

# 5 Key Workplace Mental Health Challenges in Education

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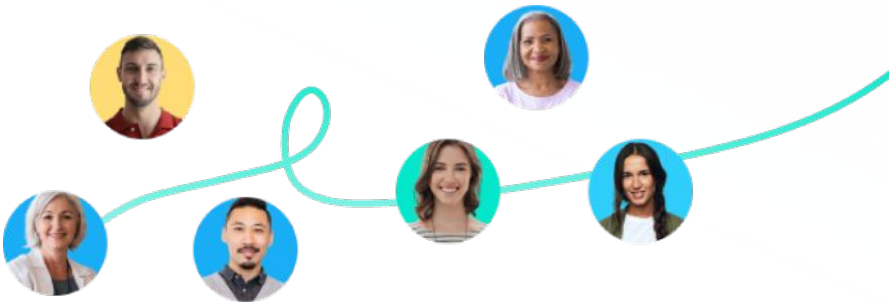




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# Introduction:

## Mental Health Challenges in Education

### Teaching is a rewarding profession.

Not only are teachers developing the next generation of leaders, but they are also observers of their students during a critical part of their development.



Today, the stakes are higher than ever before, with new challenges and pressures facing teachers, education assistants, and administrators every day, including:

1. An increase in student special needs and attention
2. Lack of support in remote communities
3. Student behavioral disorders at an all-time high
4. Lack of appropriate funding and resources
5. Teacher self-efficacy at risk

Starling Minds' Chief Science Officer and Clinical Psychologist, Dr. Andrew Miki, has been at the forefront of treating teachers struggling with stress, anxiety, and burnout. Over the last decade, he's witnessed the changing landscape of the education profession.

We felt it was important to share both what we've learned about the greatest challenges facing teachers, as well as their perspectives.



# An Increase in Student Special Needs and Attention

There's been a staggering increase in students needing special attention and support due to more diverse classroom compositions. Unfortunately, there are not enough resources to give students what they need to thrive or for teachers to create inclusive education.



There's a lot of awareness around learning disabilities and behavior problems, leading to an influx of parents enrolling their children into special needs programs. Unfortunately, there are not enough Education Assistants and Teachers to support the numbers.

— Teacher, Grade 7



Parents are also getting much more involved with their child's education and what they want us to teach. It's hard to sustain it – in the public and private education system. We need to shift resources from maintaining a bureaucratic system to one addressing the pains of teachers.

— Teacher, Grade 4



## Did you know?

- 1 An average of [17%](#) of students per primary school and [27%](#) per secondary school receive special education support.
- 2 [66%](#) of primary schools and [53%](#) of secondary schools report a restriction on the number of students that can be assessed for special education each year—a trend that has been increasing among primary schools over the years.



# Lack of Support for Special Needs Teachers

Special education teachers enable a quality education to millions of students across the US. With [14 percent](#) of students needing special education services, special education teachers play a vital role in ensuring their students have a chance to thrive at school. However, more and more Special-Ed teachers are leaving the profession, especially in rural areas that lack even more resources, funding, community support than their urban counterparts.



The issues in special education are not just due to the attitudes of some professionals — they are fundamentally built into the way the system is set up, the legislation, the documentation, the way that resources are allocated

— **Special-Ed Teacher**



Being a special education teacher is hard. I'm expected to help my students practice functioning skills but the public education system can undermine what we need to do our jobs. Our system just isn't set up to support the needs of our Special-Ed students.

— **Special-Ed Teacher**



## Did you know?

- 1 More than [50%](#) of all school districts struggle to staff well-qualified special education teachers.
- 2 In the US, [90%](#) of states report shortages in special education teachers, but almost double the rate of them are leaving teaching compared to general education teachers.



# Student Behavioral Disorders at an All-time High

Across North America, [aggressive and violent](#) reported incidents against elementary school teachers are on the rise. New research confirms the troubling rise. According to their study, while [7%](#) of teachers reported physical violence by students in 2005, by 2017-18, the rate had increased to [54%](#) experiencing violence by physical force.



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“While the search for answers about how to help these kids and the battle over responsibility wages on, teachers and children are left on the frontlines with no backup, lots of blame and criticism, and a complete feeling of failure. They are the casualties of this ongoing conflict.

— Grade 2 Teacher



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“We need to increase resources for teachers to address student mental and physical health needs in the context of escalating harassment and violence they are experiencing. Teachers need early intervention resources and training to identify behavioral issues and to adequately address them.

— Professor, University



Problems aren't just in primary schools. According to leading studies, high school students' stress levels are increasing, leading to higher incidences of anxiety disorders and panic attacks. With the rise of social media, perfectionism and expectations among students are at an all-time high. Students are comparing themselves to unattainable levels, leading to “all-or-nothing” thinking.

Unfortunately, teachers aren't given adequate tools and resources needed to help students manage their expectations and stress. For high-school teachers, it's particularly challenging to build meaningful relationships and trust with students as they may only see a student for 1 – 2 hours a week.





” ”

Students were never like this before. There wasn't this level of expectation and worry in so many students. It's great that students and parents are more aware of the impacts that stress, depression, and anxiety can have, but with awareness comes a call-to-action, and teachers aren't getting the resources or training needed to take action. We're getting resources cut, which makes it even harder.

— Teacher, Grade 10



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Mental health and behavior issues are on the rise and require a lot more of our time and attention than ever before. This often takes away from the time needed for academic school improvement.

— Principal, High School



” ”

The needs of our students are becoming increasingly complex. Mental health issues have been more prominent in our day-to-day dealings, with minimal support and limited expertise in the building.

— Principal, High School



” ”

Being a student today is so different from what it was 10, 15, 20 years ago. They have so many more distractions to deal with, which is causing a lot of stress, anxiety and panic; parents are expecting teachers to deal with it.

— Principal, High School



## Did you know?

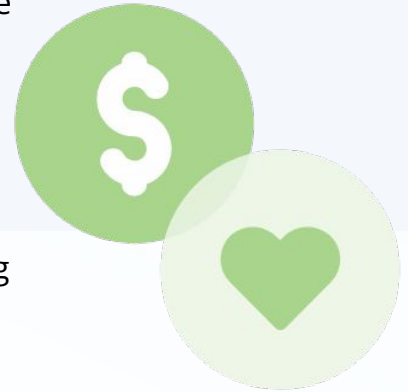
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According to an [Adolescent Health Survey](#), more students said they suffered from anxiety disorder and panic attacks (19% in 2018, up from 8% in 2013), depression (15%, up from 10%), post-traumatic stress disorder (3%, up from 1%) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (7%, up from 6%).



# Lack of Appropriate Funding and Resources

Teachers and education advocates have been working to ensure appropriate funding and resources are allocated to the right schools. In Canada, the model for funding takes statistical averages to allocate funding whereas in the US, it allocates funding based on the actual number of students.



Although these models may seem efficient from a policy-making perspective, it does not work in the education field as it takes the human calculation, growing inequalities, and experience of teachers out of the equation.



"In the previous system, there were more deliberate efforts to identify special education fundings in classrooms and schools, but with a prevalence model, many students will fall through the cracks due to its removed approach. We are severing the tie between the needs of students in classrooms and funding."

— Teacher, Grade 9



Lack of funding devoted to education can be evidenced in many ways: lack of schools and other facilities, insufficient classrooms, underpaid trained teachers, etc. Each one of these results of insufficient funding can act as a barrier to any child seeking a primary education.

— Vice Principal, High School



## Did you know?

- 1 School funding had already been cut at the federal level by [8 percent](#), before the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- 2 In the next few years, Pre-K - 12th grade education revenue is expected to drop between [10 and 20 percent](#) (\$21 billion to \$57 billion in education budgets and nearly 750,000 teaching positions eliminated).





# Teachers' Self-Efficacy and Job Confidence Declining



Teacher self-efficacy is when they believe in their ability to guide their students to success. For years, [researchers](#) have explored the link between teacher efficacy and student achievement. A teacher's perception of their abilities depends on a variety of factors, including past experiences and school culture.

Bad classroom experiences or an unsupportive work environment can cause a massive decline in a teacher's confidence. A positive classroom experience like witnessing their student's growth can boost their confidence and ability to improve their performance. School leaders also play a critical role in a teacher's efficacy with a supportive administration helping them feel valued, confident, and successful.

Teacher efficacy can have a great impact on their student's achievement, even higher than factors like teacher-student relationships, home environment, or parental involvement.



When we are able to focus on professional learning with teaching staff, we see a direct influence on student engagement and achievement.

— Principal, High School



We're seeing more and more of our young teachers leaving the profession after five years. It's become a cost we can no longer ignore, especially as our more senior teachers look to retire within the next ten years.

— Principal, High School



## Did you know?

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Up to [40%](#) of teachers leave within their first five years of teaching, largely due to a loss in confidence in their abilities and overwhelming stress.

# How Leaders can Build Teacher Efficacy and Retain Staff

Many administrators are well aware that teacher efficacy is linked to better student outcomes. The question is: How can administrators build teacher efficacy and retain teachers? The key is to support teachers emotionally and mentally, ensuring their perspectives and voices are heard and validated. There are many approaches on how to achieve that, but it won't happen overnight.

For many administrators, they often need an immediate solution to support their teachers. Since 2014, an Education organization has offered Starling Minds, an online mental health support platform for their teachers. The platform offers Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) strategies and techniques, an approach that Dr. Andrew Miki has found to be the most effective for supporting teachers in his years of clinical experience.

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CBT works incredibly well for teachers as it takes an educational approach to mental health. Much of the work I do with teachers requires homework on their part. About five years ago, I realized that everything I teach in sessions could be self-taught, which is why a digital solution was the perfect platform to deliver that. It gives teachers access to mental healthcare whenever they want it, and in the comfort of their own home.” — **Dr. Andrew Miki**



## Teachers who used Starling as a mental health tool agree:

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With Starling, it has given me the confidence I need to teach my students. I can't change the resources I have and don't have, or the expectations parents put on me, but I know how to manage that stress and anxiety better now.”

— **Starling Community Member**



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These are the tools I've desperately needed for my mental health. I have already been practicing some of these through the program, such as the thought balancer and journal writing. It's such a relief to have access to this!”

— **Starling Community Member**





# A Platform for Every Teacher

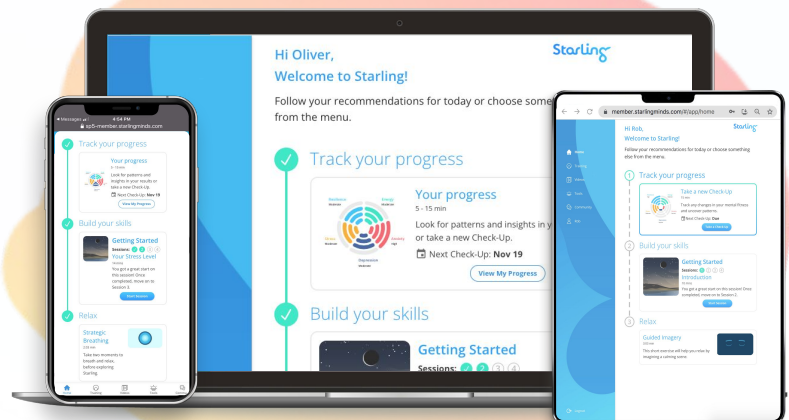
Starling Minds' platform has programs to target every teacher's needs. Whether they are looking to build a more resilient mind, are at-work and struggling, or are currently on stress leave, Starling Minds is here.

[Starling Mental Fitness Program](#) is designed for teachers who are looking to build resilience to stress, anxiety, and depression to better manage growing stressors in the profession.

Mental health support is no longer a question, it's now a priority.

**Reach out to us below to start improving the mental health of your teachers now.**

**Contact Us**



The logo features the word "Starling" in a blue, rounded, sans-serif font. To its right, the tagline "Build Resilient Minds." is written in a smaller, black, sans-serif font, arranged in three lines. The background of the entire image consists of soft, wavy, light blue and green shapes at the bottom, and a flock of small, light blue birds flying in a curved path from the top right towards the center.

Starling

Build  
Resilient  
Minds.