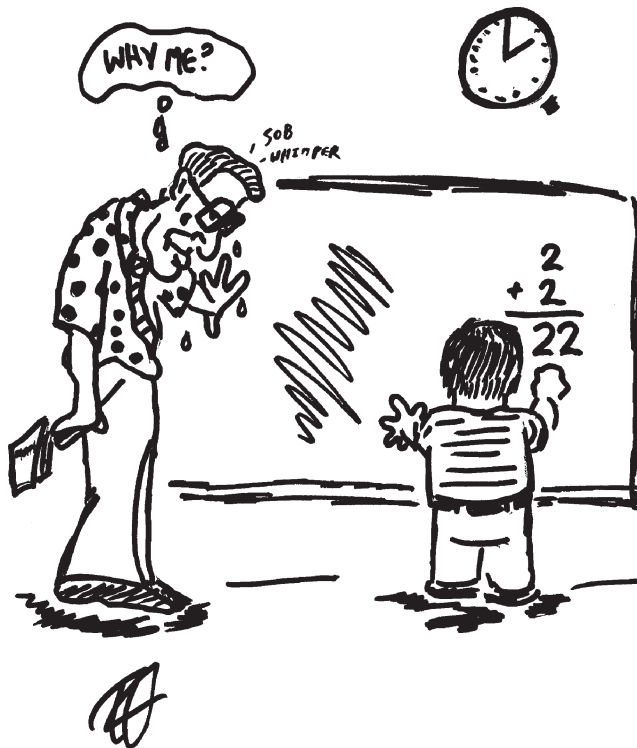


STEP 1

Identifying Schools as a Culture of Stress

Figure 1.1 Teaching Is a High-Stress Profession



A first-year teacher writes to her elementary methods professor:

Dear Dr. Smith:

Is my life supposed to be like this? All day yesterday the principal reminded *all* teachers during afternoon announcements of the staff development on Step 3, "Building Integrated Activities With Rigor for the Common Core" was to start in the media center five minutes after the last bus departed. On the way to the workshop, I stopped by the teachers' lounge and bought my favorite candy bar and raided the fridge for any soft drink left from my break. After a quick caffeine rush, I was ready for the Common Core. "Bring it on," I thought to myself. An hour later, the caffeine and sugar high crash hit. After two hours of building our activity guide, the presenter reminded us what was due for next week and dismissed the disgruntled group. I went back to my room for a "brief" planning meeting with my team. Completely absorbed or in a state of shock, I realized I was sitting alone. I found myself running out the door as the custodian was locking the building to leave as night time would soon be approaching. Panic consumed me when I realized that I had spent the last hour discussing the next day's final plans with team members. We had obviously planned for the next day, but I had obviously zoned out. As a result, I had left the building with tomorrow's lesson plans but unsure of what I was responsible for leading the next day. To cover all bases, I had carried two large boxes of instructional materials out the door to my car. I could have been mistaken for an employee of a major moving van line. I really felt sick.

Once I arrived home, I prepared dinner, washed the dishes, and put in a load of laundry. My husband gave the twins their baths and got them ready for bed. Sitting down to reflect on the day's events, I wondered why I had to tell Marvin three times to put the crayons in the box. I felt guilty

for losing my temper with three girls who continued to play after I had redirected them twice to complete center work. I was close to a nervous breakdown—Is there such a thing? As I wondered about nervous breakdowns as real or made-up, I starting thinking what miracle has to be performed to get Jason to turn in his homework. It was getting late, and my husband had been to bed for what seemed like hours. I had a choice either to crash on the bed in total exhaustion, complete tomorrow's lesson plans, or read the want ads for a new job in the morning's paper still unrolled in a nearby chair. I crashed on the sofa before I could make the choice. My husband guided me to bed later in the night. As I was about to go to sleep, the radio came on welcoming me to a brand-new day. Why did we never talk about these things in our classes? Yes, I had learned about various stages of student development, many different methods, and the right way to conduct a parent conference. I did not sign up for this. Is this what teaching is really about?

Sincerely,
Jane Doe

SCHOOL CULTURE AND STRESS

Stress for today's teachers continues to be a national epidemic. Increased and continual anxiety to the degree that we experience daily has led to what has been labeled "teacher burnout." In fact, most teachers believe that our nation's schools have become centers that can only be viewed as a "culture of stress." What is a culture of stress? A *culture* is a pattern of beliefs, values, and practices shared by a group or organization. The culture basically defines how things are done within the culture. *Stress*, clinically defined, is the sum of the biological reactions to any adverse stimulus, mental or emotional, internal or external, that tends to disturb the organism's balance. Teachers continue to work in a culture of stress and are

members of a profession that follows a pattern of expected practices that can disturb homeostasis and cause an array of illnesses, and it is not getting any better.

In other words, as a teacher you can become sick teaching in a classroom or school environment that is stressful, and all classroom or school environments are stressful.

You have two choices.

1. Use precautions or plan activities to prevent or eliminate the adverse stimuli.
2. If unpreventable (such as we experience daily in the classroom), you must counteract the adversity to return to a state of homeostasis.

Not Your Typical Jack and Jill Story

Jill knows that if she groups two boys known to fight with each other in a group activity, she will experience an adverse stimulus that will cause her stress. With this knowledge, she uses precaution and planning and does not place them in the same group; therefore, she avoids the adverse stimulus and stress. On the other hand, Jack, totally unaware of this situation, groups the boys together, and as expected, they begin to fight. Jack experiences the adverse stimulus and the related stress. He becomes frustrated and moves the boys apart. His body is not in balance; biological reactions may include increased adrenaline, heart rate, and blood pressure. He is in an agitated state and is stressed. However, Jack has learned a special deep breathing exercise (one that you are going to learn in this book) and sits quietly for a few moments doing the quiet deep breathing activity and slowly returns his body to a state of homeostasis or what we call *life balance*.

Many health professionals use the term *distress* to differentiate between stress that is considered negative and stress that can be viewed as positive. However, even positive stress can cause problems if not balanced. Think of the holiday season, a wedding, or the birth of a child. These are some of the greatest events in our life and can be toxic as related to stress. Why? The body really does not know the difference between positive and negative stress and attempts to return to the state of life balance as quickly as possible. The major difference is with positive stress, the event ends, and we move on with our lives. With distress or negative stress, many times there are no ending times, only slowing down times.

Though the term “stress” has become common in today’s society, interpretations of the identity of stress vary greatly. Teacher burnout can be viewed as a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion resulting from an inability to cope effectively with the daily stresses found in teaching over an extended time. The classroom teacher is a major candidate for burnout. Whether chasing 25 to 30 elementary children for six to seven hours or commanding 100 to 150 students for three 90-minute or seven 50-minute periods in a small space while attempting to teach, control behavior, reinforce, reward, socialize, and raise test scores, usually all at the same time, it does not take long for today’s teacher to reach exhaustion.

Unless you have been a teacher, you have no way to understand what we are saying. So, this book is for teachers, teacher assistants, parent volunteers, and those who have been in the classroom.

Teaching Is a High-Stress Profession

Teaching is identified as a high-stress profession by researchers. Conflicting reports have surfaced, but in recent studies, upward of 85% of educators view teaching as a stressful job. Disenchantment can lead to teachers leaving the profession. In our society today, about half of classroom teachers do not stay past the third year of teaching. Major sources of teacher stress today include the following:

- Disengaged students
- Discipline problems

- Dealing with difficult school administrators
- Feeling unsafe in the school environment

Teaching is considered to be a high-stress profession.

Stress by definition is a situation in which one must adapt to change, and the demands of teaching change with the wind, creating an abundance of unchecked stress. In fact, in the first edition of this book, we reported more than 20% of teachers leave the profession within the first three years. We stated previously the new numbers from our research and numerous states report the number is closer to 50% now. And as new teachers enter America's schools over the next 10 years, most will enter the ranks with enthusiasm, but our prediction is that 60% will leave the profession after five years and 85% after 10 years.

Of interest, concerns remain the same from beginning teachers as we first reported and are remarkably similar to those of veteran teachers discussed previously, but may additionally include the following:

- Trying to cope with individual differences in students
- Poor relationship with parents
- Lack of instructional support
- Receiving poor preparation for teaching in teacher training institutions (This is especially true for individuals entering the profession teaching at the senior high school level. Quite frankly, observing in many classrooms in more than 600 districts in 49 states, the situations are unbelievable, but that is for another book.)

Furthermore, it is our experience that a much greater number of today's teacher education graduates awarded teaching licensure or credentials do not make it to teaching. Many are lured by businesses and industries promising higher salary and benefits, a healthier work environment, and lower levels of job stress. With this increased phenomenon and more than 70% of teachers reaching retirement age within the next five to ten years (or plan to do early retirement available in most states), schools are experiencing a growing teacher shortage in about every level and subject area. School boards are being forced to hire nonqualified individuals who are changing careers or rebounding from corporate and government downsizing or from the recession that started in 2008. Once in the classroom, these new

teachers soon discover the stigma that “anybody can teach” is a false and frightening claim. Unprepared to teach specific content areas or lacking basic teaching skills, most of these recruits are not willing to work through the early and largely overwhelming hands-on training program necessary to get them through the first year of teaching.

For More Information: Visit the following Web site for more information on teacher training: www.ncate.org (the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education).

Research Note

In the recent 44th Kappan-Gallup poll (August 2012), parents found that their children expressed greater fear of bullies from within the classroom or school and less fear of intruders from outside the school coming in with weapons to launch deadly attacks. Half of the adults completing the yearly survey reported having been bullied as children, while only 16% stated they had been the bullies. At least half the parents surprised the researchers by proposing that schools should investigate school-related bullying when it is carried over into the community and even various types of online bullying.

When we wrote the first edition of *The Frazzled Teacher*, bullying was more limited to small incidents at school. In the years between the first and second editions, we have heard more extreme examples of how bullying has varied and multiplied. This is still FEAR, a major stressor that can lead children and youth to serious health problems both physically and emotionally. We are not experts on bullying, but as educators and parents we know it must be brought under control. We urge you to find other resources from Corwin on the topic of bullying.

Source: the 44th Kappan Poll (August 2012). *Phi Delta Kappan*, Volume 94, Number 1, 23. Bloomington, Indiana: Author.

School Reform and Teacher Stress

The National Commission of Education intensified a long era of legislated school reform that enforced more rigorous teacher selection, teacher evaluation, standardization of curriculum, and testing of students.

The Perception

School reform has been predicated on the assumption that teachers are the problem or reason for mediocre school performance, and therefore, need to be carefully controlled and monitored. Educators are experiencing a time of “teacher bashing”—the wrongs of education and even society have been attributed to incompetent, inconsiderate, and self-serving teachers and administrators.

Since 1965, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) has provided the guidelines for the federal government's requirement for public schools. With the bipartisan support given to President George W. Bush in 2001, a redefined ESEA emerged, often referred to as the No Child Left Behind Act. States had to be in compliance with the national standards set forth by this legislation to receive federal monies, which required more testing resulting in higher teacher and student stress in the classroom.

During the Obama years, teachers are seeing some relief from massive state testing with the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, but just like accountability standards, the CCSS may create as much confusion and concerns related to accountability. Much will depend on states and districts having the funding to prepare faculties with the new standards and what the much awaited for Common Assessments will have on the entire process.

For More Information: To read more about the Common Core Standards visit: <http://www.CommonCoreStateStandards.com>

Teaching and Noninstructional Responsibilities

Handling discipline problems and receiving extra duties such as hall and cafeteria monitoring, among others, are viewed as detriments to teaching and are not considered a part of the job description by some teachers. Faculty meetings, homeroom duties, and high-stakes testing promote feelings of misusing valuable instructional time. Laws require the inclusion of students with various disabilities; special accommodations are, therefore, required of regular classroom teachers for these students to function at a minimum level, which just adds to the list of stressing concerns.

Students bring distracters and stressors—described as life events—to the classroom daily. Researchers designed and conducted a study that measured 42 items using the Adolescent Life Events Checklist (ALEC). Condensing the 42 items into 16 subscales produced the following list:

1. Change in eating and sleeping habits
2. Death or accident of friend or relative
3. Problems with friends
4. Sexual events (pregnancy, abortion, miscarriage)
5. Change in status of parents
6. Family conflict
7. Satanism or magic
8. Substance-use issues of self or family member
9. Mother's pregnancy or miscarriage
10. Problems with police
11. Delinquent activities
12. Money and employment problems of self or family member
13. Physical violence
14. School stressors
15. Personal injury or illness
16. Sexual abuse

Research Note

Frequency of the occurrence of the life events was examined by the researchers to determine which events occurred to more than half the student participants in the individual schools involved in the study. Three life events appeared in the top six for all schools involved: death of close friend
(Continued)

(Continued)

or relative, money problems experienced by the family, and change in relationship with people you know. When students are stressed and upset, their behavior usually deteriorates, and teacher stress levels can increase proportionally.

Problems that many students bring to the classroom as social baggage lead to additional stress on teachers. Teachers cannot and should not be required to deal with family problems, street life, or community problems, but often the teacher, especially the elementary teacher, has to serve in multiple roles ranging from nurse to counselor. These extra duties or expectations add to the level of stress.

WARNING: Prolonged exposure to high levels of stress without effective coping leads to health problems. Stress and related anxiety can manifest in a plethora of physical problems: tachycardia (racing heart), high blood pressure, asthma, abdominal pains, headaches, backaches, and other somatic complaints.

TEACHER STRESS AND THE IMMUNE SYSTEM

Stress affects the immune system of our bodies. A high percentage of teachers express job dissatisfaction. Dissatisfaction over a long period of limited control or inability to change can lead to distress and health problems.

Researchers studying psychoneuroimmunology (PNI) have scientifically proven domains of stress affect the immune system. Evidence showed stress might cause a measurable decline in the immune system's ability to fight disease. Over the years, theoretical explanations have emerged grounded in scientific study. Medical findings appear to imply anyone experiencing stress can have a decrease in immune function.

Defense against infectious disease is controlled by the immune system. Foreign substances that are not naturally part of the body are attacked by the immune system.

Not confined to one organ or one site in the body, the immune system is everywhere. Immune cells occupy the skin, eyes, nostrils, lungs, and the lining of internal organs. Every part of the body is occupied. In different ways, an assortment of specialized cells protects the body. When a part of the body gives a distress call, immune cells charge to the problem area via the lymphatic system.

To learn more about the technical aspects of lymphocytes, T-cells, and NK-cells, visit www.webdoctor.com

Possible Consequences of Stress

Stress has the potential to depress immunity. This may be one of the reasons why people under stress are more susceptible to illness. Hormonal deregulation caused by stressful events leads to inflammatory disease and depression. Stress affects immune responses to viruses and bacteria. Therefore, it is believed that chronic stress increases susceptibility to the common cold.

Research Note

High levels of cortisol, a stress hormone found in the bloodstream, affect immune function. If these levels remain high for too long, individuals may suffer related illnesses, including winter colds and flu.

Stress may lessen the effectiveness of certain vaccines and can confound some studies of certain illnesses, such as AIDS and autoimmune diseases. Vaccinations for hepatitis B and for influenza were influenced by stress, causing a suppression of T-cell response and lowering antibody levels. These are two factors imperative for developing a strong immunity to these diseases.

Researchers from the University of California-Los Angeles examined the relationship between stressful life events and the development of colorectal cancer. Men under stress were five times more likely to get colorectal cancer than men without job difficulties.

A profound stressor is job dissatisfaction. For many reasons previously discussed, teachers have been dissatisfied with their job. One reason may be that educators encounter continual daily conflicts that are persistent and repetitive and go unchecked. Individually, these events may not pose much harm, but collectively, this accumulated stressor can become problematic. Teachers receive stressors from internal, external, and personal pressures. When individuals feel demands from the environment and these demands cannot be handled appropriately, stress occurs.

A combination of teaching and personal pressures makes stress the Number 1 health problem of classroom teachers.

TEACHING AND PERSONALIZING STRESS

Internal and External Stressors

Internal pressures trigger stress in teachers. Internal stressors may include isolation from other adults and dealing with the unique learning abilities and weaknesses of individual students. Other internal stressors consist of deadlines, bells, excessive paperwork, inadequate supplies, preparation, and grading. Teachers may also feel internal stressors from being harassed or questioned by students. Students tend to complain verbally about assignments and may physically damage personal property in the classroom. Student absenteeism can also be stressful because it requires additional work by the teacher. Each stressor not only affects the teacher's health, but instructional class time as well.

External pressures are additional stressors teachers deal with daily. Such stressors include dealing with parents, working with mentors or supervisors, and interacting with administrators. Violence at school is another external stressful situation. Circumstances surrounding violence are time-consuming and require paperwork.

Each stressor uses individuals' energy and may cause stress hormones to activate.

An educator's personal stress may also affect immunity. Personal stressors include death of a loved one, car accident, illness of a family member, divorce, debt, trouble with in-laws, changes in living conditions, and financial situations. Even though personal stressors were not caused at school, each stressor may affect a teacher's classroom performance. Personal stress may contribute to additional internal and external pressures during an educator's day.

Research Note

Harvard physiologist Walter B. Cannon first described the fight-or-flight response. In this response, the body reacts internally to a threat. Acute stress could be dealt with effectively by either fighting or running away. This response was essential to survival when human beings faced physical threats such as wild animals. However, in modern life the stresses we face are more likely psychological and interpersonal. A stress researcher at McGill University concluded that the body reacts to today's stresses as though it were still facing an actual physical threat. Stressful situations have always caused the body to react.

Responding to Stress

Individuals encounter three basic stages in response to stress.

- Stage 1, alarm, refers to the body mobilizing for fighting or fleeing.
- Stage 2, resistance, is where the individual combats the stressor. Through purposeful action, the individual attempts to reduce the stressor by using coping tactics.
- Stage 3, exhaustion, is referred to as burnout.

Each of the previous three stages can be compared to diving into cold water. First the body is "alarmed" by the frigid water. Second, the body is able to swim for a period while it builds up "resistance" to the cold. Finally, the swimmer becomes "exhausted" if the water is too cold or the swimming too long. In response to stress, each individual stage affects the function of the immune system.

Aspects of immune function may be bolstered by bursts of short-term stress. When stressful situations become chronic, however, the immune system may falter and health problems arise. Physiologically, the body reacts each time a stressor is present. In response to Stage 1, fighting or fleeing, the immune system causes changes to occur within the body. First, adrenaline starts to pour throughout the body and affects immune functions. An individual's heart rate begins to accelerate. Then an increase in blood pressure and blood clotting occurs. Whereas most functions speed up in stressful situations, the digestive system slows down. If a teacher continually encounters stressful experiences, severe physiological symptoms may begin to occur. Such symptoms include insomnia, upset stomach, ulcers, ulcerative colitis, headaches, migraines, chronic back pain, asthma, fainting, fever, diabetes, stuttering, skin rashes, menstrual problems, Graves' disease, hypoglycemia, multiple sclerosis, arteriosclerosis, arthritis, anxiety, and depression.

Physiological disorders can affect the work completed by teachers. For instance, educators may plan less often or less carefully, teachers may teach class less enthusiastically and creatively, and they may stay home from work more often. Furthermore, educators may feel less sympathetic toward students and less optimistic about the future. Teachers may also get frustrated more easily by classroom disturbances and become irritated by a lack of student progress.

Stress reactions tend to follow a stage-by-stage process. Frustration is frequently the first reaction, and causes a wide range of feelings from irritation to anger.

High levels of anxiety may be created by increased demands or a greater degree of role uncertainty. A teacher's

ability to make decisions may be unproductive because ability to concentrate is reduced. Teachers may experience a feeling of panic or a sharp loss of confidence in teaching ability. When there is prolonged exposure to a situation that causes anxiety, teachers may reach the exhaustion threshold. Feelings of tiredness are often described as "feeling drained."

There is a risk that teachers will become burned out if exhaustion levels are not relieved. Teachers who are burned out are completely drained emotionally, physically, behaviorally, mentally, sexually, and spiritually. Acute stress transforms into chronic stress once a teacher reaches the burnout stage.

The Dangers of Teacher Burnout

Educators experience stress in different ways and for different reasons. Continuation of stressful situations causes the immune system to undergo system disorder. In general, teachers who encounter stress are usually irritable, anxious, angry, or sad. However, chronic stress may lead to severe problems throughout the body.

Read Closely

Negative stress from psychological, cardiovascular, respiratory, and physical traumas has proven to affect teachers' health. The immune system's connection to bodily systems results in a significant correlation between stress and health. Psychological and somatic complaints by teachers include fatigue and weakness, blurred vision, irritability, sensitivity to weather, dizziness, malaise, and depression. Dysfunctional cardiovascular systems have affected educators through palpitations, hypertension, arteriosclerosis, and coronary artery disease. Musculoskeletal problems manifest as back

(Continued)

(Continued)

difficulties, cervical tension, and headaches. Respiratory system dysfunctions have caused repeated upper respiratory infections, bronchial problems, asthma, and hyperventilation. Last, physical trauma may include lacerations, bruises, head injuries, seizures, and deafness.

Chronic stress may lead to severe problems throughout the body.

Research Note

Studies have shown teachers who tend to be unhappy, measured by psychological testing, were more likely to have recurrent cold sores. Higher levels of antibodies to herpes viruses were common in people under various kinds of stress. High levels of antibodies to herpes indicate low immune function. Consistent and convincing evidence proves stress can affect the body's control over herpes virus infections.

Autoimmune disease stems from excessive immune system activity. Rheumatoid arthritis, systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE), and Type 1 diabetes are included in these diseases. In autoimmune diseases, antibodies mistakenly identify the body's healthy cells as foreign invaders and attack. Life-threatening organ damage and chronic inflammation are the result. Acute stress activates the immune system, and stress precipitates these illnesses.

More than 50% of urban high school teachers—41% in New York, 53% in Chicago, and 77% in San Diego—reported that their work has caused them physical illness.

Nationally, teacher absenteeism has nearly doubled in the public schools in the past 20 years.

MANAGING SCHOOL STRESSORS

Refocusing on Teacher Roles

Teachers should not feel alone when managing their stress in the classroom. School leaders can do several things to help manage teacher stress. The first of these is to specify and clarify prescribed roles and expectations and ensure that teachers are given the roles in which they can operate most effectively. This could mean that principals ensure that the workload is spread appropriately and individual teachers are not overloaded.

In addition, the authors believe that support plays an important role in stress reduction:

- Working in a school where there is social support is important. Social support enables teachers to share concerns with one another, which can lead to helpful suggestions from colleagues that teachers can implement to help resolve the sources of stress.
- Participation of all staff in staff development programs can lead to professional socialization.
- Simply sharing problems or engaging in some social activity with colleagues can often effectively help dissipate the feelings of stress.
- Also, since teachers themselves reduce stress through physical exercise and interpersonal communication, schools and districts may benefit from developing programs and activities within their buildings that promote regular physical exercise and opportunities for staff dialogue and social support.

Principals Can Help

Principals need to think about how administrative actions create unnecessary sources of stress. For example, a principal can set unrealistic deadlines for the completion of certain tasks or fail to communicate adequately with others, which then raises avoidable problems. Principals can provide support to help teachers relieve frustration that can raise anxiety levels. We have found two areas

on which principals should focus to manage teacher stress. The first is to help teachers manage reactions to stress. For example, principals can bring relaxation training, health and wellness programs, and time-management seminars to their schools. The second is to assist teachers in establishing clear guidelines and responsibilities by seeking teacher input in goal setting and decision making, providing social support time for teachers, and developing the setting for superior mentor relationships. Teachers can make great partners. Principals and teachers can work together to reduce stress at school and in the classroom.

Develop and use a schoolwide classroom and discipline plan such as *Positive Discipline* by Nelson or *Responsible Discipline* by Queen. For more information on classroom discipline, visit www.responsiblediscipline.com

21 PLANNING TECHNIQUES TO PREVENT CLASSROOM STRESS

Listed here are 21 ideas shared by teachers throughout the nation. Teachers, principals, and school administrators can use these techniques throughout their schools to reduce classroom stress.

1. Develop and use a schoolwide classroom management plan.
2. Acknowledge individuals with sincere statements of appreciation.
3. Establish common planning time for departments, teams, or grade levels.
4. Schedule occasional duty-free lunch periods.
5. Organize first-year teachers' support group.
6. Have mentors available on same grade levels or content area.
7. Limit faculty meetings to once per month.
8. Minimize classroom interruptions of all types.
9. Keep communication open with school administrators.

10. Develop a teacher buddy system for networking and support.
11. Use newsletters and notice boards for sharing information instead of more meetings.
12. Plan workday social activities for morale building.
13. Ban negative talk in the teachers' lounge.
14. Allow freedom of lesson plan format.
15. Plan teacher-recognition activities.
16. Have upper-grade students provide assistance in clerical duties.
17. Keep instructional resources cataloged by grade level or subject area.
18. Provide meaningful staff development for practical use in the classroom.
19. Provide greater support from principals with parent-related issues.
20. Acquire advanced technology, training, and support for record keeping.
21. Implement flexible scheduling to improve effective use of classroom instruction.

For More Information: Please visit our new website ([www .TimeandStressMasters.com](http://www.TimeandStressMasters.com)) focused on the frazzled teacher, and stay up to date on the latest research and activities to help lower your stress levels. Visit us on You Tube at the same name for more. For information on scheduling and improved classroom instruction, go to [www. blockscheduling.com](http://www.blockscheduling.com), and visit www.WritersEdgePress.com for the dates, locations, and times of our national staff development programs and seminars.