



BRAIN HEALTH BOOST



Appreciation for Teachers Can Start with Addressing Brain Health

*The Brain Health Initiative (BHI) is working to develop brain healthy communities, creating a culture that promotes brain health protective factors and decreases risk factors, thereby improving brain health, optimizing brain performance, and preventing and fighting brain illness across the lifespan for the Florida Suncoast region and beyond. **Today, we honor teachers and recognize the indelible contributions they make to our lives.***

Teachers dedicate their lives to our children. They ensure students are prepared academically, not just for success in school, but for future careers and life. There is no substitute for the daily opportunities for students and teachers to grow together, meeting face-to-face. Yet, teaching has historically been an undervalued profession. Too often, the dedication, care, and devotion America’s educators show for the progress of students are obscured by regulations, testing, health, and behavioral issues. *That is why we need to double-down and better recognize the essential role teachers play.*

Unfortunately, many teachers are saying they are thinking of leaving the profession. Teachers are sounding the alarm about the many risks to their brain health, including the stress, burnout, and job dissatisfaction they face, especially after two years of COVID-19 uncertainty. In February 2022, the National Education Association unveiled a nationwide survey revealing that 55 percent of teachers said they plan to leave the profession early. That rate is nearly double the proportion of teachers who said the same thing in July 2020. Since January 2020, there has been a net loss of 600,000 teachers nationwide, according to U.S. Bureau of Labor statistics.

Some of the difficulties teachers already faced were made worse by the pandemic. State regulations and testing prevented teachers from offering needed mental (brain) health support or education on development and interpersonal skills, they say.

“Teachers are just juggling a lot,” said Heather Hill, Hazen-Nicoli Professorship in Teacher Learning and Practice and Faculty Co-Chair, Teaching and Teacher Leadership, at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. “Teachers are experiencing reform again and again and again. This year, it might be a math curriculum, the next year it might be bullying. There was already a lot on

teachers' plates. All of the mandated things are taking away agency from teachers to make decisions, and that is at the heart of what teaching is.

Hill continues, "The pandemic has exacerbated this, increasing uncertainty, increasing the amount of work that teachers have. We do not see any real decline in accountability pressure. Testing has continued. I think teachers are really at a breaking point."

What can be done to support educators' brain health and entice existing teachers to stay in the profession, while also attracting qualified new teachers? Beyond an increase in recognition of the importance of the profession (including increased compensation), the BHI and Hill recommend focusing on making brain health a priority for school personnel, students, and families. Hill encouraged schools to redouble efforts to invest in mental (brain) health support and personal and professional development opportunities to promote brain health and reduce risk of brain illness.

And it boosts *everyone's* brain health to show some extra appreciation to the educators in our lives.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY TO PROTECT YOUR BRAIN HEALTH

Multiple factors have contributed to educators' stress levels and risks to brain health. Brittany Collins, a teaching fellow at the Harvard Graduate School of Education, made the following suggestions about what school leadership can do to support the brain health of educators and reduce risk of brain illness:

- **MAKE SPACE FOR SHARING.** "Affinity groups," or collections of people with a common interest or goal, have been shown to boost morale and offer a sense of community that eases common stressors and risks to brain health.
- **OFFER TIME TO REFLECT.** When possible, offer teachers, staff, and students regular short blocks of time with activities such as mindfulness, art, music, physical movement, or expressive writing to help experience, process, and communicate emotions and feelings in proactive and productive ways.
- **LOOK OUTSIDE.** Create whole-school brain health support systems that connect educators with resources and professionals to support the identified stressors and risks for brain illness.
- **REACH OUT FIRST.** Create opportunities in staff meetings or office hours in which educators are encouraged to discuss how risks to brain health are showing up in their work and respond to their concerns.
- **ACKNOWLEDGE AND APPRECIATE.** Sharing gratitude and recognizing the unending efforts involved in the education profession can begin with a smile.

BE BRAIN HEALTHY and adopt a lifestyle that includes thoughts, behaviors, emotions, responses, and language that promote brain health protective factors:

- Stress resilience
- Nutrition
- Physical activity
- Sleep

- Social connection
- Emotional wellbeing
- Meaning and Purpose
- Cognitive stimulation and creativity
- Engaging with nature
- General health
- Positive impacts

About the Brain Health Initiative (www.brainhealthinitiative.org)

The Brain Health Initiative (BHI), a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, uses a cutting-edge approach to protecting brain health, promoting brain performance, and preventing and fighting brain illness across the lifespan. The BHI is building brain healthy communities, cultures that foster brain health protective factors and address risk factors, thereby improving brain health and optimizing brain performance outcomes for the Florida Suncoast region and beyond. Join the ***Be Brain Healthy*** movement, ***because brain health matters, and lifestyle makes a difference.*** To view all Brain Health Boosts [click here](#).