best to reduce rates of burnout in the future. The first angle is the teacher side. Teachers who have a strong sense of work life balance, and who actively make space for non-work activities outside of work hours, tend to be the best at avoiding burnout. While this is not going to stop parents from taking their frustration out on you, nor will it magically make your administration more supportive, nor can it raise your pay (sadly), it is a way in which teachers can have agency within their own lives despite the surrounding struggles. When a teacher simply says, "I will not be answering emails on the weekends", they set a strong boundary and expectation of respect between them and their peers.

The other angle is the administration angle. Low pay, and low support are two of the largest reasons teachers tend to get burnt out, and it makes sense as to why. Bending over backwards to help out your students, only to find that your administrators have left you out of the loop on important discussion can be debilitating. Doing that while having little financial stability as well, can leave a teacher feeling at best underappreciated, and at worst taken advantage of. If administration wants to keep turnover low, and retain its employees, then there are a few moves that can help with that. The simplest one is increase in salary, however that can be difficult in public school settings. Simply having an administration that openly supports its teachers and backs them up on major decisions can go a very long ways to keep those teachers effective and motivated. Knowing that your boss is a shield defending you and not a sword hanging over your head, will provide stress relief, and security to all the teachers in that school.

FINAL THOUGHTS

This was a quote I stumbled across in research, I felt it best summed up how teachers can best take agency in their own burnout struggle, regardless of whether or not Administration is supporting them: "To avoid becoming a victim to teacher burnout, educators need to build balance into their lives. One way to do this is by setting clear work boundaries. Perhaps that means you won't check your emails after 6 p.m., or you'll only grade papers until a favorite TV show starts, or maybe you'll never work on Sundays. Whatever schedule you set for yourself, stick to it to ensure balance in your life."

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