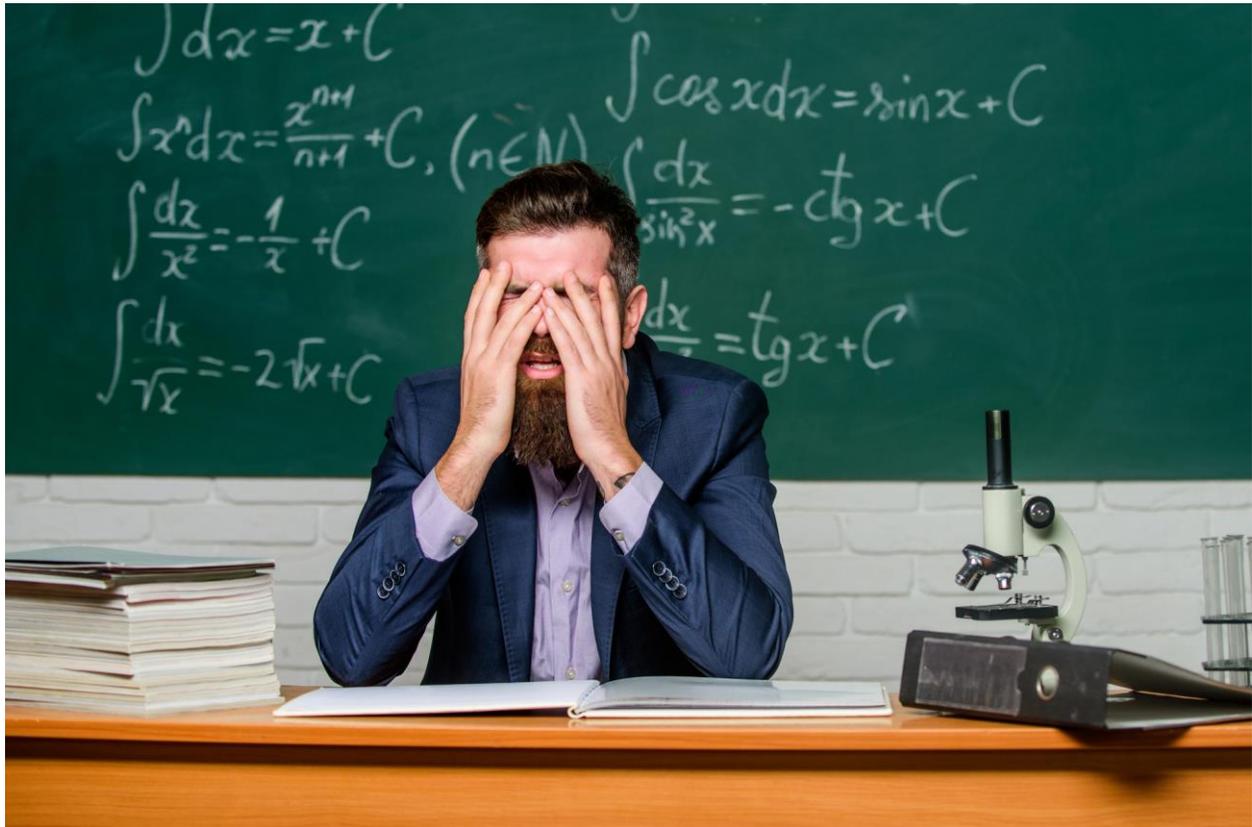




## Addressing the Social-Emotional Needs of Teachers

by Emily Makelky



Teaching through the pandemic is more stressful, time-consuming, and emotionally-draining than any other time in recent history. The stressors of teaching kids in person, virtually, and oftentimes a combination of the two, are far beyond the many stressors that teachers have experienced. What has become abundantly clear, is that for today's educators, the conditions and scenarios in which they are working, cannot sustain if we want to avoid mass burnout.

Since the start of the pandemic, there has been a push to make sure we are meeting the basic needs of our students. As we know, if their basic needs are not being met, the chances of students being successful at achieving academic targets are slim. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is used to determine how to better meet the needs of students. This same hierarchy should also be used to better meet the needs of our teachers. Within your Curriculum Coordinating Council (CCC), or curriculum governing committee, make this topic a priority at your next meeting. Here are some ways to address this issue.

**Do the research** As is common practice when discussing issues within the CCC, find articles that clearly communicate the topic like [this one on teacher morale from Edweek](#). Upon reading, ask committee members to share out what resonates with them. Ask them to reflect upon the strategies listed, determine if their school is already doing them, or if any of the strategies could work there.

Introduce [Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs](#) and each level of the hierarchy. Relate each need to teachers and how their needs are not being met due to the pandemic. For example, a physiological need that may not be met right now is food. As stress levels rise and time is short, teachers may be rushing to get out of the house in the morning and may not prioritize packing a healthy lunch. Another physiological need that may be lacking is sleep or rest. Additional responsibilities at work usually take away from personal downtime and might make it more difficult for teachers to get adequate rest.

**Brainstorm solutions** Ask CCC members to come up with ways that the district could help meet teachers' basic needs. Put a poster-sized piece of paper for each level of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs at different tables around the room. Divide the paper into columns. The first column would identify the specific need, the second column to list what the district is already doing, and the third column is used to record what more can be done. For example:

Need	What are we doing already?	What more can we do?
Food	Allowing lunch time	Provide free lunch \$
Sleep/rest	45 minute prep	Increase prep time by decreasing the number of class periods (requires a schedule change)

Encourage members to be as creative as possible and not to worry about the costs. If a solution does cost money, ask them to add a dollar symbol to that one.

**Prioritize solutions** Use a facilitation activity, like "Spent a Dot," to determine priorities. Give members of the committee six or so dot stickers, or sticky notes, whatever you have on hand. Ask them to walk to each paper and review the ideas offered during the brainstorming session, and "spend a dot," or add a dot sticker to the ideas that they think should take priority while planning next steps. After the activity, it should be clear which ideas, or solutions, to move forward.

**Plan next steps** Good intentions and discussions will always remain just those, unless, a plan is created and followed through. For each of the priority solutions, plan what needs to be done, who will be responsible for seeing it through, and when it needs to happen. It may be helpful to create

a subcommittee for following through with the plan as some solutions might take more time and effort than others. To ensure that the next steps happen, make sure to revisit this topic at the following CCC meeting, and create ways for teachers to offer their feedback.

Continue to monitor the social-emotional health of your teachers throughout the remainder of the year and be sure to communicate your efforts to better meet their basic needs. The last thing anyone wants is for a third of the teaching staff to resign because they can't continue teaching under the conditions of this past year or so. Your teachers will appreciate that you care and that the district is looking out for their well-being.