

# Research finds educators need mental health support following hurricanes

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After Hurricanes Harvey and Matthew hit Texas and North Carolina, it was the custodians who removed debris and damaged supplies from the athletic fields. It was the principals who stayed in the building for 24

hours while their schools operated as shelters. It was the teachers who ran to the local pharmacy to retrieve students' lifesaving medicine while communication was limited.

When hurricanes strike, educators turn into first responders for their communities and students—but they aren't always provided with the support they themselves need to help themselves recover and avoid burnout.

Researchers at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and Texas State University recently spent eight months interviewing educators in 20 school districts across Texas and North Carolina following hurricanes.

"We found that they felt burned out and unsupported after the hurricanes that affected their communities," says Cassandra R. Davis, an Assistant Professor in the Department of Public Policy at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a Faculty Fellow at the Carolina Population Center. "We wanted to learn what could have helped them recover—both inside and outside of the classroom."

Davis and colleagues, whose research appears in *Educational Policy*, found that most schools were unprepared to address the [mental health](#) of educators after disasters to assist with recovery.

They recommend that [school districts](#) create specific emergency plans to prepare for future disasters—and that the [emergency plan](#) should focus on mental health, especially for educators.

"An emergency plan should include what to do before, during, and after a natural disaster—and how to address the mental health needs of both students and [teachers](#)," says Davis. "We also heard that teachers want to receive professional development training on how to adjust lessons to make up for lost time, and for how to better support their students after

a disaster hits."

Having a plan in place for disasters like hurricanes, earthquakes, tornados and [winter storms](#) can help ease the burden on teachers, and help schools return to normal more quickly—while also helping educators and students process the disaster and its aftermath.

**More information:** Sarah R. Cannon et al, Using an Emergency Plan to Combat Teacher Burnout Following a Natural Hazard, *Educational Policy* (2022). [DOI: 10.1177/08959048221120273](https://doi.org/10.1177/08959048221120273)

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