



# TEACHER STRESS & BURNOUT

The High Cost of Low Social and Emotional Development



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**Teachers are the most important school-based factor** in student success, impacting every aspect of students' achievement and overall development.<sup>1</sup> In addition to leading academic instruction, teachers create the environment in which students interact, collaborate, and build meaningful relationships.



However, teaching is ranked as one of the worst professions for physical health, psychological well-being, and job satisfaction, which leads to high turnover rates.<sup>2</sup> New teachers, especially those within their first five years, feel



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this stress most acutely.<sup>3</sup> They tend to work in schools with a larger share of students from low-income families, which negatively affects the quality of education those students receive. Teachers in urban schools face additional stressors,<sup>4</sup> such as heavier

workloads, school-level disorganization, student poverty, and high stakes testing pressures than their suburban counterparts.<sup>5</sup>

Longstanding inequities, exacerbated by the pandemic, have compounded to create stressful working conditions for teachers, making it even more difficult for them to provide a high-quality education.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, overall pandemic stressors coupled with the disproportionate effect of COVID-19 on communities of color imposed an immense emotional and mental burden on teachers of color, with Black teachers also managing the additional psychological burden of coping with the current atmosphere around racial injustice.<sup>7</sup>

## **TEACHER STRESS INCREASINGLY LEADS TO ABSENTEEISM.**

According to the most recent data available from the U.S. Civil Rights Data Collection,<sup>8</sup> nearly 29 percent of teachers were considered chronically absent, missing ten school days or more.<sup>9</sup> When teachers are chronically absent, students' test scores decrease.<sup>10</sup> Teacher absences also negatively impact school budgeting, generating the additional expense of hiring substitute teachers.

Several districts in the South have begun to offer monetary incentives to improve teacher attendance and reduce the need for substitutes.<sup>11</sup> However, monetary incentives do not address the root causes of teacher stress and may exacerbate stress by discouraging teachers from taking time off to attend to their wellness needs.

### **TEACHER TURNOVER LIMITS THE AVAILABILITY OF DIVERSE, QUALIFIED TEACHERS.**

Across the nation, teacher turnover rates have increased. In 1992, five percent of teachers left the profession, compared with eight percent by 2005. The turnover rate has hovered around eight percent.<sup>12</sup>

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Teacher turnover rates tend to be highest in the South, approximately 50 percent higher in Title I schools that serve students from low-income backgrounds, and 70 percent higher in schools that predominantly serve students of color.<sup>13</sup>

Several factors contribute to teachers leaving the profession, including heavy workloads, school culture, and lack of professional development opportunities. Stress is the number one reason that teachers leave the classroom, reported twice as often as low compensation.<sup>14</sup> In fact, in the American Federation of Teachers' *2017 Educator Quality of Work Life Survey* of nearly 5,000 teachers, 61 percent of teachers and school staff found their jobs "always" or "often" stressful.<sup>15</sup>

A teacher's effectiveness, which often increases throughout the first five years in the profession, directly relates to student



outcomes.<sup>16</sup> But teachers often do not stay in classrooms long enough to build their effectiveness and reap the benefits of years of experience. Research has shown that high teacher turnover has a disruptive effect on the classroom and the broader school climate, negatively impacting student achievement for all students in the school.<sup>17</sup>

Along with the cost to student learning, teacher turnover extracts a high financial price. Research shows that teacher replacement costs, including school and district expenses related to separation,

recruitment, hiring, and training, can range from around \$9,000 per teacher in rural and suburban districts to more than \$20,000 in urban ones.<sup>18</sup>

It is projected that the pandemic will exacerbate the teacher turnover issue, particularly for Black teachers. RAND Corporation's *2021 State of the U.S. Teacher Survey* found that 23 percent of teachers reported they would likely leave teaching by the end of the 2020-21 school year.<sup>19</sup> The proportion was significantly greater among Black teachers, many of whom experienced unique stress, anxiety,



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and racial fatigue in this past year of our country's racial reckoning, with nearly half reporting they were likely to leave their jobs by the end of the school year. This outsized impact on Black teachers affects all students as research has shown that while Black students particularly benefit from having Black teachers, all students benefit from the diverse perspectives teachers of color bring to the classroom.<sup>20</sup>

## **HEALTHY SCHOOLS ARE IMPORTANT FOR STUDENTS AND TEACHERS.**

Positive school climates and student well-being are important aspects of healthy schools and productive learning environments. While there has been an important emphasis on how students' social and emotional skills improve learning environments, there has not been enough attention to how teachers' well-being and social emotional skills contribute to school climate and how these skills equip teachers to cope with the stresses of the profession.

In order to create schools that are well balanced and conducive to learning, teachers should be given the opportunity to build their own social and emotional skills, such as self-management and relationship skills. Teachers can then use these skills to manage their own emotions, co-regulate their students' stress, and contribute to creating a healthier school climate.

## **WHAT ARE SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS?**

Social and emotional skills are the ability to recognize and manage emotions, show empathy, build relationships, and collaborate effectively.<sup>21</sup> These skills are developed through daily, embedded, ongoing practice, as opposed to isolated lessons out of context.<sup>22</sup>

National non-profit organization CASEL: Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning has established the most widely accepted definition for social and emotional learning known as *The CASEL 5*.<sup>23</sup>

**THE FIRST TWO COMPONENTS**, self-awareness and self-management, focus on personal and internal development. Teachers and students must be able to understand and manage or react appropriately to their own emotions.

**THE NEXT TWO COMPONENTS**, social awareness and relationship skills, allow people to interact with each other in a productive and beneficial manner. Social awareness refers to the ability to understand and empathize with those

around you. While relationship skills are focused on building the capacity for productive connections with others through communication.

**THE LAST COMPONENT**, responsible decision-making, is focused on developing external actions. The ability to make choices while considering the impact on yourself and those around you is imperative for a productive learning environment.



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## SEL RESEARCHERS ALIGN ON A THREE-COMPONENT FRAMEWORK.

Proposed models for social and emotional learning typically include three key components that are integral to creating healthy schools.<sup>24</sup>

- 1 The first component is the *Learning Context*.** This refers to school factors such as communication, leadership style, behavior systems, organization, and connection to the community. Both students and teachers require a supportive and safe learning context to develop social and emotional skills.



- 2 The next component is the *SEL of Teachers*.** Developing *The CASEL 5* skills in teachers allows for SEL to become integrated in classrooms and student learning. With additional skills teachers can build more meaningful relationships with students, improving student outcomes and decreasing teacher stress.<sup>25</sup>

**Both students and teachers require a supportive and safe learning context to develop social and emotional skills.**

- 3 The *SEL of Students* is the third and final component of this framework.**

When students develop *The CASEL 5* skills and improve their self-awareness and self-management, they cause fewer classroom disruptions and are able to build relationships and work together in a productive manner. When they are better at exercising responsible decision-making skills, they are better equipped to engage in the learning process.

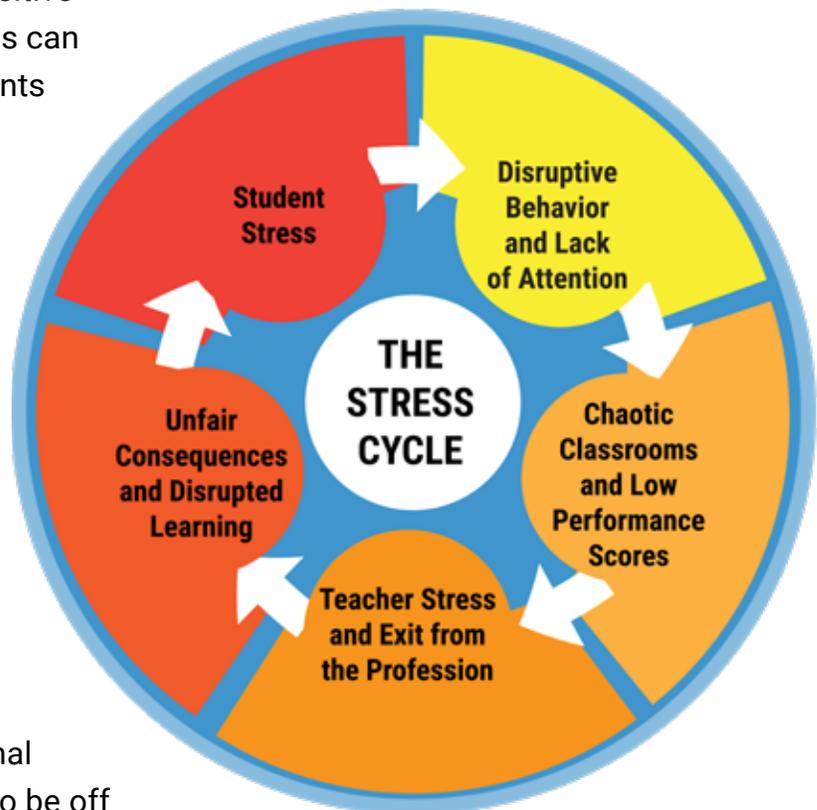
All three of these components are necessary and interrelated. When all three components are not developed and supported the result can be a cycle of stress.<sup>26</sup>

## WELL-EQUIPPED TEACHERS CAN INTERRUPT THE CYCLICAL NATURE OF STRESS AND KEEP LEARNING ON TRACK.

Well-developed social and emotional skills are imperative for teachers to manage stress and create a positive classroom environment.<sup>27</sup> Stress can originate in many places: students may experience stress due to at-home factors or academic frustration, and teachers may experience stress due to insufficient resources, standardized testing requirements, and large class sizes.

Stress, in anyone in a classroom, acts in a feedback loop between teacher and students.<sup>28</sup> When teachers do not possess social and emotional skills, students are more likely to be off task and display disruptive behaviors.<sup>29</sup> Students who are in unbalanced, stressful, or chaotic classrooms tend to earn low performance scores.<sup>30</sup> When students in a classroom display high levels of stress, this results in higher rates of teacher stress and burnout.<sup>31</sup>

When adults develop their social and emotional skills, they have an opportunity to interrupt this cycle and get learning back on track.<sup>32</sup> Emotionally supportive teachers are more sensitive to and supportive of the social and emotional needs of their students.<sup>33</sup> Social and emotional skills equip teachers to



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manage student behavior without removing students from the learning environment and by giving students the skills to make better choices in the future. In addition to academic competence, social and emotional skills

are a critical component of developing the higher order thinking skills, resourcefulness, resilience, and growth mindset that prepares young people personally and socially for responsible adulthood.<sup>34</sup>

## **TEACHER PREPARATION PROGRAMS ARE A KEY LEVER FOR DEVELOPING TEACHERS' SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS.**

Traditional teacher training through a university is a common entry point into the career with 75 percent of adults who enroll in certification programs enrolling in traditional teacher preparation programs.<sup>35</sup> But the nature and quality of these programs is not consistent. Many teacher preparation programs are removed from the realities of the classroom, and

many of the professional development opportunities teachers access once they are in the classroom are not effective in helping them develop the social and emotional skills they need to thrive. Additionally, there is inequitable access to certified teachers with students of color more likely to have uncertified teachers with fewer years of experience.<sup>36</sup>

## **WHAT ARE TEACHERS LEARNING ABOUT SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SKILLS BEFORE THEY ENTER THE CLASSROOM?**

While preparation elements related to learning context and student SEL—such as behavior management and emotional development—are becoming more common, there is still a lack of focus on adult and teacher SEL in traditional teacher preparation programs. In a 2017 analysis of



**The study found that only 13 percent of university preparation programs included at least one course that focused on relationship skills, six percent included a course on self management, and one percent included a course on self-awareness.**

The CASEL 5's inclusion in one-third of the country's university preparation programs, the study found that only 13 percent of programs included at least one course that focused on relationship skills; six percent included a course on self-management and one percent had a course on self-awareness.<sup>37</sup>

While *The CASEL 5* remains at a nascent stage of adoption into teacher preparation programs, pre-service teachers may develop their social and emotional skills through meditation and mindfulness strategies.<sup>38</sup> Teachers who engaged in one-year of consistent mindfulness practice experienced more self-awareness and self-management, greater life satisfaction, and more self-efficacy in teaching.<sup>39</sup>

## **SOME SOUTHERN DISTRICTS ARE MAKING STRIDES TOWARDS TEACHER SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT.**

While progress in teacher and adult social and emotional development is a relatively new concept, many districts in the South are making strides towards this goal.

### **Atlanta Public Schools, GA**

District departments dedicated to social and emotional learning are rare, and Atlanta Public Schools has been an early adopter of this approach. The department has an explicit commitment to "Adult SEL Capacity Building for all Staff" and "Emotional Wellness for Students and Staff." Social and emotional learning is a core aspect of the district's [Definition of Teaching Excellence](#) encouraging teachers to model SEL competencies and reflect on their own social emotional strengths and weaknesses. School leaders are also expected to provide social and emotional learning for staff as reflected in its [Definition of Leadership Excellence](#).

Additionally, Atlanta Public Schools has developed its own [SEL Competencies and SEL Learning Standards](#) to provide "students, teachers and staff with the skills needed to succeed in school, work, and life." These standards are built around *The CASEL 5* and guide teachers in embedding the five competencies within teaching and learning. Additionally, teachers use social and emotional curricula with students, including the Second Step curriculum for kindergarten through eighth grade and the Seven Mindsets curriculum for ninth through twelfth grade.

## ■ Palm Beach County, FL

[Palm Beach County](#) has partnered with CASEL to promote social and emotional development in their schools and equip educators with trainings on empathy and implementing SEL in the classroom. Palm Beach County is piloting an online platform that allows teachers and staff to work through SEL training modules at their own pace.



## ■ Tulsa Public Schools, OK

[Tulsa Public Schools](#) offers the professional learning course Introductory SEL 101 to its principals and teachers. Administration and staff at pilot schools receive training on the Recognizing, Understanding, Labeling, Expressing, and Regulating Emotions (RULER) program, a systematic approach to SEL.

Tulsa Public Schools also offers adult social and emotional development through the [Greater Good in Education](#) resources developed through UC Berkeley.<sup>40</sup> This resource provides educators with online courses, such as Basics of Social and Emotional Learning and Basics of Mindfulness for Educators, with videos, modules, research informed practices and downloadable resources.

## POLICY AND PRACTICE RECOMMENDATIONS

Districts, school leaders and teacher preparation programs supportive of developing teachers' social and emotional skills, may consider the following recommendations:

- Districts should provide targeted SEL support to new teachers to help them build the skills to thrive and become effective sooner.
- Districts with monetary attendance incentives should assess whether these policies are discouraging teachers from taking the time off they need to manage stress and take care of their social and emotional health.
- Teacher preparation programs should assess their course offerings for social and emotional skills training and explore opportunities to offer courses cross-listed with departments of psychology, which often have available courses that may be adapted to an educational context.
- School and districts leaders should conduct surveys and hold listening sessions to understand teacher well-being and job-related stressors and then use this information to target interventions. Leaders should be mindful of how teachers from different backgrounds may experience different job-related stressors.
- Districts should leverage American Rescue Plan Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding, which requires that at least 20 percent of funds be used to address lost instructional time with evidence-based interventions that respond to students' academic and social and emotional needs. Programs and interventions for student SEL should also include provide professional development to help teachers meet their students' needs and to regulate their own stress.
- States and districts should also use ESSER funds to address the root causes of teacher shortages and advance strategies to build a stable and diverse teacher workforce, including partnerships with Historically Black Colleges and Universities which prepare 50 percent of the nation's Black teachers.<sup>41</sup> 

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