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TEACHERS

NEW RESEARCH FROM TIM PRESSLEY AND STUDENT HANNAH CROYLE.

by [Jim Hanchett](#) | April 13, 2021*Above: Tim Pressley (left) and Hannah Croyle**Read time: about 2 min*

One of the hidden human costs of COVID-19 is how the virus spiked the stress and anxiety levels of school teachers, according to new research by [psychology](#) professor Dr. Tim Pressley.

In one of the first empirical studies identifying factors contributing to teacher burnout in the midst of the pandemic, Pressley analyzed the results of an October 2020 electronic survey of hundreds of K-12 teachers nationwide. Pressley found ample evidence of teaching anxiety, anxiety communicating with parents and anxiety flowing from a lack of administrative support leading to teacher stress.

“The results are important for schools and researchers to consider when it comes to the impact of COVID-19 on teachers,” Pressley said. “It’s also important for schools and education leaders to understand the level of anxiety teachers are experiencing as they make plans for the coming school year and, sadly, for potential pandemics to come.”

Pressley measured anxiety using the [Coronavirus Anxiety Scale](#), a tool developed by Christopher Newport psychology professor Sherman Lee. The scale revealed that teachers felt varying degrees of anxiety around several common challenges:

- Adjusting to virtual instruction, including using unfamiliar programs and having to teach students both traditional subject matter and how to learn online
- Communicating with parents and often being the first resource for parents who struggled as they tried to help their children master instructional technology
- Dealing with their own health concerns and trying to teach online from their homes when caring for children or parents

There was no difference in teacher burnout stress based on ethnicity, location, years of teaching experience and instruction type.

Pressley emphasizes that even as vaccines become more widely available and schools slowly return to more normal operation, administrators still need to be aware of what their teachers are enduring.

“To limit teacher burnout, schools and districts need to monitor teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic and provide support throughout the school year,” Pressley said. Examples of that could include providing teachers a mental health day to support their self-care, telehealth options outside of school so they can address their anxiety, and improved district and school communications so teachers don’t have to face criticisms from frustrated parents.

A peer-reviewed article by Pressley outlining his findings was published in the journal *Educational Researcher*.

Working with student Hannah Croyle ‘20 (MAT ‘21), Pressley has also published research concerning the impact of COVID-19 on teacher training, especially the price paid by newly hired teachers fresh from college who had to confront a very different world than they had prepared for. Croyle’s own experiences as a “preservice” teacher helped inform the research.

This study focused on Virginia teachers just as they started their careers, comparing the class of “preservice” teachers who interned in the 2018-19 year with those who served truncated internships in the 2019-20 school year. Those student teachers who had to leave the classroom in March as the pandemic spread say they did not feel as prepared to teach as they would like.

When Croyle and Pressley surveyed those student teachers, answers included:

*“Since moving online, I lost confidence and do not feel capable of teaching. It just was not the same as being in front of students.”*

*“I would have liked to have had more time in the classroom to have gotten more feedback on my teaching and have more time with my students. I feel like I am going to be at a slight disadvantage going into next year, but I hope I have support from my school to help with the transition.”*

The student-teachers are particularly concerned about their ability to handle misbehaving children because they had fewer face-to-face interactions:

*“I feel underprepared in classroom management and I wish I had more time to practice discipline and enforcing rules, routines, and procedures for students.”*

Pressley and Croyle said administrators should be aware of these concerns and give first-year teachers extra support in the 2021-22 school year. An article about their findings is scheduled for publication in *The Teacher Educators’ Journal*.