



Reduce harmful work stressors.
Improve job quality and health.

Healthy Work Strategies

Workplace Policies and Programs to Reduce Job Stress Among K-12 Education Staff (U.S.)

Teachers and other education staff in elementary and high schools face various sources of stress at work, including high workload demands, students with problem behaviors, limited decision-making authority, inflexible schedules, conflicting demands from peers, supervisors, students or students' parents, inadequate opportunities for skills development and workplace violence, especially in special education. Many of these stressors appear to be increasing.

However, there has not been a lot of research on policies and programs to reduce sources of stress at work among educators. The research that exists is mostly on stress management programs (designed to help people better cope with stress) rather than on policies and programs designed to improve working conditions.

Mentoring Programs

The most widely studied type of workplace programs for K-12 staff were support, guidance and orientation programs for new teachers, called “mentoring” or “induction” programs. While one review of such programs found inconclusive results, another review found that, in most cases, new teachers who participated in induction programs were more likely to stay in teaching, and to develop job skills related to teaching.

Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) Programs

A somewhat expanded version of mentoring called Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) is currently used in at least 41 school districts in 13 U.S. states. PAR is designed to support and evaluate both new and struggling experienced teachers. Skilled consulting teachers released from some classroom teaching serve as mentors. A panel of teachers and administrators recommend personnel decisions based on evidence from evaluations, with due process. In one study, about 2/3 of veteran teachers identified for the program improved their teaching skills substantially and successfully completed the program; about 1/3 resigned or were dismissed. In another study of seven school districts that used

PAR, about 90% of first-year teachers came back for their second year, a much higher % than the national average for urban districts. PAR appeared to encourage a culture of working together, and focused teachers' attention on teaching methods and teaching standards. (See <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/~ngt/par/>.)

Other programs

Other programs include Teacher Assistance Teams (TATs), which provide problem-solving assistance to general education teachers for students who are difficult to teach or manage, and teacher training programs on classroom behavior management strategies. However, few studies exist about the effectiveness of these strategies, and those studies tended to be small in size, thus, it is difficult to draw conclusions about their effectiveness.

Workplace violence prevention in Oregon schools

The Oregon School Employees Association (OSEA) has promoted a variety of legislative, collective bargaining, research and public awareness efforts to deal with assaults against school staff, which occur mainly in special education. For example, the OSEA helped pass legislation in 2013 requiring school districts to create a process for reporting injuries. They argued that many employees were discouraged from filing incident reports documenting physical or verbal attacks, being told that it was just "part of the job". The experience of educators in Oregon suggests that to promote decent conditions for children with disabilities, and for their educators, adequate resources are needed for staffing, training, protective equipment, injury/assault reporting and investigation. (See <https://www.osea.org/work-shouldnt-hurt/>.)

Collective bargaining to reduce sources of job stress in K-12 education

Language from collective bargaining agreements in education, provided by the American Federation of Teachers, includes language on new teacher support and mentoring, PAR for new or experienced teachers, assistance for struggling teachers, team teaching, Professional Learning Communities (a broader model of team teaching), empowerment/participation/School-Based Management, prevention of employee harassment or bullying, commitment to a respectful climate and culture, prevention of workplace violence, management of disruptive students/school discipline, and Employee Assistance Programs. For detailed contract language, see [this resource](#). Also, see details about specific efforts to improve working conditions and reduce job stress in [Cincinnati](#), [New York State](#), and [Rochester, NY](#) (featured [here](#)).

Legislation to reduce sources of job stress in K-12 education

All states have [laws to prevent bullying of children in schools](#). However, only [Kansas](#) and [Florida](#) also include protections against bullying of school staff. In 1999, the California

State Legislature authorized a statewide grant program for PAR programs. State legislatures also remain the center of current debates over school budgets, teacher staffing and tenure. Many of the programs and policies described here require time, support, staffing and resources. Thus, their effectiveness will depend, in part, on adequate school funding.

Conclusions

A variety of school policies and programs exist which have the potential to reduce job stress and improve the health of K-12 education staff. Mentoring and induction programs and Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) programs appear to increase workplace social support, job skills, decision-making authority, and, perhaps, job security for teachers, and thus may be able to reduce their job stress and improve their health. Collective bargaining is a form of job control that employees exercise as a group, rather than individually. The Oregon experience suggests that efforts to reduce workplace violence in education require adequate resources for staffing, training, equipment, reporting and investigation. Many collective bargaining agreements and laws need to be further studied for their effects on educator working conditions and on their health and safety.

For further details about such programs and policies, see:

1. Landsbergis P, Zoeckler J, Kashem Z, Rivera B, Alexander D, Bahruth A. Organizational policies and programs to reduce job stress and risk of workplace violence among K-12 education staff. *New Solutions* 2018;27(4):559-580, <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29125021>.
2. Landsbergis P, Zoeckler J, Rivera B, Alexander D, Bahruth A, Hord W. Organizational Interventions to Reduce Sources of K-12 Teachers' Occupational Stress (pp. 369-410). In McIntyre TM, McIntyre SE, Francis DJ. *Stress in educators: An occupational health perspective*. Springer, 2017.

Also, see this excellent series of reports by the Economic Policy Institute on the crisis facing education and solutions:

- Report 1: [The teacher shortage is real, large and growing, and worse than we thought](#)
- Report 2: [U.S. schools struggle to hire and retain teachers](#)
- Report 3: [Low relative pay and high incidence of moonlighting play a role in the teacher shortage, particularly in high-poverty schools](#)
- Report 4: [Challenging working environments \('school climates'\), especially in high-poverty schools, play a role in the teacher shortage](#)
- Report 5: [The role of early career supports, continuous professional development, and learning communities in the teacher shortage](#)