

Job-Related Stress Threatens the Teacher Supply

Key Findings from the 2021 State of the U.S. Teacher Survey

BY ELIZABETH D. STEINER, ASHLEY WOO

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The authors use American Teacher Panel data to explore the state of teacher well-being in the United States. They describe the job-related stressors that teachers faced during the COVID-19 pandemic and how those stressors are associated with teachers' reported well-being. They also examine the working conditions of teachers who were considering leaving their jobs because of the pandemic.

Research Questions

- What is the state of teacher well-being during the pandemic?
- What job-related stressors have teachers faced during the pandemic, and how are these stressors associated with teacher well-being?
- How do teachers' reports of well-being and intentions to leave their job compare with those of the general public?
- How do the job-related stressors faced by teachers who were considering leaving their jobs because of the pandemic differ from those faced by their peers: teachers who were likely to leave before the pandemic and teachers who were unlikely to leave?

Key Findings

- Nearly one in four teachers said that they were likely to leave their jobs by the end of the 2020–2021 school year, compared with one in six teachers who were likely to leave, on average, prior to the pandemic. Black or African American teachers were particularly likely to plan to leave.
- A much higher proportion of teachers reported frequent job-related stress and symptoms of depression than the general adult population.
- Mode of instruction and health were the highest-ranked stressors for teachers.
- One in three teachers were responsible for the care of their own children while teaching.
- Many pandemic-era teaching conditions, such as technical problems while teaching remotely, were linked to job-related stress, depressive symptoms, and burnout.
- More teachers who were likely pandemic leavers (i.e., teachers who were unlikely to leave their jobs before the pandemic but who were likely to leave at the time of the survey) experienced working conditions that were linked to higher levels of stress than teachers who were unlikely to leave and those who were considering leaving prior to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- The experiences of likely pandemic leavers were similar in many ways to those of teachers who had already resigned during the pandemic.

Recommendations

- Schools should implement recommended COVID-19 mitigation measures in a way that allows teachers to focus on instruction. Districts and schools could recruit additional staff to help students comply with safety measures. Schools could ensure that windows are operable, employ fans and air purifiers, or upgrade ventilation systems. Education leaders also should consider how schools can facilitate vaccinations for younger students once they become available.
- Leaders should collect data on teacher working conditions and links to well-being. State, district, and school leaders should keep in mind that teachers from different backgrounds might be affected differently by their working conditions. For example, teachers of color might experience different job-related stressors and working conditions — and thus have different needs — than their teacher peers.
- District leaders should work with teachers and school leaders to design and implement a variety of mental health and wellness supports. States and districts should consider using American Rescue Plan funds, along with teacher and principal input, to provide mental health supports for staff.
- State leaders should help teachers access child care, which could go a long way toward alleviating stress and promoting teacher retention. State leaders should consider including teachers in the definition of essential worker to ensure that they are eligible for American Rescue Plan child care assistance.
- District leaders should collaboratively develop clear policies for remote teaching and consider adopting technology standards for remote teaching equipment issued to teachers — such as laptops, cameras, and microphones — and provide necessary training to support remote teaching in the long term.

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