Teacher Burnout: Causes, Cures and Prevention

Sarah Bousquet

American International College

Edu: 853 Thinking About Teaching

First Core Advisor: Dr. Bonda

Second Core Advisor: Dr. Celli

August 07, 2012

Teacher Burnout: Causes, Cures and Prevention

Teacher burnout is a serious psychological condition that affects the lives of thousands of highly effective teachers throughout the United States. An educator who is experiencing burnout has low morale, low self-esteem, and is physically exhausted (Roloff & Brown, 2011). Teacher morale directly correlates with student achievement; the higher the teacher morale, the greater the student achievement (Raines, 2011). The emotional experience of a teacher sets the tone for a class. Teacher burnout is one of the most common reasons that effective teachers leave the profession (Roloff & Brown, 2011). If more energy were put into providing emotional support for effective educators, they would be far more likely to continue to teach and to share their passion and knowledge in the years to come. If a teacher is clinically depressed, anxious, or experiencing physical illness, he will be more likely to retire early or to cease working to his capacity than if he is emotionally and physically well. With appropriate treatment and care, a teacher who is experiencing burnout will be revitalized and refocused on his work. Taking preventative measures will help educators to avoid the physical and emotional effects of prolonged stress and will provide them with the energy to continue to be successful teachers throughout their careers. Low morale is not only a problem for students; it is a problem for the faculty members themselves. In fact, burnout is not only a mental state, but a true psychological condition that negatively affects every aspect of a teacher's life. However, few educators realize that significance of the condition. Policymakers and community members often are completely unaware of the physiological and psychological ramifications of teaching (Raines, 2011). For this reason, little research has been done to determine the best ways to improve teacher morale and to provide psychological support for chronic stress. In order to help educational leaders to better serve their students and faculty, this paper seeks to answer the following question: what

causes teacher burnout, how can teacher burnout be prevented, and how can burnout be healed so that teachers can return to a healthy and productive state?

Burnout is "a type of psychological distress-a chronic negative psychological condition that results as day-to-day work stressors take their toll" on educators (Roloff & Brown, 2011, p. 453). Teachers who experience burnout have three categories of symptoms: exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished personal achievement. Exhaustion is experienced when a teacher feels as though all of his "emotional resources are used up" (Roloff & Brown, 2011, p. 453). Depersonalization occurs when one separates himself from colleagues, family, and friends. Separation may manifest through a physical isolation or through distancing oneself emotionally (Roloff & Brown, 2011).

All burnt-out teachers feel a sense of decreased personal value and as though they are incompetent in their careers (Roloff & Brown, 2011, p. 453). Like many other psychological conditions, burnout is caused by an interaction of environmental and physiological factors. The physiological response to prolonged stress is a complex response system that involves the nervous, endocrine, and respiratory symptoms. The hypothalamus, a region of the brain that is located in the limbic system, releases corticotropin-releasing factor (CRF) which alerts the pituitary gland of an emergency. The pituitary gland (a crucial part of the endocrine system which is housed in the lower brain) creates the hormone adrenocorticotropin which signals the adrenal gland to release cortisol and adrenaline (Amen, 2005, p. 168). Cortisone and adrenaline, also known as epinephrine, are responsible for the "fight or flee" response in mammals.

Together these hormones prepare the individual to attack an aggressor or to leave a dangerous situation. In the presence of heightened cortisol and adrenaline, the pupils dilate in order to improve vision. Blood is redirected from the hands and gut to the legs and arms; this enables

one to partake in a fist fight or to run away. Breathing and heart rates increase in order to quickly circulate oxygen and nutrients. Sweat gland activity increases in order to prevent overheating. Glucose, proteins in the form of amino acids, and fats flood the bloodstream in order to provide extra energy (Amen, 2005, p. 168).

The "fight or flee" response is healthy in small doses and is induced in order to treat specific medical conditions. For example, cortisol is an anti-inflammatory that is injected into injured soft-tissues such as tendons, muscles, and ligaments. The decrease in inflammation controls pain. Cortisol is also administered to patients who have organ transplants; it allows their body to accept foreign tissue as its own (Amen, 2005). Cortisol levels are naturally increased by pregnancy, exercise, clinical depression, anxiety, sleep deprivation, and chronic stress (Amen, 2005). Even though there are benefits to temporarily high levels of cortisol, experiencing high levels of cortisol for an extended period of time is very unhealthy. Chronically high cortisol levels lead to cravings for sugars and fats. Abdominal weight gain occurs because the cortisol tells the fat cells to refrain from using their energy in order to be prepared for a future attack or a time of famine. Fatigue, "poor concentration, elevated cholesterol levels, heart disease, hypertension, increased risk for strokes, diabetes, muscle wasting (atrophy), osteoporosis, anxiety, depression, irregular menstrual cycles," infertility, bleeding ulcers, large deposits of fat in veins and arteries, sleep disorders, gastrointestinal illness, and an increased risk of developing Alzheimer's disease are direct results of continuously high levels of cortisol (Amen, 2005, p. 169: Roloff & Brown, 2011).

Chronic stress response decreases immune function. Psychoneuroimmunologists study the effects of mental states on the immune system (Zimbardo, Johnson, Weber, & Gruber, 2010, p. 349). They find that cortisol and adrenaline lead to the release of cytokine proteins which tell

visceral and skeletal muscles and immune organs such as the bone marrow, liver and thalamus gland, to conserve energy. This conservation of energy leads to chronic fatigue, fever, and clinical depression. Fatigue, fever, and depression all slow immune response, thus preventing healing and prolonging illness (Zimbardo, et. al., 2010, p. 349). Additionally, cortisol decreases the production of the growth hormone dehydroepiandrosterone (DHEA) and the sex hormone, testosterone. The decrease of DHEA and testosterone slows metabolism, increases appetite, increases fat retention, and decreases libido (Amen, 2005). Since teaching is a "highly emotional and bafflingly chaotic" profession teachers are vulnerable to lengthy periods of work-related stress (Brookfield, 2006, p. 2). Twenty-first century educators are faced with more demands than teachers in any previous era (Kozol, 2007). Due to the break-down of the American family, they are expected to act as social workers, health care providers, and parents while continuing to educate the children about core content areas, technology, and the global community (Kozol, 2007). Teachers are also faced with a growing amount of paperwork, pressure to teach to standardized tests, and a constant need to defend themselves against the public belief that schools are failing the children of the nation (Kozol, 2007). Career-related stress from difficult students, excessive work hours, new and additional demands, and negative relationships with coworkers or administrators takes a prolonged period of time to fix. Therefore, these challenges lead to maladaptive responses. One example of a maladaptive response is a decreased ability to defend against foreign cells in the body; this increases the likelihood of viral and bacterial infections. Another common maladaptive cellular behavior is an inability to distinguish healthy body cells from dangerous cells; this leads to the death of essential and important body tissue due to automimmune disorders. Some of the common autoimmune disorders that are triggered by burnout are diabetes, lupus, sjorgren's and celiac disease (Zimbardo et. al., 2010, p.350).

Maladaptive responses that present due to chronic stress also increase the likelihood that one will develop cancer because the t-cells (a type of white blood cell that is responsible for killing abnormal cells) are suppressed and unlikely to kill cancer cells before they reproduce. Abnormal cells multiply, creating a tumor, and eventually spreading throughout the body's systems (Zimbardo et.al., 2010). Now, more than ever before, teachers are finding they are burnt-out and are consequently facing dangerous health consequences.

General Adaptation Syndrome is one of the natural bodily responses that is maladaptive during times of chronic stress. Hans Seyle discovered a "pattern of general physical responses that take essentially the same form in responding to any serious chronic stressor" (Zimbardo et. al., 2010, p. 345); the body responds to the stress of combat in the same way that it responds to the demands of a classroom (Zimbardo et.al., 2010, p. 345). This pattern has four stages. The initial response to stress is the alarm reaction. During this stage the initial adrenaline and cortisol are released. The second stage is resistance. In resistance, the steroid levels drop and the swelling of the adrenal gland decreases as the individual begins to return to his normal state of homeostasis. A person in resistance no longer appears stressed, uncomfortable, anxious, or concerned. However, if a second stressor is introduced during the resistance stage, a person will feel overwhelmed because the endocrine system is still recovering from the previous perceived attack and is unable to create a new line of defense. Many people can relate to the feeling that after a very challenging day, one minor difficulty or unexpected delay can "put them over the top" and trigger irritability, anger, and feelings of doom. This is not just an emotion, but a biological reality. In fact, having one additional stressor during the resistance phase can lead to death. For example, many soldiers survive the horrors and physical stress of combat for weeks at a time, only to die in relatively safe and humane prisoner of war camps. They do not die of

starvation, thirst, or maltreatment, but their bodies simply do not have the resources to sustain any additional stress (Zimbardo, et. al., 2010, p. 347). Should one survive resistance without a new stressor, the third stage is exhaustion. Exhaustion occurs when the original stressor continues to persist despite the body's best defenses, the brain's most highly developed plans of action, and the passing of time. Exhaustion is the reappearance of the initial adrenaline and cortisol alarm reaction. It is one final fight. After mounting this last attempt to pry the individual from the chronically difficult situation, the person is left either void of all energy and unable to further protect himself or to perform daily tasks or the individual dies of stress (Zimbardo et. al., 2010, p. 347). Fortunately, when one experiences exhaustion, often there are friends and family to help them through the stage. Since the body is aware of the risks of the three stages of Generalized Alarm Response, it may utilize another defensive strategy. Withdrawal from an activity, social group, or physical location can prevent or halt the General Alarm Response. However, in the case of teacher stress, avoiding school, and failing to engage with students leads to a decrease in student performance. Student performance is the greatest concern for educators; therefore, withdrawal indirectly increases stress and does not save the teacher from the effects of General Alarm Response (Roloff & Brown, 2011; Zimbardo et. al., 2010). By the very nature of their profession, teachers are forced to regularly experience alarm response, resistance, and exhaustion. There is no other biological response on which they can depend. The state of exhaustion in education is evident when teachers are chronically, physically absent or mentally unable to continue to plan and carry-out effective lessons for their students.

Hobfoll (1989, 1998) found that people tend to conserve biological resources during the resistance and exhaustion phase of an alarm response; this is known as the Conservation of Resources Theory. Conservation of Resources Theory explains why many teachers experience

chronic stress but few teachers die from exhaustion (Roloff & Brown, 2011). With the little energy that remains during times of exhaustion, a person works to locater and protect resources (Hobfoll, 1989, 1998). The most important resources to the human body are time for sleep, socialization, healthy eating, and exercise. According to Hobfoll (1989, 1998), stress is the physiological experience one has when resources are threatened, resources are lost, or after a significant amount of time or energy was spent on an endeavor that proved to be unbeneficial (Roloff & Brown, 2011, p. 451). On the surface, teacher schedules appear to provide adequate time for family, exercise, eating, and sleep. However, the realities of the profession are far different. The contrast between the expectation for adequate time and the reality of long, unusual hours confuses the brain. The brain tells the body that it must be prepared for anything. The schedule the brain expected and prepared for was inaccurate; therefore the brain must conserve energy in case the future continues to be demanding. The brain cannot foresee relief, and so the body goes into a state of continuous warfare. Just like a nation involved in a total-war preserves food and materials in case they are needed by the troops, the body preserves calories and hormones in case they are needed in order to make up for sleep deprivation, poor eating habits, and a lack of personal time (Roloff & Brown, 2011, p. 451).

With a basic understanding of the stress responses in the body, one can begin to identify the components of teaching that trigger these stress responses. After all, burnout is a response to the relationship between the body and the environment. There are many environmental experiences that are unique to teaching that trigger burnout. Roloff and Brown (2011) found that the number of hours one works per week contributes to stress. Working 44 hours or more per week increases the risk of career burnout. Teachers work an average of 53 hours a week during the academic year. This work includes lesson planning, grading, and

conferences. Working from home, in addition to working from school exacerbates the stress response (Roloff & Brown, 2011, pp. 452-453). One of the greatest factors in chronic work stress is the number of evenings that one must work in addition to a full-time day shift. Teachers consistently work a full day only to go home to spend an evening planning and grading. Work that infiltrates one's personal and family time is perceived as an additional hardship that is not part of the initial work agreement. Furthermore, working from home weakens the association between home and comfort. The teacher's brain never feels as though it can relax and separate itself from career challenges (Roloff & Brown, 2011, p. 452).

Time demands that are in addition to the original work agreement are known as "extra role activities" and they are strongly correlated with increased psychological stress and burnout (Roloff & Brown, 2011, pp. 452-453). In the field of education, coaching, advising, and providing after school help-session fall into the category of "extra role activities" (Roloff & Brown, 2011, pp. 452-453). Many administrators encourage teachers to commit to extra role activities (Roloff & Brown, 2011). Some districts even include the expectation of extra-role activities in faculty evaluations and all school districts include extra-role activities in their collective bargaining agreements (Roloff & Brown, 2011). While coaching and advising provide teachers with a way to connect with students outside of the classroom, they also have devastating effects on the teacher's psychological state. Supervising co-curricular activities increases the number of hours that a teacher works, increases the number of evenings and weekends a teacher works, and decreases the amount of time teachers have for sleep and relaxation. Teachers who coach often find that they are unable to do their best teaching during an athletic season. They experience exhaustion. While students benefit from co-curricular activities, faculty members suffer psychological harm from the extended work days (Roloff & Brown, 2010). Very few

professions expect an employee to take on additional part-time employment; none expect workers to take on extra leadership roles without any economic gain or for a minute stipend. While money does not bring happiness, it can be used to hire help. If teachers who coached were paid a competitive salary, they could afford to pay for a cleaning service or a landscaping company in order to help them to make more time for family, friends and relaxation; however, this is not the case. "Extra role activities" in teaching are a common cause of teacher burnout (Roloff & Brown, 2011).

Another environmental factor that contributes to low morale and chronic stress is poor student achievement and inappropriate student behavior. Studies show that teachers are reinvigorated by student success. No other factor, not even pay, provides as powerful a reinforcement as student progress. When students succeed, teachers see the benefits of their hard work. Unfortunately, there are many factors that make it difficult for students to see students progress. Teachers may not have the facilities they need to assist students. They may spend their own money purchasing supplies for lessons. They may be totally unable to obtain up-to-date versions of textbooks or to provide their students with access to technology. Some teachers work in schools that are not only outdated, but crumbling around them. There are schools with holes in the ceiling that allow rain to drip into classrooms. Schools often do not provide adequate heating or cooling. Some classrooms do not have enough desks for students (Kozol, 1991).

Teachers whose greatest desires are to see students grow are forced into environments that make it nearly impossible for students to focus on their studies. Very few professions send their employees into work without the proper tools. Teachers who are expected to teach without the tools to do so are set up for failure.

Student behavior is unpredictable. Since students at the elementary and secondary levels do not have well-developed frontal cortices in their brains, they are unable to control all of their actions, they have short attention spans, and lack foresight (Zimbardo et. al, 2010). Without foresight and self-control, students speak out and act inappropriately. There is no way to accurately predict how a class of 25-30 students will respond to a lesson plan. This "unplanned, uncontrolled" environment "exceeds the (body's) capacity to adjust to it and allows no time for rest or recovery" of the body's resources (Hallowell, 2010, p. 128). A teacher has no "down time" during the work day. She must always be alert physically and cognitively (Hallowell, 2010, p. 128). There are few professions that demand constant and complete attention for seven hours a day. Teachers are always on the alert (Hallowell, 2010).

The 21st century is especially daunting for teachers. The No Child Left Behind Act decreased teacher morale by placing "undue emphasis....on state-moderated testing" and neglecting to acknowledge the importance of other aspects of the curriculum (Byrd-Blake et. al., 2010, pp. 450-452). The law narrowly defines success; it ignores the progress that teachers make with students in other areas of study such as public speaking, the arts, critical thinking, and citizenship. Since the perception of high standards is essential to a school's reputation, teachers are encouraged not to "fail too many, but (to) keep the standards high" (Garmon, 1997, p.4). Teachers are told to expect and demand more than has ever been demanded before, but to be sure that all students excel and all students achieve superiority; this is an impossible task. It sets a teacher up for chronic stress.

Not only are educators expected to provide a higher quality of academic programming than ever before in the history of American public schools, they are also expected to provide social services to students. Due to the decline of the family, schools are expected to provide social services, psychological testing, nutritious food options, and health care. Now more than ever schools are acting in loco parentis. Teachers work diligently to ensure that children are safe at home, that despite broken families, illness, or poverty, all students have a chance to learn. Even though teachers are providing more and more services to children, politicians and community members continue to add new educational initiatives (Roloff & Brown, 2011). No matter what a teacher does, his job is never done. This continual state of responsibility triggers chronic stress response.

The public not only continues to demand more of teachers, but they are rarely satisfied. The media, politicians, and parents consistently speak about the failure of American schools (Garmon, 1997). Teachers' professionalism is questioned by the home school movement, wherein untrained parents attempt to instruct children and claim to do a better job than experienced, accredited faculty. "Collective bargaining imbroglios" and the questioning (and in some cases termination) of teachers' unions based on the public belief that teachers are spoiled by the benefits they receive further disrespects the sacrifices of educators (Garmon, 1997, p. 4). It is difficult for teachers to take pride in their work when they are surrounded by messages of disapproval and disrespect (Garmon, 1997).

Since it is unlikely that any one administrator or teacher can alleviate all of the environmental factors that trigger teacher burnout, one must focus on the steps that can be taken to prevent burnout whenever possible. School leaders should use time as a reward for great instruction or commitment to the school community. On extended work days, such as parent-teacher conference nights, administrators can take responsibility for students during the last period of the school day. This can be done by hosting a school assembly or activity block. An extra period for preparation provides teachers with the time they need to prepare materials for

parents and it decreases the additional hours that a faculty member must work that week. Principals and vice-principals can also offer to teach one period for a teacher on her birthday. This annual gesture of appreciation provides the administrator with useful time to interact with students and to build positive relationships with the student body. It also conveys respect and gratitude for the staff member. The faculty can use the extra preparation block to prepare lessons or to grade assignments. A teacher will have a little extra time with loved ones to celebrate one's birthday because his lesson plans were completed during the school day (Whitaker et. al., 2009). Eliminating non-teaching duties gives teachers the time they need to focus on instruction and assessment. When possible, non-teaching staff should be responsible for monitoring the halls, lunchroom, and student parking areas. (Garmon, 1995). Since time is one of the most treasured human resources, faculty should never be surprised by an additional responsibility or pressured to take on additional work (Whitaker et. al., 2009, p. 27). Teachers should always be given time to consider extra responsibilities and to discuss their decision with loved ones. Should a teacher decline to take on an extra role, such as coaching or advising, administrators should respect the teacher's decision and even be grateful to the teacher for knowing her limits (Whitaker et. al., 2009).

Administrators can provide positive reinforcement through verbal praise that is "specific, honest, and given in a timely manner (Whitaker et. al., 2009). This praise may be done quietly through face-to-face communication or may be given in the form of a thank you card (Whitaker et. al., 2009). Regardless of the format, all praise should be "authentic, specific, intimate, and clean" (Whitaker et. al., 2009, p. 43). Authentic praise is based on honest approval. Specific praise clarifies the behavior that was worthy of a special commendation. Intimate praise is kept between the parties involved. Clean praise is given without a hidden agenda.

Providing opportunities for socializing can help staff to develop a sense of community and to feel supported (Roloff & Brown, 2011). Faculty events should be planned for the sole purpose of sharing a pleasant afternoon or evening. Positive, fun experiences with others help to maintain psychological wellness. Play is psychologically defined as "spontaneous, intuitive thinking" (Hallowell, 2010, p. 127). It can be experienced through participation in a board game, dancing, a scavenger hunt or a light-hearted conversation. States of play stimulate "the secretion of brain-derived neurotrophic factor, or BDNF, a molecule that promotes nerve growth" (Hallowel, 2010, p. 127). BDNF allows the brain to heal itself. Play is a healing activity. It counteracts the neurological death done by stress. Play engages the amygdala, the emotional center of the brain allowing an individual to better regulate his emotional response. The emotional well-being helps a teacher to respond calmly and collectively to disruptive or difficult students. A final benefit of having a social event for employees is that play strengthens the prefrontal cortex. The prefrontal cortex is very important for teachers because it enables them to plan their lessons, to organize student work, to schedule events, and to decide on a course of action. Effective teachers have strong prefrontal cortices (Hallowell, 2010).

Teachers can also take steps to prevent burnout. They can decline some requests from family, friends, coworkers, and administrators. No one can take on every job or favor that is asked of him. Teachers should only accept additional tasks that are related to personal or professional goals (Amen, 2005, pp. 170-176). For example, if one's professional goal is to increase student understanding of current events, it would be appropriate to accept a role as an advisor to the school paper but may not be ideal for the teacher to coach the football team. Teachers also can make sleep a priority in their lives. For those who are already experiencing stress-related sleep disorders such as insomnia or apnea, homeopathic remedies such as warm

milk with vanilla, calming music, and avoiding the use of televisions and computers for two hours before bedtime may provide relief. Sometimes, a teacher may need a doctor's assistance in selecting a safe prescription sleep aid (Amen, 2005). All teachers should determine a bedtime that provides them with a full six to eight hours of sleep. Sticking to a bedtime requires a teacher to put his wellness first, but doing so is not selfish. Students will benefit from a well-rested teacher who is able to do his best instruction. Teachers should be just as committed to regular exercise as they are to sleep. Regular exercise not only improves the quality of sleep, but it also provides a release of adrenaline and cortisol that are elevated in the blood stream. Exercise releases endorphins to ease mental and emotional pain. Aerobic activity increases BDNF and therefore improves cognitive function. All exercise increases calorie burn, decreases excess body mass, and decreases the risk for autoimmune and cardiovascular illness (Amen, 2005). Teachers who exercise have fewer sick days and have a higher likelihood of being there to support students for years to come.

Meditation and prayer are also proven to be beneficial in times of stress. Both prayer and meditation correlate with an increased life expectancy, increased and improved sleep, decreased muscle pain, decreased depression, decreased anxiety, and fewer headaches (Amen, 2005). The physiological reason for these benefits is increased frontal lobe activation. Meditation requires the practice of controlled attention and decreased movement. It slows activity in the "anterior cingulate cortex and basal ganglia;" these areas are associated with anxiety and worry (Amen, 2005, pp. 172-173). Since the basal ganglia and anterior cingular cortex are slowed, one cannot be anxious during deep meditation. The feeling of calm that one experiences during meditation lingers throughout the day. Since the ability to focus one's thoughts strengthens the prefrontal lobe, meditation increases one's attention span for all activities (Amen, 2005). A teacher who is

Deleted: ¶

relaxed and able to engage in prolonged selective attention is more effective than a teacher who is anxious and overwhelmed by the ever-changing demands of the classroom.

The food and drink that a teacher consumes also plays an important role in preventing chronic stress. Educators who avoid chemicals that stress the brain, such as preservatives, sugarsubstitutes, nicotine, and ephedra, are better able to handle daily stressors (Amen, 2005). Vitamin B is necessary for the brain to perform higher order thought, to properly activate the immune system, and to regulate mood. Adding foods that are rich in vitamin B to one's diet helps to maintain emotional stability, cognitive function, and a healthy immune response (Amen, 2005). Just like a healthy diet should be part of a daily routine, so should laughter (Amen, 2005). Teachers should enjoy their work. Kozol (2007) found that the standards movement discourages merriment, or moments of joy in the classroom. However, the best teachers allow themselves to have moments of immaturity; they tell jokes and perform skits. Great teachers share their joy of learning with students (Kozol, 2007). Laughter lowers blood pressure and releases endorphins to ease pain. Laughter also increases platelets to aid healing and releases gamma-interferon, a protein that kills illnesses (Amen, 2005, p. 175). Laughter is a medicine for both the person telling the joke and the audience. Teachers who use humor in instruction feel happier, and are healthier. They are also helping their students to enjoy the benefits of laughter. By maintaining a healthy pattern of sleep, exercising, meditating, eating well, and laughing, teachers decrease the likelihood that they will experience burnout.

Despite the best efforts of teachers and administrators, not all burnout is preventable.

Once a faculty member begins to exhibit the symptoms of burnout there is much that can be done to initiate healing; burnout does not need to be a permanent psychological condition.

Administrators can help worn-down faculty in many ways. On Fridays, more teachers

demonstrate symptoms of burnout than on any other day. This is because they have worked diligently throughout the work week. In order to provide a therapeutic dose of inspiration, acknowledgement and appreciation, school leaders can develop Friday Focus Memos. Friday Focus Memos serve three purposes: they remind staff of upcoming events, provide much-needed reinforcement on the final day of the work week, and provide a gift of time. A Friday Focus memo includes an upcoming schedule of events so that faculty who may have forgotten adjustments to the schedule can easily access the important information. This is especially important on Fridays because faculty members are exhausted and fatigue increases errors in memory. Another component of the memo is a quote from a community member or faculty member that describes and commends a particular teacher, lesson plan, or activity. The quote informs the faculty that they are valued and that the community acknowledges their hard work. The final component of the memo is a gift of time; a Friday Focus Memo includes a note that faculty may leave school earlier than required by contract. Openly allowing teachers to start their weekends earlier than required by contract gives them a sense of relief and confidence that they can make it until the weekend; an extra five minutes of free time can prevent despair (Whitaker, Whitaker, & Lumpa, 2009).

Administrators can also help burnt-out faculty by providing praise and recognition.

Personal one-on-one praise raises dopamine levels in the brain of both the individual receiving the praise and the individual giving the praise. Dopamine assists in the creation of positive feelings. If nothing else, complimenting teachers will assist administrators in combating their own chronic stress (Hallowell, 2010). Appreciation is always helpful in encouraging highly success staff to maintain highly successful teaching practices. Sometimes combining reinforcement, recognition and community building can be particularly helpful in creating a

school culture of respect and excitement. Creating a public relations committee that regularly contacts the media in order to share good news about the school also helps teachers. Instead of being bombarded by media attacks on education, positive news stories allow educators to experience a sense of pride and accomplishment. Using a committee that is comprised of teachers from various content specialties or grade levels can help to insure that all school events and lessons have an equal likelihood of publication (Whitaker, Whitaker & Lumpa, 2009).

Providing on-site psychotherapy for teachers is another way to address their needs.

While many schools may not have a budget that allows for a faculty therapist, hiring a therapist is likely to decrease the number of times a teacher calls in sick and therefore will prevent the school from needing to hire numerous substitutes. A school guidance counselor who holds the title of school climate and reinforcement officer can provide services to faculty (Whitaker, Whitaker & Lumpa, 2009). The counselor would work to promote mental health for the faculty. His duties would include listening to a faculty member who is having a difficult week, offering a quiet space for reflection during a preparation block, and providing instruction in meditation and self-hypnosis (Whitaker, Whitaker, & Lumpa, 2009).

A final way that administrators can assist burnt-out teachers in recovering from their state of chronic stress is to provide faculty with a designated workout area and to encourage staff to use the exercise space before school, during preparation blocks, and after school. The fitness area must not be large or expensive. A large storage closet or an infrequently used conference room may be adequate. Faculty can be encouraged to bring in equipment that they have at home and would like to share. Community fitness stores can be asked to make donations. While expensive equipment such as treadmills and elliptical trainers would be excellent in a fitness area, inexpensive yoga mats, exercise balls, and free weights are great ways to start an exercise

room. Teachers can also be encouraged to walk through the school and to track the miles they walk with pedometers. They may count the flights of stairs they climb. Fitness in the school halls not only provides teachers with the stress-reduction benefits of exercise but provides extra supervision throughout the building (Whitaker, Whitaker, & Lumpa, 2009).

Teachers can also take action to heel themselves when they are experiencing burnout (Roloff & Brown, 2011, p. 470). Teachers should "be proactive" about setting limits to the amount of time they invest in work. They can "advocate for clear communication with administrators regarding investments and expectations for reciprocal gains" (Roloff & Brown, 2011, p. 470). Teachers should listen to their bodies in order to be aware of their physical and mental states. When a teacher is tired he should rest. When necessary, teachers should be able to quit or take a sabbatical from their extra-time responsibilities such as coaching or advising in order to tend to their personal well-being and their primary job as a classroom instructor. Most importantly, all faculty members should carefully allot significant amounts of time to "valued resources, such as sleep, family, and friendships" (Roloff & Brown, 2009, p. 470). Teaching is challenging physically, mentally, and emotionally. It is crucial that teachers acknowledge the demands of the field and that they take action to maintain their ability to teach to the best of their ability for years to come.

Teacher burnout is a psychological condition that leads to exhaustion, depersonalization, and decreased teacher achievement and self-worth (Raines, 2011). Burnout is a reaction to chronic stress. The effect of teacher morale is often overlooked by policy-makers and faculty members themselves. Positive teacher morale leads to high levels of student achievement. Preventing and treating teacher burnout provides a necessary health benefit to teachers and helps to ensure that children will receive the best education possible. This paper explained the

biological realities of teacher burnout and explained how the school environment triggers these dangerous physiological and psychological reactions. It also explained how administrators and teachers can actively work to prevent burnout and provided key steps that faculty can take in order to heal from burnout and return to their previous state of health and pedagogical success.

References:

- Bivona, K. N. (2002). Teacher Morale: The Impact of Teaching Experience, Workplace

 Conditions, and Workload. *ERIC*, EBSCO*host* (accessed August 5, 2012).
- Brookfield, S. D. (2006). The skillful teacher on technique, trust, and responsiveness in the classroom. (2 ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
- Byrd-Blake, M., Afolayan, M. O., Hunt, J. W., Fabunmi, M., Pryor, B. W., & Leander, R. (2010). Morale of Teachers in High Poverty Schools: A Post-NCLB Mixed Methods Analysis. *Education And Urban Society*, 42(4), 450-472.
- Garmon, J.F. (1997, May 5). Improving faculty morale improves the value of a college.

 Community College Week. p.4.
- Hallowell, E. M. (2010). What Brain Science Tells Us About How to Excel. *Harvard Business Review*, 88(12), 123-129.
- Hobfoll, S. E. (1989). Conservation of resources: A new attempt at conceptualizing stress.

 *American Psychologist, 44, 513-524.
- Hobfoll, S. E. (1998). Stress, culture, and community: The psychology and philosophy of stress. New York, NY: Plenum.
- Amen, D. (2006). Making a good brain great. (1 ed.). New York: Three Rivers Press.
- Kozol, J. (2008). Letters to a young teacher. New York: Crown. [Kindle edition].
- Kozol, J. (1991). Savage inequalities: Children in america's schools. New York: Harper.

 Perennial.
- Potter, L., & National Association of Secondary School Principals, R.A. (1995). How To

 Improve Teacher Morale: Create a Duty-Free School. Tips for Principals. Retrived from

 ERIC on August 5, 2012.

- Raines Evers, C. (2011, January 1). A Relational Study of Elementary Principals' Leadership

 Traits, Teacher Morale, and School Performance. *ProQuest LLC*.
- Roloff, M.E., & Brown, L.A. (2011). Extra-Role Time, Burnout and Commitment: The Power of Promises Kept. Business Communication Quarterly, 74 (4), 450-474.
 Doi:10.1177/1080569911424202
- Whitaker, T., Whitaker, B., & Lumpa, D. (2009). *Motivating & inspiring teachers: The*educational leader\'s guide for building staff morale. (2 ed.). Larchmont, NY: Eye On

 Education Inc.
- Zimbardo , P. G., Johnson, R. L., Weber, A. L., & Gruber, C. W. (2010). *Psychology with discovering psychology*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.