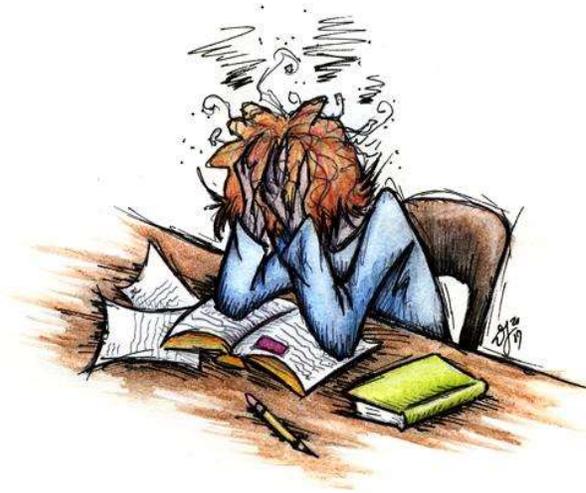


Teachers & Stress: Examining Recent Research

By *Debbie Diaz, LTA President*



LTA WEBSITE

The LTA website contains up-to-date information about events (both past and forthcoming), election results, Bargaining updates, bylaws, photos, and much more!

There is also a list of each site's Faculty Representative(s), the members of the Executive Board, and a listing of current LTA committees and what each one does. If you are interested in joining one of these committees, please email Debbie Diaz at Debbie@lynwoodta.org.

The LTA website can be viewed by going to www.lynwoodta.org. You can also view many of the photos taken at LTA events by going to facebook.com/LynwoodTeachers

Don't Forget! The LTA Office has a new phone number!

310-933-8577

students, parents, or a combination of these – at rates far higher than reported for other professions. The survey revealed that teachers' frustration stems from the feeling that they have little influence over various job factors, including:

- academic standards
- professional development
- school budgets and spending
- curriculum
- discipline policies

The 2017 AFT survey also found that educators are much more likely to be bullied, harassed, and threatened at work than other workers. 50% of teachers identified a student as the bully; 35% identified a principal, administrator, or supervisor; 31% identified a parent; and 23% identified a co-worker. Respect for educators appears to be a relic of the past.

School discipline is a growing stress factor for teachers as districts attempt to lower student suspension rates by implementing peer mediation and restorative justice programs. Many teachers feel they can't control their classrooms under the new discipline guidelines and complain that consequences for misbehavior are minor or even nonexistent. In an attempt to address stringent and unfair discipline policies, districts have allowed the pendulum to swing too far back, so that it appears there aren't consequences for inappropriate student behavior in the classroom or on campus. In turn, well-behaved students are cheated out of an optimal learning environment.

The beginning of each new school year brings additional stress due to a growing layer of professional responsibilities. This is referred to as "intensification" by author Doris Santoro in [Demoralized: Why Teachers Leave the Profession](#).

- You receive an email from your Principal to please meet in her office at the end of the school day to discuss a parent concern. She advises you to bring your union rep.
- You leave your classroom at 5 p.m. with a stack of 180 uncorrected written essays – and you know you won't have the time or energy to look at them after going to the grocery store and then making dinner.
- You know exactly how the Maywood Academy teacher in the YouTube video felt and you understand why he went off because you've been in similar situations many times before.

Sound familiar?

There is no doubt that public school teachers are stressed out at work. A 2017 survey of 5,000 teachers by the American Federation of Teachers revealed that 61% of American teachers feel stress at work. 58% of the survey respondents described their mental health as "not good" for at least seven of the previous 30 days before taking the survey – and over half of the teachers surveyed reported they didn't feel the same enthusiasm they had when they first started teaching. Additionally, teachers reported experiencing poor health, sleep deprivation, and being bullied at work—by administrators, colleagues,

GAUGING STRESS &
TENSION LEVELS

Respond to each statement below, using a number between 1 (seldom) – 4 (often).

1. I feel tense, anxious, or irritable.
2. People at work/home arouse my tension.
3. I have tension/migrane headaches, pain in the neck/shoulders, or insomnia.
4. I eat/drink/smoke in response to tension.
5. I feel depressed/frustrated at work or home.
6. I can't turn off my thoughts at night/on weekends long enough to feel relaxed/refreshed during the day.
7. I take tranquilizers to relax.
8. I have a difficult time finding time to relax.
9. Once I find time, it's hard to relax.
10. My workday is made up of many deadlines.
11. I find it difficult to concentrate on what I'm doing because I worry about other things.
12. In conversation, I find myself interrupting or finishing what the other person is about to say.
13. Annoyances tend to build up during the day and become noticeable.
14. I find it difficult to sleep.
15. I clench my hands during ordinary conversation.

Text adapted, in part, from Thorenson's Simplified Self-Scoring Test for Gauging Stress and Tension Levels, (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University).

“Public school teachers are expected to do more with less; they are experiencing intensification.” -Santoro

Santoro also looks at the increasing responsibilities teachers have. “Public school teachers are expected to do more with less; they are experiencing intensification. This intensification refers to the professional demands that are added to the teachers' workload without increased work time allotted and without a reduction in previous duties – and usually without an increase in pay.” Santoro adds that these new duties may include “collecting and analyzing data, recordkeeping of special education referrals, explicit test preparation, and adoption of new curriculum standards – at most districts, these new duties do not include additional planning time.”

Financial stress also takes its toll on teachers. According to the September 13, 2018 *Time* magazine article entitled “Exactly How Teachers Came to be So Underpaid in America”:

- “The pay gap between teachers and comparably educated professionals is now the largest on record. In 1994, public school teachers in the U.S. earned 1.8% less per week than comparable workers, according to the Economic Policy Institute (EPI). By last year, they made 18.7% less.”
- “Many states are still spending less per student in 2015, leaving many public schools dilapidated, overcrowded and reliant on outdated textbooks and threadbare supplies.”
- “The bipartisan war on public education, the increase of charter schools and the attack on teachers pensions and collective bargaining rights PLUS the arrival of SBAC, Common Core, changes in evaluation procedures, all contribute to stress in the teaching profession.”

Whose fault is it?

In “New Data Shows School ‘Reformers’ are Getting it Wrong”, David Sirota claims that the educational reform movement (education and technology corporations, bankrolled politicians and activist-profiters) collectively believes that America should expect public schools to produce world-class academic achievement regardless of the negative forces bearing down on a school's students. The reform belief pretends that a lack of teacher accountability is the major education problem and that family economics play no part in this. Sirota cites a new U.S. Department of Education study that says, “about one in five public schools was considered high poverty in 2011.” Are we expected to believe that everything other than poverty is what's causing problems in failing public schools? The study claims that the crisis in education has far less to do with bad teachers than it does with the taboo subject of crushing poverty. A 2011 study by Stanford's Sean Rerdon shows that “family income is now, by far, the biggest determining and predictive factor in a student's educational achievement.”

So, what does this mean for Lynwood teachers?

Every stress factor mentioned in this review of articles affects teachers in Lynwood, but what can teachers do about this?

Next month's newsletter will address ways we can support our students and teachers in and out of the classroom and create a less stressful environment for both. I [Debbie] will be looking at research-based solutions, but I am open to any serious suggestions. Please direct all suggestions to: debbie@lynwoodta.org