

C. Practice Notes: Three School-Based Approaches to Minimizing Burnout

**In general, schools attempt
to minimize burnout in three ways:**

1. Reducing Environment Stressors

Urban School Restructuring

In the book, *Urban School Restructuring and Teacher Burnout* (1991), Barry Farber and Carol Ascher discuss how several components of school restructuring namely: school-based management accountability, career ladders, school-within-schools, curriculum initiatives, flexible scheduling and team teaching, have the potential of improving the context of urban teaching. Each can possibly promote a greater sense of efficacy and control among teachers, and a stronger teacher - student connection. However, the authors also underscore how the process involved in school restructuring can lead to teacher burnout. Ultimately, the authors conclude that unless the structural components directly address ways to improve teaching and learning such as district policies on pupil assignment, professional development, or evaluation which are all critical to teacher well-being, teacher burnout will continue to be a prevailing concern in the school system.

For a more detailed discussion of this model refer to the ERIC Digest section of this introductory packet on *Urban School Restructuring And Teacher Burnout*.

2. Increasing Personal Capabilities (job competence and stress coping)

Job Competence

Around the country a variety of model programs have been established to enhance professional competence and growth and in the process to counter burnout. The following are but two examples.

Atlanta Public Schools -- Atlanta has a Teacher Resource Center which provides teachers and non-instructional staff with staff development services. The center has several functions: student teacher placement, certification renewal, staff training, and personnel evaluation. The Teacher Resource Center is equipped with a technology center, a teacher center, a media services center, a science center, and a professional library. In 1994, the center provided 1,336 workshops to over 38,000 participants. Participants included teachers, administrators, service employees, students, and parents. In addition, the center has a New Teacher Institute which provides new teachers with support, seminars, mentors, and orientation. The center also provides conflict resolution and peer mediation training.

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Baltimore City Public Schools -- Baltimore's Professional Development Center has several components. The center offers district staff a series of workshops, ranging in issues from classroom management to leadership development to technology to safety. BCPS also has an Academy for Educational Leadership, which offers a Skill Builder Series. This series of seminars and workshops is offered to all school system leaders -- Superintendent's Cabinet, principals, assistant principals, and central office leaders.

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Stress Coping

Many school districts have established employee assistance programs that can help school professionals enhance their ability to cope with stress. As described by one district:

Employee Assistance Program -- Employee assistance programs are designed to help employees deal with personal problems. Most of us have stresses at some time in our lives. Generally we can manage them on our own. At times, however, it is helpful to discuss problems with someone other than our family or friends. This program provides you and your family with such an opportunity.

Examples of the type of assistance provided are: Crisis intervention, assessment, information, and referral services are available for a wide range of problems which affect personal lives, and may carry over into work. Stresses such as marital and family difficulties, problems with drinking or drugs, or emotional distresses, can be discussed confidentially through an early assistance program.

3. Social Support

There are a variety of ways school professionals can enhance social support as a way to minimize burnout. These include working together on problems (teaming), establishing mutual support groups, and creating debriefing mechanisms. A good example of a debriefing mechanism is the *Critical Incident Stress Debriefing* process that was developed for crisis workers.

Critical Incident Stress Debriefing

This is a technique for the reduction of stress and the mitigation of its ill effects (J. T. Mitchell & G.S. Evely, *Critical Incident Stress Debriefing*, Chevron Pub., Ellicott City, MD, 1993).

A debriefing is a clinician guided group discussion of a traumatic event. It is a psychological and educational process intended (1) to mitigate the impact of a traumatic event, and (2) to accelerate normal recovery in normal people with normal reactions to abnormal events. The session should occur between 24 and 72 hours after the event. However, even months later it can be very helpful.

Debriefing is an opportunity for

- C education on stress and its effects
- C ventilation of pent-up emotion
- C reassurance
- C forewarning of predictable symptoms and reactions to stress
- C confronting the fallacies of uniqueness and abnormality
- C positive contact with a mental health professional
- C building group cohesiveness
- C interagency cooperation
- C doing prevention
- C screening to identify persons in crisis or at high risk
- C referring persons in need to appropriate resources