



## Check on Teachers; They Are Not Okay

By Educator Barnes – October 10, 2020

There has been a debate about what is more important, academics or students' mental health. The coronavirus pandemic has consumed the majority of 2020, and it is not clear when it will come to an end. What is clear is that schools are trying to resume some sense of normalcy. What has mostly been left out of this conversation is the mental health of teachers. That needs to change.

Teachers are one of the key pieces of what makes education work. Their mental well being is not being taken into consideration. Teachers are expected to push forward and lead a classroom of students virtually or in-person or in both formats as if they are not also living through a pandemic. Let's not forget the teachers who are also parents. Those teachers also have to make sure their own children are learning as well.

Instead of receiving support, they are being told to figure it out without receiving the tools to figure it out. A teacher, who wished to remain anonymous for fear of consequences from her school shared, "I'm up before the sun comes up and working past midnight daily. I've had panic attacks. My anxiety is high. When I asked for help, my administrator said, 'Everyone is having a tough time; you'll figure it out.'" This lack of help will drive teachers right out the door.

When teachers say they need help, they do not need an uplifting speech to make them feel good. They need actionable items that will improve their condition. If teachers are having breakdowns, they need information to places where they can receive mental wellness services. If the staff includes teachers of color, those resources must include mental health professionals that are of color. Seeking help for mental health is still stigmatized in many communities of color, and many people of color only feel safe talking to a mental health professional of the same racial background.

On top of the pandemic, the attention to social justice issues has also highlighted diversity, equity, and inclusion issues that are in schools. Some schools have only made surface level attempts to pretend like action is really going to take place. Teachers who really want to see real attempts are mentally taxed knowing they are employed by a school that is not willing to do the work.

Teachers' hearts are full of love for their students. They know students are not learning the best during the pandemic. They know some students do not have access to what they need. This keeps them up at night because they know their students are struggling, and there is not much they can do to help.

Parents and community members can help by reaching out to teachers and asking what they need. Teachers can help themselves by advocating for what they need. Even if they are not taken seriously, they must keep speaking up. Teachers should take time to take care of themselves. There is a reason the flight attendants tell adults to put their oxygen masks on

first even when they have children with them on the plane. Adults cannot take care of children unless adults take care of themselves first.