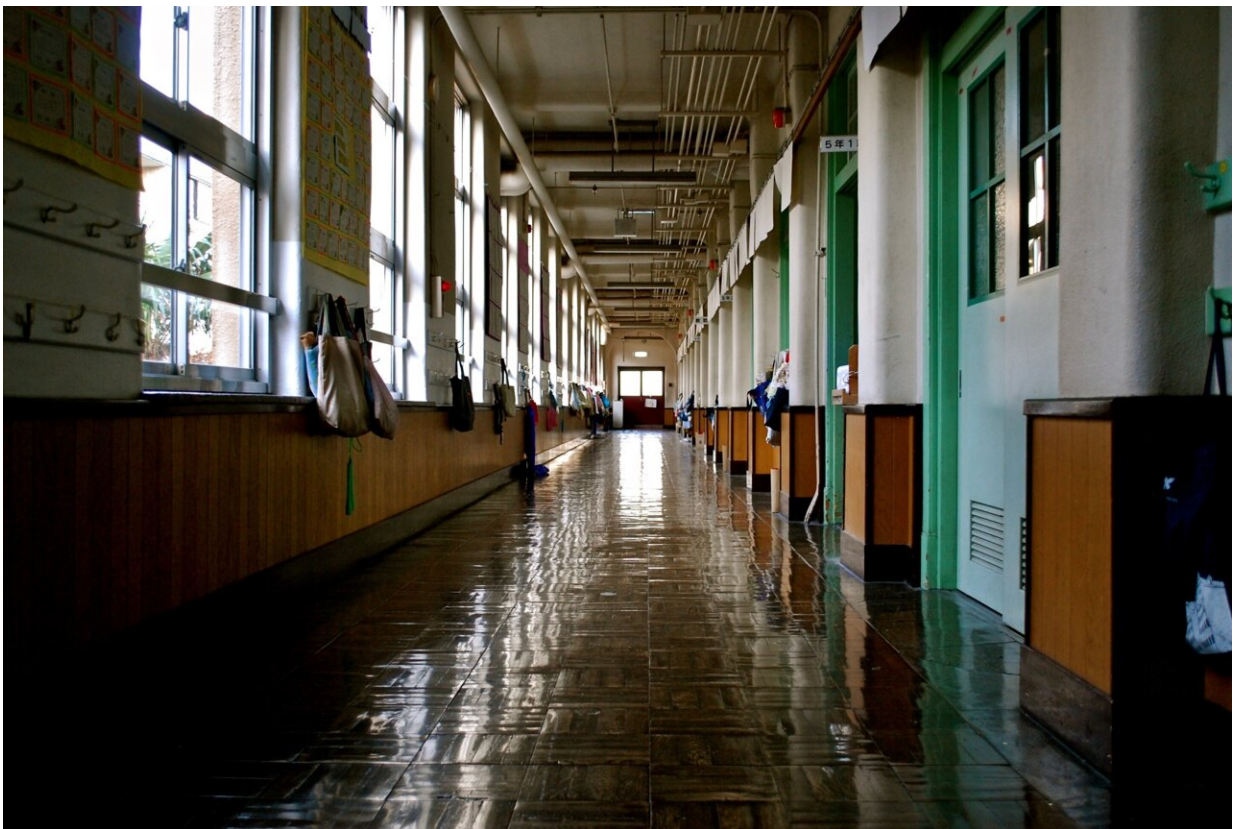


Teachers, other school personnel, experience violence, threats, harassment during pandemic

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While much of the focus on education during the pandemic has involved the effects on children in schools, it is also having a negative impact on

teachers, administrators, social workers, psychologists and school staff. Approximately one-third of teachers report that they experienced at least one incident of verbal harassment or threat of violence from students during the pandemic, and almost 50% expressed a plan or desire to quit or transfer jobs, according to [a survey](#) conducted by a task force of the American Psychological Association.

"As teachers and schools learn to adjust to the realities of education during COVID, it is important to understand [school](#) safety concerns and how best to address them to create an effective and safe environment for students, teachers and school staff," said Susan Dvorak McMahan, Ph.D., of DePaul University, chair of the APA Task Force on Violence Against Educators and School Personnel, which conducted the survey in collaboration with national education and related organizations.

The task force surveyed 14,966 participants—9,370 teachers, 860 administrators, 1,499 school psychologists and social workers, and 3,237 other pre-K through 12th grade school staff members (e.g., paraprofessionals, instructional aides, school resource officers, school counselors) – from all 50 U.S. states and Puerto Rico. As described in [a technical report](#) that elaborates on the survey, the largest portion of the participants came from the Southern U.S. (38.17%), while the Northeast accounted for the fewest participants (13.12%). More than 94% of participants were from public schools. The racial/ethnic distribution of the entire sample was similar to the racial/ethnic distribution of teachers in the United States. Data was collected from July 2020 to June 2021, while many schools were operating in online or hybrid modes due to the pandemic.

Participants were asked about their experience with threats of [violence](#) (including verbal harassment, threats or cyberbullying) from students, parents/guardians, colleagues and administrators, as well as physical violence from students. They were also asked about their desire or

intention to quit, retire early or transfer to another position in the school or school district. The survey also included a series of open-ended, qualitative questions asking participants to share details of their experiences, expand on their concerns and offer recommendations for solutions.

One out of every three teachers (33%) reported at least one incident of verbal harassment or threatening behavior from a student, and 29% reported at least one incident from a parent of a student. The numbers were even higher for school administrators: Approximately 37% reported at least one incident of harassment or threat of violence from a student and 42% reported the same from a parent.

Approximately 14% of teachers reported incidents of physical violence from a student. And it wasn't just teachers. At least 18% of school psychologists and social workers, 15% of school administrators and 22% of other school staff reported at least one violent incident by a [student](#) during the pandemic.

"I have been physically assaulted multiple times by students in the building and they know that not only is there no one to stop them, but there will be no consequences either," said one [teacher](#) who responded to an open-ended question on school safety concerns. "I ended up in the hospital the last time it happened."

The toll of all the harassment and violence against teachers and school staff is formidable, according to McMahon. The survey found nearly half (49%) of teachers expressed a desire or plan to quit or transfer to another school. More teachers reported a desire to quit (43%) than to transfer (26%). Although not as high as among teachers, a large percentage of school psychologists and school [social workers](#) (34%), school administrators (31%) and other [school staff](#) (29%) also reported a desire or plan to quit or transfer.

"Violence against educators is a public health problem, and we need comprehensive, research-based solutions," said McMahon. "Current and future decisions to leave the field of education affect the quality of our schools and the next generations of learners, teachers and school leaders in the nation. Physical and verbal violence directed against school personnel may be exacerbating reports of high stress, transfers and leaving the profession."

In response to the survey findings, the task force offered recommendations to address violence against school personnel, including:

- Supporting the mental health of school personnel as well as students and promoting trauma-informed practices.
- Enhancing school organizational functioning by including educators' voices in decision-making.
- Increasing school capacity by meeting the professional development needs of educators and school personnel and addressing the socio-emotional and mental health needs of students.
- Providing research-based systemic training to prevent school violence and reducing the use of zero tolerance policies in response to troubling behavior, a practice that has not been found to reduce infractions.
- Improving preparation programs for educators by providing more training to help better understand and address the social-emotional needs not only of students but of themselves and other educators.

The task force also identified [a series of actions](#) that could be taken by Congress, including enacting bills being considered and funding priorities that could help address the issues identified by the survey.

Members of the APA task force that conducted the study were: Susan D. McMahon (DePaul University), Eric M. Anderman (The Ohio State University), Ron Avi Astor (University of California, Los Angeles), Dorothy L. Espelage (University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill), Andrew Martinez (Center for Court Innovation), Linda A. Reddy (Rutgers University), and Frank C. Worrell (University of California, Berkeley).

The APA task force planned to present these findings at a congressional briefing March 17, joined by national co-sponsoring organizations that included the National Education Association, American Federation of Teachers, National Association of School Psychologists, National Association of School Social Workers and School Social Work Association of America.

Provided by American Psychological Association

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