

Chapter 43

Strategies to Overcome Middle School Teachers' Classroom Management Stress

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the complexities of classroom management, student development, and middle school philosophy for new teachers at the middle school level. In addition, the authors provide the following four strategies to help new teachers deal with the stress of classroom situations: (a) improving knowledge of student development, the brain, and stress; (b) focusing on what is in the teachers' control; (c) breaking down the tasks into small chunks; and (d) creating a positive mindset. This chapter is unique because few authors have combined the concepts of middle school teacher stress caused by classroom management, how the brain influences classroom management, teacher stress, the cyclical nature of new teacher stress, and strategies to ameliorate stress.

INTRODUCTION

Although rewarding, teaching is considered a high stress job that is especially challenging for new teachers given their lack of experience (Chaplain, 2008). Classroom behaviors are especially a challenge for new teachers. New middle school teachers face additional challenges because of the characteristics of students from this age range. Despite these points, there is very little written on specific solutions for the stresses that new middle school teachers encounter when they deal with the stress caused by classroom management. Thus, this chapter discusses the following: (a) new teacher stress and the impact of losing middle school teachers, (b) characteristics of middle school students, (c) specific training needed for

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middle school teachers, (d) new middle school teachers, stress, the brain, and classroom management, and (e) strategies for new middle school teachers to overcome classroom management stress.

In this chapter, the terms middle school students (ages 10-15) and middle schools are used in accordance with the descriptions of the Association for Middle Level Education (AMLE) (2010; 2012). In doing so, when we discuss the term middle school, we are referring to the middle school concept and not just the school that carries the name "middle school." However, we recognize that much of the research on middle schools does not distinguish whether or not we use the terms middle school, middle school students, and/or middle school teachers as defined by AMLE (2010; 2012).

New Teacher Stress and the Impact of Losing Middle School Teachers

Teaching today is a complex job that results in almost as much as 40% of new teachers leaving their job within the first five years of teaching (Klassen & Chiu, 2011). Title I schools, school with a high percentage of students of color, and schools with high percentage of low-income students have significantly higher turnover rates than schools with different populations (Sutcher et al., 2019). Although special education, ESL/ELL teacher, and foreign language teachers have high turnover rates and are often considered to have teacher shortages regardless of grade level, math and science middle and high school teachers are more likely to leave their school than their elementary school counterparts (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017, 2019; Sutcher et al., 2016).

Teachers leave teaching early in their career for many reasons, such as lack of support, issues with the administration, problems with workload or working conditions, and the stress of standardized testing (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017, 2019; Ingersoll et al., 2014). Another reason that teachers typically move on from teaching is because of issues with student motivation and discipline (Albright et al., 2017; McCarthy et al., 2015). Specifically, some new middle school teachers leave teaching because of issues with classroom management or because they were not prepared to teach students at this level (Albright et al., 2017; Mee & Haverback, 2014; McEwin, Dickinson, & Anfara, 2005). Dealing with student behaviors causes stress for teachers (e.g., Chang, 2009; McCarthy et al., 2015). Yet, teachers who have effective classroom management skills are more likely to stay in teaching longer (Chang, 2009; Veldman et al., 2016).

New teachers at the middle and high school levels experience higher levels of stress and lower levels of self-efficacy than their elementary school colleagues (Klassen & Chiu, 2011). Some research suggests that middle school teachers are less likely to remain at their school than elementary school teachers, have higher attrition rates and turnover than elementary and high school teachers, and tend to leave their job as a result of the issues associated with adolescent students (Brill & McCartney, 2008; Kraft et al., 2016; Kukla-Acevedo, 2009).

Teacher retention is problematic because having teachers leave their school or the profession causes districts to spend additional funds to recruit and train teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017; Sucher et al., 2016, 2019). Teacher retention is also problematic because losing teachers influences school climate, reduces institutional knowledge, and lowers student achievement (Coleman, 2018; Ingwolson, 2016; Kraft et al., 2016). Given that school climate, administrative support, and collegiality are important factors for middle school teacher retention (Coleman, 2018), losing middle school teachers in general, and new middle school teachers specifically, negatively impacts the school, the teachers, and the students. In schools that adhere to the middle school model by including grade level teams, losing teachers negatively impacts the middle school structure and team dynamics, the cohesion of the team,

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