

If You Want to Keep Teachers, Pay Attention to Your It Infrastructure

In the year 2021, it should be perfectly normal for teachers to expect access to some basic IT infrastructure.

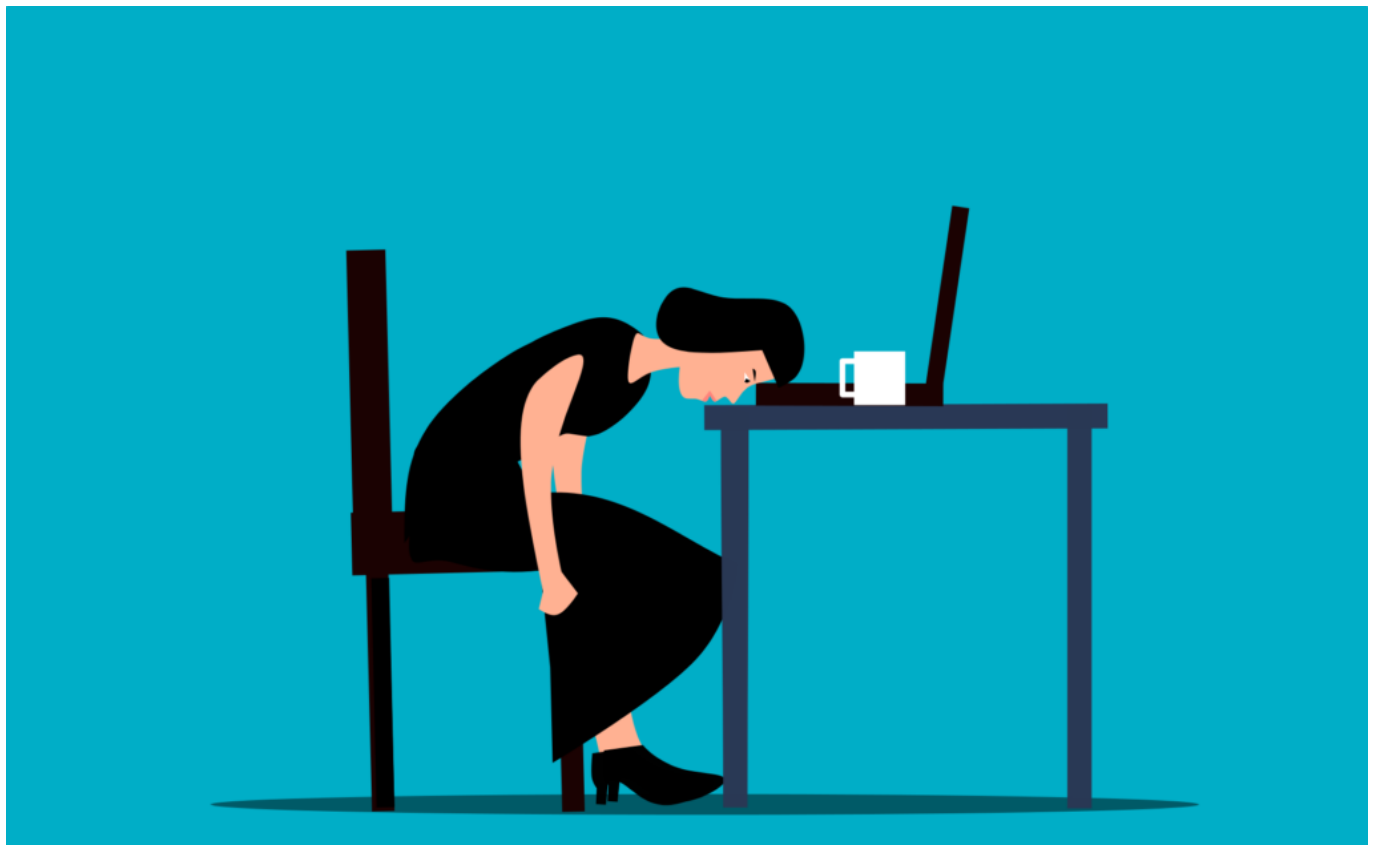


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For me, this includes at least a projector, some speakers, and WiFi in my classroom. Fortunately, this is the case at the school where I work. In many public schools, it isn't. This was also one of the reasons, why I accepted a teaching job at a private school in Germany. The state of some of the public schools I visited, while looking for a new job is dismal. Some didn't even have this basic IT infrastructure.

But even in a school like the one where I work, it does occur from time to time, that some IT infrastructure breaks down. In this case, it is very important that the school or company has an effective IT department. They need to deal with issues in the IT infrastructure effectively. If this is not the case, teachers will leave the school.

We Depend on Our It Infrastructure

I currently work 35 hours per week, according to my contract. 22 of them I spend in front of students. So, to prepare for all my lessons, I have about 13 hours. That leaves me with just over half an hour to prepare for a lesson. It is doable because I am experienced enough. And I have a large back catalog from previous lessons to fall back on.

But I will not have time to solve basic issues with IT infrastructure in my classroom. I am not the only teacher who experiences it like this. I need the projector to work if I have planned to use it for my lesson. If it doesn't, I need to know that the IT department deals with my request to fix it. And fast. This, in essence, is no different from other employees at other companies. Teachers are not unique in that respect. There are many businesses that depend on functioning IT infrastructure. It is at the core of their production capacity. Think of accountants, for instance.

Faulty It Infrastructure Is a Major Stress Factor

For many teachers, faulty IT infrastructure can be a major stress factor. It forces teachers to adapt to the moment. They need to improvise every time. This can throw off an otherwise good lesson. 25 kids can get bored very fast if you are busy getting the projector to work. And kids who get bored can be very inventive when it comes to doing dumb stuff.

Yes, in a perfect world I should have a plan B. But I tell you a secret. Sometimes I don't. Because half an hour is not a hell of a lot of time to prepare for a good lesson.

It is not that big of a deal if it happens once or twice. Stuff breaks. But it is a problem if the issues persist. Because the IT department doesn't take it seriously. Or because the leadership doesn't want to invest in the IT infrastructure. In both cases, what you get is permanently frustrated teachers.

And guess what frustrated teachers do?

They leave.

I have witnessed both. Sometimes at the same time. I have tried writing to IT departments and not even getting an answer to a support ticket. I have also tried school management being skimpy. Denying the cost of a 12€ adapter, so I can actually use the projector with my laptop.

A school leader who doesn't take issues is a No-go. It is a sign, that they

do not value my work. We should not ask teachers to also be IT engineers. It is the same as asking teachers to buy basic teaching supplies with their own money. That adapter, I mentioned earlier? I ended up buying it myself.

Over the years I spent several hundreds of Euros on IT equipment for my classroom. Maybe even thousands, but who is counting, eh?

Teacher Retention Is Not Just About the Salary

Most dissatisfied teachers I know are not complaining about the salary. They are complaining about the conditions they encounter at work. Constant stress factors take a high toll on mental health. And no salary increase can compensate for it.

School leaders and school authorities need to step up their game. Otherwise, there is no way they will retain teachers. In almost every western country, there are huge teacher shortages. Teachers are leaving in droves. They either change careers or go private. If you can teach, there are many career paths, where you can apply your skills.

Ultimately, being a class teacher is a leadership position. And it should be valued as such. That is not difficult. Invest in good IT infrastructure, that enables teachers to deliver good, modern lessons. Invest in your classrooms. Teachers and students should not have to be afraid that the ceiling collapses at any moment. And for heaven's sake, just provide basic teaching supplies. Such as whiteboard markers, and pencils.

If we fail to do these basic things, we don't deserve to keep our teachers.