



EDUCATION INSIGHT

How to Support Teachers Now

Three Ways to Reduce Teacher
Burnout and Promote Success

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Introduction

Teaching has always been a challenging job—never more so than now. The disruptions to learning caused by the pandemic have increased inequities and opportunity gaps producing academic and developmental challenges for students and their teachers.

Many teachers and school support staff are feeling overworked and under-supported and are leaving the profession. The resulting labor shortages in schools are causing further burnout for the educators who remain, creating a vicious cycle that threatens the quality of education students receive.

Amid these challenges, K–12 administrators are tasked with leading recovery efforts and accelerating student achievement. Success is only possible if K–12 leaders can identify concrete and immediate strategies for supporting faculty and staff to reduce attrition and help them be most effective. What got us to this point is not going to get us to the next point. Instead, K–12 leaders need to innovate.

This Education Insight explores the key challenges facing K–12 educators today. It offers three practical ways administrators can support teachers now and into the future to lead recovery efforts, reduce staff attrition, and get students reading on grade level.



A Period of Unprecedented Challenges

K–12 leaders know all too clearly the challenges they’re facing. The results from the 2022 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) show that a third of students in grades four and eight can’t read at even a “basic” level¹, which reveals just how much work schools must do to make up for lost instructional time during the last few years.

Meanwhile, teachers are facing serious burnout. A Gallup poll from February 2022 suggests the burnout rates among K–12 employees are greater than those for even healthcare and law enforcement workers, with 44% of educators saying they’re “always” or “very often” stressed out at work. That’s a full 14 percentage points higher than the average burnout rate among all other full-time U.S. workers right now.²

The burnout teachers and instructional staff are experiencing is causing many to leave the profession. Citing figures from the U.S. Bureau

of Labor Statistics, the National Education Association says U.S. public schools lost 600,000 teachers from January 2020 to February 2022.³ In a June 2022 survey, 53% of K–12 leaders described the staffing shortages in their school system as at least a “major” problem—and 14% called it a “crisis.” Nearly half said student learning is suffering as a result.⁴

Leading schools during these challenging times requires K–12 administrators to understand the reasons why so many teachers are burning out and leaving the profession. With this knowledge, leaders can take steps to reduce teacher attrition, help educators become more effective, and close achievement gaps that have only widened during the pandemic.

There are many factors contributing to teacher burnout, but the Gallup poll identified a few in particular. They include:

1 Unreasonable expectations and time pressures

Even before the pandemic, teachers were juggling many tasks—from managing classrooms and planning lessons to communicating with parents and personalizing instruction for every child.

Teachers have now learned new technologies and modes of instruction. They’ve had to work long hours to overcome students’ learning loss. They’ve had to incorporate trauma-sensitive teaching practices in response to rising levels of anxiety and depression among students. Teachers need time-saving tools and strategies to help them accomplish these tasks in the limited number of hours they have available.

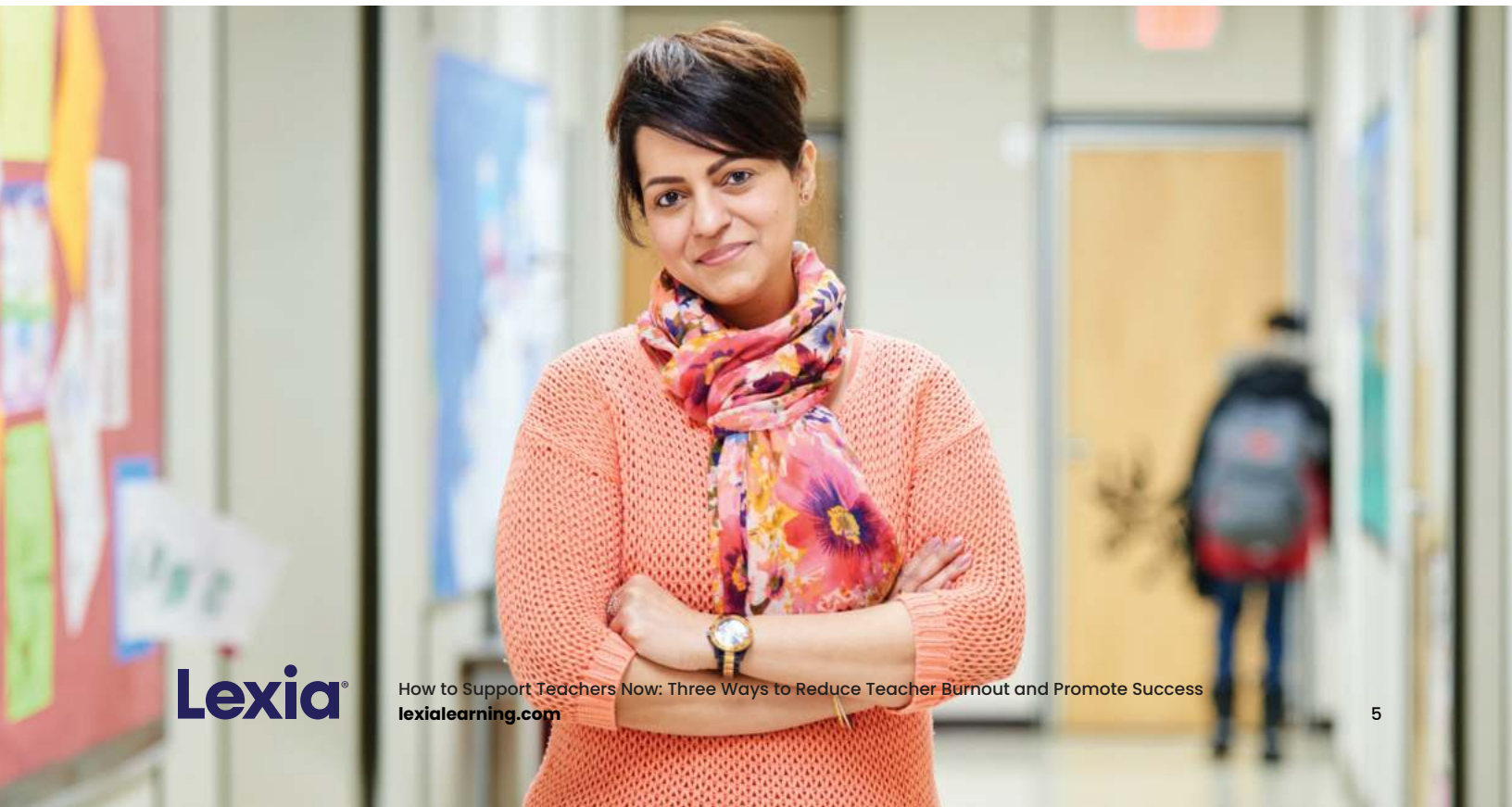
2 **Unmanageable workloads**

The staffing shortages many school systems are experiencing have placed an additional burden on educators in all roles. To cover for missing colleagues, teachers and support staff are taking on even more responsibilities. K–12 leaders need to find creative solutions that don't require educators to take on unmanageable workloads.

3 **A lack of support from administrators**

In many school systems, teachers lack the tools required for success. They need resources they can use in their classrooms immediately to support their students. These include evidence-based instructional materials that have been proven effective and the professional learning needed to implement them well. Many schools and districts provide ample professional development opportunities, but these experiences often miss the mark in terms of immediacy and relevance.

Teachers are also feeling isolated. Without adequate, ample, and aligned support from school and district administrators, teachers feel alone in serving students, parents, families, and communities—many of whom are also under duress. This complex and challenging community engagement dynamic is also contributing to the burnout teachers are experiencing.



Three Ways to Support Teachers Right Now

Reducing teacher burnout, limiting staff attrition, and creating an environment where educators can do their jobs effectively requires much more than just quick-fix solutions. These are complex, multifaceted challenges that demand a holistic approach for resolution. For instance, policy makers and K-12 leaders ultimately will need to make widespread changes that improve teachers' working conditions, resulting in higher pay, more respect, and a greater focus on employee well-being.

However, school systems also need immediate solutions to ensure students are getting a high-quality education. Here are three things K-12 administrators can do right now to support teachers and empower them to succeed.

Provide flexible classroom resources

Teachers need high-quality instructional materials with evidence of efficacy that students can use both in the classroom and at home to accelerate learning and close achievement gaps.

The right instructional program can help teachers become more effective with their limited time, while ensuring all students are making progress toward grade-level learning—including those who have difficulty reading. Here are three key features of one such program based on the science of reading.

Feature	Reason for importance
It must be flexible enough to use in a face-to-face, online, or hybrid learning environment.	<p>The pandemic revealed that school systems must be prepared for any contingency, and students might not always be able to attend school in person.</p> <p>A flexible solution students and teachers can use in any type of learning environment or modality ensures high-quality learning can occur anywhere, regardless of the circumstances.</p>
It must be evidence-based and grounded in the science of reading to ensure students are learning according to proven methods.	Research shows that 95% of all students have the cognitive capacity to master the building blocks of literacy when they're engaged in high-quality instruction based on the science of reading.
It must combine instruction and assessment in an Assessment Without Testing® model.	Teachers have too many demands on their already limited time. With a learning solution that seamlessly embeds assessment within instruction, teachers can collect actionable data to improve student achievement in a way that doesn't take away from valuable instructional time.

Provide targeted professional learning

To move the needle on student achievement, teachers need proven instructional materials that are actionable and convenient. They also need high-quality professional development to make them more effective educators—complete with practical strategies they can apply with

their students immediately to improve teaching and learning.

Here are three key elements of a professional learning program that can help teachers close achievement gaps and excel at their profession.

Feature	Reason for importance
It must be flexible, adaptable, and personalized to each teacher's needs, rather than one-size-fits-all instruction.	<p>Just as we expect teachers to differentiate their instruction to meet students' unique needs, the professional development teachers receive should be specific to their individual learning goals.</p> <p>Professional learning should be based on a teacher's daily practice. It should be directly relevant to the skills and grade levels they teach. Teachers should be able to learn new skills and pedagogies with lessons that appropriately match their own comfort levels and prior knowledge.</p>
It must be easy for teachers to experience with bite-sized opportunities for learning that teachers can access at their convenience.	<p>Teachers are already overburdened. Professional learning shouldn't feel like another responsibility piled on their plates.</p> <p>Teachers should be able to participate in professional learning opportunities when it's most convenient for them to do so, such as during a free period or at night. Online options allow teachers to fit professional learning into their busy schedules, while also supporting "just-in-time" learning when the need to acquire a new skill arises.</p>
It must include supporting resources to help teachers apply what they've learned to advance student achievement.	<p>Participating in a workshop or training session isn't enough to make the learning "stick." To transform their practice, teachers also need ongoing support.</p> <p>Successful professional learning ensures teachers have follow-up tools to support them as they're trying new techniques for themselves. These tools might include coaching, lesson plans, instructional strategies, and a network of fellow teachers who are willing to share ideas.</p>

Advocate for teachers and provide a culture of support

Teachers often feel isolated and alone in their classrooms. Too often, they don't feel like they're part of a team, and they don't always feel their contributions are valued by administrators or community members. Teachers have also heard a lot of criticism from parents and other stakeholders during the last few years about instructional decisions parents might not fully

understand. They don't always feel supported by school or district administrators in these interactions.⁵

Here are three things K–12 leaders can do immediately to change these perceptions and show teachers how much they're valued.

Strategy	Reason for importance
Listen to teachers and include them in decision-making.	Teachers are on the front lines in education, and they're in the best position to know what their students need. Yet, teachers often don't feel like they play an integral role in the decision-making process at their school or district. Soliciting teachers' feedback and giving them a voice in key decisions helps them feel respected, improves staff morale, and ensures schools are serving students' needs more effectively.
Stand up for teachers.	Teachers need to know administrators have their backs. K–12 leaders can send this message loudly and clearly by identifying gaps in instructional resources and working to fill them, so teachers have all the tools they need for success. In addition, leaders must defend their staff when teachers feel like they're under attack from external stakeholders. There is a lot of misinformation about the best way to teach literacy skills, and teachers are often caught in the middle of instructional debates.
Provide instructional software and other technologies for communicating effectively with parents.	One reason educators are feeling under siege is because many parents don't understand the science behind how their children are learning to read. Having tools that simplify communication can help teachers keep parents informed, correct misunderstandings, and engage parents in becoming more effective partners in their children's' education.

Time to Innovate

Unparalleled challenges call for resourceful approaches to school and district leadership. As K-12 administrators look to lead their schools into the future, they need a combination of immediate and long-term strategies to support teachers and accelerate learning.

Creating a culture where students and staff flourish should be the goal of every school and district leader over the long term. Leaders can show educators how highly valued they are by ensuring they have the right instructional resources, professional learning, and institutional support to be as effective as possible. This will go a long way toward retaining teachers and boosting student achievement.

How Lexia® Can Help

Lexia's instructional technology and professional learning solutions support teachers in improving students' literacy skills and closing achievement gaps in ways that make life easier for teachers and make them more effective.



Notes

¹ Sparks, Sarah D. (2022). "Two Decades of Progress, Nearly Gone: National Math, Reading Scores Hit Historic Lows." Education Week. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/two-decades-of-progress-nearly-gone-national-math-reading-scores-hit-historic-lows/2022/10>

² Carstarphen, Meria (2022). "Putting Out Teacher Burnout." Gallup blog. <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/gallup/400670/putting-teacher-burnout.aspx>

³ Walker, Tim (2022). "Survey: Alarming Number of Educators May Soon Leave the Profession." National Education Association. <https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/survey-alarming-number-educators-may-soon-leave-profession>

⁴ Lieberman, Mark (2022). "How School Staffing Shortages Are Hurting Students." Education Week. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/whos-at-risk-when-schools-staffing-shortages-persist/2022/06>

⁵ Noonoo, Stephen (2022). "The Mental Health Crisis Causing Teachers to Quit." EdSurge. <https://www.edsurge.com/news/2022-05-02-the-mental-health-crisis-causing-teachers-to-quit>



Lexia, a Cambium Learning® Group company, is the Structured Literacy expert. For more than 30 years, the company has focused solely on literacy, and today provides a full spectrum of solutions for both students and teachers. With robust offerings for differentiated instruction, personalized learning, assessment, and professional learning, Lexia helps more learners read, write, and speak with confidence.

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