

# Teachers' Mental Health and Wellbeing during a Pandemic

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Stressed, heightened anxiety, emotionally drained, harassed, burned out—these terms were far too common amongst teachers across the country prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is not new to the profession; decades of research confirm that teaching is a stressful job.<sup>1</sup> Further, teachers experiencing heightened stress levels can lead to lower quality of instruction, poorer student achievement, negative teacher wellbeing and health, burnout, and greater attrition. However, there is research indicating that employing effective stress management techniques can lead to resilient teachers capable of remaining effective despite exterior challenges.<sup>2</sup>

With this in mind, the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF/FCE) asked its affiliate members to join in their *Teacher Mental Health Check-in Survey – Pandemic Research*.<sup>3</sup> NSTU members answered this survey in significant numbers (958 NSTU responses), with participation across all grade-levels; from classroom teachers, resource, school counselling, consultants, and specialists; representing full-time and term members; of various age, gender, and diversity.

Nova Scotian teachers are fairing about the same as Canadian teachers in general. On the very simple question “*How are you feeling today?*” 43 per cent of NSTU members answered very unhappy/somewhat unhappy with only 19 per cent answering somewhat happy/very happy. This compares very closely to CTF's 46 per cent very unhappy/somewhat unhappy to 18 per cent somewhat happy/very happy. When asked “*How well are you coping with the daily stresses of teaching right now?*” 36 per cent of our members answered not coping at all/barely coping compared to CTF's 37 per cent. With both NSTU members and CTF/FCE members ranking their top three concerns as 1) stress, anxiety, depression, 2) workload, work-life balance, and 3) mental and emotional exhaustion.

What are our members finding the most exhausting? NSTU members report finding it very or severely draining: managing student behaviour and juggling multiple responsibilities 80 per cent; meeting personal and professional expectations 69 per cent;

adjusting to new pedagogical practices 51 per cent; time spent on computer or digital devices 48 per cent; and covering classes for absent colleagues 40 per cent.

Sadly, Nova Scotian teachers are finding it difficult to maintain the practices known to improve physical and mental health. With 53 per cent never or infrequently getting sufficient sleep, 31 per cent never or infrequently eating regularly, 56 per cent never or infrequently drinking enough water to stay hydrated, and 57 per cent never or infrequently setting time in their day to be physically active. This bodes poorly for teachers' short- and long-term health.

Though our members are not feeling supported by their employer; 71 per cent not or barely supported by their regional centre for education/school board; and 92 per cent not or barely supported by the Ministry of Education and Early Childhood Development; they are finding support from others. Our members are feeling very or extremely supported by colleagues 68 per cent, friends and family 62 per cent, and by administrators 44 per cent.

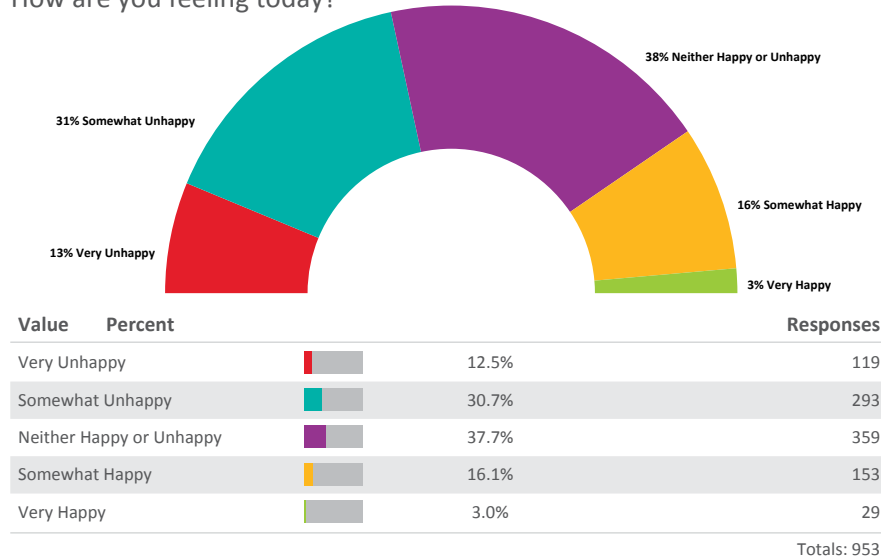
There are resources to help individuals address the issue of workplace mental health. The full report can be found here: <https://vox.ctf-fce.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Doc-13-1-Pandemic-Research-Report-Teacher-Mental-Health-Check-in-Survey.pdf>

The Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC) has developed *Mental Health First Aid*,<sup>4</sup> which is directed at individuals wishing to increase their mental health literacy and develop skills to better manage potential or emerging mental health problems in themselves or in a family member, friend, or colleague.

The Member Assistance Program of the NSTU provides one-on-one counselling for NSTU members and their families. For more information contact [nurse@nstu.ca](mailto:nurse@nstu.ca) or phone 1-800-565-6788 and ask to speak with the nurse.

The Resilience® (Employee and Family Assistance Program) provides counselling in-person, by phone, or through a secure online service. For more information call 1-877-955-6788 or for online service go to [www.myresilience.com](http://www.myresilience.com) and quote contract #39146.

How are you feeling today?



### References:

1. Laura J. Sokal, Lesley G. Eblie Trudel, Jeff C. Babb. "Supporting Teachers in Times of Change: The Job Demands- Resources Model and Teacher Burnout During the COVID-19 Pandemic", International Journal of Contemporary Education, Vol. 3, No. 2, October 2020.
2. Patricia A. Jennings, Mark T. Greenberg. "The Prosocial Classroom: Teacher Social and Emotional Competence in Relation to Student and Classroom Outcomes", Review of Educational Research, Vol 79, Issue 1, March 2009.
3. Canadian Teachers' Federation. "CTF/FCE Teacher Mental Health Check-in Survey – Pandemic Research Report", November 2020. <https://vox.ctf-fce.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Doc-13-1-Pandemic-Research-Report-Teacher-Mental-Health-Check-in-Survey.pdf>
4. The Mental Health Commission of Canada. "Mental Health First Aid", <https://www.mhfa.ca/en/big-picture>