

# Benefits Insights

## The Importance of Investing in Educator Mental Health



In the whirlwind of education reform, curriculum updates and student assessments, it's easy for educational institutions to overlook the well-being of those at the front lines: educators. Yet, the mental health of teachers and educational staff is not only crucial for their personal welfare but also for the success of the educational system.

More employers in the educational sector are recognizing the pivotal role that educator mental health plays in the overall success of their institutions. Beyond the lesson plans and grading, educators are the cornerstone of effective learning environments. They may also serve as student role models, mentors, caregivers and cheerleaders. However, the stressful and demanding nature of their roles often leads to overlooking their own mental health needs.

Recognizing and addressing employees' mental health needs is a strategic investment in educational institutions. This article provides a snapshot of the state of educators' mental health and strategies to bolster their mental well-being.

### The Current State of Educator Mental Health

Educator burnout has become a pervasive issue, exacerbated by long hours, heavy workloads and the emotional toll of supporting diverse student populations. In fact, teachers report worse well-being than the general population. The 2023 State of the American Teacher Survey revealed that teachers' top three sources of job-related stress were managing student behavior, supporting students' academic learning and administrative work (e.g., paperwork and teacher evaluations). According to the survey findings, for teachers, stress on the job is linked to absenteeism, changing jobs and intentions to leave the profession altogether.

Furthermore, 75% of teachers in the survey reported having access to at least one well-being or mental health support resource through their employer, health insurance or professional association. The most commonly reported supports were mental health care services, employee assistance programs (EAPs) and wellness activities. Despite this, 46% of teachers responded that the mental health and well-being support available to them was inadequate.

The consequences of neglecting educators' mental health are serious. Burnout leads to decreased job satisfaction, reduced classroom effectiveness and high turnover rates. Untreated mental health issues among educators can trickle down to students, impacting their learning experiences and overall well-being. For example, various studies have confirmed that when educators are stressed, the quality of their teaching and classroom management can go down. Unsurprisingly, students tend to be more stressed when their teachers are, which, in turn, can hinder their academic performance and classroom engagement.

### Employer Considerations

To help mitigate factors contributing to burnout and poor mental health, educational institutions may consider the following strategies to help support educators:

- **Offer comprehensive mental health benefits.** Robust mental health benefits cover therapy, counseling and psychiatric services. An EAP can also offer services or referrals to help employees deal with personal problems. In the end, accessible and affordable mental health care can encourage educators to seek help when needed, preventing issues from escalating.
- **Implement wellness programs.** Wellness initiatives can help promote physical activity, mindfulness and work-life balance. Organizing wellness challenges, providing gym memberships or offering mindfulness workshops can foster a culture of self-care.

- **Provide professional development opportunities.** In addition to technical topics, employers can invest in training programs that focus on stress management, resilience-building and mental health awareness. There's an opportunity to equip educators with coping strategies and resources that can empower them to navigate challenges effectively.
- **Facilitate peer support and collaboration.** Peer support groups or mentorship programs offer educators an outlet for sharing their experiences, seeking advice and offering emotional support to one another. Creating a sense of community and solidarity can help combat feelings of isolation and promote mental well-being.
- **Conduct regular check-ins.** Administrators should regularly check in with educators and staff to assess their well-being and identify signs of distress early on. It's imperative to focus on open channels of communication where educators feel comfortable expressing their concerns and seeking support from leadership.
- **Establish a supportive company culture.** Educational institutions have an opportunity to foster a culture that values and prioritizes the mental well-being of teachers, staff and students. This involves promoting work-life balance, open communication and stress management resources.

Supporting the mental health of educators and other teaching staff is essential for institutions to create a healthy and productive learning environment.

## Summary

Prioritizing educator mental health can be a strategic investment in the success of an educational institution. By providing comprehensive mental health benefits, fostering a supportive work environment, and equipping educators and staff with the tools they need to thrive, employers can create a culture of wellness that benefits both educators and students alike. In doing so, organizations not only safeguard the mental health of their staff but also enhance the quality of education and ensure the long-term success of their institution.

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