



## White Paper

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# Professional Development in Rethink Ed's Social Emotional Learning Relates to Less Educator Stress and Burnout and Better Perceptions of Well-Being and School Connectedness

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*Christina Whalen, PhD, BCBA  
Director of Research*



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## Executive Summary

Teacher burnout and stress can affect their well-being and sense of belonging in the workplace. This can lead to poor attendance, attrition, and lower student outcomes. Building Social Emotional competencies may lead to increased confidence, school connectedness, better relationships with peers and students, and more productivity. This study looked at the ratings of educators on their feelings about stress, burnout, well-being, and job satisfaction. Completion of Rethink Ed SEL professional development modules were compared to these ratings. Overall, educators who completed more PD modules reported more positive ratings than those who did not complete the PD modules. The relationship between empowering teachers in SEL and their overall well-being, job satisfaction, and teaching effectiveness are discussed.

## KEYWORDS

Teacher burnout, teacher stress, teacher well-being, professional development, social emotional learning (SEL), student outcomes, Teacher Burnout Scale, Teacher Subjective Well-Being Questionnaire, research, COVID-19, self-efficacy, self-awareness, school connectedness, teaching efficacy.

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## Educator Burnout and Stress

The teaching profession is one of the biggest high-risk careers mostly due to the occupational risk hazards such as workload, lack of social supports, lack of training and resources, difficulty with classroom management, role ambiguity, etc. (Alarcon, 2011). PreK-12 teachers fill one of the largest occupational groups in the county (Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014) but teacher stress is extremely high compared to their professions with about half of teachers leaving education within the first 5 years of teaching (Ingersoll 2001) and about 15% leaving education every year (about 500,000 teachers/year) costing taxpayers about \$2.2 billion/year (Haynes, 2014). Hayes' research also reported that teacher burnout rates are about 50% higher for Title I schools and more than 70% higher for teachers serving a majority of students of color. Burnout can also lead to higher absenteeism, low job satisfaction, and can even have serious impacts on mental and physical health (Merida-Lopez & Extremera, 2017).

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A great deal of studies report that there is a significant relationship between teacher stress and a student's ability to regulate emotions and manage stress (e.g. Oberle & Schonert-Reichl, 2016). Our ability to identify, manage, regulate, and evaluate our emotions and to perceive, understand, and respond to the emotions of others is referred to as

emotional intelligence (EI) (Cherry, K., 2020). Lower emotional intelligence is associated with higher burnout and decreased abilities in regulating emotions and managing stress (Merida-Lopez & Extremara, 2017). Lower levels of stress and teacher burnout can result in improved outcomes for students (Herrman, Hickmon-Rosa, & Reinke, 2018) and when teachers experience difficulties with coping with stress it can lead to behavioral problems with students and lower academic outcomes (Wentzel, 2010).

The COVID pandemic led to increased stress and burnout for many educators. In one study by YouGov, 1,059 educators were surveyed and 43% reported experiencing all of the components of burnout during the 2020-2021 school year and 46% of these educators reported that they were considering leaving the field (Speck, 2021). Another study with over 300 educators identified certain factors that contributed to teacher burnout and stress which included anxiety and stress about COVID-19, anxiety about teaching under COVID conditions, parent and student communication, and support from administration (Pressley, 2021). To successfully transition into the 2021-2022 school year, it is important to not only address student mental health and well-being needs but to also make sure that educators' needs are being taken care of and that they are personally and professionally prepared for overcoming the challenges returning to school in the fall.

## **Professional Development in Social Emotional Learning (SEL)**

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) is not only important for student outcomes but is also essential for building SEL competencies in educators which can reduce emotional exhaustion and burnout and improve self-efficacy and job satisfaction (Kim, Crooks, Bax & Shokoohi, 2021). In fact, taking care of educators' well-being may be one of the best things that schools can do for students because it is important that the people who are spending the most time with students and taking care of them are also taking care of themselves and

research supports that the teachers who are less stressed make for better teachers and have better student outcomes (Fan, R., 2021).



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Professional development in SEL has been shown in multiple research studies to improve teacher's well-being and to reduce burnout and stress and improve student outcomes (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). Teachers' comfort in SEL implementation and their perceptions of student motivation and behavior had the most significant effect of their stress, perceived teaching efficacy, and job satisfaction (Collie, Shapka, & Perry, 2012). The most important skills in SEL for educators to learn in order to have positive relationships with their students, create and maintain a healthy learning environment, and manage student emotional and behavioral challenges are self-awareness, social awareness, cultural awareness, prosocial values, and self-management (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

Another area that is effective for improving SEL competencies in educators is mindfulness practices for educators and the students. Mindfulness is learning to focus on one's awareness including identifying, acknowledging, and accepting one's thoughts, feelings, body, and sensory experiences. It means being able to fully focus on what is happening at the moment and to be aware of what we are doing and managing our

emotions and actions at the moment (Mindful Staff, 2020). Mindfulness-based SEL training has been shown to have a lot of promise for decreasing teacher stress and burnout and improving their emotional regulation and ability to tackle challenges in the classroom (Emerson, et al., 2017).

Effective implementation of SEL affects teachers' sense of well-being and burnout, as well as impacting the outcomes of students. The common features that predict the most success with SEL implementation include 1) Having a supportive environment; 2) Building SEL competencies in adults; 3) Working with family and community members; 4) Targeting the key behaviors and skills (e.g. CASEL framework); and 5) Setting reasonable short and long term goals (Jones, Bailey, Brush, & Kahn, 2018). Another important consideration for professional development is to help educators to promote equity and social justice through Transformative SEL (Jagers, Rivas-Drake, & Williams, 2019). According to CASEL (2021), Transformative SEL is "a process whereby young people and adults build strong, respectful, and lasting relationships that facilitate co-learning to critically examine root causes of inequity and to develop collaborative solutions that lead to personal, community, and societal well-being."

## **Rethink Ed SEL Professional Development Series**

The Rethink Ed SEL and Mental Health Professional Learning series were developed by a team of experts in education, research, psychology, social work, and counseling and consists of on-demand video-based training modules (8-10 minutes each) that help to increase awareness and understanding of mental health and social-emotional well-being of students and in themselves. The modules are self-paced and provide strategies, activities, and resources for educators to improve their teaching and build their SEL competencies and are available with English and Spanish closed captioning. Quizzes for each topic

provide the opportunity to test acquired knowledge, support PD accountability, and for educators to gain continuing education hours (30 minutes/module). The topics below each align to CASEL and mental health standards and mirror the lessons for the students.

CASEL-Aligned Modules						Rethink Ed Mental Health Suite	
Awareness of Self & Others	Self-Management	Social Skills	Social Awareness	Self-Care	SEL & Equity	Mental Health	
Self-Knowledge	Self-Control	Fairness	Cultural Competence	Mindfulness	Culturally Responsive Teaching	Anxiety	
Emotions	Stress Management	Respect	Empathy	Self-Efficacy	Addressing Injustice	Bullying & Violence	Mental Wellness
Values	Focus	Friendship	Safe & Ethical Behavior	Optimism	Leveraging SEL to Promote Equity	Depression	Reducing the Risk of Suicide
Wants & Needs	Problem Solving	Relationships	Support Systems	Self-Compassion	The Impact of Implicit Biases	Human Trafficking	Substance Use Disorders
Learning Skills	Goal Setting	Cooperation	Social Contributions	Self-Advocacy		Developing Healthy Identities	Kindness to Animals
Growth Mindset	Resilience	Conflict Resolution	Actions & Consequences	Healthy Boundaries		Digital Citizenship & Online Safety	Trauma

## Research Study

This study sought to explore the burnout and well-being of educators and to identify whether or not there is a relationship between completion of professional development in SEL and the educator ratings of burnout and wellbeing. Similar to other studies (e.g. Pressley, 2021; Speck, 2021), surveys were used to evaluate the perceptions of burnout, stress, well-being, and job satisfaction with 1,090 educators across the United States in 10 different school districts. Educators were sent a link and were asked to volunteer

to complete the surveys using the Qualtrics survey tool. The following evidence-based measures were used:

**1) The Teacher Burnout Scale** (Seidman & Zager, 1986) is a 21-item Likert scale that assesses feelings of career satisfaction, administrative support, coping with job-related stress, and attitudes toward students. The scale has been used in a large number of research studies to evaluate teacher burnout and to identify stressors that might affect teachers' sense of well-being (e.g. Cenkseven-Onder & Sari, 2009).

**2) The Teacher Subjective Well-Being Questionnaire (TSWQ)** (Renshaw, Long, & Cook, 2015) is an 8-item Likert scale survey that is designed to measure a teachers' sense of well-being through perceived school connectedness and teaching efficacy. This scale has also been used in many research studies to evaluate the positive psychological functioning of teachers (e.g. Farhah, Yustikarini, & Safitri, 2021).

The number of Rethink ED SEL PD modules completed were also measured through the Rethink Ed database and educators were distributed into 2 groups: 1) PD group (N=321) completing a minimum of 5 modules (the average was 29) or 2) No PD group (N=768) completing 0-4 modules with the majority completing 0 PD modules. The groups were compared on their survey ratings and PD modules completed. 2-tailed, 2 samples, unequal variance t-tests were used to look at group differences. It was hypothesized that 1) overall ratings of burnout and well-being would be consistent with the literature and that 2) the PD group would rate less burnout and higher well-being overall than the no PD group.

Educators with less than 5 SEL PD modules rated **significantly ( $p < .01$ ) more stress and burnout** than educators with an average of 29 SEL PD

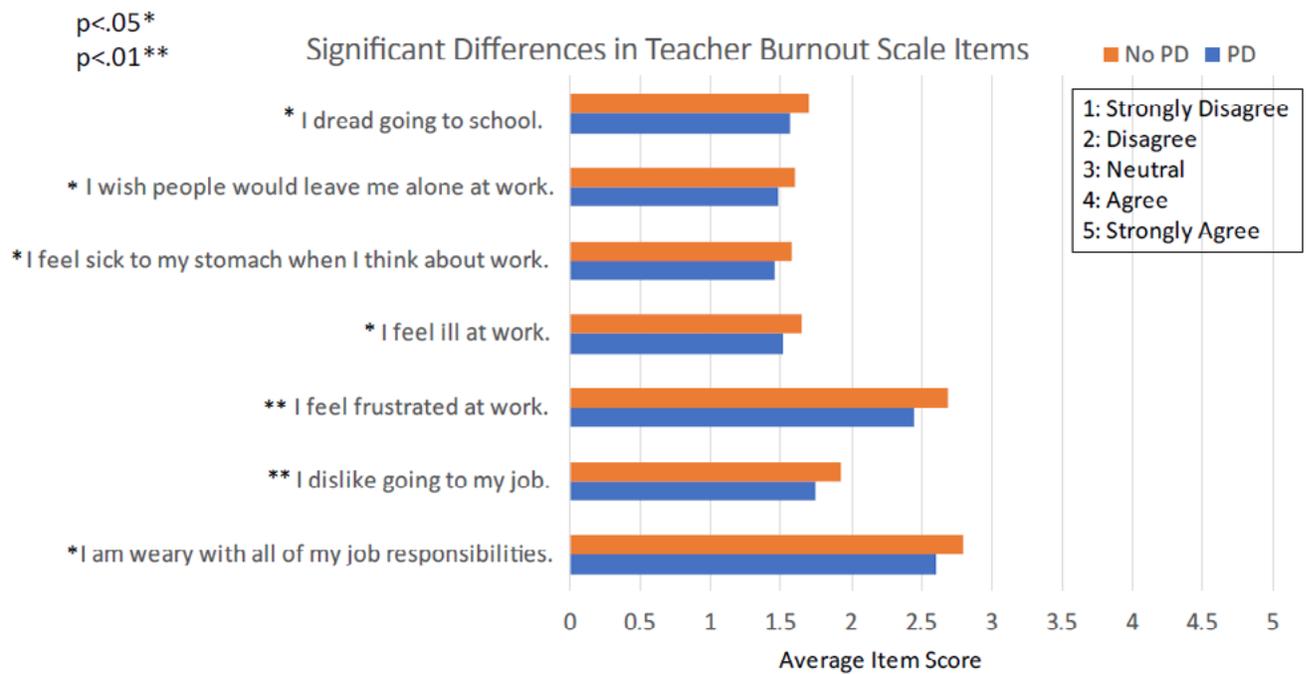
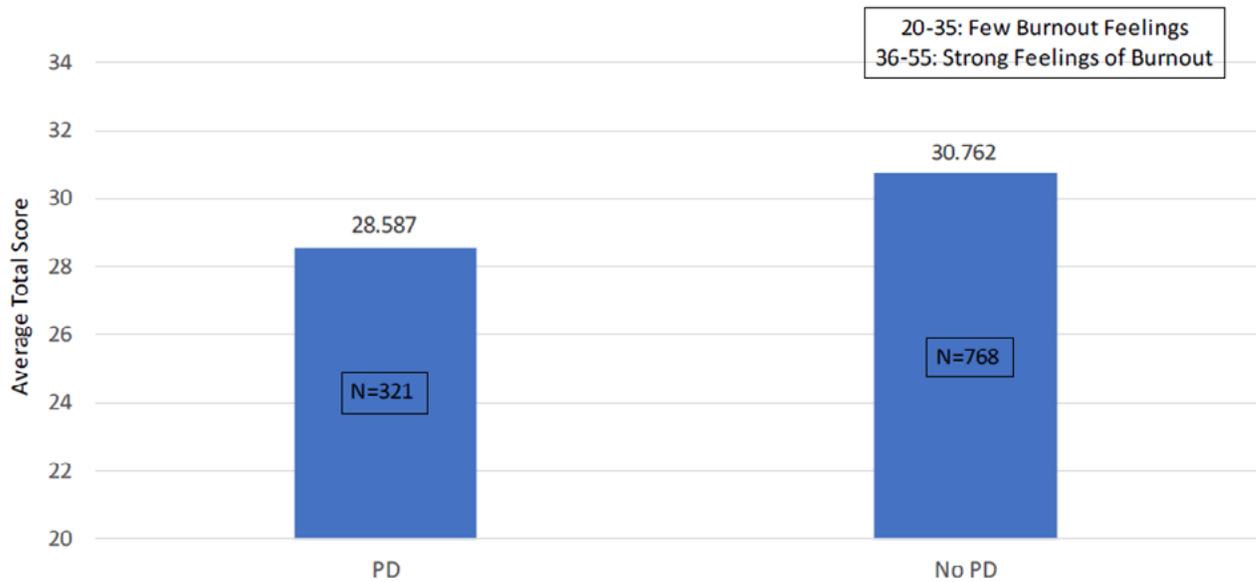
## Results

Most educators in this study (i.e. Rethink Ed customers) reported not having feelings of stress and burnout but about 16% reported having these feelings at least some of the time. Most educators in this study reported often or almost always having feelings of positive well-being but about 18% reported rarely or only sometimes having feelings of positive well-being at school. Unlike some studies reporting high ratings of burnout, the Rethink Ed customers rated more positively overall but there were differences between those who completed on average 29 SEL PD modules and those that completed 0-4 modules.

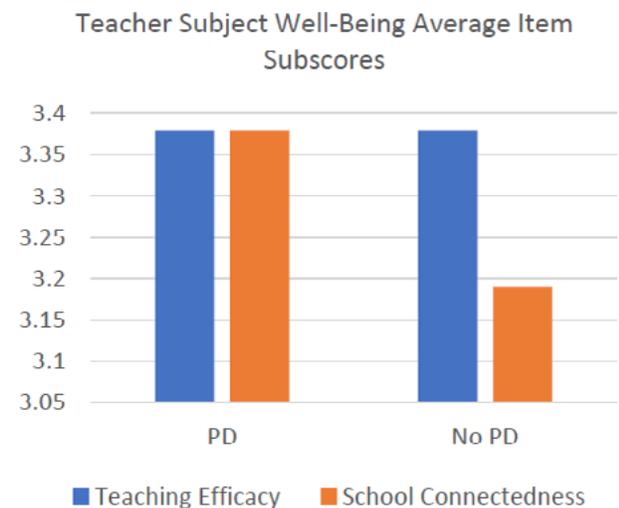
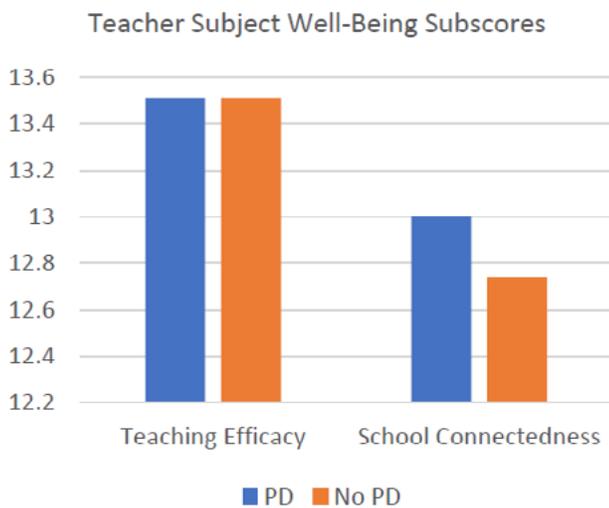
While participants rated few burnout feelings overall on the Teacher Burnout Scale, educators with less than 5 SEL PD modules rated significantly ( $p < .01$ ) more stress and burnout than educators with an average of 29 SEL PD modules. Significant differences were identified in 7/21 modules primarily related to work environment and feelings of being overwhelmed at work with the PD group reporting significantly less dissatisfaction than the no PD group on the items in the figure below.

Although the differences were not statistically significant, the PD group also reported less dissatisfaction than the no PD group on all of the remaining items in the survey relating more to peer and student relationships and job satisfaction.

### Overall Teacher Burnout Scale Scores



Educators rated higher well-being in the PD group than the no PD group on all 8 items on the Teacher Subjective Well-Being Questionnaire but the only statistically significant ( $p < .05$ ) difference was on the item “I feel like people at this school care about me” with the PD group agreeing more with this statement than the no PD group. Educators rated equally overall on the Teaching Efficacy subscale but the PD group rated higher than the no PD group on School Connectedness with higher scores overall and a higher frequency of positive ratings.



The PD group rated higher than the no PD group on School Connectedness **with higher scores overall and a higher frequency of positive ratings.**

## Conclusions, Limitations, and Future Directions

While the results of this study report lower levels of burnout and a better sense of well-being than some studies overall, the outcomes support the possibility that training in SEL may have a positive impact on these factors. Educators who completed on average 29 SEL training modules showed significantly reduced burnout and significantly increased sense of well-being (particularly related to school connectedness) than the educators who did not complete PD (or completed very little).

It is important to note the items that had the most significant differences between the 2 groups were primarily related to work environment, support systems, and job responsibilities. Training educators in SEL not only adds to improving student outcomes but may also impact overall school climate and the teachers' feelings of acceptance, belonging, and willingness to address their own biases and limitations. Research supports that teachers who feel more positively at work have better student outcomes and are less likely to leave the field. Teachers must take care of themselves to be able to care for and teach their students and schools must take care of the teachers to keep them engaged, connected, passionate, and productive.

The limitations of this study were that it was a voluntary survey and we were unable to control for having even numbers of participants in the PD and no PD groups. In addition, the study does not control for other support systems in place in the district such as implementation plans, additional pieces of training, and organizational factors. This study did not look at pre-post outcomes (i.e. repeated measures) which would be valuable in determining how the teachers rated before SEL PD and after.

Future directions should focus on evaluating implementation factors that impact outcomes, assessing pre-post outcome measures, and looking at student outcome

correlations. Future studies should also look at factors that may influence these differences between groups such as socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic diversity, differences between special education and general education teachers, and years of experience in teaching.

The outcomes support the possibility that **training in SEL may have a positive impact on educator well-being.**



This study supports the possible positive impact of the RethinkEd SEL PD series on teacher well-being. SEL can help educators build their own competencies in self-awareness, cultural competence, equity, self-care, mental health, self-management, relationship building, conflict resolution, resilience, and other important skills that will help them to model and teach these skills to their students in an effective and warm environment. Rethink Ed believes in nurturing the educators as well as the students and advocates for empowering and supporting teachers and building an SEL culture to create a school climate that keeps the teachers as well as the students engaged, learning, and making progress.

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# White Paper



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Rethink First | 49 W. 27th Street, 8th Floor  
New York, NY 10001

# About Us

Rethink Ed was founded on a simple, yet powerful idea: To re-think education. To make it better and easier. To unburden school districts and empower educators. To improve outcomes and elevate accountability. To promote collaboration and inspire learning. And most importantly, to make a difference in the school day for everyone – administrators, educators, and students.

The Rethink Ed solution is part of Rethink First, a global company that is transforming behavioral healthcare. Similar to Rethink First's other solutions that are innovating and improving outcomes for clinicians and employers globally, Rethink Ed is pioneering EdTech with our relentless pursuit of innovative methods that put evidenced-based, data-informed, digitally delivered instruction and assessments into the hands of educators, clinicians, and parents who share our singularly minded focus: To power the potential of all children and to work together to help them succeed.

## Get in touch

info@rethinked.com  
(877) 988 - 8871  
49 W 27th Street, 8th Floor  
New York, NY 10001



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