



Teachers Need to Take Care of Themselves

By Educator Barnes – February 26, 2020

The pressure put on teachers is breaking them down mentally and physically. Teaching is not the only stressful profession, but it is getting to the point where teachers are no longer being rational and taking care of themselves. This goes beyond the self-care wave that has become ever popular. Self-care is starting to become gimmicky. It is more than spa days and getting away with friends. Teachers need to start being a little selfish; a rundown, mentally or physically unwell teacher is not good for students.

Currently, I'm a school administrator that supervises and evaluates nine educators. Since Friday, five of my team members have been sick. I'm not talking low-key sick. I'm talking about visible sweating, flushed faces, congestion where it's hard to understand what the person is saying. The response overwhelmingly was guilt. Why should a teacher feel guilty about staying home and getting better? This is what the teaching profession has done to educators. They believe it is better to show up to work with a fever than to go to a doctor, get medication, rest, and recuperate. I should not have to convince a teacher to stay home. I shouldn't have to say, "I know you are an adult and can make your own decisions, but you need to put yourself first."

Think about it. Over half of my team has been ill since Friday. When educators come to work sick, they can get other colleagues sick and can even get students sick. How effective are lessons when the instructor has a pounding headache and other aches and pains? It would be better for students to have a sub and the teacher recuperate than for the teacher to struggle.

There are reasons teachers respond like this. It starts with school leadership. I worked at a school where a school goal was for every staff member to have 97% attendance. I never met that goal. If you dipped below 97%, you might get pulled in for a conversation with administration. Here's the problem with this. If a teacher took all of his or her sick days, the teacher would fall under 97%. Why give teachers sick days and then put systems into place that clearly discourages teachers from using the days?

I don't only have myself to take care of; I also have my twin sons. Since my husband and I both work full time, we take turns taking off when our sons are sick. What typically happens with our boys is one is sick and stays home. Then, the other gets sick a few days later. That means both my husband and I had to take a sick day that week. Most educators are also parents and not only can school leadership through their actions discourage teachers from taking off, but their actions can also discourage teachers from keeping their children home from school. I'm not even going to lie. I have sent my sons to school a few times when I should not have. I know it was wrong, but I didn't want to hear from my administrator again.

Knowing my personal experience, I have made it clear to my teachers they need to stay home when they are sick, and that it is also okay to stay home when their children are sick. When it comes to teacher retention, everything is not about more compensation. Sometimes teachers just want to know that school leadership genuinely cares about them. Teachers want administrators who want them to take care of themselves and not expect them to be superheroes.