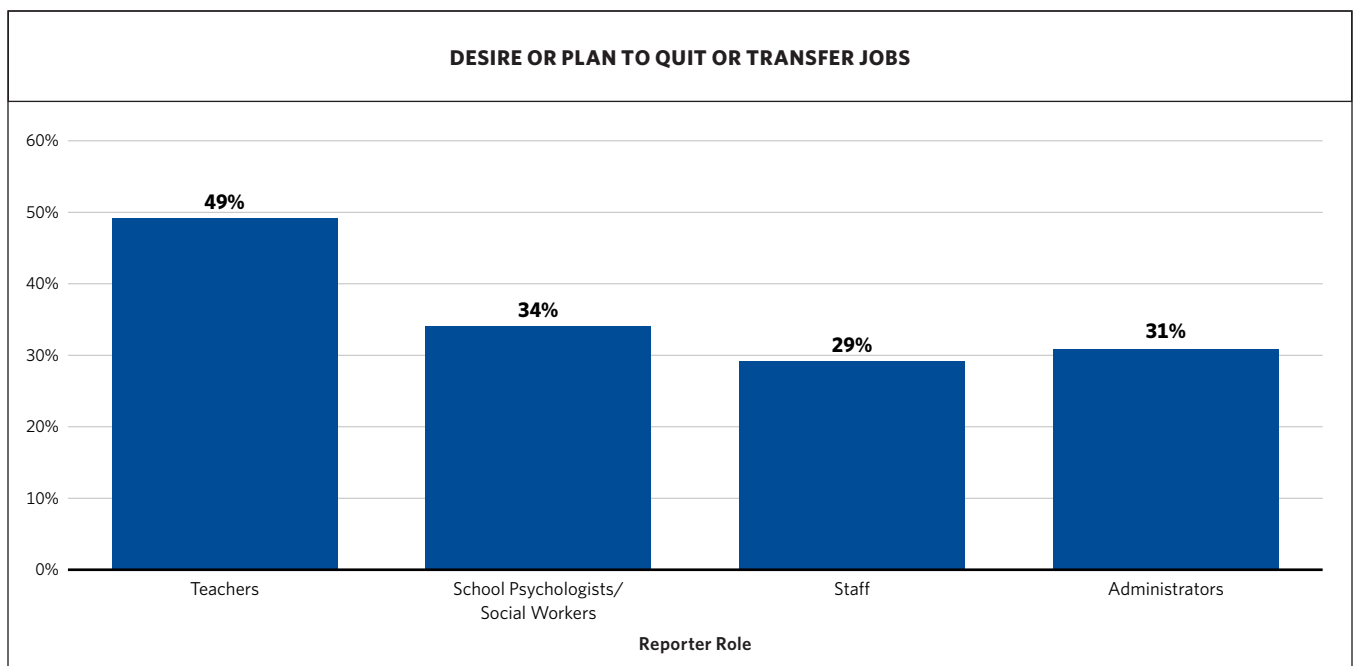




Violence Against Educators and School Personnel: Crisis During COVID

The US is experiencing trends of dramatic employee turnover in our nation's schools. Current and future decisions to leave the field of education affect the quality of our schools and the next generations of learners, educators, and school leaders in the nation. Physical and verbal violence directed against educators may be exacerbating reports of high stress, transfers, and leaving the profession. In this policy brief, we present the viewpoints and concerns of school personnel across the country and offer recommendations based on their reports for what can be done to prevent and address this trend. This brief presents findings from a national survey of violence against educators and school personnel in the US. The survey was conducted from July 2020 to June 2021 as the nation faced several significant challenges (e.g., racial unrest, a global pandemic, concerns over student mental health, and the aftermath of a disputed Presidential election). School stakeholders were asked to rate their experiences during COVID (since March 2020).

The sample of 14,966 participants includes 9,370 teachers, 860 administrators, 1,499 school psychologists and social workers and 3,237 other school staff members.

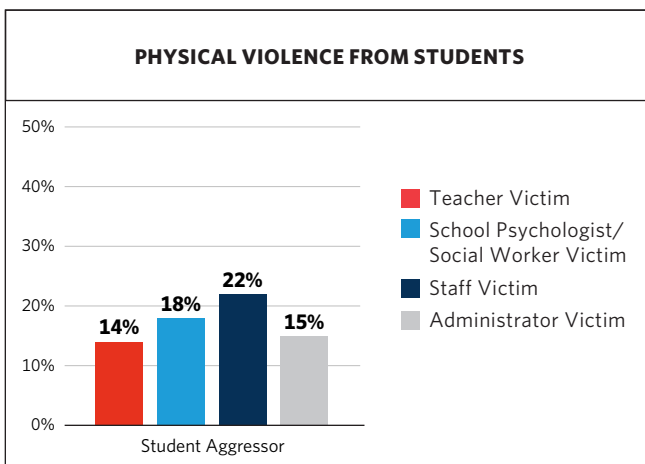
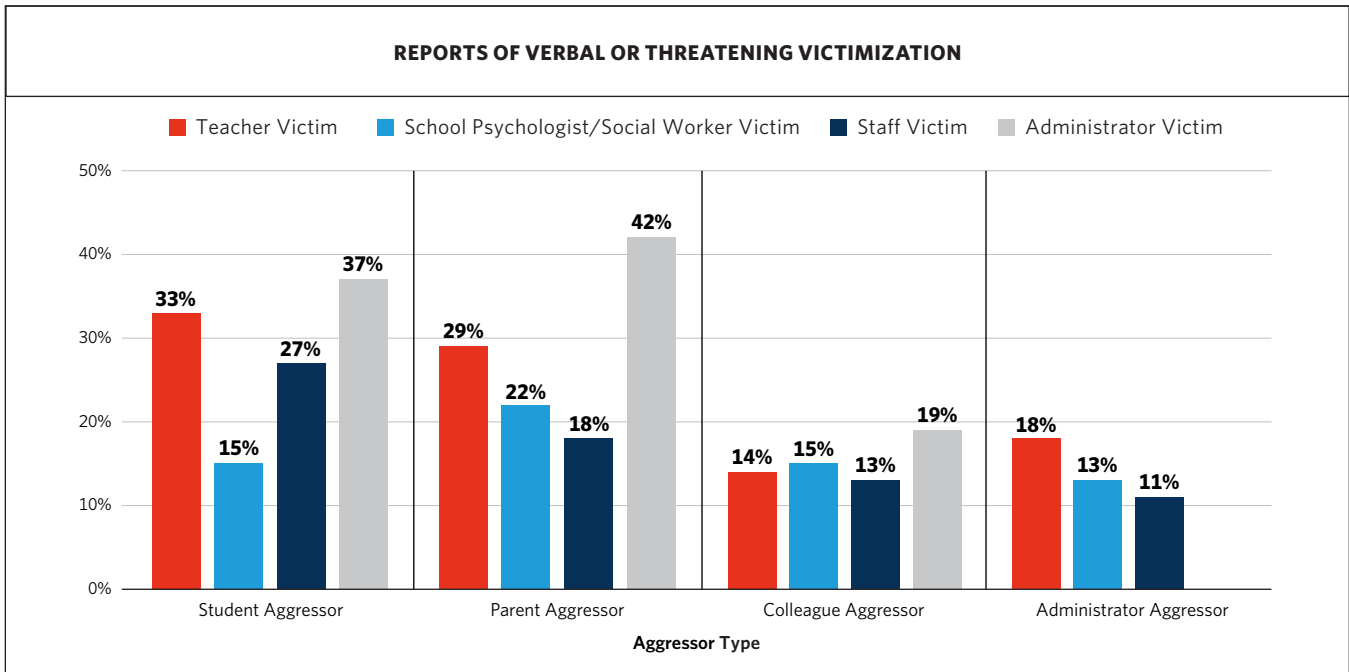


Rates of interest in quitting their careers or transferring schools are troubling and high across the board, ranging from 29% to 34% for school staff, administrators, and mental health personnel. **Almost half of all teachers reported they desire or plan to quit or transfer their jobs due to concerns about school climate and school safety.**

Contributing to teacher and school personnel reports of high stress are feeling unsafe, lack of supportive work environments, and limited input into school policies and procedures. Faced with a range of challenges, many recommend effective policies and practices that address student mental health, enhance student engagement, reduce violence, and increase educator involvement in decision-making.

REPORTS OF VIOLENCE AND VICTIMIZATION

Rates of violence and aggression against school personnel are high despite most schools being remote during the time of the survey. **One-third of surveyed teachers reported they experienced at least one incident of verbal and/or threatening violence from students during COVID** (e.g., verbal threats, cyber bullying, intimidation, sexual harassment). **Over 40% of school administrators reported verbal or threatening violence from parents during COVID.** These rates of violence are extremely problematic and may contribute to teachers and school personnel wanting to quit or transfer.



Even when many schools were implementing remote or hybrid instruction, there were substantial rates of student physical violence (e.g., objects thrown at participants, ordinary objects weaponized, and physical attacks) against teachers and school personnel.

Student physical violence rates range from 14-22% of survey respondents.

School staff (e.g., paraprofessionals, school counselors, instructional aides, school resource officers), a typically unexamined group, reported the **highest rates of student physical violence, with 22% of staff reporting at least one incident of physical violence during COVID.**

EXAMPLES OF REPORTED VIOLENCE

Many teachers, administrators, and other school personnel described the violence they face as on-going and pervasive. One educator described their experiences.

"I have been physically assaulted multiple times by students in the building and they know that not only is there no one to stop them, but there will be no consequences either. I ended up in the hospital the last time it happened."

School personnel describe violence and aggression from parents and other adults in the school; students are not the only aggressors, as illustrated below.

"Parents have been more aggressive and verbally abusive to teachers in our district since COVID. The social media posts by parents are vicious and they don't seem to remember that teachers were already undervalued, underpaid, and overworked before the pandemic. Those feelings have only been made worse by the pandemic."

"I have never had such aggression toward me from the community, the board of education, and my administration in my life. If I could financially quit I would. The belittling of concerns and bullying of teachers from other adults has pushed so many of us to a breaking point. I have been called ungrateful, lazy, whiny, entitled, uncaring, heartless, selfish, stupid, and more. By adults."

EXAMPLES OF WHAT EDUCATORS AND SCHOOL PERSONNEL SAY WE SHOULD DO

TEACHER

"We need policies, procedures, and interventions to identify, address, and respond to student behaviors that lie outside the management capabilities of K-1 teachers in the general education program."

SOCIAL WORKER

"Increased education on the reasons students use violence, ways to intervene in this and an increased awareness of cultural and racial issues related to this, particularly OUR internal responses to someone of a different racial or ethnic background."

SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGIST

"Given proper resources, we could gain insight from all our communities (Hmong/Karen/Karenni/Sudanese/East African immigrant and all low-income families) to identify their needs and coordinate with community services and supports to mitigate those needs."

ADMINISTRATOR

"Our largest concern is staffing. Often we have to scramble to find staff to cover classes and meet the other needs within the school."

VIOLENCE AGAINST EDUCATORS IS A PUBLIC HEALTH PROBLEM: WE NEED COMPREHENSIVE RESEARCH-BASED SOLUTIONS

SUPPORT SCHOOL PERSONNEL AND STUDENT MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

- **Support educator mental health and well-being.** School districts should establish mental health programs for educators and school personnel. Programs can include professional development training and supports for self-care, coping with stress, and mentoring. School-based and community partnerships can be leveraged to support educator mental health.
- **Support student mental health and well-being.** Increase the number of well-prepared teachers, school psychologists, and school social workers to address student needs. Reinforce connections with and between students; help students manage their emotions; establish and maintain positive relationships. Develop and sustain positive school and classroom climates; reduce stress; and build students' skills, resilience and agency.
- **Promote trauma-informed practices.** Provide training on the impact of trauma on children's health and development and implementation of school-wide trauma-informed practices.

ENHANCE SCHOOL ORGANIZATIONAL FUNCTIONING

- **Include educator voice in decision-making.** School and district leaders should involve educators and school personnel in regular discussions regarding school practices, discipline, placement, staffing, and school climate.
- **Increase resources to build school capacity.** Increase funding to schools, especially in high need school districts, to ensure schools have the resources, capacity, and qualified staffing to meet the learning, social-emotional, and mental health needs of students.
- **Provide evidence-based programing.** Provide, comprehensive, coordinated and centralized evidence-based programs and training, avoiding overlap. Programming can include interventions geared toward preventing violence and creating positive school climates.
- **Enhance teacher and parent collaboration.** Provide research-based consultation and strategies to support teacher and parent partnerships that target social development and learning at school and home.

- **Reduce exclusionary discipline policies.** Reduce the use of zero-tolerance policies, exclusionary approaches (e.g., suspensions), and school hardening strategies and replace them with non-punitive approaches to addressing challenging behaviors, such as mediation and de-escalation methods.

CONDUCT ASSESSMENTS

- **Assess student, teacher, and school personnel perspectives annually.** Conduct surveys, interviews, and/or focus groups with school stakeholders to help monitor stress, wellness, and needs and to identify necessary supports. The information gathered from these assessments can help to identify progress and inform on-going school interventions.
- **Conduct anonymous reporting.** Conduct annual school, state, and national anonymous reporting surveys on the extent and types of violence that educators and all school personnel experience, effective practices and policies, and recommended solutions.

IMPROVE EDUCATOR PREPARATION PROGRAMS

- **Provide more training on social and emotional learning and trauma-informed teaching.** Capacity building will better prepare educators to understand and address student needs.
- **Support the social-emotional needs of educators through preparation curricula.** Work with psychologists, counselors, and social workers to understand educator needs, adapt curricula and educator preparation standards, and teach practical ways to support educators' social and emotional needs in school settings. Integrate coping mechanisms, stress response training, and wellness material.

SUPPORT FEDERAL POLICIES

Please see our [list of legislative priorities](#) for information about proposed bills and programs that can help improve conditions for educators and school personnel, by:

- **Investing in policies that grow and diversify the educator workforce.**
- **Increasing funding for programs that train educators.**
- **Creating sustainable pathways to holistically meet the mental and behavioral health needs of students.**
- **Increasing funding for programs that provide school-based mental health services.**

For more information about this study and the data presented in this brief, please see the [Technical Report](#).

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See also:

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