

Teaching in 2020

Supporting teacher and student wellness



In these unprecedented times, COVID-19 drastically shifted lives around the world, very notably for teachers and students. Further, threats to and murders of innocent Black Americans met with protest and social unrest across the nation. In response, many students experienced their own and loved ones' imperiled physical safety, widespread illness and death, loss of family income, and housing instability. Others found themselves overwhelmed by the loss of routine, isolated in homes where family violence was a reality, or struggling to meet academic demands in small living spaces with limited technology access. Teachers struggled with many of these experiences as they strained to serve students.

Here, we share teacher survey-informed recommendations for the 2020–2021 school year about how to best support teachers' and students' wellness in these turbulent times. Teachers often provide front-line wellness support to students. Without acknowledgement and support of this essential work, teachers are vulnerable to burnout and to experience compromised well-being.

This report highlights:

- Preliminary findings of national teacher survey
- Survey focus: Teacher and student wellness
- All participants: Full-time educators in Spring 2020
- PK-12 US teacher responses across 46 states
- Data collected Summer 2020



► Findings

- Student wellness concerns
- Teacher actions in response to student wellness concerns
- Teacher responses to wellness work demands

► Recommendations

4 for teachers

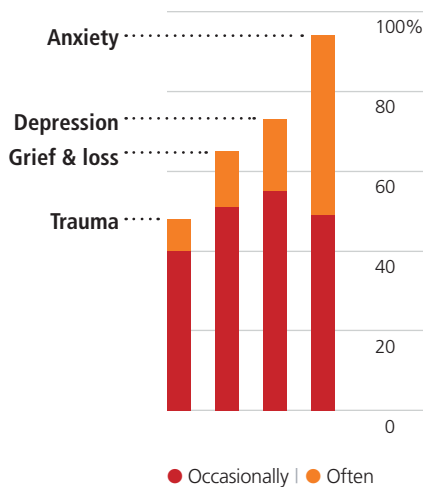
4 for school leaders, district leaders and school-based wellness personnel



▶ **Teachers' survey responses indicated** elevated levels of student wellness concerns during our nation's intertwined crises: housing and food instability, academic stress, fears about their family's well being, anxiety, depression, grief and trauma. Teachers are poised to, and often do, recognize and respond to their students' distress.

Student Wellness Concerns

Teacher encounters, Spring 2020



Teachers encountered substantial student wellness concerns, more than before the pandemic, even with their limited access to students.

46% of teacher participants reported encountering student mental health concerns such as anxiety, depression, trauma and grief more often than they did before the pandemic.

Other student wellness concerns, such as food insecurity, housing insecurity, and fears that family members would be harmed, killed, or would contract COVID-19, also came to teachers' attention.

Teachers referred their students for support, but more often handled student wellness issues themselves.

In response to the pressing support needs their students brought them, teachers took action.

In write-in responses, teachers voiced both a desire to act upon their day-to-day knowledge of students and a sense that other supports were inadequate or unavailable.

Teacher Actions

Supporting student wellness, Spring 2020

19% referred students to school-based professionals

13% contacted administrators

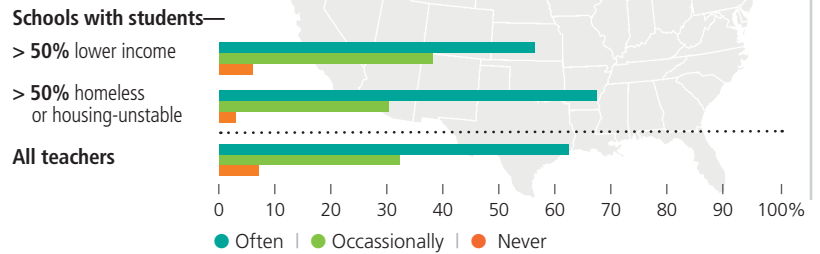
55% handled student wellness issues themselves

...supporting teacher and student wellness in a time of crisis

Teachers serving marginalized populations encountered more student wellness concerns, but had less access to support. Teachers in schools that serve large proportions of immigrants, lower-income, and housing-unstable students and students of color more often reported high levels of student wellness concerns. These same groups of teachers more often addressed concerns themselves.

Student wellness concerns handled by teachers

Without making referrals, Spring 2020



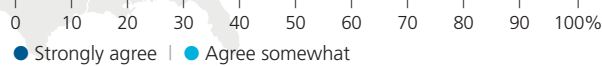
These findings reveal inequity; schools with higher rates of student wellness concerns provide lower levels of support to students beyond what teachers can offer.

Teacher reactions to providing wellness support

Spring 2020

I feel **confident** about my ability to support student with wellness problems.

I feel **overwhelmed** by my students' wellness problems.



Teachers felt some competence to address student wellness concerns,

but these responsibilities overwhelmed them and at times negatively affected their well-being.

57% of teachers reported that their students' trauma caused them personal distress.

Teachers who received wellness-related training more often made referrals for student support and reported higher levels of their own well being. Even a small amount of mental health training made a difference to teachers' use of supports and sense of being able to manage wellness demands.

Teachers' responses to wellness work

Spring 2020

Can cope with own stress

Can effectively teach students who are living with adversity

Knows how to make a referral when student has wellness concerns



▶ Preliminary recommendations

Research Team

Betsy Levine Brown, PhD, co-PI

Associate Professor
George Mason University
ebrown11@gmu.edu

Kate Phillippo, PhD, co-PI

Associate Professor
Loyola University Chicago
kphillippo@luc.edu

Audra Parker, PhD

Professor
George Mason University

Ken A. Fujimoto, PhD

Associate Professor
Loyola University Chicago

Aidyn L. Iachini, PhD, LSW

Associate Professor
University of South Carolina

Melissa A. Maras, PhD

Research Consultant
Assessment Resource Center
University of Missouri

Amy J. Heineke, PhD

Professor
Loyola University Chicago

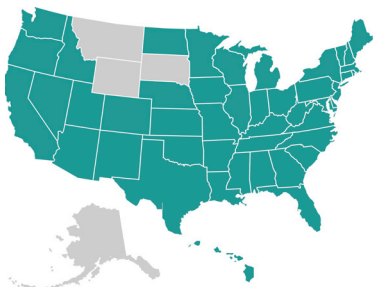
Crystal Lennix, Ed.M

Doctoral Student
Loyola University Chicago

Survey Participants

State Representation

2100+ PK–12 teachers



For **teachers**

- 1 Ask school administrators for wellness support and resources for students showing need.
- 2 Identify and use available wellness supports for students within your schools.
- 3 Honor your knowledge about and connection to students, but don't place the entire burden of addressing their needs upon yourself.
- 4 Your own physical, financial, psychological, professional wellness matters. Care for yourself so that you can care for your students. Remember that student-centered referrals and consultation are self-care.

For **school leaders, district leaders** and **school-based wellness personnel**

- 1 Schools that lack wellness personnel—such as social workers, nurses, counselors—need these supports more than ever.
- 2 Outreach by school-based wellness personnel can bring services more directly to teachers and their students.
- 3 Teachers who encounter student wellness support needs would benefit from referral resource lists with concise, accurate contact information and referral guidelines, whether for within-school or community-based services.
- 4 Provide professional development to support teachers' knowledge and understanding of student wellness concerns and effective responses to them.