

NEWSROOM

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EDUCATIONPROFESSOR WRITES BOOK DETAILING HAVOC PANDEMIC WREAKED ON SCHOOLS,
TEACHERSby [Kelli Caplan](#) | January 10, 2024*Read time: about 3 min*

When COVID hit, Dr. Tim Pressley had a first row seat to its impact on teachers.

He saw his wife, a middle school teacher, and her coworkers struggle with the overwhelming pressures and problems the pandemic created for the education system. There was no doubt that it was going to be life changing for teachers and students.

"I wondered, 'if she's feeling it, are other teachers feeling this way?,'" said Pressley, who co-authored "Lessons of the Pandemic: Disruption, Innovation, and What Schools Need to Move Forward," a book recently published by Guilford Press.

Turns out she was not alone. And Pressley, an associate professor of [psychology](#) and instructor for the [Master of Arts in Teaching program](#), decided that the story he was watching unfold needed to be told. Changes to the education system were critical to keeping teachers afloat, even after the pandemic had faded and life returned to a new normal.

Pressley, with the help of students, launched a research project to gauge teachers' thoughts and wellbeing, both during COVID and in its aftermath. He sent multiple surveys out nationwide to K-12 educators to evaluate how they were coping and determine their morale. Pressley also conducted focus groups with researchers from Auburn

University and Randolph Macon College to get first-hand perspectives of what teachers were experiencing.

Kyla Ganey, '25 Psychology, was one of the students who helped Pressley. She analyzed transcripts from the teacher focus groups and questions from the surveys.

"I was surprised to see that problems in a classroom setting are prevalent around the entire country. Regardless of age, race, residence, and level of experience, teachers are all struggling in some form or another," she said.

When Pressley began probing the responses, he realized how severely teachers were suffering with anxiety and stress, and the wide range of changes schools needed to make. Pressley partnered with David Marshall, a Newport News native and professor at Auburn University, to write a book detailing their findings: that the pandemic created and exposed a myriad of issues in the world of education. In the book, which refers to the pandemic as "the great disruptor," Pressley and Marshall take an in-depth look at education during the pandemic and after, and offer ideas and solutions to inspire positive change. . "We are so excited about it," Pressley said. "It's surreal. It started as a Word document, so to see a hard copy makes me extremely proud. I hope it's useful to school leaders and teachers."

Pressley wants teachers' voices and perspectives to be reflected in the book.

"We asked teachers what they needed to be successful," Pressley said. "What was most interesting was that money was not number one on their list. Number one for them was respect and time. Teachers want to be seen as professionals and have the opportunity to make the decisions they believe are right for the education of their students.

"The number one lesson we learned is that we need to remember that teachers are humans, too," Pressley said. "They are very knowledgeable about what's going on in the classroom with their students. Their voices should be listened to."

Ganey, who plans to work as a mental health worker after she graduates, said that being part of research that could improve teachers' lives and the education of young students was not something that was ever on her radar. But once she met Pressley and learned about the opportunity, Ganey was all in.

"Doing research at CNU has shaped my experience because it helped me step out of my comfort zone and build my confidence. Dr. Pressley allowed me to present the research at the [PAIDEIA](#) conference, which is something I never imagined doing," Ganey said. "It was an intimidating process, but Dr. Pressley was extremely helpful in walking me through the steps and making me feel more confident. He has also given me a lot of autonomy throughout my portion of the research, and his trust in me as well as an appreciation for my insight has made me feel more assured of my abilities."

Ganey is optimistic that the book, and all of the research that was conducted, will result in much-needed changes to improve both teachers' lives and the education system.

"I hope from this research that people will be much more empathetic and respectful toward teachers. Teachers are often looked down upon for various reasons, but people often fail to recognize how foundational teachers are to our society," she said. "Teachers are the ones who have brought grandparents, our parents, and ourselves to the places where we are today, and they are the ones who will be shaping future generations. They need our support."