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School Leadership Assessment of Teachers' Work-Life Balance: Perceptions and Professional Learning Needs During a Global Health Pandemic

Juliann Sergi McBrayer
Georgia Southern University, jmcbrayer@georgiasouthern.edu

Summer Pannell
Stephen F. Austin State University, summer.pannell@sfasu.edu

Alissa Sasser
Georgia Southern University, alissahsasser@gmail.com

Katherine Fallon
Georgia Southern University, kf10548@georgiasouthern.edu

Katarina Evans
Georgia Southern University, Ke06973@georgiasouthern.edu
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School Leadership Assessment of Teachers' Work-Life Balance: Perceptions and Professional Learning Needs During a Global Health Pandemic

Introduction

In early 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) identified a virus rapidly spreading worldwide, COVID-19. The WHO and the Center for Disease Control (CDC) strongly advised schools to reduce the spread of COVID-19 by shifting from the traditional face-to-face model to a virtual setting (Frosyl & Roldan, 2020). Not only did students face completing their school year in a virtual setting, but teachers also had to move from face-to-face curriculum and instruction within a brick-and-mortar school to teaching remotely with minimal preparation (Daniel, 2020). Since March of 2020, teachers faced unprecedented challenges, as they found themselves teaching remotely, in socially distanced classrooms, or in a hybrid model with a combination of both face-to-face and virtual teaching and learning. All of these settings experienced extreme cases of absenteeism, leaving many students not participating in learning. With this teaching shift, there are added stress levels and increased anxieties hindering teachers' well-being (Pressley, 2021). Amid the pandemic, teachers reported that they were more likely to feel stressed and burned out, and 84% of those teachers shared that teaching during the pandemic was more stressful than in prior years (Gewertz, 2021). As the pandemic continues, it is evident that this "new normal" will be around for an unknown and prolonged period before returning to what we were doing before the health crisis with traditional, face-to-face instruction (Banack et al., 2021).

As a research team, we aimed to examine the well-being of teachers and desired to make certain teachers were taking care of themselves and being supported by their districts and school leaders in a time of chaos. Thus, this study utilized a survey to better understand how the current global health pandemic, COVID-19 is impacting teachers' work-life balance. Our goal is to provide strategies for maintaining healthy boundaries for daily self-care by conducting research to better understand teachers' needs during this shift to teaching in a global health pandemic. Educators in the field share the pitfalls placed on teachers including being overwhelmed, admitting personal neglect, facing unexpected challenges, and feeling of isolated (Leech et al., 2022). Thus, our research questions are the following: To what degree are teachers experiencing a balance

between work-life (time at work and time spent on work at home) and keeping boundaries to maintain their well-being? and What do teachers need in terms of professional learning to better attain a work-life balance to maintain their daily workload and prioritize their well-being?

Review of the Literature

Teacher Attrition in a Health Pandemic

Recent research estimates that almost half of new teachers leave the profession within five years (Sims & Jerrim, 2020). Replacing teachers not only has substantial financial ramifications (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2020), but also has a detrimental impact on students' academic progress (Sorensen & Ladd, 2020). Compounding this already high attrition, teachers' intentions to leave the teaching profession have drastically increased since the global health pandemic, with a 9% increase indicating a desire to leave by the summer of 2021, a 13% increase by the summer of 2022, and a 16% increase by the summer of 2025 (Fullard, 2021). Teaching is a strenuous career within the best of circumstances, so it is not surprising that one in five teachers reported that in the fall following the pandemic they were likely to not return to in-person teaching and were more likely to quit at the end of the school year than they were before the pandemic (Will et al., 2020). One-quarter of teachers reported that they were likely to leave their profession when they completed the 2020-2021 academic year (Gewertz, 2021). If this number of teachers who claimed to quit actually left, it would be more than triple the normal rate of attrition in this chaos (Gewertz, 2021). Additionally, organizational conditions such as the overall quality of a school's leadership and the sense of community coupled with feeling accepted can drastically influence how a teacher interacts with the changes and events occurring. Examining these external factors concerning teachers' well-being can be important when understanding the attrition rate among teachers to keep them in classrooms (Herman et al., 2021).

Work-Life Balance During a Global Health Pandemic

Work-life balance refers to one's involvement and engagement in work and non-work life presented with minimal conflict between the two roles (Sirgy & Lee., 2018). A good work-life balance leads to high

organizational performance, increased job satisfaction, and stronger organizational commitment (Allen et al., 2000). It also plays an important role in individuals' health, family, and overall satisfaction (Keyes, 2002).

A recent study conducted during the pandemic found that teachers were more likely to report feeling stressed and burned out compared to other state and local government-sector employees noting that 84% of them are experiencing more stress now than before the pandemic (Gewertz, 2021). Teachers are finding it difficult to navigate what a healthy work-life balance is with the additional challenges they are facing. These challenges include lower student attendance, lower engagement in online classes, and having to help students access technology without proper technology training. Furthermore, following the pandemic's start, teachers are having to put more hours into work, and, before the pandemic, teachers were already overworked (Herman et al., 2021).

A major concern teachers are encountering is the lack of training that is provided but needed for distance education. There are skills and knowledge necessary for teachers to develop so that they can adequately teach through virtual learning environments. Learning these additional skills can be a time-consuming process and add to the stress teachers face. Although teachers have faced difficulties during the pandemic, there have been some advantages for them when it comes to engaging in virtual learning. These advantages include a decrease in stress and costs associated with commuting to work and having the opportunity to manage their time more efficiently. It may be difficult for teachers to find the balance between their work and personal lives, but working remotely can offer them a chance to better cope with anxiety, spend time with their families, and possibly pursue new hobbies (Jakubowski & Sitko-Dominik, 2021).

Ever since the pandemic, professionals, especially teachers, have realized the necessity of reinventing their work routines. This is mainly due to the shift to accommodate teleworking. One study found that 79% of teachers reported working more hours during the pandemic than before the pandemic (Lizana & Vega-Fernandez, 2021). Furthermore, teachers are still under the same contract as before the pandemic but are now putting in extra work hours, negatively impacting teachers' mental health. Thus, the need for a healthier work-life balance is more essential now than ever before for teachers.

Stress and Burnout

Teachers are essential workers for the education system, and teaching is a highly stressful profession by nature; add on a health pandemic, and this stress gets further compounded (Herman et al., 2021). Moreover, teacher stress often is coupled with poor coping skills, which can result in negative outcomes for teachers' physical and psychological well-being, resulting in lower job satisfaction levels. In addition, workplace self-efficacy, emotional intelligence, and social support are related to professional burnout and stress (Jakubowski & Sitko-Dominik, 2021). Importantly, this happens more frequently among women and teachers working in low-income schools (Jakubowski & Sitko-Dominik, 2021). Additionally, support is needed by school leaders and their families to positively impact their professional job satisfaction, increase life satisfaction, and provide a better work-life balance for teachers. Stress negatively impacts teachers' personal lives, causing a decrease in life satisfaction along with their professional careers, which can result in reduced work commitment and work satisfaction, negatively affecting students' achievement. Additionally, stress results in exhaustion and professional burnout, negatively impacting teachers' health by increasing the risk of psychological and behavioral disorders (Jakubowski & Sitko-Dominik, 2021).

Professional Learning in a Health Pandemic

Darling-Hammond et al. (2017) provide definitions differentiating between professional development and professional learning by emphasizing professional development as “structured professional learning that results in changes to teacher knowledge and practices, and improvements in student learning outcomes” and professional learning as “a product of both externally provided and job-embedded activities that increase teachers' knowledge and help them change their instructional practice in ways that support student learning” (p. 2). Furthermore, the researchers identified key components of effective purposeful, collaborative, and sustainable professional learning to include staying content-focused, incorporating active learning, supporting collaboration, utilizing models of effective practice, providing coaching and expert support, offering feedback and reflection, and engaging for a sustained duration (McBrayer et al., 2018).

The pivot for teachers to connect curriculum to practical application through an online or hybrid learning environment instead of in a traditional face-to-face classroom was a considerable challenge with many uncertainties (Hughes et al., 2020). Additionally, school leaders must address the numerous issues impacting teaching and learning during this crisis, including uncertainty about job stability, issues around crisis management, navigating the unknowns of this pandemic, and the health and well-being of teachers, students, and their families (Hughes et al., 2020).

In summary, the desire to understand how the pandemic is affecting teachers' work-life balance may help schools and districts make informed decisions on how to help teachers navigate these challenging times. Because the pandemic is a "new normal" for teachers, a gap in the literature warrants further research to understand better teachers' needs in this challenging time with a lens on teachers' well-being and prevention of burnout and what school leaders can do to provide boundaries around work-life balance..

Methodology

Research Design

This study utilized quantitative survey results to ascertain teachers' perceptions of how the current health pandemic has impacted their work-life balance to explore self-perceptions of their support as well as professional learning needs. This researcher-created survey was developed for purposes unrelated to this current study, and it was provided as a needs assessment for a local training workshop conducted to understand the perceived experiences of teachers during this unprecedented time. However, the findings provided were aligned with the ongoing work of the research team, so further inquiry was conducted leading to the movement to disseminate the findings to a wider audience around teachers' experiences in a global health pandemic, which is much needed to increase satisfaction levels and retain an already dwindling population of teachers.

Setting and Participants

The study participants were a convenience sample of public-school teachers in one Southeastern state who attended a professional development workshop. Participants held teaching positions within elementary, middle, or high schools. Of the 107 educators surveyed at a face-to-face training about how to balance work and

life during a current pandemic, a total of 106 educators returned the online survey before the start of the training workshop for a 99% response rate.

Instrument

This survey utilized was the *Teacher Work-Life Balance Self-Assessment*, which is a 6-item survey instrument that was educator-created by the school leader charged with professional learning offerings and confirmed to adhere to the needed validity and reliability of scholarly-practitioner educational research. The items were developed based on a review of the literature regarding educator work-life balance. Experts in the field reviewed item development for clarity and relevance to the field. This survey consisted of four questions utilizing a 5-point Likert scale with varied scales specified in the findings, one question utilizing multiple-choice formatting allowing the participant to choose a provided topic, and one open-ended question allowing for narrative responses for a total of six questions. The four Likert scale questions were as follows, *on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being terrible and 5 being great, how do you feel about your teaching job?*, *on a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being terrible and 5 being great, how would you describe your energy level?*, *on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being never and 5 being often, how frequently do you connect with people for non-work related purposes?*, and *On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being never and 5 being frequently, how often do you engage in conflict with students or colleagues?* The multiple-choice item was *which topic would be most beneficial and relevant to my work-life balance?* with choices including *Healthy Lifestyle: Eating, Sleeping and Exercise; Boundaries with time and commitments; Mentally processing daily stressors; Other*. Lastly, the one open-ended question was *what additional information would you like on teacher work life balance?*

Data Collection and Analysis

The *Teacher Work-Life Balance Self-Assessment* was delivered electronically via Google Forms, an online survey platform, that was completely voluntary and anonymous was distributed to the participants before a local district training workshop. The survey was designed as a needs assessment to guide a stand-alone training workshop to ascertain teachers' perceptions of work-life balance during the current global health pandemic to garner input from teachers on their professional learning needs. A local school leader provided the

de-identified data set to the researchers to examine teachers' challenges working during this health pandemic and their perceptions of professional learning needs to disseminate evidence-based strategies to aid in retaining teachers during these chaotic times. No demographic data were collected as the original survey was intended to drive the outcomes of the training workshop rather than serve as empirical research. The data set was uploaded to a protected file folder to which only the primary researchers and the local school leader had access and will be destroyed after three years unless an extension is appropriate for continued research.

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics as well as coding of narrative responses to identify types of professional learning needed to enhance work-life balance and prevent teacher burnout. Descriptive statistics (percentages) were utilized to measure the frequency that the participants reported on a 1-5 Likert scale, their perceived job satisfaction, physical health and wellness, level of engagement in interactions with non-work-related individuals, and frequency of engagement in conflict with students or colleagues. Additionally, descriptive statistics (percentages) were used to measure the frequency of which participants noted which topic, between *Boundaries with time and commitments*, *Mentally processing daily stressors*, and *Healthy Lifestyle: Diet, Sleeping, and Exercise* would be most beneficial to them for bettering their work-life balance via purposeful, collaborative, and sustainable professional learning (McBrayer et al., 2018).

An analysis of the narrative answers was used to make sense of the text and descriptive data pulled from the open-ended narrative responses. Descriptive data can take the form of words and pictures, which allows the participants to illustrate and corroborate their experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Using a deductive coding scheme, researchers identified passages of text within the open-ended data that shared common ideas and organized them into emerging themes (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). These open-ended responses uncovered additional information regarding what teachers need to attain a better work-life balance to maintain their well-being and prioritize their work.

Findings

The survey findings identified teachers' perceptions of the challenges they face during this global health pandemic. When asked, on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being *extremely confident* and 1 being *extremely*

challenging, how they felt about their teaching job, 35.8% (n= 38) respondents indicated extremely confident, 31.1% (n= 33) indicated somewhat confident, 24.5% (n= 26) indicated neither confident nor challenging, 7.5% (n= 8) indicated somewhat challenging, and 0.9% (n= 1) denoted extremely challenging. When asked, on a scale from 1 to 5, with 5 being *sufficient energy* and 1 being *insufficient energy*, how they would describe their energy level daily, 20.8% (n= 22) of participants responded sufficient, 36.8% (n= 39) responded somewhat sufficient, 23.6% (n= 25) neither sufficient nor insufficient, 15.1% (n= 16) somewhat insufficient, and 3.8% (n= 4) denoted insufficient energy levels. Table 1 presents an overview of these findings.

Table 1*Teachers' Perceptions of Attitude Towards Teaching During the Pandemic*

Topic	5		4		3		2		1	
	n	%	N	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
General feelings about teaching	38	35.8	33	31.1	26	24.5	8	7.5	1	0.9
Energy levels	22	20.8	39	36.8	25	23.6	16	15.1	4	3.8

Notes: a rating of 5 equals extremely confident, and a rating of 1 equals extremely challenging.

When asked, on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being *frequently* and 1 being *never*, how frequently they connected with people for non-work related purposes, 28.3% (n= 30) of participants responded frequently, 19.8% (n= 21) responded often, 25.5% (n= 27) responded sometimes, 22.6% (n= 24) responded not often, and 3.8% (n= 4) responded never. Lastly, when asked, on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 being frequently and 1 being never, how often they engage in conflict with students or colleagues during this challenging time, 1.9% (n= 2) of participants responded frequently, 5.7% (n= 6) responded often, 14.2% (n= 15) responded sometimes, 35.8% (n= 38) not often, and 42.5% (n= 45) denoted never.

Table 2 presents an overview of these findings.

Table 2

Teachers' Perceptions of Relationships with Colleagues and Students During the Pandemic

Topic	5		4		3		2		1	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Frequency of peer connections outside work	30	28.3	21	19.8	27	25.5	24	22.6	4	3.8
Frequency of conflict with students or colleagues	2	1.9	6	5.7	15	14.2	38	35.8	45	42.5

Note: a rating of 5 equals frequently, and a rating of 1 equals never.

When asked to identify a topic which was perceived as most beneficial and relevant to the participants' work life balance; 54.7% (n= 58) of participants noted having boundaries with time and commitments as most important, 24.5% (n= 26) of participants noted being able to mentally process daily stressors as most important, and 20.7% (n= 22) of participants noted having a healthy lifestyle, inclusive of diet, sleeping, and exercise as most important. Table 3 presents an overview of teachers' perceptions of the importance of topics related to gaining a sustainable work-life balance.

Table 3*Teachers' Perceptions of the Benefit and Relevance of Topics as They Relate to Work-Life Balance*

Most Beneficial and Relevant Topics	n	%
Having boundaries with time and commitments	58	54.7
Being able to mentally process daily stressors	26	24.5
Having a healthy lifestyle, inclusive of diet, sleeping, and exercise	22	20.7

Note: n=106

Themes

The open-ended question in the survey measure yielded narrative responses that were coded into three overarching themes including *boundaries with time and commitments*, *mentally processing daily stressors*, and *healthy lifestyle: diet, sleep, and exercise* based on patterns and trends in the findings.

Boundaries with Time and Commitments

The overarching theme of *boundaries with time and commitments* resulted from the interpretation of the data generated to explore what resources would be beneficial to develop healthy work-life balance and the prevention of teacher burnout. This theme was significant to more than half of the participants who believed effective initiation and maintenance of boundaries between work requirements and home life was necessary for a manageable work-life balance. Many participants noted their desire for assistance with how to “balance meetings and taking work home every night” and “how to manage work and extracurriculars outside of school.” Specifically, one participant expressed the desire for the skills to create “balance of lesson prep/plan plus maintaining the ‘life’ [they] had before - i.e., working out, meal prep, family time etc.” One participant reported they would benefit from, “tips on figuring out when to bring work home or if it should be brought home at all as well as scheduling out lesson plans and activities/tests.” One participant stated desiring help with “how to shut off my brain from thinking about work even when not at work!”, which was consistently noted amongst participants. Another participant stated, “time management and boundaries are a huge problem for me. I never have enough time and I am constantly at work or worrying about work.” While another participant noted how this past year has been exceedingly difficult to manage: “I just need more time in the day. This is my 17th year, but I’m teaching something new. I feel like a 1st-year teacher all over again. Now, however, I have a husband, children, and am living in an entirely new place.”

Additionally, a large concern for participants was needing assistance in how to develop better time management in handling specific tasks and requirements during the workday. Participants reported desiring resources on prioritizing and organizing tasks and duties such as “how to distinguish between necessary and important,” “how to get lesson plans done without spending hours,” “grading and giving feedback in a timely manner,” efficiency in “learning new curriculum,” and “strategies to utilize short breaks throughout the day to

accomplish tasks.” Further, with the ever-growing focus on remote learning with the health pandemic, participants noted a need for resources on “how to balance my focus on digital and in-person students.”

Another participant stated believing they would benefit from,

Resources and guides to planning effectively regarding teaching different sections of a class during the same period/block. I currently teach 3 different classes in my 1st block and am just having to go through my presentations one at a time while the students sit there either working on materials for other classes or listen to information that is not meant for their class.

Some participants even noted a belief that this balance is unattainable due to their requirements and expectations as educators. One participant reported, “The examples I see all around me tell me there is no such thing as work-life balance.” In addition, the participant supported this belief by stating, there is “not enough time in the day to do it all.” Furthermore, participants also noted a concern of how they will be perceived by their coworkers and supervisors when attempting to initiate boundaries. For example, one participant stated, “building healthy boundaries and not coming off as not wanting to help out.” This participant further noted how “positive communication efforts” from school leaders would be beneficial in her growth as an assertive educator.

Mentally Processing Daily Stressors

The overarching theme of *mentally processing daily stressors* resulted from the interpretation of the data generated to explore what resources would be beneficial to develop healthy work-life balance and the prevention of teacher burnout. Many participants noted a desire for general resources in preparing them for the teaching requirements of new educators, such as “advice for new teachers on developing curriculum, specifically if they have no previous years of experience and no resources left by previous teachers or textbooks to rely on.” One participant noted a specific concern of a limited educational background, hindering their advancements in teaching, noting a desire for “advice on how to get through the first few years with no education background and building curriculum.” Participants noted more general suggestions for advice on “how to handle all the paperwork, planning, grading, etc.”

Further, many participants noted a general concern of how to cope with everyday classroom stress and anxiety, as well as prevention of burnout in their careers. One participant supported this need by stating, “I am

not new to the profession, but I REALLY want to know how to keep from burning out because at year 16 it is getting exponentially harder to see 30 or even 20 years.” Another participant supported this need by requesting resources for “not getting overwhelmed with it all and feeling like I have to do everything perfectly.”

Additionally, participants noted a need for resources on how to appropriately address interpersonal stressors, such as students’ stress and disruptive students. One participant noted difficulties in “finding enjoyment in the workplace when others around you are always so negative.” To combat this difficulty, one participant suggested the implementation of “infographics of reminders or encouraging quotes”. Other participants suggested resources for available mentor programs, tips for dealing with varying leadership styles or bureaucracy, tips on how to request support, and tips for “how to talk to coworkers and principal about having realistic expectations.”

One participant appeared to summarize new educators' general concerns, academic and interpersonal, by providing everyday experiences in their careers. This participant noted,

I am ready to quit almost every day. Real advice about actual situations would be wonderful. For example: 1) being handed a course that has no curriculum, content, or book 2) having students who are immature and do unexpected things like pull items out of garbage cans to play with while you have to stand in the hall to watch for fights.

Healthy Lifestyle: Diet, Sleeping, and Exercise

The overarching theme of *healthy lifestyle: diet, sleeping, and exercise* resulted from the interpretation of the data generated to explore what resources would be beneficial to develop healthy work-life balance and the prevention of teacher burnout. Participants expressed concern with the unhealthy lifestyle many are experiencing during the current global pandemic. They also noted that they recognized the overall relationship with the current two themes and the quality of their overall lifestyle. For instance, some participants noted a desire for resources to help them prioritize their energy and stress management skills, such as meditation and yoga. Participants recognized they would have to be proficient in setting boundaries on time to implement any type of exercise routine. Further, some participants noted the implementation of a regular exercise or meditation program could potentially help achieve more mental clarity to process daily stressors.

Similarly, participants realized the relationship between a healthy diet and other aspects of health. Several participants prioritized assistance in developing balanced diet habits when noting the help they needed in their pursuit of a healthy work-life balance. Specifically, one participant noted resources on “how to adjust dietary needs to constantly being busy” would be beneficial in avoiding burnout. Another participant noted needing resources on how to “avoid eating out after work.” Statements from both participants connect to the previous theme of setting time boundaries and time management. While no participant mentioned sleep directly, we realize the role sufficient sleep plays in our body’s overall ability to function effectively and efficiently and believe providing teachers with techniques to effectively manage sleep would ultimately positively contribute to other aspects they are struggling with, including cognitive and physical functioning.

Discussion

Overall, it appears teachers are committed to their careers, despite the continuous hardships that teaching during a health crisis unveils. Most teachers noted having protective factors for teacher burnout, including appropriate energy levels, time and ability to form meaningful connections in and outside of their work environment, and minimal conflict with students and colleagues. One concern related to energy levels is that over 40% of the respondents in this study noted having some level of energy exhaustion to perform their jobs effectively. Previous studies have attributed the correlation of social support to professional burnout and stress (Jakubowski & Sitko-Dominik, 2021). Teachers in our study reported that they had social support within the workplace, which increases job satisfaction, and in non-work relationships, which increases life satisfaction; therefore, encouraging a healthier work-life balance is essential (Jakubowski & Sitko-Dominik, 2021). However, with teachers under more stress than prior to the pandemic, it is imperative for researchers and school leaders to also assess risk factors of teacher burnout and develop accessible resources that can increase teacher well-being, and, in turn, increase student well-being (Gewertz, 2021).

Quantitative and narrative findings suggest that teachers mostly desire resources and assistance for boundaries with time and commitments to create an effective work-life balance, with resources to mentally process daily stressors as the next most pertinent need. Previous research has noted roughly 78% of educators

are working more hours daily, with the continuously shifting demands of in-person instruction to teleworking; therefore, resources for establishing and upholding boundaries with time and commitments seem most imperative for a healthy work-life balance (Lizana & Vega-Fernandez, 2021). Accessibility of these resources to enhance coping skills can combat potential negative outcomes for teachers' physical and psychological well-being (Herman et al., 2021). Importantly, many of the participants reported a sense of defeat in their careers, exemplifying that burnout has potentially already occurred. Identifying resources and support to not only prevent burnout but also reduce burnout can greatly benefit the well-being of teachers during these chaotic times. The bottom line is that school leaders need to provide professional learning around teachers' well-being and this professional learning needs to be purposeful, collaborative, and sustainable (McBrayer et al., 2018).

Implications for Practice and Future Research

The importance of attaining and maintaining a balance of work and life is vital in the teaching profession. The crux of this research is to provide teachers with evidence-best strategies via purposeful, collaborative, and sustainable professional learning to cope with the stressors of life during this current health pandemic. Some of these strategies include establishing a routine and structure for your day; having a consistent self-care plan; and saying no if added tasks are overwhelming or instead of saying yes or no immediately, tell people you will get back to them as it is important to never say yes out of pity, obligation, or guilt. One does not need to over-explain; thus, it is important to practice saying no without explanation. Simple things that can prove beneficial are turning notifications off outside of work hours, allowing yourself to take a lunch break, not sending emails after 5:00 p.m., and communicating workload concerns to school leaders. For example, compile a plan for emails like getting rid of all junk mail, answering emails that do not require a thorough reply, and scheduling time to answer emails that will require a detailed response. It is also pertinent to distinguish between the urgent and the important; do not make someone else's urgency your emergency. Always respond to interruptions while focusing on the task at hand, and this can be better done by finding a list-making system that works for you. Use your calendar for time allocation of tasks, and make certain that your calendar reflects both

your professional, personal, and self-care needs and goals. Identify the most important task of the day and do it first. Additionally, group similar tasks together to increase efficiency and avoid multitasking.

When unexpected feelings and events occur, let yourself sit with the feeling at that moment without acting or responding. Consider the story you are telling yourself about the event to include strategies such as naming the emotions, identifying the physical response, identifying benefits and stressors, and examining what prior experience these new initiatives may connect to. Practice an abundance mindset by reframing and creating a different way of looking at a situation, person, or relationship to appreciate the positive aspects of the situation. Teachers must understand that they cannot control what happens day-to-day, but they can control how it is interpreted and how they respond.

In terms of your spiritual fitness, find ways to recognize gratitude every day. Train your brain with daily intentions and affirmations and practice mindfulness. Self-care is the best defense against burnout. Adding exercise practices such as yoga, walking, running, and High-Intensity Interval Training (HIIT) is vital. Practice good sleep and hygiene behaviors such as going to sleep at the same time each night, avoid phone or other technology use in the bedroom, do not drink coffee or carbonated drinks after midnight, skip the nightcap, take a warm bath before bed, and use aromatherapy. In terms of nutrition, people who eat diets rich in Omega 3 fatty acids have a reduced risk of depression, and foods rich in Omega 3 such as salmon, trout, tuna, walnuts, flax seeds, dark green, and leafy vegetables help combat anxiety.

Overall, implications for practice denote that school leaders need to evaluate the current level of support being provided to teachers and assess areas of need to provide targeted professional learning that is purposeful, collaborative, and sustainable. Engaging in conversations about the challenges faced by teachers to better understand their needs during this “new normal” is pertinent to retaining teachers, which is important as school leaders face continued teacher turnover, especially during this pandemic. Further research is encouraged to engage in additional dialogue via interviews and focus groups with teachers currently teaching and learning during this continued global health pandemic.

Conclusion

Educators combated with teaching during the pandemic are encouraged to initiate small mental, physical, and social steps to encourage a work-life balance to limit teacher burnout. Teachers today are faced with ever-changing challenges that can compromise their physical and mental health. Therefore, school leaders are encouraged to develop and administer resources to increase the establishment and maintenance of boundaries as well as promoting coping skills for mentally processing daily stressors, social support, and healthy lifestyle choices including diet, sleep, and exercise. These resources should be developed with attainable and realistic goals in mind for teachers' ability to utilize these strategies. With the demanding schedules and minimal time to fulfill their teaching responsibilities, time-limited strategies should be encouraged not to increase burden on educators' schedules and well-being but rather help build mechanisms to help teachers be successful.

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