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## **Teacher Burnout Sparks National Concern**

### **When the Chalk Fades: Teaching on the Edge of Exhaustion**

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#### **Opening Reflection**

Teaching is meant to inspire, not to deplete. In South Africa, where classrooms carry the weight of inequality, hope and transformation, the wellbeing of educators is not a luxury, it is a necessity. When seasoned teachers begin to leave the profession in droves, citing stress and emotional fatigue, it signals more than a staffing issue. It reveals a system under strain, and a profession in quiet crisis. The recent surge in early retirements and emigration among teachers is not just a headline, it's a warning.

#### **What Happened**

In October 2025, education experts and unions raised alarm over rising burnout among South African teachers. According to Basil Manuel of NAPTOSA, a growing number of educators aged 55 to 59 are applying for early retirement, citing emotional exhaustion and declining job satisfaction. Younger teachers, meanwhile, are seeking opportunities abroad, driven by overcrowded classrooms, administrative overload and low morale. The Western Cape and Gauteng have reported significant attrition, with rural schools facing even deeper shortages. Calls for urgent intervention have grown louder, as the profession teeters on the edge of a retention crisis.

#### **What It Reveals**

This trend exposes a deep systemic fault line: the erosion of teacher wellbeing in a context of rising demands and limited support. It reveals how emotional labour, bureaucratic pressure and social complexity converge to make teaching unsustainable for many. From a systems-thinking lens, this is not just a staffing issue, it is a relational and operational breakdown. It reflects the need for holistic support, dignified working conditions and leadership that prioritises care.

## Why It Matters

Teachers are the heartbeat of education. When they burn out, learners lose mentors, schools lose continuity, and society loses wisdom. This crisis threatens not only academic outcomes but the moral fabric of our classrooms. Philosophically, it touches on Ubuntu, vocational dignity and educational justice. Teaching must be a space of renewal, not depletion. It must offer joy, not just survival.

## Reflective Responses

### What does teacher wellbeing look like in practice?

It means emotional support, manageable workloads and recognition. It means treating teachers as whole people, not just deliverers of content.

### How do we retain wisdom while welcoming innovation?

By pairing new teachers with experienced mentors, celebrating institutional memory and fostering intergenerational collaboration.

## What systems must be in place to prevent burnout?

- Reduced administrative burden
- Access to counselling and peer support
- Incentives for rural placements
- Leadership that models empathy and care

## Sidebar: Facts and Philosophy

### Stats and Sentiment (2025):

- 50% of South African teachers are considering leaving the profession
- Teachers aged 55–59 are applying for early retirement at unprecedented ratesEWN
- Overcrowded classrooms and admin overload are top stressors

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| "They need to be happy for the children." - Basil Manuel (NAPTOSA) |
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