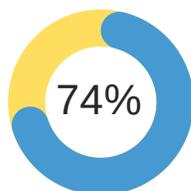




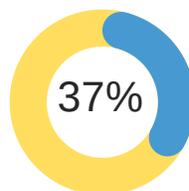
# Back-to-School Staff Wellness

Climate Connection is a monthly publication of the NYS Center for School Safety.

In January and February 2022, the RAND Corporation surveyed 2360 teachers on a variety of topics including well-being, school climate and working conditions. They also surveyed working adults in the general population. The [State of American Teacher](#) survey found that:



74% of teachers reported work was stressful "often" or "always" compared to 35% of working adults



37% strongly agreed with the statement "I don't seem to have as much enthusiasm now as I did when I began teaching."

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most frequently reported sources of stress:

- supporting my students' academic learning because they lost instructional time during pandemic
- supporting students' mental health and well-being
- implementing Covid-19 mitigation measures (i.e. masks, social distancing) in the classroom
- taking on extra work because of staff shortage
- managing student behavior

## A LAYERED APPROACH TO STAFF WELLNESS

Recent editions have focused on the importance of social connections in promoting a positive school climate and supporting student mental health. For staff to be fully present to build relationships with students, their own wellness should be a priority. Just as mental health challenges impact a student's ability to learn, job-related stress and emotional well-being has an effect on the ability of teachers and staff to effectively address academic needs and build relationships with students and families.

We often focus staff wellness efforts on strengthening resiliency through social support and self-care, but promoting staff wellness requires a layered approach - one that provides individual, peer and organizational interventions.





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Not all stress is the same nor does it originate from the same emotions and/or experiences. The definitions below will help provide a better understanding of the various sources of stress so schools can build a **layered approach** to supporting staff wellness.

**Compassion fatigue**, sometimes referred to as secondary traumatic stress, is the mental and physical exhaustion and emotional distress experienced by anyone in a position of caring for someone who has experienced trauma or other adversities. Use **individual** and **peer** strategies to support wellness, such as self-care, adult SEL and the development of a strong formal support network.



**Burnout** is a form of job dissatisfaction characterized by exhaustion, a feeling of being ineffective and a growing sense of cynicism often due to organizational factors such as high demands, and a lack of resources, autonomy and support. Effective strategies to address burnout are **organizational** interventions that protect teacher time, and engage teachers/staff in decision-making and the development of professional learning opportunities.



**Moral distress** is often associated with healthcare workers and members of the military but can apply to educators, too. It occurs when one's integrity is compromised - they know what needs to be done but are unable to act on it, often due to organizational constraints. **Individuals** may need to seek professional mental health support to manage this type of distress but **organizational** policies and partnerships that support social justice and equity will help mitigate moral distress.

## RESOURCES

[Healthy School, Healthy Staff, Healthy Students: A Guide to Improving School Employee Wellness](#) (2018), published by the National Association of Chronic Disease Directors, provides a roadmap for employee wellness initiatives that are staff driven, collaborative and engage multiple stakeholders, such as benefits providers, parents and community businesses.

[Structural Supports to Promote Teacher Well-Being](#) (2021), published by EdResearch for Recovery, provides a review of the research describing interventions at the organizational level that promote staff wellness specifically addressing challenges related to Covid-19 recovery efforts.

[Teacher Stress and Health: Effects on Teachers, Students and Schools](#) (2019), published by Pennsylvania State University, identifies four main sources of teacher stress and provides both individual and organizational intervention strategies, including workplace wellness programs.