

CTF/FCE Special Edition Podcast:
A Conversation on Pan-Canadian Teacher Mental Health
Episode Highlights

In this special edition Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF/FCE) podcast, Julieanna Mawko of the CTF/FCE's Public Affairs team connected with Dr. Pamela Rogers, CTF/FCE Director of Research and Professional Learning, and Nichole Grant, Researcher and Policy Analyst. These two are the small but mighty research team behind CTF/FCE's latest pandemic research report, titled [*"But at what cost?" Teacher mental health during COVID-19*](#). This report, CTF/FCE's third throughout the pandemic, captures first-hand accounts and an in-depth understanding of living through COVID-19 as a teacher during the 2020-2021 school year.

In this discussion, Pam and Nichole unpacked the report's findings and delved into the professional and personal realities facing teachers and education workers throughout the pandemic. CTF/FCE President Sam Hammond also joined to outline what these findings mean for publicly funded public education at large and what needs to happen next at the national level to address this mental health crisis.

What is unique about teachers' realities, working and living during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Pamela Rogers (PR): Teachers are very much at the centre of socio-political and economic decisions in ways that many people haven't experienced.

PR: Teachers and education workers, like health care workers, have been frontline throughout the pandemic and continuing in the pandemic. They're at the mercy of decision making that shapes their daily lives and their work.

What are the realities that teachers and education workers are facing both in and out of the classroom?

Nichole Grant (NG): The reality is the classroom is a very different place now. Teachers provided stories of needing to do so many things in their professional repertoires from scratch.

NG: The classroom is also no longer simply a physical space. So, educators described that one of the biggest effects was often losing that physical ability to connect with students that the classroom really gives them.

NG: Online distant teaching is part of the current teaching reality. And it's one that scares educators in its potential trajectories from industrial and privatized models of education, but also for how it takes away from those important connections with students.

What stood out the most or surprised you while conducting the research?

PR: Teachers and education workers really are superheroes, and they should be commended for all that they do. But at the same time, I think we also need to recognize that teachers are humans, and that they have finite amounts of energy and resources just like anyone else.

NG: I didn't expect to carry the emotions of the whole research and reporting process as much as I did. I didn't foresee the amount of closeness or how deep the relationships would be, even from such short conversations and with people we were speaking with for the first time.



As authors of this report, what else do you think is important for listeners to know?

PR: From what we heard from teachers and education workers across the country, they've really told us similar stories, regardless of where they're teaching, whether it's grade, or province or territory, any level or any course. And so, because of this, we hope it sends a strong message about the current and very tenuous culture of work in public education. Because we really need to have education workers, teachers and students' mental health and well-being at the centre of the work that we do.

As the President of CTF/FCE, what do these findings mean to you for the teaching profession and publicly funded public education at large?

Sam Hammond (SH): Teachers and education staff in every corner of this country are stretched to their absolute limit. Their mental health and well-being are in jeopardy.

SH: If they're not working to their absolute maximum or have the resources and the supports to do that, everything within public education will begin to crumble and students will feel that and we'll feel that in our community.

Based on these findings, what is the CTF/FCE calling for?

SH: What this report tells us is that we have a national crisis on our hands and the federal government needs to step up and deal with this national crisis in conjunction with the provinces and territories.

SH: To do that, step one, the federal government should be convening a national advisory table on public education to deal with issues related to mental health and well-being of educators in this country.