

Teacher stress linked with higher risk of student suspensions, researcher finds

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Just how stressed are teachers? A recent Gallup poll found teachers are tied with nurses for the most stressful occupation in America today. Unfortunately, that stress can have a trickle-down effect on their

students, leading to disruptive behavior that results in student suspensions.

One of those overburdened teachers is Jennifer Lloyd, a [high school English teacher](#) in Maryland and a [graduate student](#) at the University of Missouri. She has noticed how perceptive her students are to her mood and their ability to feed off of her energy, for better or worse.

"If I come into class from a rough meeting or a stressful morning and I bring those feelings into the [classroom](#) environment, the kids notice," Lloyd said. "Sometimes they will give that negative energy right back to me, and we all end up having a bad day."

To examine the impact of teacher burnout on student behavior outcomes, Lloyd's sister, Colleen Eddy, a doctoral student in the MU College of Education, and her colleagues with the Missouri Prevention Science Institute, conducted teacher surveys and classroom observations in nine Missouri [elementary schools](#). They found when teachers are highly stressed and emotionally exhausted, students in their classrooms are at a higher risk of being suspended or disciplined by [school administrators](#).

"Removing students from the [classroom environment](#) as a form of punishment can be really harmful, as research has shown it not only reduces student achievement but also increases the risk of dropout," Eddy said. "If we want to make schools a positive place for [student learning](#), we first need to ensure it is a positive workplace for teachers. By giving teachers strategies to better manage disruptive student behavior, they will have more time for instruction and building those positive relationships with students."

Strategies for managing teacher stress include personal coping mechanisms, such as reflecting on things to be grateful for, as well as

collaborating with [school administrators](#) to identify ways to reduce some of the demands placed on overburdened and under supported teachers.

"Teachers have the potential to impact the lives of so many students in their classrooms," Eddy said. "Therefore, supporting them with the skills they need in classroom management and stress management is really important because it will have a positive impact on their students in the long run."

As the sister of a teacher, Eddy has seen firsthand the influence Lloyd can have on her students and their long-term life trajectories.

"The students have told me that it is so helpful to know they have someone who is in their corner and supporting them, and when students don't have that, we have seen higher absence rates and lower assignment completion," Lloyd said. "They don't want to be engaged if they feel like no one in the building cares about them, so if they do feel cared for and supported in the school environment, they are much more likely to remain in school and be a part of the learning experience."

Since nearly half of all new teachers leave the profession within their first five years, creating a support system to help manage teacher stress can reduce teacher burnout and improve [student](#) outcomes.

"Our research is focused on identifying what we can shift in students' environments to improve their learning and behavioral outcomes," Eddy said. "Teachers are so important and their influence on students is immense. They are superstars and deserve all the support we can give them."

More information: Colleen L. Eddy. Does Teacher Emotional Exhaustion and Efficacy Predict Student Discipline Sanctions? *School Psychology Review*.

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