

April showers  
bring May flowers



F.O.N.T.

## Focus on New Teachers

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### DID YOU KNOW?

- The Farmingdale School district budget vote and elections are on May 15th.
- To help get the budget passed, the FFT will have phone banks to call NYSUT members that live in Farmingdale.
- The FFT encourages everyone to get involved and donate one hour of time to make phone calls asking residents to pass the school budget.
- Stay tuned for more info.

### THE ELEPHANT IN THE STAFF ROOM—WHY WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT TEACHER WELLBEING

It is impossible to support the social and emotional health of young people, if we as teachers do not attend to our own emotional health.

Anyone who has worked in schools or who knows a teacher will be aware that they are often stressed, tired, and running on empty until the next school holiday arrives. Reports suggest that high workloads, increased monitoring and accountability, challenging pupil behavior or emotional difficulties, ongoing policy changes and toxic school cultures are among the many factors that contribute to poor teacher wellbeing.

It is increasingly pressing that teacher wellbeing should be viewed as a serious concern. Worrying figures show teachers are reporting poor physical and mental health as a result of their work, and of course this all has an impact on absence rates, motivation, and staff retention, both for individual schools and for the whole profession.

Teacher wellbeing is not only a profound issue for our teachers, it also has a major impact on pupil outcomes. Research has shown that teacher wellbeing not only significantly impacts pupils' SAT results, but also has an effect on pupils' own social and emotional wellbeing, creating a negative learning environment and damaging the quality of relationships between teacher and pupil.

But how can we improve teacher wellbeing? Many solutions arguably lie within the wider education system, such as by creating fair and appropriate expectations around teacher workloads, reducing the pressures faced by schools from accountability processes, there are many strategies that schools or teachers can employ themselves to improve teacher wellbeing.

Firstly, schools need to talk about teacher wellbeing. Recognizing that high stress and poor mental health are common, not exceptional, experiences in the profession is an essential step in making a difference. Figures suggest that up to one in ten teachers have been prescribed antidepressants due to school pressures, and one in three teachers have taken time off because of stress. School leaders need to provide appropriate channels where teachers can speak honestly about their wellbeing, and put strategies and support in place to either preempt or respond to concerns. Often, investing time and money supporting teacher wellbeing will more than cover the costs associated with stress-related absences. In one school, the principal sets time aside each week so that teachers can request coverage if they feel overwhelmed. This not only enabled the principal to monitor how things are going with the staff, but also creates a supportive culture where teachers feel safe to express that things are difficult. Another school hires substitute teachers at particularly stressful times of the year, such as when report cards are due, in order to give teachers more time to complete paperwork.

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## Teacher Wellbeing continued

Teachers need to acknowledge the impact of their wellbeing on pupils and prioritize setting time aside for themselves, without feeling guilty. When you are on an airplane, flight attendants instruct travelers to put on their own oxygen mask first before helping others in an emergency, and this analogy is applicable to teacher wellbeing. Leaving a few papers ungraded to get an extra half hour of sleep, doing some exercise, or practicing mindfulness will have a far greater impact on pupil outcomes than spending the entire evening grading or planning to the point of exhaustion. This is easy to type, and harder to achieve. As a profession teachers need to choose to find a different way ahead.

Schools and teachers must find time amongst the stress and business of school life to support each other, because it really does make a difference. A small gesture, like making a cup of tea and talking with someone, can have an enormous impact on wellbeing because the teacher will feel valued and supported. Research has shown that when teachers perceive a school to foster high levels of compassion, stress levels reduce and job satisfaction goes up, while teachers' commitment to school life can increase. A whole-school approach to emotional health aims to create a positive school culture, with supportive, empathetic relationships between staff, as well as with pupils and parents.

It is crucial for schools and teachers to take action now to support teacher wellbeing, and the strategies here give examples of how this can be done. By making these changes to foster good emotional health in our schools, a positive impact can be made on pupils' academic, social, and emotional learning, and the teaching profession at large.

*Reprinted from HuffPost Blog by Nick Haisman-Smith*

## THINGS TO REMEMBER WHEN INTERACTING WITH STUDENTS

There are some protocols that may be awkward or seemingly obvious for teachers when dealing with students, but there are some things that all teachers, but especially new, untenured teachers, must be mindful of.

1. **Do not be alone in a classroom with a student.** It becomes a case of "he said, she said" and it's best to avoid that situation at all costs. If a student needs to make up a test or other assignment, put a desk in the hallway and let the student take the test there. If it is unavoidable and you find yourself alone with a student, keep your door open and stay in the line of sight from the hallway.
2. **Be aware of what you post on social media and who is following/friending you.** Consider making your accounts and posts private. Please do not post pictures of behavior that could be considered inappropriate.
3. **Avoid physical contact with students.** When students are upset, it is natural to try to comfort them with a hug. Try to refrain from doing so. It can be caught on camera and be misconstrued. Instead, offer to let them go to their Guidance Counselor and visit a Social Worker or Psychologist.
4. **Do not give students a ride in your car.** It is tempting to pull over and offer a student a ride home in a downpour, but do not do it. It is easy for accusations and rumors to start which could lead to loss of your position or license.
5. **Do not give out your personal information, including your personal cell phone number or email address.** There are numerous ways to communicate with students that do not involve your personal information. Consider Google Classroom, school email, or the Remind App as alternatives to texting or emailing students through your personal accounts.
6. **Keep conversations and interactions professional.** Do not become too friendly with your students. You are there to help them, but you are not their friend. Do not discuss sensitive issues with them.

It is beneficial to review these things periodically in order to avoid complicated issues in the future. It is always best to be above board when interacting with your students.

*Linda McCoskey*

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