Avoiding Teacher Burnout

When teachers know that their work is making a difference they gain energy by investing time in their students. The single most important thing that school leaders can do is cultivate a strong instructional culture. Assisting teachers in managing their workload creates more opportunities for teachers to have a positive impact on students. Providing supports to teachers and opportunities for teachers to give feedback to administrators can have tremendous positive impact.

IDENTIFY SCHOOL-LEVEL CAUSES OF TEACHER BURNOUT

Teacher workload issues may be a result of school-wide systems. Carefully monitor school resources, responsibilities, and efficiencies.

- **Resources.** Provide a variety of school-wide resources to teachers (for example: curricula, templates, lesson plans, and grade-level scope and sequence documents) and design systems for teachers to collaborate and share information. In some situations, teachers may benefit from additional “human resources” in the form of classroom volunteers and tutors. Time is the most valuable resource - strive to provide teachers with adequate planning and processing time during the school day.

- **Responsibility.** If many school staff members are overwhelmed, examine the staff roles for responsibilities that could be altered. For example: Do grade-level leaders really need to monitor recess three times a week? Do teachers need to purchase their own supplies?

- **Efficiency.** Design systems that enable teachers to "work smart" and use teachers' time in productive ways. For example, differentiate group development sessions, focus the purpose of meetings, and examine mandatory paperwork to ensure that all teacher administrative responsibilities are effective and necessary.

COMMUNICATE WORKLOAD EXPECTATIONS AND RESOURCES

Teachers should know how and who to ask for help, and be aware of the resources available to help them manage their work. Create structures and routines for raising workload issues (e.g. during check-ins with coaches or feedback meetings).

SUPPORT TEACHERS' ENERGY

Teachers can become overwhelmed and exhausted in any school - including schools with strong instructional cultures! Many schools that require extraordinary workloads develop creative ways to support and acknowledge their teachers.

Tony Schwartz, the President and CEO of The Energy Project, frames engagement and sustainability at work as a matter of energy, not time. He suggests that leaders manage energy by considering their staff as complete individuals with psychological, emotional, physical, and inter-personal needs.

- **Psychological Energy** Psychological energy describes the intellectual satisfaction that teachers receive from a job well done. This energy also emerges from "working smart" - strategies that will be addressed in the next section of the text.

- **Emotional Energy** Schools can support their teachers' emotional energy by praising and celebrating excellence, listening and responding to teachers’ needs, and addressing difficult situations.

- **Physical Energy** Healthy teachers have more energy. Some schools have creatively supported this domain by:
  - Providing a healthy breakfast, snacks, or other meal;
  - Creating exercise groups or other opportunities for physical activity;
  - Shifting teachers’ period schedules to allow them to sleep in a few days a week;
  - Ensuring that teachers have the time to use the bathroom by creating a peer or administrator drop-in system.

- **Interpersonal Energy** Teachers are happier when they have close, supportive friends at school. To support interpersonal relationships, deliberately create opportunities for staff to connect throughout the year. Activities can range from formal mentoring and collaboration to casual book clubs and events.

For more resources, check out the complete toolbox: tntp.org/toolbox