

A Tough Time for Teachers

In this *New York Times* article, Natasha Singer reports on the exhaustion many teachers were experiencing in the closing months of 2020, especially those being asked to toggle between remote, hybrid, and in-person formats as infection rates in their communities waxed and waned. Hybrid instruction seemed to be causing the most stress, with teachers trying to keep an eye on proper mask-wearing and social distancing in their classrooms while engaging students at home.

“I have *never* been this exhausted,” said a veteran high-school English teacher in New Jersey. “This is not sustainable.” Another teacher wrote on an online discussion site, “I work until midnight each night trying to lock and load all my links, lessons, etc. I never get ahead. E-mails, endless e-mail. Parents blaming me because their kids chose to stay in bed, on phones, on video games instead of doing work.” An NEA survey found that 28 percent of teachers were considering leaving the profession or retiring early.

In addition to the challenges inherent in remote instruction, many teachers have stepped up to be impromptu social workers: grief counseling, helping students deal with anxiety, depression, and isolation, and steering them to local food banks. Teachers try to maintain a sense of optimism and normalcy, but it’s difficult. “In the greater context of the pandemic,” said a Chicago science teacher, “who cares about photosynthesis?” And then there’s the requirement to judge students’ work. “Just the fact that I have to give grades to 9-year-olds right now doesn’t seem morally right,” said a grade 4-5 teacher, painfully aware that two of his students had recently lost a grandparent to Covid-19. This teacher, who is African American, feels especially pressured because his students are dealing with the pandemic and a heightened awareness of racial injustice.

Some principals are making a point of doing one-on-one check-ins with teachers, urging self-care, and giving them extra time for planning – in one case an entire day each week. In Minnesota, the governor issued an executive order requiring schools to give teachers 30 minutes of additional prep time every day for remote or hybrid instruction.

[“U.S. Faces a New Crisis: ‘An Extreme Level of Teacher Burnout’”](#) by Natasha Singer in *The New York Times*, December 1, 2020