

EASTERN KENTUCKY TEACHER AND ADMINISTRATIVE STRESS

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The purpose of this research was to survey selected Eastern Kentucky Principals (Elementary, Middle, and High School) to collect data about stress in public schools. This was a unique study for Eastern Kentucky that collected data on how men and women teachers and men and women administrators handle stress. This study sought to determine if there were differences in how men and women teachers/administrators handle stress at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. In addition, the research considered school size, school financial condition, and age as factors that might influence stress for teachers and administrators. The surveys were mailed to randomly selected Eastern Kentucky Principals that were located in the Morehead State University service area (22 Counties) in the spring of 2010.

Mersky (1983) completed a study involving stress for educators in Eastern Kentucky. Mersky conducted a study concerning task-based stress among teachers in a rural setting. Teachers in 12 Eastern Kentucky schools were asked to complete a 51-item instrument. Mersky found that stress in Eastern Kentucky for teachers is associated with management practices. Also, stress for teachers was the result of violence/student discipline. Mersky found the least stressful events for teachers centered on pedagogical activities. Mersky suggested the need for improved management practices in Eastern Kentucky schools.

Kirby (1990) studied the stress levels of Kentucky elementary school principals. Kirby surveyed 200 Kentucky elementary school principals using a 24 item survey. Kirby's findings indicated forcing the resignation/dismissal of a teacher and dealing with unsatisfactory professional performance were the two most stressful events for elementary

school principals. The lowest amount of stress was found to be working with the district's central administration. Kirby concluded the job of being a Kentucky elementary school principal was not highly stressful.

Hammond and Onikama (1997) found stress factors for teachers were caused by school reform efforts, minimal administrative support, poor working circumstances, and lack of involvement in school decision making, paperwork, and lack of resources. Moody and Barrett (2009) concluded that administrators cause stress for teachers, administrators know their teachers are stressed, teaching was stressful and teachers are aware of their stress, and stress affects students.

Hammond and Onikama concluded there was a difference in stress between administrators and teachers. They stated that administrators are making healthier choices than teachers.

Haberman (2004), in a very good article on teacher burnout, stated "The persistent and pervasive nature of teacher stress studies makes it clear that teaching has become a high stress occupation". Haberman noted that teacher stress and turnover now costs 2.6 billion dollars annually to school districts.

Stress is a problem that affects teachers and administrators who work in the public schools. Research by Holmes and Rahe (1967) concluded that life events such as divorces, illnesses, change in financial state, changes in roles at work, the beginning or ending of school, trouble with a boss, changes in working conditions, vacations, and a number of other items can cause stress. Teachers and administrators have been identified as suffering from stress since the study by Hicks (1933). Two stress studies have been conducted in

Kentucky by Mersky (1983) and Kirby (1990). Education has been identified as the most important function governed by state legislatures. It is important and relevant to study and report on stress that impacts the teachers and administrators in Kentucky. This data will be important and valuable to the Commonwealth, universities, school districts, administrators, teachers, and the public to help them understand and hopefully lower stress for teachers and school administrators.

Research Procedures:

A stress survey was sent to randomly selected elementary, middle, and high school principals located in the Eastern Kentucky region serviced by Morehead State University (22 Counties). The region serviced by Morehead State University consists of 158 elementary schools, 33 middle schools, and 48 high schools. The principals were selected by a random drawing. For the 10% random sampling, 16 elementary schools, 4 middle schools, and 5 high schools were randomly selected for the survey. . The first survey was mailed on April 28, 2010 and was to be returned by May 24, 2010. The first mailing resulted in 15 surveys being returned out of the 25 that were sent. A follow-up survey was mailed on May 22, 2010. The follow-up survey was to be returned by June 7, 2010. The follow-up survey resulted in 4 additional useable surveys being returned for a total of 19 returned surveys. This provided a 76% return percent for the survey. The surveys were returned to the Foundational and Graduate Studies in Education office for tabulation by Dr. Victor Ballesterro and Dr. Sam Wright.

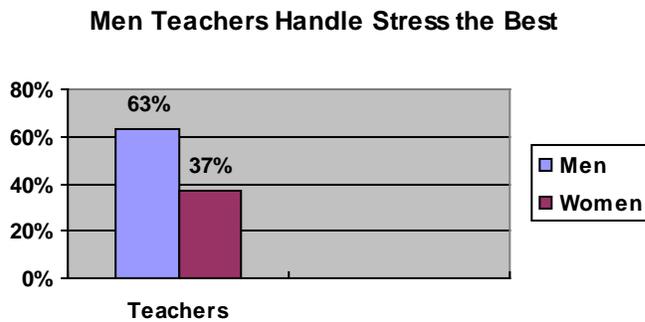
This was the first study on teacher and administrator stress in Eastern Kentucky since 1990. It has been 20 years since the previous stress research and it was time to revisit the topic of stress for Eastern Kentucky teachers and administrators.

Survey Results:

The analysis of the data for this study on stress for Eastern Kentucky teachers and school administrators was based on the 19 Eastern Kentucky school districts that responded to the survey.

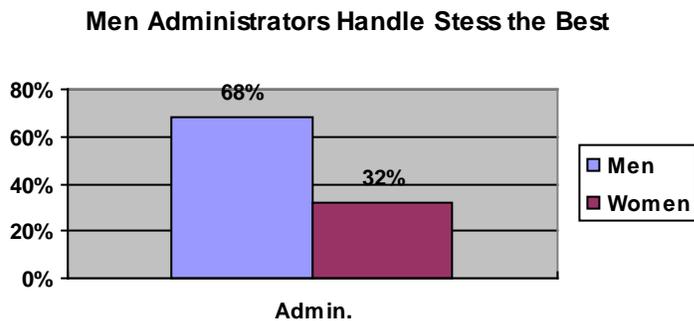
Question 1. Which gender of teachers handle stress the best?

There were 7 principals (37%) who indicated they believed women teachers handle stress the best. For the second option, 12 principals (63%) selected men teachers as handling stress the best.



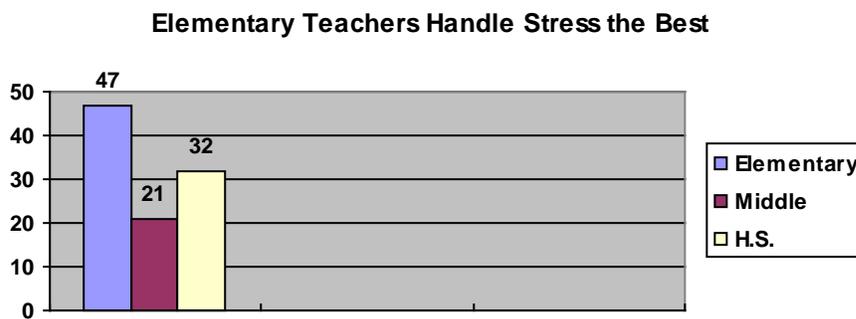
Question 2. Which gender of school administrators handle stress the best?

There were 6 principals (32%) who marked they believed women administrators handle stress the best. For the male option, 13 principals (68%) selected men administrators as being the best at handling stress.



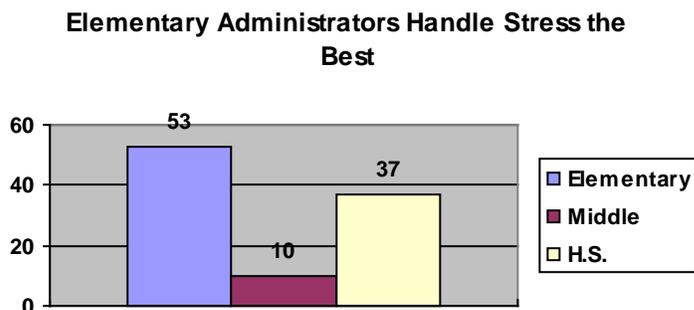
Question 3. Which grade level of teachers handle stress the best?

There were 9 principals (47%) who selected elementary teachers as being the best at handling stress. There were 4 principals (21%) who selected middle school teachers as being the best at handling stress. And 6 principals (32%) selected high school teachers as being the best at handling stress.



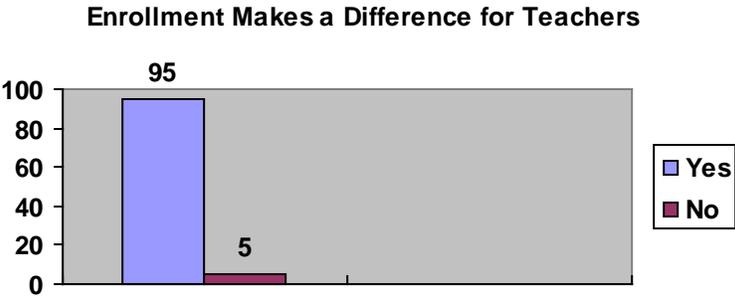
Question 4. Which grade level of school administrators handle stress the best?

There were 10 principals (53%) who selected elementary administrators as being the best at handling stress. Only 2 principals (10%) selected middle school administrators as being the best at handling stress. And 7 principals (37%) selected high school administrators as being the best stress handlers.



Question 5. Does the enrollment of a school make a difference in the level of stress for teachers?

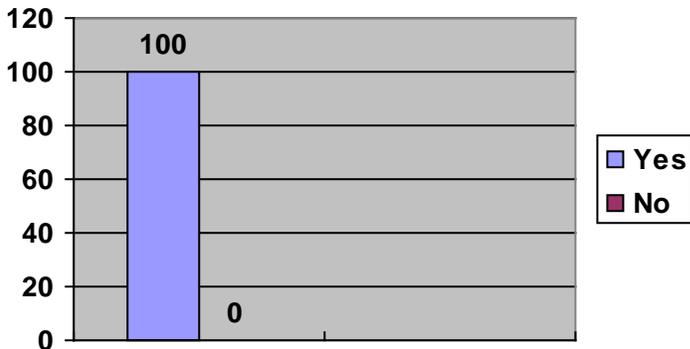
There were 18 principals (95%) that marked yes school enrollment makes a difference. Only 1 principal (5%) marked no that enrollment made no difference in the level of stress for teachers.



Question 6. Does the enrollment of a school make a difference in the level of stress for school administrators?

All of the principals (100%) indicated they felt enrollment makes a difference in the level of stress for school administrators. No principals indicated otherwise.

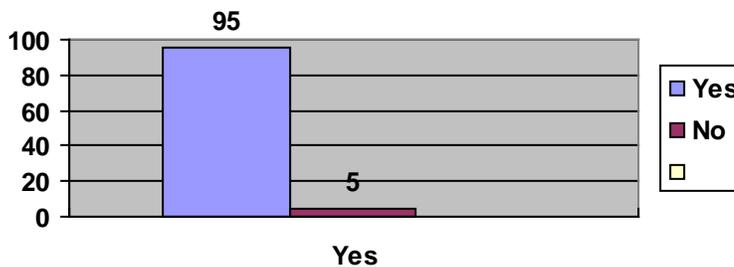
Enrollment Makes a Difference for Administrators



Question 7. Does the financial condition of a school district make a difference in the level of stress for teachers?

There were 18 principals (95%) that selected yes that the financial condition of a school district does make a difference in the level of stress for teachers. Only 1 principal (5%) indicated they do not feel the financial condition of a school district makes a difference in the level of stress for teachers.

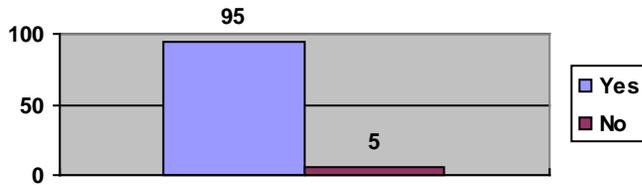
Financial Condition Makes a Difference for Teachers



Question 8. Does the financial condition of a school district make a difference in the level of stress for school administrators?

There were 18 principals (95%) that selected yes that the financial condition of a school district does make a difference in the level of stress for teachers. Only 1 principal (5%) indicated they do not feel the financial condition of a school district makes a difference in the level of stress for school administrators.

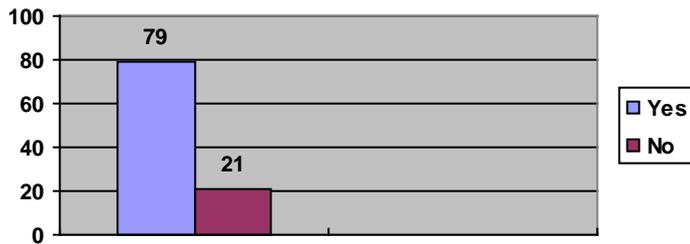
**Financial Condition Makes a Difference
for Administrators**



Question 9. Does the age of a teacher make a difference in the level of stress?

There were 15 principals (79%) that indicated yes the age of a teacher makes a difference in the level of stress. There were 4 principals (21%) that indicated age was no factor in the level of stress for teachers.

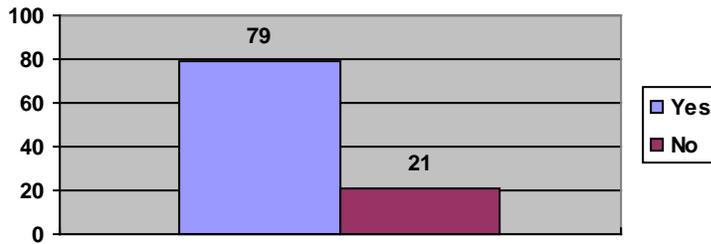
Teacher Age Makes A Difference



Question 10. Does the age of a school administrator make a difference in the level of stress?

There were 15 principals (79%) that indicated yes the age of a school administrator makes a difference in the level of stress. There were 4 principals (21%) that indicated age was no factor in the level of stress for school administrators.

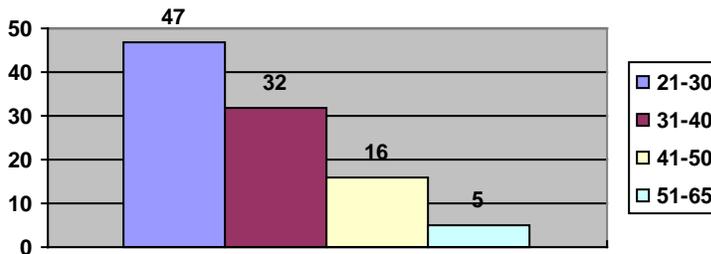
Administrative Age Makes a Difference



Question 11. Which age group of teachers suffers the highest level of stress?

There were 9 principals (47%) who selected the 21-30 age group of teachers as suffering the highest level of stress. The 31-40 age group was selected by 6 principals (32%). The 41-50 age group was selected by 3 principals (16%). The 51-65 age group was selected by 1 principal (5%).

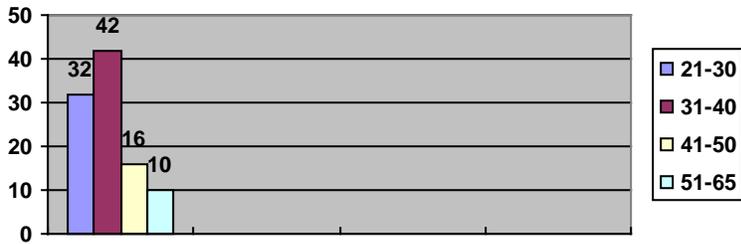
Teachers 21-30 Suffer the Most Stress



Question 12. Which age group of school administrators suffers the highest level of stress?

There were 6 principals (32%) who selected the 21-30 age group of school administrators as suffering the highest level of stress. The 31-40 age group was selected by 8 principals (42%). The 41-50 age group was selected by 3 principals (16%). The 51-65 age group was selected by 2 principals (10%).

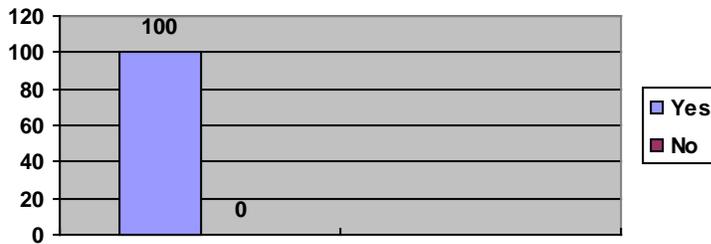
Administrators 31-40 Suffer the Most Stress



Question 13. Is teacher stress increasing or decreasing?

All 19 principals (100%) indicated they felt teacher stress was increasing.

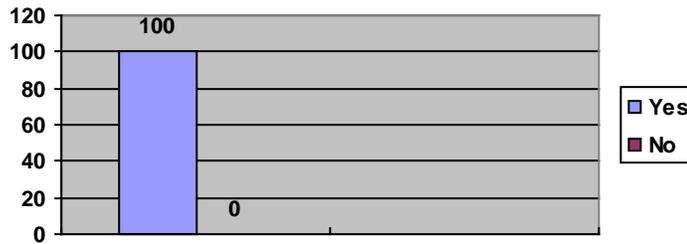
Increasing Teacher Stress



Question 14. Is school administrator stress increasing or decreasing?

All 19 principals (100%) indicated they felt school administrator stress was increasing.

Increasing Administrative Stress



Conclusions:

1. A majority of the principals (63%) indicated men teachers handle stress the best.
2. A majority of the principals (68%) indicated men school administrators handle stress the best.
3. A clear difference of opinion exists on which level of teachers handle stress the best. The principals indicated elementary teachers at 47%, middle school teachers at 21%, and high school teachers at 32%. It appears the elementary teachers have a slight edge in handling stress.
4. Another difference of opinion exists on which level of school administrators handle stress the best. The principals indicated elementary school administrators at 53%, middle school administrators at 10%, and high school administrators at 37%. The survey gives the edge to the elementary school administrators in handling stress.
5. A majority of the principals (95%) felt enrollment makes a difference in the level of stress for teachers.
6. The principals unanimously felt enrollment makes a difference in the level of stress for school administrators.
7. A majority of the principals (95%) felt the financial condition of a school district makes a difference in the level of stress for teachers.

- 8. A majority of the principals (95%) felt the financial condition of a school district makes a difference in the level of stress for school administrators.**
- 9. A majority of the principals (79%) felt age makes a difference in the level of stress for teachers.**
- 10. A majority of the principals (79%) felt age makes a difference in the level of stress for school administrators.**
- 11. The principals felt the 21-30 category of teachers (47%) suffered the highest level of stress.**
- 12. The principals indicated the 31-40 category of school administrators (42%) suffered the highest level of stress.**
- 13. The principals unanimously indicated stress was increasing for teachers.**
- 14. The principals unanimously indicated stress was increasing for school administrators.**

Implications:

- 1. Stress is one of the most harmful factors on human beings. The data indicates an increase of stress for teachers and school administrators in Eastern Kentucky school districts. This is harmful to our teachers and making schools less of a positive learning environment for children.**
- 2. The responsibility of reducing stress is ultimately a state task. The Kentucky legal case of *Rose v. Council for Better Education* (1989) ruled the obligation of common schools is a state responsibility and it cannot be shifted to local school districts. The state bears the burden of reducing stress for all Kentucky teachers and school administrators.**

References

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Kirby, H. J. (1990). **Stress Indicators of Kentucky Elementary Principals**. Retrieved October 27, 2009 from http://moreheadstateuniversity.worldcat.org/oclc/425342008&referer=brief_results

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Appendix A:

Eastern Kentucky Teacher and Administrative Stress Survey

Directions: Please answer the questions by placing a check mark in the space that answers the question. The response will be your opinion.

1. Which gender of teachers handle stress the best?

Women Teachers

Men Teachers

2. Which gender of school administrators handle stress the best?

Women Administrators

Men Administrators

3. Which grade level of teachers handle stress the best?

Elementary Teachers

Middle School Teachers

High School Teachers

4. Which grade level of school administrators handle stress the best?

Elementary Administrators

Middle School Administrators

High School Administrators

5. Does the enrollment of a school make a difference in the level of stress for teachers?

Yes

No

6. Does the enrollment of a school make a difference in the level of stress for school administrators?

_____ Yes

_____ No

7. Does the financial condition of a school district make a difference in the level of stress for teachers?

_____ Yes

_____ No

8. Does the financial condition of a school district make a difference in the level of stress for school administrators?

_____ Yes

_____ No

9. Does the age of a teacher make a difference in the level of stress?

_____ Yes

_____ No

10. Does the age of a school administrator make a difference in the level of stress?

_____ Yes

_____ No

11. Which age group of teachers suffers the highest level of stress?

_____ 21-30

_____ 31-40

_____ 41-50

_____ 51-65

12. Which age group of school administrators suffers the highest level of stress?

_____ 21-30

_____ 31-40

_____ 41-50

_____ 51-65

13. Is teacher stress increasing or decreasing?

_____ Increasing

_____ Decreasing

14. Is school administrator stress increasing or decreasing?

_____ Increasing

_____ Decreasing

Thank you for your assistance! Please place the survey in the enclosed, stamped envelope and return to Dr. Sam Wright, Associate Professor of Leadership,

Morehead State University.

Appendix B:

Letter to Principals

April 28, 2010

Dear Principal:

The enclosed survey has been designed to collect information about stress concerning Eastern Kentucky teachers and school administrators. You were randomly selected to participate in this Morehead State University study. It has been approximately 20 years since the last stress study was completed for Eastern Kentucky. Your opinion as a school principal is critical to this study. Please give us a few minutes of your valuable time to complete the short survey regarding stress for teachers and school administrators. A self-addressed, stamped envelope has been enclosed for your convenience in returning the survey.

Please assist Dr. Ballestero and myself by returning your survey by May 24. Thank you for your assistance.

Sincerely,

**Dr. Sam Wright
Associate Professor
Leadership**

**Dr. Victor Ballestero
Professor
Leadership**

**Appendix C:
Follow-up Letter to Principals**

May 22, 2010

Dear Principal:

The enclosed survey is a follow-up to the one sent to you a few weeks ago. If you have not returned the survey to date, please take a few minutes to complete the questions. The information gathered from the survey will be shared with Kentucky schools. Your valuable help is greatly appreciated. This survey is intended to gather information about stress from Kentucky School Principals. Once tabulated, this research will add to the information available concerning stress for teachers and school administrators in Eastern Kentucky.

A self-addressed, stamped envelope has been enclosed for your convenience in returning the survey. Please assist us by returning your survey by June 7th. Thank you in advance for your valuable assistance.

Sincerely,

**Dr. Victor Ballestero
Professor**

**Dr. Sam Wright
Associate Professor**

Appendix D:

Service Region for Morehead State University

