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The Effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic on School Leaders' Well-Being



EDUC580: Educational Research: Designs and Procedures

Action Research Report

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EDUC580

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EDUC580 Educational Research: Designs and Procedures
The Effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic on School Leaders

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ACTION RESEARCH TOPIC

The topic of this action research study is the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on school leaders' well-being. The focus is to determine if there has been more workload, if physical and mental health have been affected, and if the stress of dealing with the pandemic in schools has had an impact on the well-being of school leaders.

ABSTRACT

AIM

The aim of this action research study is to determine how much the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the well-being of school leaders worldwide. It will study how the additional burden of dealing with the pandemic has impacted the workloads, stress levels, physical health, and mental health of school leaders. Taken together, the study of these four categories should paint a picture of where the well-being of school leaders stands as a result of the pandemic crisis in our schools.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted via an online survey consisting of quantitative and qualitative questions. In many cases participants could respond to questions using a Likert scale. In order to get to the question of what effect the COVID-19 pandemic has had on international school leaders' well-being, a five-part questionnaire was devised consisting of 42 questions. These questions were either demographic in nature or linked to one of four categories chosen for their relationship to what is known as 'well-being.' Those four categories are workload, physical health, mental health, and stress management. At the end of three sections there is an open-ended question allowing the respondents to share details of their particular situations during the pandemic. A link to this questionnaire was then posted on educational leaders' groups on the professional social media website, LinkedIn. School leaders could then willingly choose to participate in the study by linking to the survey and answering the questions. This is a common approach used since the advent of social media for professionals, such as the LinkedIn social media website. The qualitative questions were then analyzed and the resulting conclusions are hereby presented in this study.

FINDINGS

This study makes it clear the COVID-19 PANDEMIC has had a negative impact on the well-being of school leaders worldwide. School leaders are operating under the weight of overwhelming workloads, reduced physical health, an increase in mental health issues, and a highly stressful work environment while they deal with the COVID-19 pandemic in their schools.

In the end, it should be no surprise our school leaders have been carrying a heavy burden looking after their staff and students the best they can while enduring many sleepless nights, stressful working holidays and declining physical and mental health. The report goes on to make some practical suggestions for supporting our school leaders through stressful times.

RATIONALE FOR THE RESEARCH

The rationale for this research study is to study if workloads and stress levels significantly increased amongst school leaders during the pandemic, and if so, to see how the physical and mental health of school leaders has been affected. Then it is hoped to present helpful suggestions to somewhat relieve the burden on our school leaders.

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, it was a highly stressful time with a lot of uncertainties. Governments were demanding schools go online. However, online programs and teaching were new to most students and teachers. There was a lot of time pressure to put forth a quality educational product online. Around the world, school leaders were dealing with these same difficult issues in their schools.

Teachers, most of whom had never used online platforms, had to be trained and supported in a small window of time. There were sure to be some hiccups along the way and these would have to be identified and fixed as the online programming was running. In many schools, teachers were required to take pay cuts at a time when they were working harder and under more stressful conditions than they ever had in their careers. Adding financial concerns to all the other concerns around the pandemic in schools just adds to greater anxiety on the staff (Wilson, 2020).

Many parents were skeptical of online classes and didn't think they equated to classroom learning, although support for online learning has grown over time. (Parker, 2004) Many

parents would demand tuition discounts. Some principals had to mediate negotiations between parents and school owners to find acceptable discounts for all involved. Principals had to reassure parents the quality of online learning would be acceptable after teachers finished their training (Henderson, 2021).

And after all that preparation to put classes online, it was demoralizing to see some schools struggle for student engagement. Students would not show up for classes, some stubbornly refused to submit any work and still others were present but would not participate. It was very difficult to implement consequences for these undesired behaviours. An example of the student point of view comes from an upper secondary school in Finland. Students there, when answering a survey that was given 4 or 5 times during the pandemic, said the online workload was too heavy and they suffered from fatigue (Niemi, 2020).

For principals, there were many sleepless nights, many evenings spent texting with staff, parents, and school ownership. As teachers went on scheduled breaks, management kept working to make sure things were in order when staff and students returned to school. There were many Zoom meetings, webinars and readings to do in order to develop a vision of what online learning would look like in the school. It wasn't enough to just go online, there had to be meaningful lessons taking place too.

Fitness and other healthy habits were pushed aside until a future return to normalcy. Many meals were delivered by courier straight to the principal's desk as there was no time to take a quiet meal and thereby lose an hour of work time. It seemed nothing could have prepared school leaders for a crisis of this magnitude. Some decisions school leaders were asked to make felt like they could literally be life or death decisions. School leaders around the globe seemed to be sharing similar circumstances.

The physical and mental well-being of the staff and administration in schools must be looked after if schools are to perform at their optimum level. Burned out or exhausted personnel do not perform at their best. It is crucial that the education system monitor and nurture the mental and physical well-being of all its personnel and offer assistance when needed to be sure the students are being actively looked after. (Kelly, 2021)

Principals and Heads of Schools, as the leaders of the administration team, are often looked to for guidance and direction in tough times. If staff are under stress than it's often the

principal making the decisions about what will be done to support the staff. But if the principals themselves are falling under unprecedented levels of stress something must be done to support them. This rationale for this paper is seek an understanding of how much the well-being of school leaders has been affected by the COVID-19 crisis in our schools.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS OR RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study is primarily concerned with addressing key areas that affect school leaders' overall well-being and how these areas have been impacted while school leaders have addressed the COVID-19 crisis in their schools. For the purpose of this research four aspects of well-being will be addressed as they relate to the job of being a school leader. Those areas are workload, physical health, mental health, and stress management. It is the intent of the study to learn not only if these areas of a leader's well-being have been affected, but also to find out to what degree they've altered the ability of leaders to carry on with the typical work of being a school leader.

Specifically, the questions meant to be answered are: How much, if any, has the workload of school leaders increased during the pandemic? How has the physical health of school leaders been impacted by the COVID-19 crisis in our schools? How has the mental health of school leaders been impacted by the COVID-19 crisis in our schools? And, how successful have school leaders been at managing the additional stresses brought on by the pandemic?

The answers to these questions are to be derived from the responses school leaders provide to the related questions in this survey. Taken all together, the mosaic created by converging the four sets of information gleaned from each of these areas ought to bring us to the bigger picture, and the answer to the study's topic: What has been the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on school leaders' well-being?

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

There have been many studies regarding the workload and stress levels of leaders in schools. These studies also note how physical and mental health have been impacted by larger workloads and stress. One in particular, in Australia showed that principals were working long hours, on average 55 hours a week, and suffered from high stress levels. (Henebery, 2020). Another study from New Zealand and Australia found that the hours worked and the pressure on principals have increased year by year (Cranston, 2003). Yet another study from South Africa noted that “the workload of school principals is becoming more and more unmanageable....” (Botha, 2004). These studies were done BEFORE the COVID-19 pandemic spread around the world and forced school leaders and education systems everywhere to adapt.

Then, after the pandemic hit, workloads went higher. Principals have felt like they often need to be the filter between government announcements and school stakeholders such as parents and the staff. (Henebery, Oct 2020) Principals are not left with much time to digest, review, and apply government directives before stakeholders are demanding answers. Parents will approach the principal the day after government makes an announcement on COVID and ask how the announcement impacts the school and its programs. Teachers also want to know what comes next. There is a lot of pressure to demonstrate leadership in a fast-moving environment.

Even as leaders adapt to the greater workload and make the necessary adjustments to run their schools, additional pressures come from not having the resources needed to implement all the new changes (Varela, 2020).

The pressure that goes with being a school leader and the hours required to do that job have increased year after year (Cranston, 2003). At a time when the demands on the role of school leader have increased nearly to the breaking point, along comes the COVID-19 pandemic. With no established blueprint for dealing with a pandemic in our schools, administrators have had to improvise on the fly. Some principals who have been mostly successful before the pandemic were probably best equipped to deal with it in their school. Principals who have enough experience to have mastered the workload requirements (Crozier, 2007), and those

who have the cooperation of an effective leadership team (Hulpia, 2009) are the ones who deal with stress and heavy workload the best.

However, most international school leaders have less than 3 years in their roles (Hawley, 1993) and that is, most likely, not enough time to be ready to meet the demands expected of leadership in a crisis. If school administrators were already overworked and stressed out before the pandemic as some studies have suggested (Klocko, 2015), then it stands to reason their workload and stress would increase as they adjusted to the new reality of education during the pandemic.

As the pandemic-forced changes in education have only been with us for a year, there hasn't been a lot of time to measure its effects on educational management yet. However, there was one such survey in New York City in the United States at the time when New York was really the epicenter of the crisis in the states. According to this survey, in which over 1000 principals and other management in New York participated, 95 percent described negative feelings they suffered from. The most common emotion, by far, was anxiety (Brackett, 2020). This is certainly understandable given the wide-ranging impact COVID has had in our communities and in our schools. Policies had to be made on the fly, without previous experiences as a guide. School leaders also described feeling overwhelmed, stressed, and worried as they dealt with pandemic and education in New York (Brackett, 2020).

Besides the well-being of themselves and their family members, participants listed three main areas they felt distressed about. Firstly, they worried about the health of their faculty, staff, and students (Brackett, 2020). By this time most of the teaching was taking place online but the virus was spreading out-of-control throughout the state of New York and everyone felt at-risk on some level. As they are administrators, it's hardly surprising to find out they care deeply about those under their charge. No doubt, they got into education because they have empathy for people.

Secondly, principals worried about their work/life balance, having now moved to a remote learning environment (Brackett, 2020). For most educators that means they were working from home and it could be very difficult to just 'turn things off' when the clock says the school day is over. With all the issues and concerns about school and the pandemic being directed towards them it would be nearly impossible to tune out the 'noise' at 4 pm.

Thirdly, Principals were very concerned that their students were receiving a quality education during the pandemic (Brackett, 2020). Online learning was mostly uncharted waters for most educators before the pandemic, so staff and students were adjusting to a new form of education and principals wanted to feel confident they could show their stakeholders meaningful learning was taking place.

These three concerns are not surprising, given the impact of the pandemic on New York City. The broader question is whether these concerns, or similar ones, are manifested in the professional lives of principals all over the world, from Southeast Asia, to India, to Europe and the Americas. Stress and burn-out amongst school leaders is a known issue in education, and leads to poorer performance and things like absenteeism, and dropping out of the profession (Timms, 2012). Working through the pandemic could exacerbate all these issues.

How much have workloads increased and how has the virus impacted the well-being of principals internationally? What are school leaders doing, or not doing, that could help them manage their situations?

In a roundtable discussion amongst three expert panelists, it was agreed principals often don't do enough to manage their own time and stress properly (Superville, 2020). The host of the discussion, Peter DeWitt, a former principal and a regular contributor to publications such as Education Week, had asked principals why they don't generally talk about their mental health. In response, principals said they had to be role models, they worried about not being supported by their supervisors, and they were concerned about being judged (Superville, 2020).

The expert panelists made ten suggestions for how school leaders can deal with the additional workload and stresses that go hand-in-hand with education during the COVID crisis. Suggestions from the panel were to:

Try meditation and breathing exercises.

Get enough sleep.

Build breaks and daily quiet time into your schedule.

Manage time wisely.

Every call does not have to be a Zoom video conference (Just use audio and multi-task)

Practice self-reflection

Find your tribe

Exercise

Eat healthy

Be aware of that voice in your head (Superville, 2020, para. 14)

These suggestions will be incorporated in this survey for school leaders. The point will be to find out how overworked school leaders are, how it is impacting their physical and mental health, and what can be done to help school leaders stay healthy physically and mentally.

Finally, as is to be expected, others have taken on the same topic as a point of research during these turbulent times in education. In particular, is a study by Dr. Helen Kelly (Kelly, 2021) which overlapped the research phase of this report and ends up reinforcing many of its findings. Dr. Kelly's report was released in January of 2021 and is more extensive in regard to the numbers of participants. Even so, her findings support many of the conclusions from this study.

In Dr. Kelly's summary she says,

The findings suggest that many leaders have felt overwhelmed during the crisis. They feel their training has not prepared them for a crisis of this magnitude and that the support structures in place have failed them. The findings suggest that increased stress has had a significant impact on the professional and personal lives of school leaders. Most leaders have relied on a range of coping strategies but for many these strategies have had a limited impact on their overall wellbeing. Eleven months from the start of the pandemic, levels of wellbeing are generally very low. (Kelly, 2021, p. 4)

The conclusions from Dr. Kelly are significant in recognizing how the overwhelming expectations for school leaders during the COVID-19 crisis has negatively impacted their well-being. The results presented in this study will share many similar conclusions with Dr. Kelly and extend some of the learnings in regard to the challenges presented to school leaders over the duration of the COVID-19 crisis in schools.

DESCRIPTION OF PARTICIPANTS OF THE STUDY

In order to efficiently find school leaders to participate in this study, a call to action along with a link to the survey was posted on seven education and educational leadership groups on LinkedIn. This was done to target a random sampling of school leaders to join the study by completing the survey. Over 250,000 educators, worldwide, are members of these groups. In all, 32 school leaders submitted the 42-question survey in the span of three weeks. Reminders were regularly posted and the survey was closed when surveys were no longer being submitted.

The survey collected mostly qualitative responses but some quantitative data was also collected for demographic purposes. This data was then used to formulate the chart below which presents a full overview of who took part in the survey.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS IN A STUDY TO MEASURE THE WELL-BEING OF SCHOOL LEADERS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

<i>Demographic characteristics</i>	<i>Frequency /32</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>	<i>Demographic characteristics</i>	<i>Frequency /32</i>	<i>Percent (%)</i>
<u>Gender</u>			<u>Highest Degree</u>		
Female	13	41	Doctorate	04	13
Male	19	59	Masters	19	59
			Bachelors	09	28
<u>Age</u>			<u>Type of School</u>		
25-34 years	02	06	International School	22	69
35-44 years	10	31	Private School	07	22
45-54 years	16	50	Public/Gov't School	03	09
55-64 years	03	13			
<u>Citizenship</u>			<u>Position</u>		
U.S.A.	10	31	Head of School	14	44
U.K.	08	25	Principal	09	28
Canada	05	16	Coordinator	03	09
India	03	09	Key Stage Leader	02	06
Australia	01	03.17	Department Head	01	03.3
Azerbaijan	01	03.17	Middle School Leader	01	03.3
Germany	01	03.17	Vice-Principal	01	03.3
New Zealand	01	03.17	No Response	01	03.3
South Africa	01	03.17			
Thailand	01	03.17			
<u>Residence</u>			<u>Years in Current Role</u>		
Thailand	12	38	< 3	14	44
Canada	03	09.4	3-6	13	41
India	03	09.4	7-10	03	09
China	02	06.3	11-15	01	03
Morocco	02	06.3	16-20	01	03
U.K.	02	06.3	>21	00	00
Senegal	02	06.3			
Brazil	01	03.3	<u>Years in School Leadership</u>		
Colombia	01	03.3	< 3	03	09
Japan	01	03.3	3-6	17	53
New Zealand	01	03.3	7-10	04	13
Romania	01	03.3	11-15	05	16
Switzerland	01	03.3	16-20	02	06
			>21	01	03

To summarize the chart, nearly 60% of respondents are male, and nearly 60% hold a master's degree. Fifty percent are between the ages of 45-54. Seventy-two percent of respondents described themselves as either a Head of School or a Principal. Nine participants said they were either Coordinators, Key Stage Leaders, a Middle School Leader or Head of a Department. There was one Vice-Principal.

They have not been in their roles for long; 14 respondents said they have held their current roles for less than 3 years, 13 have been in their roles for 3-6 years, only 5 have held their positions 7 years or longer.

However, they have held leadership positions longer than their current roles. Seventeen of the respondents said they have been in leadership positions for 3-6 years. Five said they have been in leadership positions for 11-15 years, four said 7-10 years. Only 3 have been in leadership for less than 3 years, and another 3 have served more than 15 years.

Most participants work in private or international schools. Twenty-nine said they work in either a private school or an international school. Only 2 said they work in government schools. One said their school is a Thai private school developing into an international school.

The schools where respondents are employed represent 13 different countries all across the globe. The largest contingent are the 12 school leaders working in Thailand. None of the other countries represented have more than 3 respondents living there.

Of the 32 school leaders who responded to the survey, 10 are citizens of the United States of America and another 8 are from the United Kingdom. Five more are Canadians, while three are from India. There were six countries with one citizen responding to the survey. Those countries are Germany, New Zealand, South Africa, Thailand, Azerbaijan, and Australia.

DESCRIPTION OF DATA COLLECTION TOOL(S) / MATERIALS

This study was conducted via a mostly qualitative online survey. In order to get to the question of what effect the COVID-19 pandemic has had on international school leaders' well-being it was decided to make a five-part questionnaire consisting of 42 questions. A link to this questionnaire would then be posted on educational leaders' groups on the professional social media website, LinkedIn. This approach emulates other educational research studies that have been conducted online in recent years.

The first part are demographic questions designed to find out who are responding to the survey and what their backgrounds are. Since respondents must have been school leaders during the first wave of the pandemic, which was judged to start in some places shortly after January 1st of 2020, the very first question asked, “Have you held a position of leadership in a school since at least January of 2020?” If respondents replied ‘no’, their subsequent answers would be disqualified from the survey. As it turned out, all the participants who chose to take the survey answered ‘yes’ to the first question. The other questions in the demographic section were designed to understand what specific role the participant played in school leadership, their age and gender, what type of school they work in, and how long they’ve served in an educational leadership capacity during their career.

The next four sections of the survey were drafted to assess how the well-being of school leaders has been directly affected by the pandemic. Well-being has been described as having four parts (Munn, 1996), five parts (Types of Wellbeing, 2018), six (What is wellbeing? 2021), and up to even 29 parts (Hills, 2002). For purposes of this study, well-being is broken-down into four categories. This was done to keep the study narrowly focused on components which have to do with educational leaders and the specific aspects of their job that pertain to the study. The four sections are workload, physical health, mental health, and stress management. All the research questions are designed to find out how each of these categories have been affected by the additional issue of the pandemic being added to the issues school leaders were already meant to deal with pre-pandemic.

The workload section consists of seven questions designed to decipher the amount of additional workload, as measured by working hours, school leaders have taken on in addition to their pre-pandemic workload. The physical health section is made up of nine questions aimed at work-outs, eating habits, and sleep patterns to determine if these critical areas of good physical health have been adversely affected by school leaders having to deal with the pandemic-related issues in their schools. For the section on mental health, there are seven questions asking school leaders to gauge their own mental health and how it compares now to how they felt before the pandemic hit. And finally, there is an eight-question section on stress management. It is meant to see how the additional stresses brought on by the pandemic are being handled by school leaders.

These final four sections, taken as a whole, should provide a meaningful snapshot of the over-all effect the pandemic has had on the well-being of school leaders around the world. The results of all four sections will be summed up in the conclusions of the paper and will be followed by practical questions that might help address the major issues school leaders have identified in the survey.

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

The study was conducted as the action research topic for the author's M.A. in Education program from the Global School in Paris via its satellite campus at the Bangkok School of Management in Bangkok, Thailand. The main research tool is the survey previously described. There is no physical setting required to administer the survey because it is not a school wide survey. It is a survey of school leaders worldwide and as such leaders receive the link to the survey through social media channels. Most respondents were found through the LinkedIn social media format. The link to the survey was posted in seven groups on LinkedIn. Specifically, the LinkedIn groups where members were invited to participate were called: Principals and Teachers Network, Education Management Professionals, International School Educators, Educational Leadership: System & School Improvement to Increase ALL Students' Growth & Achievement, International School Administrators, Head Teachers, and International School Community.

Some school leaders were identified through the LinkedIn groups and were individually emailed a link to the survey. The thinking was that an individual invitation message might stand a better chance of soliciting a response.

All participants to the study were asked to agree to consent to using the information they provided for the purpose of this study. They were assured their answers and their identities would stay anonymous. This consent was posted before any questions were completed, and participants consented by continuing on with the survey.

In the end, participants were overwhelmingly school leaders from private schools and international schools worldwide. The biggest blocks of participants were school leaders working in Thailand. Over-all, eight different nationalities were represented. The biggest blocks of respondents were citizens of the UK, the U.S., and Canada. Although participants were welcome from public or government schools worldwide, only a small percentage of those

kinds of respondents submitted surveys. A longer timeframe and a more extensive marketing campaign would probably be required to reach those groups.

The research design was an online survey designed to be mostly qualitative in nature and aimed at school leaders such as principals, vice-principals and coordinators. This approach was chosen so participants could be reached anywhere in the world. Also, given that the pandemic is still affecting travel worldwide, it would be extremely problematic to achieve in-person interviews or even give out the survey in a conference. Zoom interviews were considered but ultimately viewed as massively time-consuming. Thus, given the state of world, online surveys made the most sense in reaching the intended target audience in a timely manner. The first question on the survey also acted as a filter to make sure the correct people were answering the survey. The question asked if the respondent had been serving in a school leadership position since January of 2020. As stated earlier, a 'no' response would eliminate the respondent's survey from the study pool since they would not have been in a leadership position when the pandemic started, which is the key element for respondents to possess to be a part of the study.

Data was collected by creating a survey in google forms. This survey link was then shared through email and postings on the social media site, LinkedIn. After participants follow the link, they are sent to the survey in the author's google forms folder. When respondents finish the survey, they push the SEND button and the survey is entered in the databank. The author is sent a notification each time a survey is completed. Survey distribution ran for three weeks. It started on April 15, 2021 and responses were collected up until May 3rd, 2021. Thirty-two surveys were returned.

Google forms automatically collates data according to the answers given and creates pie graphs or bar charts to show the percentage of answers to each question. It can also create a spreadsheet so the raw data can be seen in a glimpse. Each individual survey is also available. All these features lend themselves toward easy reference to the data for noting comparisons and contrasts.

DATA ANALYSIS & PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND FINDINGS

School leaders have been overworked, overstressed, and their mental health has suffered as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Principals and school heads say the burden of making what could possibly be life and death decisions for their school communities has left them with extensive working hours, increased headaches, and many more sleepless nights compared to before the pandemic. These are the primary findings of this study focused on the mental health of our principals, heads of schools, and coordinators as they navigate their schools through the pandemic and all its ramifications for our education systems.

The study consisted of 42 questions split into an introduction and four different categories. The introduction gathered background information on the survey's respondents, followed by sections on workload, physical health, mental health, and stress management. Those four categories are meant to paint a bigger picture that reflects the over-all well-being of the school leaders who respond to the survey. Thirty-two school leaders working in 13 different countries world-wide responded to a request for participants.

So, who were the leaders that responded to this study? Over 90% of them lead a private school or an international school. They split along gender lines 59% male, 41% female. Eighty-one percent are between the ages of 35 to 54. Just over 80% have been in their current job as a school leader for 6 years or less. Most of them are citizens of European or North American countries.

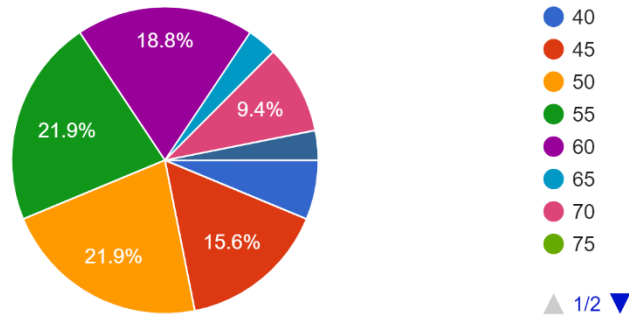
There is one key thing they all have in common; they've been a school leader while the global COVID-19 pandemic has ravaged our school systems and left our leaders in uncharted waters looking for a way to navigate their schools through this storm. They've been deeply affected by the great responsibility they've been asked to bear. Their physical and mental health are suffering and the long hours they are working don't leave much time to take care of themselves. To understand how the pandemic has affected the well-being of school leaders, this study first addresses the topic of workload, then physical health, mental health, and finally stress management.

WORKLOAD

The first topic in the study (other than the demographic questions) was workload. And this is where it's learned the hours are truly long. Studies have already established principals were working long hours before the pandemic (Cranston, 2003) and the survey respondents confirmed this in their answers. As the graph below shows, respondents reported working fairly long, but standard hours, for administrators before the pandemic. Most were working from 45 to 60 hours a week before the pandemic hit.

11 Estimate how many hours a week you were working before the pandemic.

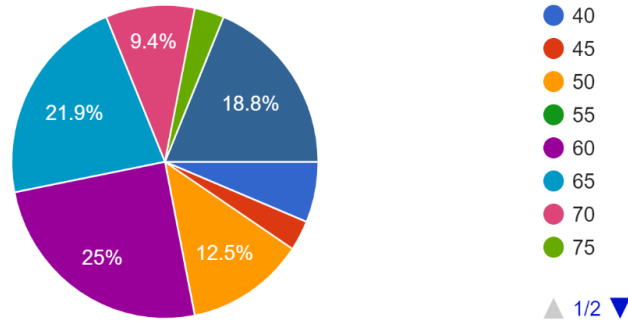
32 responses



As school leaders switched to crisis mode for the pandemic, their hours increased significantly (As the graph below shows). Those 45 to 60-hour weeks became 60-80+ hours a week. In fact, 19% of respondents reported working 80+ hours a week as the pandemic raged, whereas only 3% said they worked that much before the pandemic. Over-all, the data from this study shows 81% of respondents reported an increase in their workloads as a result of the pandemic.

12 Estimate how many hours a week you were working at the height of the pandemic.

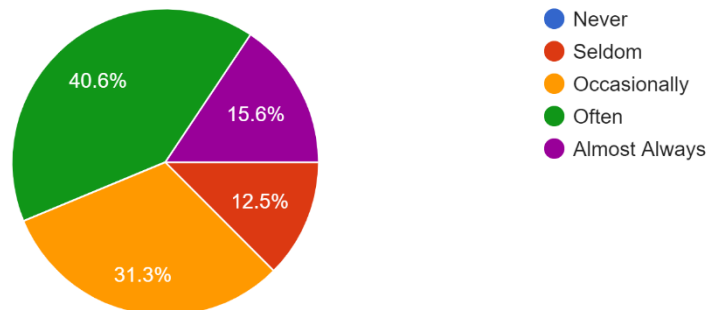
32 responses



Undoubtedly, an increase in work hours of this magnitude will begin to impact the well-being of school leaders. Unluckily, there are more factors than total hours worked when it comes to measuring a school leader’s workload and these factors have also negatively influenced pandemic workloads. In addition to increased hours, principals, school heads, and coordinators also reported losing their traditional down times; weekends, evenings, and school breaks. Normally these would be times for school leaders to rest and recharge. Instead, during the pandemic they are working through weekends, evenings and school breaks. On a Likert scale of never, seldom, occasionally, often, and almost always, only 16% of respondents said they worked breaks ‘almost always’ before the pandemic.

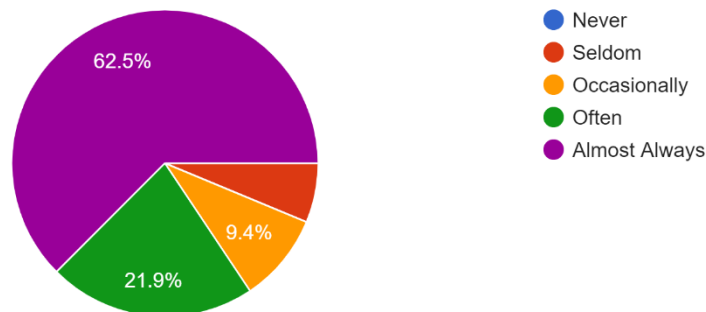
13 How often would you work weekends, evenings or on school breaks before the pandemic?

32 responses



However, looking at the graph below, these numbers jump significantly during the pandemic, with a whopping 63% of school leaders now saying they worked weekends, evenings, and school breaks ‘almost always’, (which is the top category). Add in the 23% who said they worked those breaks ‘often’ during the pandemic and that means **86% of respondents lost their school breaks** because they were working during the pandemic.

14 How often would you work weekends, evenings or on school breaks during the pandemic?
32 responses

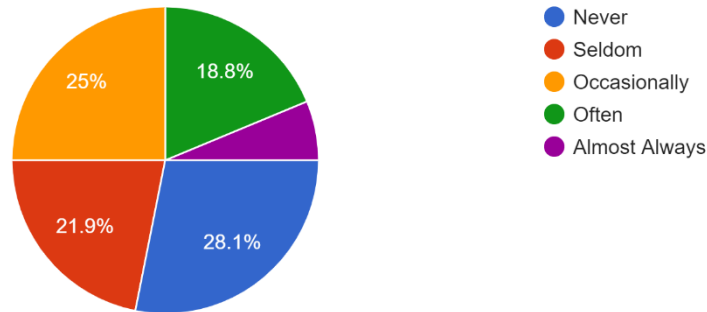


This study has determined school leaders are working longer hours during the pandemic, and they are working during their traditional school breaks, thus losing the opportunity to ‘recharge’. To complete the workload picture, the next questions asked about working from home. Whether leaders were working from home because it wasn’t safe to go to school or because the additional workload meant it was crucial to spend time at home for school-related matters, working from home can affect family life and well-being because it becomes very difficult to ‘shut down’ and take time out for the family. Unfortunately, working from home became much more common during the pandemic for school leaders.

How much did school leaders work from home before the pandemic? The chart below shows 75% of the school leaders in this study worked from home occasionally, seldom, or never, before the pandemic, with the largest group, 28%, saying they never worked from home before the pandemic.

15 How often did you work from home before the pandemic?

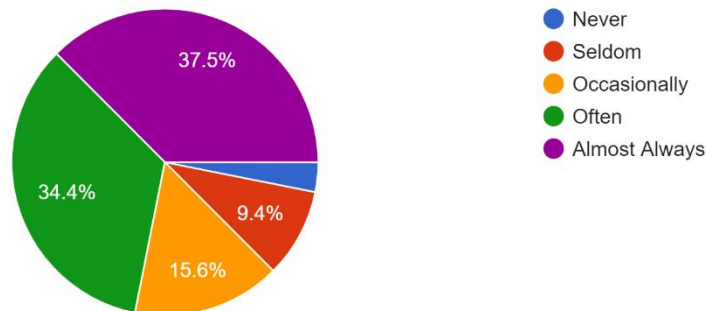
32 responses



Those numbers changed drastically once the pandemic began. More than 70% of respondents said they worked from home more during the pandemic than before. In fact, the largest group, 38%, now said they ‘almost always’ worked from home during the pandemic compared to just 6% who said the same thing before the pandemic. Of course, some of this increase could be attributed to staying home to work, in lieu of going to school while people were trying to avoid crowds. Nonetheless, it would affect normal home time routines.

16 How often did you work from home during the pandemic?

32 responses



When one looks at the combination of time spent working from home, the loss of vacation time, and the large increase in working hours during the pandemic it is clear the large majority of school leaders who responded to this survey are likely to have their well-being threatened by sizable increases in their workloads during the pandemic.

To get a deeper understanding of other specific factors that could influence the workload of school leaders, the final question in the workload section asked respondents an open-ended question, “Are there any other ways your workload has been affected by the pandemic?”.

Their written answers provide meaningful insight to what they’ve been doing in addition to the usual tasks involved in the running of their schools. These quotes from the survey share their angst at working through this unprecedented situation:

“Much more planning and implementation required.”

“I received more work from external jobs during the pandemic, which contributed to my workload.”

“Lack of certainty and constant changes to conditions across multiple stakeholders”

“Focus on pandemic responses and finance as opposed to improvement”

“Facing a new and unprecedented situation”

“Hiring has become more problematic due to quarantine and budget caution. This, it takes longer to locate & hire, which adds to my workload”

“Organizing virtual events”

“It's not so much the amount of time that has been affected --- it's the type of work that needs to be done.”

“Diverting energy to ensure compliance with safety protocols; liaising with doctors, specialist cleaning companies and sourcing products to make the school environment safer. This was added to the need to maintain a high quality of teaching and learning online, with all the time spent on equipping staff with the necessary skills and equipment to teach online.”

“Prioritizing and urgency were both challenging and at a level never experienced before.”

“The level of stress around the type of work. The increased sensitivity means it feels less straightforward. Communication becomes more important but more difficult.”

“Excessive screen time.”

“Lacking resources to support teachers, especially financial.”

“Also studying for a degree at the same time.”

“Had to do more in a shorter period of time.”

“Not getting things done due to the constant churn of Covid related stuff that needed doing.”

“There was a promise by the government to give a Chromebook to each child and make internet available- this was not delivered.”

The common thread in these comments is how much more time-consuming, difficult, and exasperating it became to run a school while trying to adjust to a new way of doing things without any roadmap on how to proceed. Running a school was already more than a fulltime proposition before the pandemic hit. After the pandemic hit, school leaders still had to look after their traditional duties and the added responsibilities and uncertainties that came with making adjustments to continue with educating students. Our school leaders had to rise to these challenges but it’s meant more tasks to do and a great deal more hours required to do them.

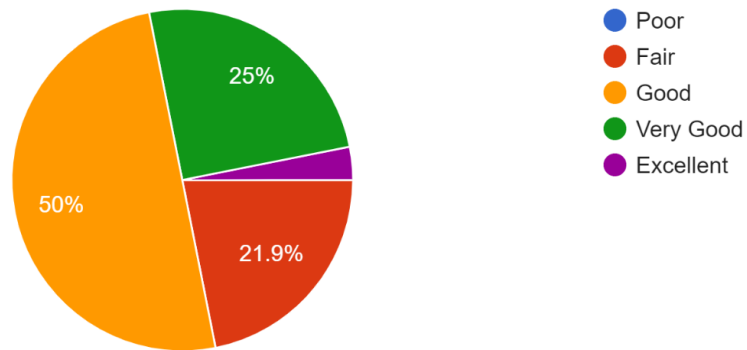
PHYSICAL HEALTH

Physical Health is the next component of well-being in this study, and to measure it the study asks participants about workouts, eating habits, headaches, and sleeping patterns. With the increased workloads evidenced in section one of the survey it would stand to reason that school leaders would see changes in their physical health during the pandemic, although these kinds of changes can sometimes take a while to manifest themselves.

School leaders in this study were first asked to report on their pre-pandemic physical health. As the chart below indicates, nearly 80% of school leaders in the study reported having good, very good, or excellent physical health before the pandemic started.

18 How would you describe your physical health before the pandemic?

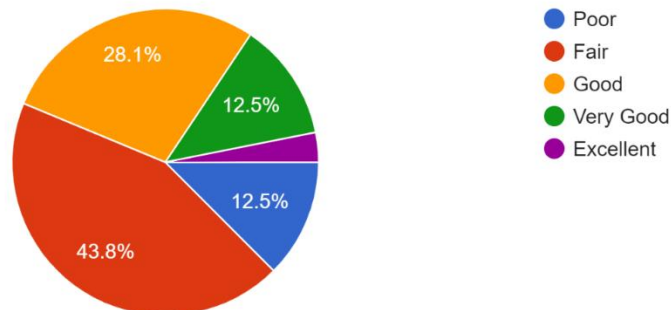
32 responses



According to the next chart, since the pandemic started, half of the school leaders reported sinking physical health. While some reported no change, the biggest percentages now said their physical health fell into the fair or poor categories, with a total of 56% in those categories.

19 How would you describe your physical health since the pandemic began?

32 responses

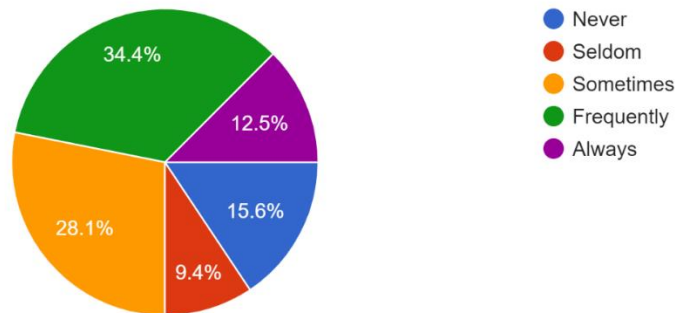


The raw data shows a full 50% of school leaders report a drop in their physical health. Sadly, 13% reported poor health (the lowest category) during the pandemic, whereas no one thought they had poor health in pre-pandemic times. Interestingly, while only one person reported their health improved, anecdotally some said the pandemic actually allowed an opportunity for more work-outs since they didn't have to be at school so often.

To understand school leaders' dip in their physical health, one only has to compare their pre-pandemic workout regimens with their workouts during the pandemic. The chart below illustrates how often school leaders were working out, pre-pandemic. Whereas the following chart will show their workouts during the pandemic.

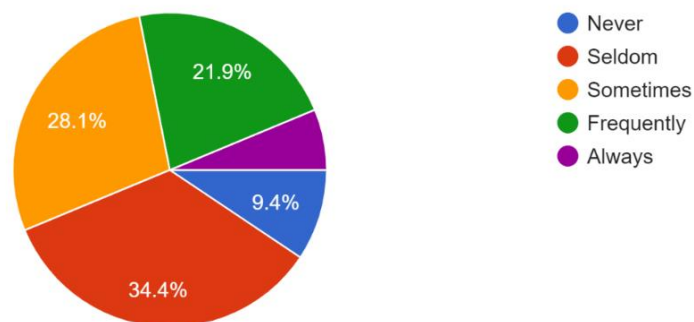
22 How often did you work-out before the pandemic?

32 responses



23 How often have you worked-out during the pandemic?

32 responses



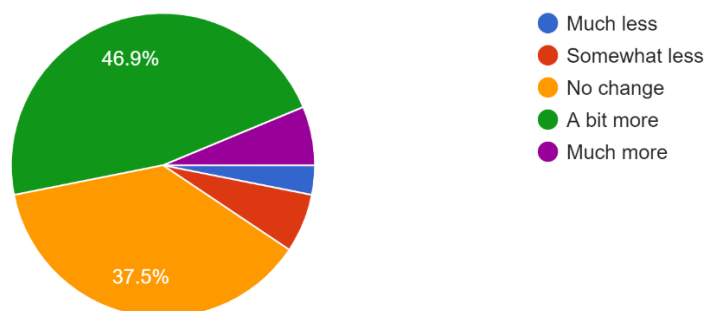
The 25% of school leaders who said they never worked out or seldom worked out before the pandemic expanded to 44% during the pandemic! And that doesn't tell the full story. The charts in this case don't show what happened in individual cases, so it's necessary to review separate surveys. The individual data shows most school leaders reported a drop in how often they would normally work-out. Typically, if they reported working out 'frequently' before the pandemic that changed one category to 'sometimes.' If they originally were working out 'sometimes', that dropped to 'seldom' during the pandemic. Of note, there were those who reported no change or even improved workouts during the pandemic. Those were the ones who said less structured time at school gave them more flexibility to get fitness, but these leaders were very much in the minority. Almost all leaders reported workout habits going down a category, and a few reported big drops from where they started. Of course, in the bigger picture of overall well-being, any dip in fitness becomes another factor in diminishing health.

Along with workouts measuring physical health, this study measured eating habits. Most school leaders said their eating habits remained the same or dropped a bit during the pandemic but for the most part their healthy eating habits still fell into the upper ranges of sometimes, frequently, and always. So, while there was a slight downward trend in healthy eating habits, unlike the other factors measured in this survey, it was fairly negligible and not likely to make a significant dent in the physical health of school leaders.

However, if we start to look at how the mind can affect the physical health of school leaders, we notice a troublesome pattern as presented in the next chart. Asked if they suffered from more headaches during the pandemic, over 50% said they had more headaches. Specifically, 45% of leaders said they had a 'bit more' headaches and 7% said they had 'much more'.

25 Have you had suffered from more, or less, headaches during the pandemic?

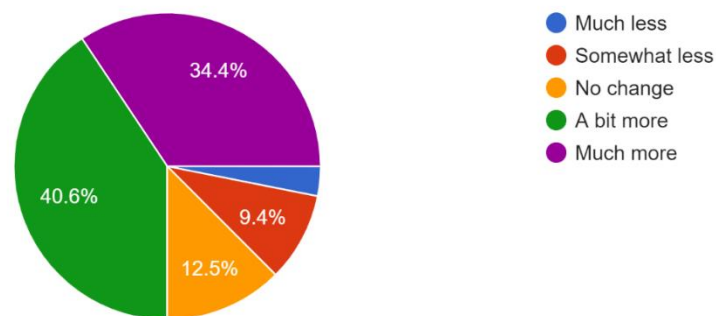
32 responses



Of even greater consequence is the amount of insomnia school leaders have suffered. Asked if they had ‘much less’, ‘somewhat less’, ‘no change’, ‘a bit more’, or ‘much more’ insomnia since the onslaught of the pandemic, a large majority, at 75% of school leaders, said they’ve suffered ‘a bit more’ or ‘much more’ during the pandemic.

26 Have you had suffered from more, or less, insomnia during the pandemic?

32 responses



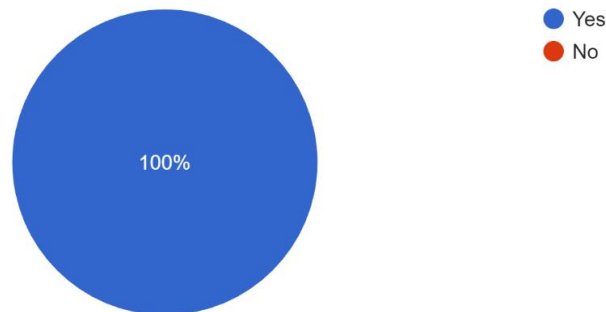
Put frankly, our school leaders are not sleeping well during the pandemic. This does not bode well for their over-all well-being. Add up less fitness, more headaches, and a substantial amount of insomnia, and it is despairing to conclude there is a significant downward trend in the physical health of school leaders during the pandemic.

MENTAL HEALTH

There can be no doubt the workloads of school leaders have gone up during the pandemic. It is also not surprising there is a corresponding dip in physical health as workloads have increased. Perhaps most alarming though is that school leaders report a significant impact on their own mental health. This is possibly exacerbated by their perceived duty to look after the mental health needs of their own staff. When asked, *'Have you found yourself needing to manage the mental health needs of your staff?'*, 100 percent of respondents replied, *'Yes'*.

27 Have you found yourself needing to manage the mental health needs of your staff?

32 responses



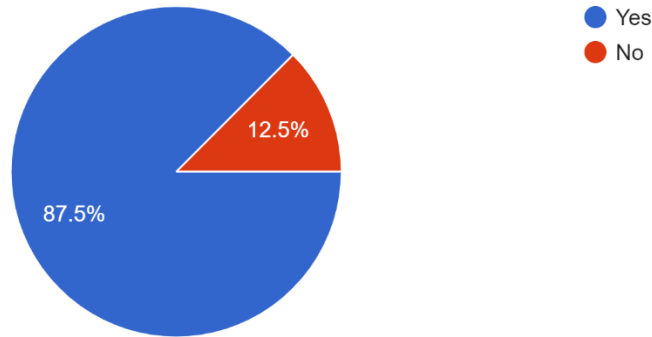
It is a big responsibility to take on the mental health needs of your staff in addition to all the other responsibilities school leaders manage. Examining how school leaders go about assessing the mental health needs of their staff, and then managing them, is a big topic and best left for another study. However, it is safe to assume that the need to help a large group of others manage their own mental health can certainly weigh upon your own.

While 100% of respondents felt they had to look after the mental health of their staff, a large number of school leaders also report their own mental health has been affected. As the chart below shows, 88% of respondents think working during the pandemic has impacted their mental health.

Only 4 school leaders thought there'd been no change in their mental health due to the pandemic.

28 Do you think working during the pandemic has impacted your own mental health?

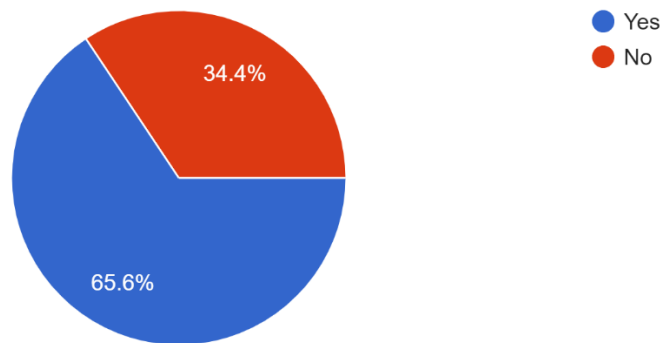
32 responses



Intriguingly, over 65% of respondents thought they do a good job of managing their own mental health needs. Seventy-four percent said they have a close friend or colleague they rely on for mental health support.

29 Do you feel like you've done a good job managing your own mental health needs?

32 responses

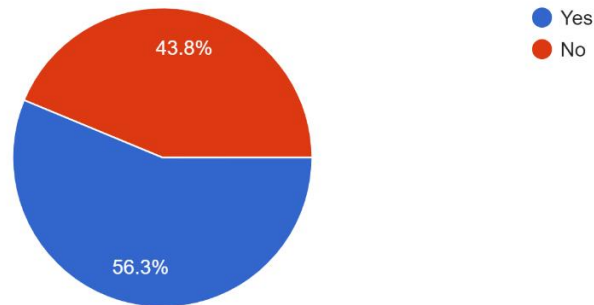


It's a bit of a paradox that so many school leaders think their mental health has been affected by the pandemic but also think they do a good job of managing their own mental health needs. How would leaders go about managing their own needs if they were in crisis,

when, in fact, 56% of them say they would be reluctant to share their mental health issues with their superiors?

30 Would you be hesitant to share your own mental health concerns with your superiors?

32 responses



It can be surmised that historical perceptions of mental health as a weakness still exist, even in the school leaders' community. That would account for why such a large group would try to keep their own mental health issues silent. The next question in the survey speaks directly to the issue of how leaders think the public might perceive a leader seeking mental health support. Asked why they would not share mental health issues with their superiors, nearly half the respondents said it is because, "The school community expects you to be strong." Clearly, even at a time when mental health support is needed more than ever, there is still the fear that requests for mental health support might be seen as weakness.

31 If your previous answer was yes, choose a reason why you would be hesitant to share your own mental health concerns with your superiors.

25 responses



To speak to some of the specific factors that school leaders see affecting their mental health, the survey concluded with an open-ended question, “What were the biggest influences affecting your mental health during the pandemic?” School leaders seemed eager to share their experiences, as 27 of 32 left responses. Respondents shared a large range of answers that can be loosely assigned to one of three categories; Stress, Workload, and Personal.

STRESS

“The stress of dealing with a new situation and sharing in the collective anxiety that it induced.”

“Stress and pressure of making decisions to keep people safe.”

“Keeping things running in multiple locations when not being physically there.”

“Pressure mental”

“Insomnia as a result of worrying about whether enough had been done to ensure that students and staff would be as safe as possible whilst on campus. The significant impact of the pandemic on the school budget.”

“Student enrollment dropping and parental concerns about online learning.”

“Student’s participation / engagement in class. Poor revenue.”

“Negative: Challenges of prioritizing needs. Parent concerns and complaints (increased volume and frequency). Parental dissatisfaction in educational quality despite teachers giving 110 % (well beyond any previous efforts level) and coming to terms with that. The inability to accept the things I cannot change (letting go). Positive: A heightened awareness of my own health needs: diet, exercise (daily), standing up and moving (not sitting for many hours straight, working standing up, using voice instructions versus text, eye sight breaks & blue light glasses, stretching/yoga (daily) to counter act to much sitting and a much more sedentary life.”

“Continuous uncertainty, lack of travel.”

“Communication with others. You become a point of support and it made me focus on ensuring i was healthy and strong. But when it gets to hard decisions, sometimes I could not be there for people. But I was doing morning and evening regular meditation sessions guided with online videos. I didn't often feel much stress because this practice supported me to manage each day what was most important and let things go.”

“Uncertainty and Need to be on your toes at all times.”

“Management and ownership frequently disagreed on how to approach things.”

“Responsibility for other people’s mental health and not being able to please vast swathes of people with your decisions.”

“The unknown and illogical. Knowing that decisions being made were not based on logic or scientific evidence. I swore a lot more this year.”

“Job security”

WORKLOAD

“Workload and increased stress because of it. Also, more covers were needed for teachers who were sick or being tested.”

“No time to properly switch off and relax. This drained me mentally at times. Each week had new challenges.”

“The workload, uncertainty of the future, having to adjust to a new lifestyle.”

“Burnout...too much work and not enough balance.”

“The parents had not kept their contact details updated with the school!”

“Workload”

“Being overloaded by the director to do more. As founding head with minimal admin support staff, starting, running and authorizing an international school (and concurrently an elementary bilingual programme) is already more than enough ... demanding more hours observing, or 'correcting' teachers is really being blind to the reality - new school, new programme, new to MYP teachers, yes not perfect. But pushing everyone more is not the answer.”

PERSONAL

“Family”

“Being separated from family.”

“Travel restrictions prevent my otherwise frequent visits home to the U.S.”

“Lack of exercise.”

“Compassion fatigue; personal life sacrifices.”

Two of the three categories’ leaders said were affecting their mental health are also categories being measured for this study. Whilst workload and stress are accounted for, it is worth noting those leaders who mentioned the need for family time. Most of the participants are expatriates working away from their extended families in foreign countries. Before the pandemic and the resultant harsh restrictions on travel, those in the education field could always count on the option to visit home and family during their school breaks. With the

travel option severely restricted over the long months dealing with the COVID-19 crisis, school leaders have lost the in-person contact with their families and consequently, they name this as one of the sources of their decline in mental health.

At this point, it has already been shown that rising workloads and declining levels of physical health can be factors depressing the well-being of school leaders during the pandemic. Add to that the perception that school leaders think their own mental health has suffered during the pandemic and three of four categories of well-being in this survey are indicating real concern for the well-being of school leaders during the COVID-19 crisis. The final category of well-being to be considered is Stress Management.

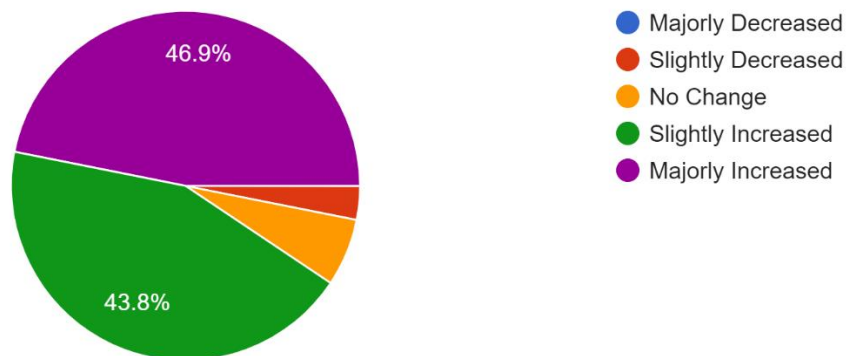
STRESS MANAGEMENT

Many of the aggravating factors for mental health listed by the school leaders refer to the additional stresses that have been placed on them to deal with all the ramifications of the pandemic in our school systems. So how has the pandemic and the need to remodel our education systems during this crisis affected the stress levels of our school leaders?

Nearly 50% of school leaders say their stress levels has majorly increased and yet another 44% say their stress levels has slightly increased. That means 91% are saying their stress levels increased to some degree as a result of the pandemic.

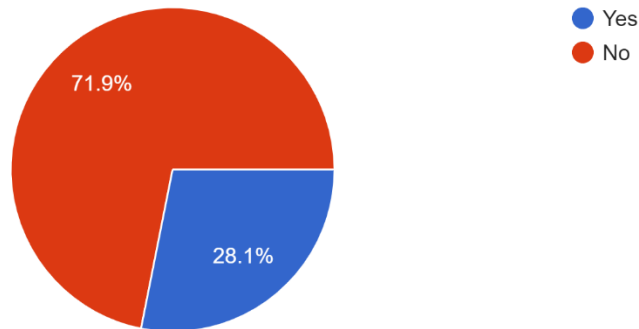
34 How has the pandemic affected your stress level?

32 responses



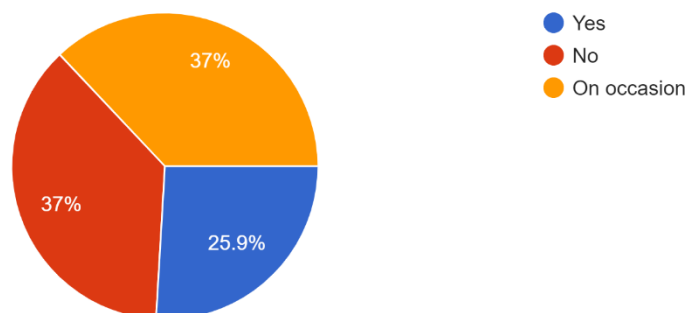
School leaders attribute their increased stress levels to many things. Seventy-two percent said they didn't feel well-prepared to handle a crisis of this magnitude.

35 In regard to the pandemic, did you feel well-prepared for a crisis of this magnitude?
32 responses



In schools where staff were asked to take pay cuts, 64% said staff felt demoralized, and in regard to the difficult measures' schools had to implement to deal with new protocols, 63% of school leaders felt like staff blamed them, at least occasionally.

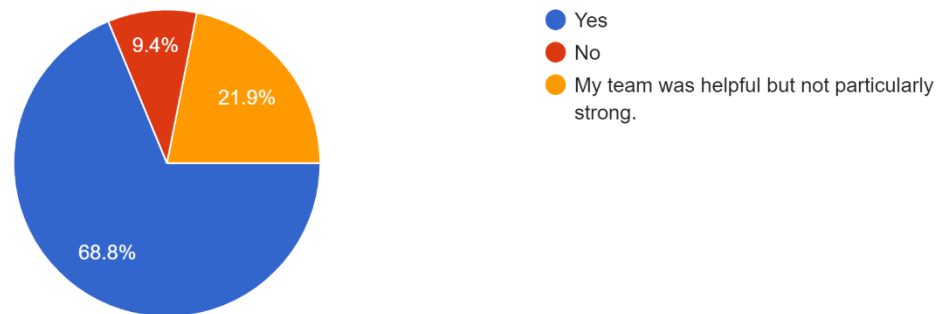
37 Did you ever feel like staff blamed you for the difficult measures the school had to take in regard to the pandemic?
27 responses



A third of all school leaders felt like their performance in regard to the pandemic could affect their job status. On the other hand, most leaders (70%) felt like they had a good team behind them. They also said the support of that good team was the biggest factor helping them deal with their stress.

39 Do you feel like you've had a strong team supporting you?

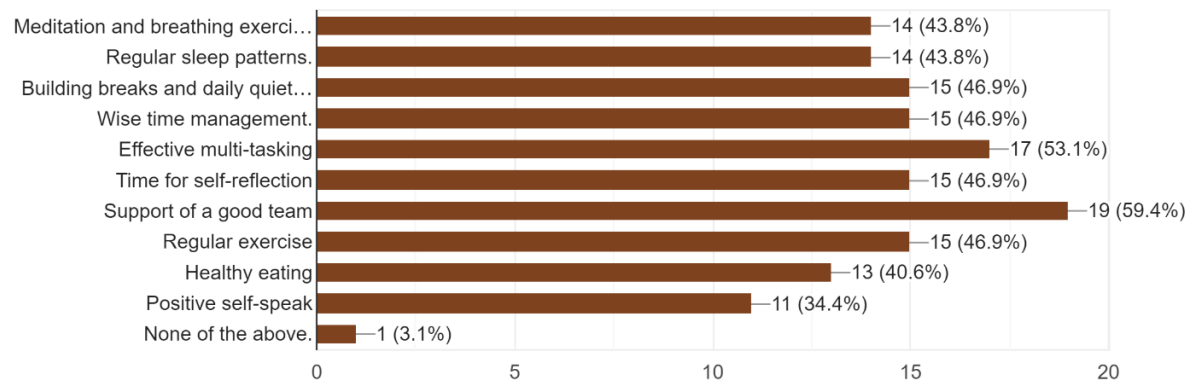
32 responses



The other factor over 50% of school leaders said they used to deal with the stress was effective multi-tasking. Self-reflection, wise time management, and regular exercise were other popular ways leaders told us they dealt with stress. These and other stress management techniques used by school leaders are presented in the chart below.

40 Check the stress management techniques you've used during the pandemic:

32 responses



Taken all together it is clear school leaders have been under a lot of pressure during the pandemic. They say their stress is way up, that they weren't prepared to deal with a crisis of this magnitude, and that in some cases they felt staff blamed them for the difficult measures that had to be taken to deal with the crisis. Some even said they felt as if their jobs could be at risk, depending on how successfully they dealt with the COVID-19 crisis. These stresses, along with the results of the other three categories of well-being for this survey, add to the weight pulling down the well-being of school leaders during the pandemic.

There are some positives to report from this section of the survey. Two main mitigating factors exist to relieve some of the pressure school leaders have been enduring in the pandemic. One is that almost 70% of leaders feel like they have a strong team to support them and the other is that leaders have an array of stress management techniques they use to get them through difficult times. Perhaps this is not unexpected; climbing the ladder to become a successful school executive requires a certain mastery of stress management techniques. Given that school leaders said they were unprepared for a crisis of this magnitude it is safe to say school leaders probably used all the stress management techniques they could, given the circumstances.

WRAP

To conclude the survey, school leaders were asked to add any comments or observations they thought pertinent to the study. In response, they provided an eclectic selection of comments which provide fascinating insight as to what school leaders have gone through during this pandemic. Their responses are shared below:

“Managing requirements and parental expectations with needs of my staff was a challenge! The fact that my staff had prepared online teaching and learning and lessons via Zoom only to find that a very small percentage of children signed in or did the work. Just left the teachers wondering: 1) all the just in time learning they needed to do, and 2) the work they did was really worth it.”

“I think the biggest cause of anxiety was when the Thai Government closed the borders and made it extremely difficult for a lot of teachers to return home to Chiangmai.”

“Many parents were adamant about receiving discounts before they even saw what the online program would look like.”

“I have a strong personal background in crisis preparedness (due to the location of prior work), but the country, staff and school I was in did not have this ... this made our challenges

much greater since everything started from scratch. Also, China was first & completely caught off-guard, while other locations had warning 'it was coming'."

"Salary cuts, job security and the shift in market expectations is something worth mentioning."

"I wakeboard as a hobby with my daughter. There were days where we were at the park every day. Online school finished at 3pm. We would be at the park by 4pm, computer set up and able to continue working and exercising. We were lucky, lockdown was short and wakeboarding opened up immediately. Our life was not impacted in fact we exercised more."

"I think there should be more support and resources for the mental health of leaders. It is of utmost importance, as it is a high-stress job with a lot of responsibility, but leaders need outlets to de-stress, strategies for effective stress and emotion management."

"Thank you very much for this survey. I think that the results will be very useful and reassuring for most school leaders."

These comments suggest there were challenges dealing with ownership, staff, parents, and students that would not have been necessary but for the COVID-19 crisis. Dealing with all these additional issues in a timely fashion and in a professional way, would mean the normal tasks of school leaders are being crunched into a smaller box to be dealt with when, and if, time allows for it.

Finally, after seeing all four categories of well-being for school leaders affected by the extra burdens created by the pandemic in our schools, it can be said school leaders have suffered multiple negative effects on their well-being during this time of crisis.

CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVING TEACHING / LEARNING

SUMMARY OF MAIN FINDINGS

This study found that dealing with the COVID-19 crisis in our schools has negatively affected the well-being of school leaders. This finding was achieved by evaluating four aspects of well-being as it pertains to being a school leader; workload, physical health, mental health, and stress management. In each of these categories it compared how school leaders felt about their well-being before and after the pandemic began impacting our school systems.

In the section on workload, school leaders were shown to have dramatically increased the hours devoted to their jobs as compared to the already big workloads they were dealing with before the pandemic. The time spent working from home, the loss of vacation time, and the large increase in working hours have created a sizable increase in the workloads of school leaders during the pandemic.

The physical health of school leaders also shows a downturn in well-being. According to the survey, school leaders say they are getting less fitness, more headaches, and a substantial amount of insomnia compared to their pre-pandemic selves.

School leaders also think their own mental health has suffered during the pandemic. They reported stress, workload, and personal issues weighed heavily on them during the pandemic and affected their mental health. The inability to see family members in far-away countries contributed to the declining mental health of school leaders.

Finally, the level of stress school leaders felt after the pandemic started has risen substantially compared to before the COVID-19 crisis hit. To make matters worse, almost all school leaders felt they were unprepared to handle a crisis of this magnitude.

Clearly, school leaders have been operating under the weight of overwhelming workloads, reduced physical health, an increase in mental health issues, and a highly stressful work environment while they've dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic in their schools. All four of the well-being categories measured for this study have shown increased negative effects on well-being during the pandemic, as compared to before the pandemic started. This study makes it clear our school leaders are in a crisis of well-being.

EVALUATION: STRENGTH & LIMITATIONS

Although limited in its scope, this study makes it clear school leaders are overworked, suffering from reduced physical health, mental health issues, and are working in a highly stressful environment while they deal with the COVID-19 pandemic in their schools.

There are certain strengths to this research. For one, school leaders from all over the world chose to complete the survey. They answered all the questions thoughtfully, honestly, and when given the chance, in detail. The field of research; well-being of school leaders during the pandemic, is a fairly new topic and as such, this paper should be part of the groundwork being laid on this topic.

At the same time, this research has its limitations. It has a relatively low number of participants and used a limited amount of time to collect surveys. Both of these would need to be more substantial to give the results more legitimacy. However, it should be noted, the study results so far mirror other similar studies with more participants. Another limitation is that 12 of the 32 participants in this study are working in Thailand. With a third of the studies' participants in Thailand there is somewhat of a built-in predisposition to whatever pandemic circumstances were in Thailand at the time of the study.

Other limitations to note: all participants were voluntary; participants self-assessed their own well-being in the four categories presented, so the results are not based on professional assessments; and the participants were overwhelmingly leaders in international and private schools which means the public-school systems in most of the world were left untouched. Again, this could be remedied by reaching a broader panel of participants with a larger study.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

The main recommendation to improve the study would be to conduct a more exhaustive marketing appeal to attract more participants, and a greater array of schools, from a more diverse set of countries. Another improvement would be limiting the participants to just principals or heads of schools in order to be assured of a more common experience from the participants. Finally, another study could carry more medical potency if professionals were used to evaluate the well-being of participants as opposed to the self-evaluation used in this study.

FURTHER RESEARCH IDEAS OR QUESTIONS

While this study confirms the premise that the well-being of school leaders has been extensively compromised by the COVID-19 pandemic, there is more to be done on how to support the well-being of school leaders in crisis. For instance, according to some studies one of the best ways to reduce the workload for principals is to share the work. An increase in middle management positions and better preparation to manage their workloads was recommended in an Israeli study (Oplatka, 2017). A study conducted in Turkey found extra workload can cause conflicts in the family/work dynamic. It recommended hiring more assistant principals to share the workload among school leaders (Turkoglu, 2020). How would these approaches impact the workload and thus the well-being of school leaders during the pandemic?

Another possible question; would having a staff gym have a positive impact on the well-being of school leaders? When school leaders identified as excellent were asked about their physical health during the pandemic, they all said a regular workout routine was necessary and was, in fact, easier to carry-out since they were often working from home (Reyes, 2021). Experts generally agree regular exercise contributes to better productivity and better sleep patterns (Adler, 2021). It may seem contradictory, but taking an hour out of the work day for better fitness is likely to lead to better productivity. Having a staff gym at school would make it accessible and therefore more likely to be used, and therefore aid in improving staff fitness. Further research could address this question.

Then there is the issue of mental health. School leaders in the study feel like their mental health is suffering, and they feel responsible for the mental health of their staff. When it comes to managing mental health, it is most assuredly a matter best left to the professionals. Having a mental health professional employed by every school board or at least a professional contracted by schools to take on any staff members who come forward for assistance would surely yield positive results.

Finally, the question of how to deal with the amount of stress school leaders feel should be addressed. Most people understand a certain amount of stress goes with any high-level management job. The pandemic has put leaders in unfamiliar territory and many have felt the burden of what could amount to life and death decisions being made in the principal's office. It's a gigantic burden to bear. These stresses have been caused by a crisis 72% of leaders have told us they felt wholly unprepared to deal with.

A solution could be to encourage leaders to use self-regulation strategies like better planning and reducing some tasks (Tikkanen, 2017). Also, crisis management could be an essential topic in principal's training and could be regularly offered as professional development for all school leaders. That way, when a crisis comes along, at least school leaders will have a 'playbook' of sorts to provide some structure and guidance on how to proceed. Would these ideas work? Further study could be encouraged here.

FINAL CONCLUSION

This study has found that dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic in our schools has jeopardized the well-being of school leaders. These issues of well-being cannot be solved overnight, and many schools would not have the means to address them. However, the questions raised for further study could provide a blueprint for providing some positive support for school leaders. Giving our school leaders additional manpower to help with work overload, leaving fitness time in our leaders' busy days, making sure all staff have access to free mental health professionals, and providing crisis management training for school leaders would go a long way toward relieving the overwhelming pressure our school leaders deal with in the current pandemic-strained educational environment.

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APPENDIX A – CONSENT FORM

The Effect of the COVID-19 Pandemic on School Leaders

Description of the research and participation

This survey will ask 42 questions in order to understand the impact COVID-19 issues have had on our school leaders. The survey takes 5-10 minutes to complete.

Its purpose is to determine if workloads have increased, if stress has increased, and if dealing with the pandemic in schools has had an impact on the physical and mental well-being of school leaders.

This study is conducted by Mr. Mark Grittner. Mark is an educator with over 30 years of experience as a teacher, vice-principal, and principal.

All responses will be confidential and will not be linked to the identity of the respondent. If a participant wishes to refrain from answering any question, they are free to do so. Any participants wishing a final draft of the completed research paper may leave an email address at the end of the survey.

Risks and discomforts

There are no known risks associated with this research. Participants may experience some anxiety in answering the questions, but the researcher assures participants that information will be anonymous and confidential, and any data collected will only be used for investigating the aim of the study.

Potential benefits

You will have the benefit of knowing you have participated in an important study in the field of education. This research should help the world of education understand the incredible responsibility put on school leaders during the pandemic. You may benefit from reading the final paper should you opt in to receiving an email copy.

Protection of confidentiality

Data collection during the research process will be kept confidential. Everything will be done to protect your privacy. Your identity will not be revealed in any publication resulting from this study.

Voluntary participation

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate and you may withdraw your consent to participate at any time.

Contact information

Any questions or concerns should be directed to Mr. Mark Grittner.

markgrittner11@gmail.com

Consent

As a participant, you have read this consent form and understand the information contained in it. By filling in the survey, you hereby give assent to participate in the study.

APPENDIX B – SURVEY & RESPONSES

1 Have you held a position of leadership in a school since at least January of 2020?

Yes 32

No 0

DEMOGRAPHICS

2 What is your age?

25-34 2

35-44 10

45-54 16

55-64 4

65-74 0

75 years or older 0

3 Which gender do you identify as?

Male 19

Female 13

4 What is your country of citizenship?

Country	Count
Australia	1
Azerbaijan	1
Canada	5
Canada	1
England	2
Germany	1
Great Britain	1
India	2
India	1
New Zealand	1
South Africa	1
Thailand	1
UK	3
USA	5
United Kingdom	1
United Kingdom	2
United States	3
USA	1

5 What is your country of residence?

Value	Count
Brazil	1
Canada	2
Canada	1
China	2
Colombia	1
England	1
Great Britain	1
India	2
India	1
Japan	1
Morocco	1
Morocco	1
New Zealand	1
Romania	1
Senegal	1
Switzerland	1
Sénégal	1
Thailand	11
Thailand	1

6 What is the highest level of education you have completed?

High School	0
Bachelor's Degree	9
Master's Degree	19
Ph.D. or higher	4
Trade School	0

7 How would you describe the type of school you are/were leading during the pandemic?

Government School	2
Public School	0
Faith Based School	0
Private School	7
International School	22
Thai private school developing/opening international school	1

8 Which of these most closely matches your current position?

Owner/CEO	0
Head of School	12
Principal	9
Vice-Principal	1
Head of Secondary	0
Head of Primary	1
Head of Early Years	1
Department Head	1
Key Stage Leader	2
Coordinator	3
Middle School Leader	1

9 How long have you held a role in school leadership?

Less than 3 years	3
3-6 years	17
7-10 years	4
11-15 years	5
16-20 years	2
21 years +	1

10 How long have you been in your current position?

Less than 3 years	14
3-6 years	13
7-10 years	3
11-15 years	1
16-20 years	1
21 years +	0

WORKLOAD

11 Estimate how many hours a week you were working before the pandemic.

40 2
45 5
50 7
55 7
60 6
65 1
70 3
75 0
80 0
80+ 1

12 Estimate how many hours a week you were working at the height of the pandemic.

40 2
45 1
50 4
55 0
60 8
65 7
70 3
75 1
80 0
80+ 6

13 How often would you work weekends, evenings or on school breaks before the pandemic?

Never 0
Seldom 4
Occasionally 10
Often 13
Almost Always 5

14 How often would you work weekends, evenings or on school breaks during the pandemic?

Never	0
Seldom	2
Occasionally	3
Often	7
Almost Always	20

15 How often did you work from home before the pandemic?

Never	9
Seldom	7
Occasionally	8
Often	6
Almost Always	2

16 How often did you work from home during the pandemic?

Never	1
Seldom	3
Occasionally	5
Often	11
Almost Always	12

17 Are there any other ways your workload has been affected by the pandemic?

(19 responses)

Facing a new and unprecedented situation

Prioritizing and urgency were both challenging and at level never experienced before.

There was a promise by the government to give a Chromebook to each child and make internet available- this was not delivered

Focus on pandemic responses and finance as opposed to improvement

Had to do more in a shorter period of time

Lacking resources to support teachers, especially financial

Not getting things done due to the constant churn of covid related stuff that needed doing.

Lack of certainty and constant changes to conditions across multiple stakeholders

Much more planning and implementation required.

Hiring has become more problematic due to quarantine and budget caution. This, it takes longer to locate & hire, which adds to my workload

It's not so much the amount of time that has been affected --- it's the type of work that needs to be done.

Diverting energy to ensure compliance with safety protocols; liaising with doctors, specialist cleaning companies and sourcing products to make the school environment safer. This was added to the need to maintain a high quality of teaching and learning online, with all the time spent on equipping staff with the necessary skills and equipment to teach online.

The level of stress around the type of work. The increased sensitivity means it feels less straightforward. Communication becomes more important but more difficult.

I received more work from external jobs during the pandemic, which contributed to my workload.

Also studying for a degree at the same time.

Excessive screen time

Organizing virtual events

PHYSICAL HEALTH

18 How would you describe your physical health before the pandemic?

Poor	0
Fair	7
Good	16
Very Good	8
Excellent	1

19 How would you describe your physical health since the pandemic began?

Poor	4
Fair	14
Good	9
Very Good	4
Excellent	1

20 Did you practice healthy eating habits before the pandemic?

Never 1
Seldom 3
Sometimes 13
Frequently 9
Always 6

21 Have you practiced healthy eating habits during the pandemic?

Never 1
Seldom 7
Sometimes 9
Frequently 11
Always 4

22 How often did you work-out before the pandemic?

Never 5
Seldom 3
Sometimes 9
Frequently 11
Always 4

23 How often have you worked-out during the pandemic?

Never 3
Seldom 11
Sometimes 9
Frequently 7
Always 2

24 How much have you indulged in vices such as smoking or drinking during the pandemic?

Much less 5
Somewhat less 3
No change 13
A bit more 10
Much more 1

25 Have you had suffered from more, or less, headaches during the pandemic?

Much less 1
Somewhat less 2
No change 12
A bit more 15
Much more 2

26 Have you had suffered from more, or less, insomnia during the pandemic?

Much less 1
Somewhat less 3
No change 4
A bit more 13
Much more 11

MENTAL HEALTH

27 Have you found yourself needing to manage the mental health needs of your staff?

Yes 32
No 0

28 Do you think working during the pandemic has impacted your own mental health?

Yes 28
No 4

29 Do you feel like you've done a good job managing your own mental health needs?

Yes 21
No 11

30 Would you be hesitant to share your own mental health concerns with your superiors?

Yes 18
No 14

31 If your previous answer was yes, choose a reason why you would be hesitant to share your own mental health concerns with your superiors. (25 responses)

The school community expects you to be strong. 12
People might judge you. 1
Your superiors might see you as 'weak'. 4
You don't want to bother them with personal concerns. 1
I answered No. This question does not apply to me. 7

32 Do you have a coach, colleague or friend you can rely on for emotional support?

Yes 23

No 8

33 What were the biggest influences affecting your mental health during the pandemic?

(27 responses)

The stress of dealing with a new situation and sharing in the collective anxiety that it induced

Job security

Negative: Challenges of prioritizing needs. Parent concerns and complaints (increased volume and frequency). Parental dissatisfaction in educational quality despite teachers giving 110 % (well beyond any previous efforts level) and coming to terms with that. The inability to accept the things I can not change (letting go).

Positive: A heightened awareness of my own health needs: diet, exercise (daily), standing up and moving (not sitting for many hours straight, working standing up, using voice instructions versus text, eye sight breaks & blue light glasses, stretching/yoga (daily) to counter act to much sitting and a much more sedentary life.

Workload and increased stress because of it. Also, more covers were needed for teachers who were sick or being tested.

The parents had not kept their contact details updated with the school!

Family

Being separated from family

Responsibility for other peoples mental health and not being able to please vast swathes of people with your decisions.

Burnout...too much work and not enough balance

The unknown and illogical. Knowing that decisions being made were not based on logic or scientific evidence. I swore a.lot more this year

Compassion fatigue; personal life sacrifices

No time to properly switch off and relax. This drained me mentally at times. Each week had new challenges.

Being overloaded by the director to do more. As founding head with minimal admin support staff, starting, running and authorising an international school (and concurrently an elementary bilingual programme) is already more than enough ... Demanding more hours observing, or 'correcting' teachers is really being blind to the reality - new school, new programme, new to MYP teachers, yes not perfect. But pushing everyone more is not the answer.

Students' participation / engagement in class. Poor revenue

Student enrollment dropping and parental concerns about online learning

Travel restrictions prevent my otherwise frequent visits home to the U.S.

Insomnia as a result of worrying about whether enough had been done to ensure that students and staff would be as safe as possible whilst on campus. The significant impact of the pandemic on the school budget.

Communication with others. You become a point of support and it made me focus on ensuring I was healthy and strong. But when it gets to hard decisions, sometimes I could not be there for people. But I was doing morning and evening regular meditation sessions guided with online videos. I didn't often feel much stress because this practice supported me to manage each day what was most important and let things go.

The workload, uncertainty of the future, having to adjust to a new lifestyle continuous uncertainty, lack of travel

Management and ownership frequently disagreed on how to approach things.

Uncertainty and Need to be on your toes at all times

Pressure mental

Stress and pressure of making decisions to keep people safe

Lack of exercise

Workload

Keeping things running in multiple locations when not being physically there

STRESS MANAGEMENT

34 How has the pandemic affected your stress level?

Majorly Decreased 0
Slightly Decreased 1
No Change 2
Slightly Increased 14
Majorly Increased 15

35 In regard to the pandemic, did you feel well-prepared for a crisis of this magnitude?

Yes 9
No 23

36 If your staff were asked to take pay cuts, how would you describe their reaction?

understanding 3
disappointed 1
demoralized 7
Our staff were not asked to take pay cuts. 16

37 Did you ever feel like staff blamed you for the difficult measures the school had to take in regard to the pandemic?

Yes 7
No 10
On occasion 10

38 Did you ever feel like your performance on pandemic related issues could impact your employment status?

Yes 9
No 18

39 Do you feel like you've had a strong team supporting you?

Yes 22
No 3
My team was helpful but not particularly strong. 7

40 Check the stress management techniques you've used during the pandemic:

Value	Count
Meditation and breathing exercises.	14
Regular sleep patterns.	14
Building breaks and daily quiet time into your schedule.	15
Wise time management.	15
Effective multi-tasking	17
Time for self-reflection	15
Support of a good team	19
Regular exercise	15
Healthy eating	13
Positive self-speak	11
None of the above.	1

41 Please use this space to make any comments you think would be useful to the study.
(optional) (9 responses)

Salary cuts, job security and the shift in market expectations is something worth mentioning.

I have a strong personal background in crisis preparedness (due to the location of prior work), but the country, staff and school I was in did not have this ... this made our challenges much greater since everything started from scratch. Also China was first & completely caught off-guard, while other locations had warning "it was coming".

Managing requirements and parental expectations with needs of my staff was a challenge!

The fact that my staff had prepared online teaching and learning and lessons via Zoom only to find that a very small percentage of children signed in or did the work. Just left the teachers wondering: 1) all the just in time learning they needed to do, and 2) the work they did was really worth it.

I wakeboard as a hobby with my daughter. There were days where we were at the park everyday. Online school finished at 3pm. We would be at the park by 4pm,. computer set up and able to continue working and exercising. We were lucky, lockdown was short and wakeboarding opened up immediately. Our life was not impacted in fact we exercised more.

I'm don't drink,.or smoke. So the alcohol ban had no effect on me.

I think the biggest cause of anxiety was when the Thai Government closed the borders and made it extremely difficult for a lot of teachers to return home to Chiangmai.

Thank you very much for this survey. I think that the results will be very useful and reassuring for most school leaders.

Physical health section: I reported no change because I do not experience any of those events. I don't drink or smoke, I don't have headaches, and I don't have insomnia. I couldn't indicate that on the form.

I think there should be more support and resources for the mental health of leaders. It is of utmost importance, as it is a high-stress job with a lot of responsibility, but leaders need outlets to de-stress, strategies for effective stress and emotion management.

Many parents were adamant about receiving discounts before they even saw what the online program would look like.

42 Would you like a copy of the final report? If so, please leave an email address and a copy will be forwarded to you. (19 responses)