SECONDARY EDUCATORS’ SOCIOEMOTIONAL WELL-BEING THROUGHOUT THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY

By

Mercedes Harvey-Flowers

A dissertation submitted to the faculty
of the University of Michigan-Flint
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

Doctor of Education

University of Michigan-Flint

December 2022

Doctoral Committee:

Dr. Pamela Ross McClain, Ph.D., Co-Chair

Dr. Nathaniel B. McClain, Ed.D., Co-Chair

Dr. Jeramy Donovan, Ph.D., Member

Pamela Ross McClain

Nathaniel B. McClain

Jeramy Donovan
DEDICATION

To Millicent, Bruce, Valencia, Steven, and Natalia. Thank you for entrusting me with your stories.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This journey would have been impossible to complete without the support of my village, my supporters, friends and family. Thank you so much for your guidance, support, and encouragement throughout this process. Specifically, I would like to thank my doctoral committee: Dr. Nathaniel McClain, Dr. Pamela Ross McClain, and Dr. Jeramy Donovan. Your guidance and thoughtful feedback has been invaluable throughout this process. Thank you for believing in my success.

This process would have been impossible without the support of my husband, Hernando Flowers, and our babies Noah & Fahran Flowers. Our little family has adapted and supported me fully throughout this process. Noah, your tenaciousness and bright outlook showed me that the sun will ALWAYS shine, and no mountain is too high to climb. Fahran, my baby boy, you were born seven months into this adventure, and have been in Zoom calls and writing papers since you entered this world. Your utter fearlessness in the face of new challenges inspires me to face every challenge that comes my way.

I am incredibly blessed to have been on this journey with 4 wonderful cohort members: Precios Armstrong, Kendra Katnik, Nichole Moore, and Lori Singleton. We’ve been in this together, and I am confident that our support for each other is how we’ve made it this far. I’d be remiss if I didn’t acknowledge my friends and family who took interest in my work, Corey Pitts, Gregory Scott, Leticia Horry, Katelyn Walsh, and Kristi Pipok. Your constant cheerleading, willingness to read and offer feedback mean more than words can truly convey.

Finally, I thank my entire community of family, friends, and colleagues who love and support me. Thank you for celebrating, listening, and stepping in. Each of you are irreplaceable in my life, and I couldn’t have done this without each of you.
ABSTRACT

The rapid invasion of COVID-19 led to the closure of numerous communal resources, including businesses, places of worship, and school buildings. This caused widespread shifts that forced individuals and entities to change within personal and professional settings. The purpose of this narrative inquiry study is to explore the lived experiences of five secondary educators throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and associated state government shutdowns. The specific focus of this study is on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated state government mandated shutdowns on the socioemotional well-being of five secondary educators from a small southeastern Michigan high school. The understanding of these experiences led to the identification of solutions needed to support teachers through drastic change and allow for further research to be done to improve conditions within the field of education. One research question explored the perception of those teaching within the exemplar school and qualitative data was collected utilizing interviews and journal entries. From these mechanisms, it was discovered that there were feelings of isolation and issues with establishing relationships with their students. However, the educators were able to find hope in their situations from other means in their personal lives. The findings of this study were consistent with the theories associated with Figley’s Compassion Fatigue Theory and Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, and displayed the importance of mental health resources, professional development, and social interaction to educators’ socioemotional well-being and success in the classroom.

Keywords: socioemotional well-being, secondary education, lived experiences, compassion fatigue, narrative inquiry
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

COPYRIGHT 2  
DEDICATION 3  
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT 4  
ABSTRACT 5  
TABLE OF CONTENTS 7  

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION 10  
- Background 13  
- Problem Statement 15  
- Purpose of the Study 16  
- Significance of the Study 16  
- Nature of the Study 17  
- Research Question 18  
- Operational Definitions 18  
- Assumptions of the Study 18  
  - Assumptions 18  

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE 20  
- Educator Socioemotional Well-being 20  
  - Relationships 21  
  - Emotional Labor 22  
- COVID-19 and Emotional Well-being 23  
  - Influential Factors 23  
  - Leadership 24  
  - Emotional Regulation 26  
  - Wellness Strategies 27  
  - Collegial Relationships 28  
- COVID-19, Professional Responsibility, and Professional Responses 28  
  - Educator Professional Responsibilities 29  
  - Teacher Workload 31  
- Teacher Response to Change 33  
- Trauma 35  
  - Shared Trauma & Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder 35  
  - Secondary Trauma & Compassion Fatigue 36  
- Teacher Burnout 38  
  - Contributing Factors 38
Penelope’s Story of Experiences as a Secondary Educator during the COVID-19 Pandemic
Penelope in Isolation 74
Penelope and Relationships 76
Penelope and Hope & Resiliency 77
Summary 80

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION 81
Summary of the Study 81
   Overview of the Problem 81
   Major Findings 82
Limitations 83
Delimitations 84
Positionality 84
Implications 85
Recommendations 86
   Local Level Recommendations 87
   State Level Recommendations 88
   Recommendations for Further Research 89
Concluding Remarks 90

REFERENCES 92

APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER 105

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENTATION 108

APPENDIX C: SITE APPROVAL LETTER 113

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL & QUESTIONS 114
   Interview Protocol 114
      Introductory Protocol/Verbiage 114
      Interviewee Background 115
      Interview Questions (adapted from Mueller, 2019) 115

APPENDIX E: JOURNALING PROMPTS 117
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The rapid invasion of COVID-19 led to the closure of numerous communal resources, including businesses, places of worship, and school buildings. In the state of Michigan, the first presumptive case of COVID-19 was reported on March 10, 2020. In efforts to slow the spread of COVID-19, Governor Gretchen Whitmer issued Executive Order 2020-05: Temporary prohibition on large assemblages and events, temporary school closures. This executive order announced the temporary closure of all K-12 schools’ buildings in Michigan, from March 16, 2020 until April 5, 2020 as the number of presumptive cases of COVID-19 rose to twelve (Whitmer, 2020). This time period went very quickly, and through subsequent issuance of additional executive orders known as “Stay Home, Stay Safe” orders, school closures were extended again and again. Ultimately, Governor Whitmer issued Executive Order 2020-35, this order ended face to face instruction for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year.

The Stay Home, Stay Safe executive orders suspended all activities that were not necessary to sustain or protect life (Whitmer, 2020). Assemblages of greater than 50 people were banned. This led to a lack of engagement with the outside world. As such, many businesses and organizations shifted to remote work. This meant that educators were engaging with their instructional work from home, alongside their family members who were also regulated to work from home. Further, their children were also at home, meaning that family homes that were sparsely used throughout the work day/week were suddenly teeming with people. Adding to this phenomenon, WiFi that was previously used for light internet and social media usage and video streaming were suddenly being taxed with constant video streaming, from
video services, virtual meetings, and other tasks that were typically saved for the work environment (Branscombe, 2020).

The unique circumstances of COVID-19, and the state government mandated shutdowns revealed cavernous gaps in regards to equity within the education system in the United States. The context of the COVID-19 pandemic called for a shift from face-to-face learning to virtual or distance learning. This resulted in the inability to ignore the lack of equity across our nation. Such inequities were seen primarily in urban and rural areas, but were pervasive across all communities. The sample community for this study is considered suburban, there were still persistent barriers to devices and WiFi access.

Adaption was imperative as the world combatted a rapid increase of infections and hospitalizations from COVID-19. The field of education was not exempt from adaptation. Educators adapted lessons, learned new virtual interfaces (i.e. Zoom, WebEx, Google Meets, Schoology, etc.), and developed creative and strenuous ways to meet the needs of students. (Kaden, 2020). Educators were often developing a multitude of learning experiences based on student access. Educators would often craft one assignment for students that were completing distance learning activities via US Postal Mail or district drop off. Another learning experience would be developed for students that were able to engage with learning online, but lacked the capacity for live video conferencing (e.g. Zoom or Google Meets). Educators often created a third learning experience for those students with full internet access, including the capacity for live video conferencing. Educators adapted, rose to the unexpected challenges of their profession, all while being faced with the same fears for safety and uncertainty as the rest of their community.
Even though educators demonstrated resiliency through their adaptation, they were not protected from challenges with their socioemotional well-being. Educators shifted from working with many people every single day, to working remotely, alone, or with the few members of their family that they live with. Such isolation can lead to feelings of depression or anxiety. In fact, according to Badillo-Goicoechea et. al (2022), educators were more likely to report feelings of anxiety. Educators who worked remotely were more likely to report feelings of isolation.

Interrelatedly, educators are currently leaving the profession at a higher rate than prospective educators are entering the workforce (Garcia & Weiss, 2019). COVID-19 related attrition challenges are not unique to the field of education and are being experienced in other fields as well. However, the necessity of educators within society’s school-to-work pipeline puts the future of the United States at risk.

The nuanced examination of the role of educators as frontline workers within the COVID-19 pandemic further highlights the challenges that often lead to educator burnout and exodus (Beames et al., 2021). Educators can be considered frontline workers due to several aspects of their role. For example, in many states, educators are called upon to be mandatory reporters of child abuse and suspected trauma. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2018), on average Michigan students spend about 6.1 hours a day in school. As a result, meaningful relationships are often cultivated between educators and students. Students often trust educators with sensitive information, resulting in shared emotions between educators and their students.

Socioemotional well-being has been defined as the general and relatively stable emotional state associated with a determined level of vitality (high or low) and the experience of different emotions, which can be positive or negative (Biercat, 2014). The implications of low
vitality and negative emotions within socioemotional well-being have become an emphasized aspect of employee experiences. In order to execute job functions to the best of their ability, educators must be at their best, physically, mentally, and emotionally.

The body of knowledge regarding other communities of frontline workers (healthcare & mental health workers) and socioemotional well-being, and the concepts of compassion fatigue and secondary trauma is expansive (Barza et al., 2020; Nuttman-Shwartz et al., 2012). However, there is minimal evidence of such studies being conducted with a focus on educators. Addressing this gap is critical not just for educator retainment, but also for the recruitment of highly qualified individuals to the field. Without research, solutions cannot be developed, and without solutions, we will continue to struggle recruiting and retaining educators. If this gap remains unaddressed, the prospects for the educational experiences of our most at-risk populations will be inconceivably bleak. By instituting policies or practices that support mental healthcare services for educators, it becomes possible to keep highly qualified, passionate, capable educators in the classroom for such populations.

**Background**

The educator population has changed vastly in recent decades. Educators are aging, and more are retiring than entering the field. As a result, the field of education is losing experience (Collins et al., 2021). According to Carver-Thomas et al. (2016), a teacher shortage occurs when there are not enough educators in key subject areas. There were several attributing reasons to the teacher shortage in the United States, including: years of layoffs caused by the Great Recession, a growing student population, and fewer people entering educator preparation programs (Carver-Thomas et al., 2016). Such an assertion is supported by the United States Department of Education, which reported that the number of students pursuing education degrees has dropped
42% since 2009-10 (Berger et al., 2022). The combination of increased retirements/resignations, decreased educator preparation enrollment, and shortages in substitute teachers lends itself to an increased workload for educators that remain in the classroom.

This challenge has been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to a survey conducted by the Rand Corporation, a much higher proportion of educators reported frequent job-related stress and symptoms of depression than the general adult population. Many of the pandemic-era teaching conditions were linked to these reports (Steiner & Woo, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic and the related state government mandated shutdowns was full of uncertainty. This uncertainty was compounded by fears of sustaining livelihoods, and the inherent need for safety. In the state of Michigan, the Governor mandated temporary school closures for three weeks, and limited all face to face activities that were not necessary to sustain life, on March 12, 2022 in Executive Order 2020-05 (Whitmer, 2020). Simultaneous with the issuance of this order, Wayne County, one of the most populous counties in Michigan furloughed any nonessential workers. Considering the traditional face to face nature of education, the furloughing of employees, educators were increasingly apprehensive. Further, during the initial school closures as a result of COVID-19, the Michigan Department of Education announced that all online instruction that occurred during the state mandated shutdowns would not count toward the required annual instructional hours (Keesler & Guerrant, 2020). Such events, within this context, led to concerns regarding job security. This coupled with the fear and uncertainty of safety added to the mental health toll on educators. Navigating what would come to be known as the “new normal,” keeping their families and selves safe, while understanding and navigating their roles as educators. Suddenly, basic everyday tasks were deemed unsafe, and no one truly
knew what “safe” looked like. This proved to cause a negative impact on educators’ socioemotional well-being.

The situation in the state of Michigan, where this study occurs, is equally startling. Educator retirements increased 40% at the conclusion of the 2020-21 school year (French, 2021). Further, enrollment in educator prep programs across the state is down 45% (French, 2021). Steiner and Woo (2021) found that educators that considered leaving as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic experienced working conditions that were linked to higher levels of stress. Such alarming statistics highlight the dire conditions of the field of education.

**Problem Statement**

A positive consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic is the spotlight that has been shone on mental wellness. School closures and social distancing measures have presented unprecedented barriers to socialization for young people. As a result of this recognition, and the acknowledgement of the challenges within everchanging learning experiences, there has been an increased emphasis on student socioemotional well-being.

However, minimal acknowledgement has been given to the socioemotional well-being of educators. While it is easy to lump educators in with the majority of society that had to adjust to sudden change, it is imperative that the differences in the experiences of educators and the subsequent barriers to socioemotional well-being be noted and examined. By positing educators as first responders, and acknowledging the subsequent trauma exposures, and then ensuring access to socioemotional support, educational leaders can begin to reverse the tides of exodus from the field.

This research explored teachers’ lived experiences through this shift in learning experiences, professional expectations, and disruptions in daily life. Documenting teachers'
lived experience led to a better understanding of the types of solutions needed to support teachers through drastic change.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to offer a richer understanding of the lived experiences of educators throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. This study aimed to give space for educators to speak the stories of their experiences throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent school closures. Utilizing narrative inquiry and the framework of Figley’s Compassion Fatigue and Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, this study aimed to understand the experience of individuals amid societal and professional upheaval and adaptation and to make meaning of said experience. It was the hope that this study, through the narratives and reflections, would enable educational leaders to become responsive to the socioemotional needs highlighted by the stories told.

**Significance of the Study**

The exploration of the socioemotional well-being of educators throughout the COVID-19 pandemic is critical in understanding issues surrounding pandemic related educator attrition. This study adds to the current body of literature regarding educators’ mental health and attrition throughout the COVID-19 pandemic through the use of narrative research design. While the body of knowledge on educators’ working experiences throughout the COVID-19 pandemic is continuously growing, currently the presence of educator voice is notably absent. By employing a narrative research design, this study showcased the lived experiences of educators during this era.

According to the Census Bureau (2022), tens of millions of citizens were unemployed in the initial months of the pandemic. Employment was unstable for many and many more
Americans were unemployed as the shutdowns extended. According to Cech and Hiltner (2022), more than 22 million Americans had been furloughed or permanently lost their jobs. Unemployment in the United States peaked at 14.8 percent in April 2020. While many workers returned to work later on, unemployment remained above pre-pandemic levels for over a year later (Cech & Hiltner, 2022). According to Education Weekly, in July of 2020, approximately 5 school districts were due to lay off teachers, with about 211 educators being laid off (Burnette II & Will, 2020). While the educators within this study remained unscathed by layoffs, this did little to mitigate the fear and concern of educators in the moment.

State and federal level government agencies worked to minimize the impact. The American Rescue Plan, the expansion of the Child Tax Credit, and unemployment benefits, and the expansion of food assistance benefits are a few examples of programs enacted to minimize the rising needs of citizens. This was done by Executive Orders issued by the Governor, and later Emergency Orders issued by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. For example, unemployment benefits were expanded through state governments and their utilization of federal funds (Whitmer, 2020).

Nature of the Study

This study highlights the stories of five secondary educators at a small suburban high school in southeastern Michigan. Each of these educators represents a graduation requirement content area. The focus of the stories told is the socioemotional wellness of those secondary educators throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, subsequent shutdowns and shifts between traditional and virtual learning. In order to successfully highlight these stories, this study utilizes a narrative research design. The foundation of narrative research is storytelling. Narrative
research focuses on the social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional narratives within which individual experiences were, and are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Due to the completion of this narrative study, there is evidence to urge administrators to provide enhanced resources towards resilience efforts and educators’ social and emotional well-being.

**Research Question**

How do secondary school teachers describe their socioemotional well-being resulting from the adaptation of their work environment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?

**Operational Definitions**

*Adaptations.* The behaviors that enable an individual to adjust to the environment effectively and function optimally within various domains. For example, coping with daily stressors (American Psychological Association, 2022).

*Compassion Fatigue.* The feelings of hopelessness, apathy, and spiritual exhaustion that arise from absorbing the problems and suffering of others (Figley, 1995).

*Experience.* An event that is actually lived through, as opposed to one that is imagined or thought about. (American Psychological Association, 2022).

*Socioemotional.* any emotion that depends on one’s appraisal or consideration of another person’s thoughts, feelings, or actions (American Psychological Association, 2022).

**Assumptions of the Study**

**Assumptions**

The key assumptions in this study were as follows:
1. Research participants would be willing to openly share their socioemotional experiences regarding the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. The narrative approach to the study would prove to be fruitful in adding to the body of knowledge regarding the socioemotional well-being of educators.

3. It was assumed that research participants have been impacted by COVID-19 provisions.
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

COVID-19 swiftly infiltrated our nation and required communities to adapt to ensure safety. In Michigan, events transpired quickly. On March 10, 2020, the first two cases of COVID-19 were reported, and a State of Emergency was declared by the Governor. On March 13, 2020, all K-12 face-to-face instruction was suspended. By March 23rd, a statewide “Stay-at-Home” order through Executive Order 2020-05, was issued for all non-essential workers (Whitmer, 2020). Within all of these changes, educators began to adapt their instruction to distance learning. The use of technology in education was not pervasive in many K-12 schools. Subsequently, educators were forced to become adept in forms of technology with which they had varied experiences.

As school closures and shifts to virtual learning continued, media outlets, community members, and school officials voiced concerns for the mental health and social needs of students. Juxtaposingly, there was minimal discussion of the mental health and social needs of teachers relating to school closures and reopening. The goal of this research was to address the gap in this discussion. In examining the literature surrounding COVID-19 and teacher mental health, several themes emerged, including educator socioemotional well-being, COVID-19, teacher response to change, burnout, and response to trauma in professionals.

Educator Socioemotional Well-being

Socioemotional well-being is defined as the general and relatively stable emotional state associated with a determined level of vitality (high or low) and the experience of different emotions (Bericat, 2013). Within this conceptual definition the emotional states that an individual's experiences are relational, based on the individual’s connection to others. Therefore, as those relationships fluctuate, change, and adapt an individual’s socioemotional well-being also
Educator well-being is influenced by a multitude of factors. These reasons include institutional resources and support, workload, student behavior, and even educator specific personal variables such as personality or engagement at work (Balerdi et al., 2022). Education is a people-facing profession and interacting with others can often influence one’s socioemotional well-being. However, educators that can demonstrate positive socioemotional well-being are an asset to the profession. Such educators can have more positive student-teacher relationships, and even better classroom management skills (Dymnicki et al., 2022). Therefore, it can be concluded that appropriate measures must be taken to ensure that educator socioemotional well-being is placed at the center of conversations in the field of education. Simply, safeguarding educator well-being ensures that all students are receiving the best possible learning experiences.

**Relationships**

Teaching is an inherently relational profession. Educator-student relationships are critical components of the role of educator. Helma et al. (2011) highlighted the claim that educators have a basic need for relatedness with their students. Further, Shann (1998) found that positive student-educator relationships were one of the top reasons for educator job satisfaction. Through the examination of theories on interpersonal relationships such as the self-determine theory of motivation and the attachment paradigm, it is claimed that teachers have a basic need for relatedness with their students (Helma et al., 2011).

Further, in Abraham Maslow’s (1943) Theory of Motivation, he emphasized the need for belonging or relatedness as one of the most basic needs of humans. Therefore, if the human need for relatedness or belonging is not met, there can be negative consequences on an individual’s mental health and well-being. Humans, by and large, are social beings; therefore, it stands to reason that relationships are held in high regard. The COVID-19 pandemic caused individuals to
self-isolate for their own safety. Such isolation negatively influenced professional and personal relationships, thus generating negative consequences on individuals’ well-being.

According to Geier (2022), students' expectations of educator behavior influence student effort. So, if a student perceives an educator as being disengaged or disinterested, according to this research, the student will not put forth the effort they would for a teacher they perceived as engaged and interested in learning. Therefore, if there are negative or positive outside factors that are impacting a teacher’s mental state, that can translate into the classroom. Also, depending on the influence the teacher has on their students, the student’s discretionary effort could be impacted outside the classroom.

**Emotional Labor**

In examining the relationship between socioemotional well-being and educator’s professional experiences, researchers have found links between workplace demands, emotional labor, and changes in educator socioemotional well-being. (Naylor & Nyanjom, 2022). Most poignantly, the more demanding the work environment, the heavier the load of emotional labor, the more educator socioemotional well-being suffers. The concept of emotional labor is also imperative to the understanding of the relationship between educator workload and socioemotional well-being. Naylor and Nyanjom (2022) defined emotional labor as the process of regulating emotions as part of one’s professional role. Emotional labor is how educators display enthusiasm, self-confidence, and passion within their teaching. Further, such labor is critical for enhancing the engagement between educators and students (Naylor & Nyanjom, 2021).

Emotional labor refers to “the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display” (Hochschild, 1983). Further, educator’s emotional labor can be
conceptualized as the process by which educators must manage their feelings as required by social expectations and organizational guidelines (Jiang, 2020). By equipping educators with coping mechanisms that further cultivate such resilience, educational leaders can better serve educators (Beuttner, 2016). Due to the relationship between emotional labor and professional success, educators must be equipped with the skills and tools necessary to ensure their socioemotional well-being is not interfering with their professional success. The implementation of such programs can improve educators’ socioemotional well-being.

**COVID-19 and Emotional Well-being**

Emotional well-being has been at the forefront of numerous conversations surrounding the isolation caused by COVID-19. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2018), well-being is defined as judging life positively, and feeling good. The isolation, abrupt changes in life, and constant barrage of virus-related news could have negative impacts on individuals’ mental health. Educators are not immune from this risk. In fact, educator reactions to COVID-19 were similar to those in other professions. Nabe-Nielson et al. (2020) explored teachers’ emotional reactions to COVID-19 and the relationship between risk management and emotional responses. Several researchers (Collie, 2021; Steiner & Woo, 2021; Talidong & Toquero, 2020) have explored educators’ emotional reactions to COVID-19 and the role that leadership and support programs have on educators’ emotional well-being.

**Influential Factors**

Fox and Walter (2022) outlined several positive indicators for educators’ well-being. These indicators include educator self-efficacy and prosocial relations, including connectedness to one’s school. Further, cultivating educator resilience to support or maintain workplace
well-being during periods of high stress should involve attention to the structural and institutional aspects of educators’ work (Fox & Walter, 2022).

Talidong and Toquero (2020) found that while COVID-19 related fears were found to be higher in those working exclusively remotely, most educators followed the governmental recommendations regarding safety. However, those living with others also reported increased concerns, specifically about infecting others. Educators were faced with the intrapersonal conflict of the duty of going to work versus the duty to protect loved ones from infection (Fugslang et al., 2021). The social aspects of perceived safety during this time cannot be dismissed. When colleagues were practicing safe behaviors, educators felt more secure. Such perception coupled with knowledge about testing was associated with lower emotional reactions in educators (Fugslang et al., 2021). Recognizing this is important for enabling leaders and occupational health professionals. In understanding the emotional responses that others are experiencing, leaders and occupational health professionals can begin to address those concerns.

Leadership

When considering leadership, principal support is a multidimensional concept that plays an important role in the professional development of educators. Principal leadership behavior can be considered as a contributing factor to educator well-being (Conley et al., 2020). Principal support decreases stress and burnout. It also has a positive impact on educator commitment and job satisfaction. Further, it has been linked to educator retention and attrition. Subsequently, educators’ health can be negatively impacted by non-supportive leadership behaviors (Billingsley et al., 1994). Leadership behavior is identified as the approach used to motivate and manage teachers while maintaining relationships (Kauts, 2010).
When considering support for educators' emotional well-being during this time, Collie (2021) explored the role of leadership and autonomy in the examination of autonomy-supportive or autonomy-thwarting leadership. Gherghel et al. (2022) further asserted that educator mental health worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, satisfaction with institutional support has a positive effect on mental health. Particularly in a time period where adaptation of the learning experiences is essential to student success, supportive leadership is needed. Where leaders are not supportive, educators and students can experience negative outcomes.

Eyal and Roth (2010) further examined the relationship between principal leadership and educator motivation. Transformational leaders encourage educator innovation and autonomy through their leadership style. Conversely, transactional leaders focus on task completion, and filling in the boxes. Such leaders often alienate educators and that can lead to burnout, and educator disengagement.

Autonomy-supportive leadership promotes individuals’ empowerment and self-initiation. Such leadership involves participative practices that encourage input and involvement (Collie, 2021). Most crucially, this leadership practice involves understanding the needs of each individual. Autonomy-supportive leadership leads to lower somatic burden, stress related to change and emotional exhaustion (Collie, 2021). Autonomy-supportive leadership facilitates educators’ sense of empowerment through encouraging input and supporting staff members. This helps educators feel supported and they have the agency to navigate adversity in their teaching. Autonomy-thwarting leadership has a markedly different impact on the empowerment of educators (Collie, 2021). Such practices involve pressuring others to feel, act or think in accordance with leadership demands. These domineering policies and practices often incite
feelings of guilt or shame to ensure compliance (Collie, 2021). Loss of autonomy is associated with emotional exhaustion.

In order to mitigate the socioemotional challenges experienced by educators, Steiner and Woo (2021) outline recommendations for leadership. It is recommended that leaders collect data on educator working conditions and the links between such and well-being. Further, educational leaders at all levels should remember that educators from different backgrounds may be impacted differently regarding their working conditions. Subsequently, educator needs may vary. Therefore, district leadership should work with educators and school leaders to design and implement wellness and mental health programming (Steiner & Woo, 2021).

**Emotional Regulation**

Educators' emotional regulation demonstrates their ability to successfully influence their own emotions in the workplace and interact with their environment (Han et al., 2020). While investigating the relationship between emotional regulation and stress, Braham et al. (2022), found that emotional regulation has a negative impact on stress, anxiety, and depression. According to Talidong and Toquero (2020), educators still reported psychological stress or anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic, but they were still able to demonstrate a positive outlook. Further, many educators reported finding new hobbies or spending more time with family. During this time, educators, like other groups of people, have developed coping techniques and intentional outlets for supporting their emotional well-being.

More intentional emotional training also demonstrated positive impacts for educators during this time. Participation in evidence-based self-help methods can present viable options to address the urgent needs of emotional support, especially amidst the unavailability of traditional mental health services. An example of such methods is Mindfulness-Based Interventions. These
interventions are based on meditation practices that are pulled from Buddhist traditions and adapted into contemporary programs. Catone et al. (2020) assert that mindfulness-based training can effectively mitigate the psychologically negative consequences of the COVID-19 outbreak. Catone et al. (2020) implemented an eight-week Mindfulness-Oriented Meditation program to support teacher mental health. Participants in this program demonstrated significant improvements (based on self-reporting) as soon as one month after COVID-19 related lockdowns were instituted.

Wellness Strategies

According to Abenavoli et al. (2016), educators often lack training to manage their own stress and promote their emotional well-being. However, on a personal level, there are several activities utilized by educators to manage stress. These strategies include activities such as reading and exercise. Extensive research has also been conducted on the systemic implementation of stress management strategies for educators. An example of this is the use of mindfulness-based interventions. Mindfulness can be defined as attentional self-regulation focused on the present moment, and an “orientation towards one’s experiences in the present moment… characterized by curiosity, openness, and acceptance” (Bishop et al., 2004, p.232). Further, through the use of mindfulness, maladaptive behavioral responses associated with stress can be improved (Evans et al., 2022). According to Cantone et al. (2020), mindfulness-based training can effectively mitigate the psychological negative consequences of the COVID-19 outbreak.

Regarding teachers’ current stress management, many use strategies such as reading, exercise etc. for relaxation. According to Talidong and Toquero (2020), the majority maintain a sense of control during COVID-19 and remain hopeful for the future. These strategies might
have helped to mitigate their stress and serve as an important resource they use during this crisis. Concerningly, minimally effective or ineffective educators did not report colleagues or leadership as a source of support. Such educators did report going to family and friends for such support. This might be due to the emotional nature of COVID-19 stress. However, it remains one lost opportunity for better management of their stress.

**Collegial Relationships**

Collaboration across colleagues has also been found to be an integral part of educators’ practice. According to Bottiani et al. (2022), collegial relationships are a naturally occurring resource in schools. Educators’ perceptions of stress and burnout may be shared within their collegial networks and have implications for collegial support in educator stress reduction and well-being focused interventions. Educator burnout can be impacted by collegial relationships. Burnout can be pervasive, and invasive of an educator community (Gielen et al., 2020). While educator burnout level is related to the average level burnout across colleagues; several mitigating relationships were found. Particularly, early career educators, who had more interactions with experienced educators, expressed lower rates of burnout within their social network (Bottiani et al., 2022).

**COVID-19, Professional Responsibility, and Professional Responses**

Educators in the secondary setting often juggle multiple responsibilities. Educators are, of course, responsible for the educational outcomes of their students. However, educators also have responsibilities linked to the safety and well-being of students, and bureaucratic responsibilities. Lenk (1992) offers a 6-component model of responsibility. The model consists of (a) a subject of responsibility; (b) an object of responsibility; (c) an addressee of responsibility; (d) a judging or sanctioning instance; (e) a prescriptive criterion of responsibility; (f) a realm of responsibility
and action (Lenk, 2007). When examining responsibility under the lens of this model, Lauermann asserts that responsibility has motivational implications (Lauermann, 2013). Further, collective responsibility can be an important resource of motivation for educators.

While motivation is integral to encouraging educators, there are several barriers to educators’ execution of their professional responsibility. These barriers include occupational stress and technostress. Occupational stress is defined as an unpleasant emotional state arising from aspects of one’s job (Kyriacou, 1981). Technostress is the psychological and physical stress caused by people’s failure to cope with technology and the related changes of technology use within the workplace (Chirca et al., 2020). The rapid and mostly unexpected changes related to the COVID-19 pandemic created challenges for educators as they navigated their new professional responsibilities. The exploration of how educators are navigating these responsibilities throughout the COVID-19 associated school closures is integral to addressing educator concerns and moving the field of education forward. Through the examination of occupational stress, burnout, work/life boundaries, and professional identities, the literature provides a lens through which to consider teacher experiences throughout the COVID-19 related school closures.

**Educator Professional Responsibilities**

Educators’ job responsibilities can be classified into two categories, emotional job demands and teaching support. These two types of job characteristics have direct relationships with educator stress, motivation, health, and even student educational outcomes (Han et al., 2020). When specifically looking through the lens of COVID-19 related responsibilities, teaching challenges were compounded by technostress and communication challenges. The onset of consistent use of technology was a shift for many educators. This meant that many
educators were learning new videoconferencing and learning management systems in the moment, which caused stress (Bilbao et al., 2020). Further, the shift from face-to-face connections with students and parents shifted to virtual or phone conversations, causing educators to alter the way that they communicated (Kaden, 2020).

Camaya and Lazatin (2022) noted that educators experienced challenges throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, as it related to professional responsibilities. Most of these challenges centered around abrupt changes to the learning environment and adaptations that were necessary for students' success. For example, Camaya and Lazatin (2022) highlighted that educators experienced challenges with technology, student engagement, and assessment authenticity. While these challenges were experienced during face-to-face learning as well, the limited modality of learning management systems made these challenges even more prevalent during virtual learning. Coping mechanisms utilized by educators to maintain professional responsibilities are social support, adaptive instruction, and teaching resilience. Camaya (2022) further emphasized the importance of relational support for educators. Such relationships upheld educators' ability to cope during challenging aspects of this phase of their careers.

The exploration of teacher experiences throughout the abrupt transition caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent government restrictions is emphasized within the current literature (Ashbury & Kim, 2020; Arthur & Gay, 2020). Asbury and Kim (2020) highlighted the professional consequences of these abrupt transitions. The shift to remote education from traditional face-to-face learning disrupts or changes the nature of the interpersonal relationships that are at the core of the teaching profession. Since relationships are considered to be at the core of educators’ pedagogy, such a change can negatively impact their sense of professional identity.
One major shift caused by remote learning became the managing of multiple responsibilities during traditional work hours. While educators were conducting remote learning experiences from home, many of them were also tasked with navigating childcare and child learning experiences simultaneously. Arthur and Guy (2020) examined their experiences as educators and parents throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Through their autoethnographic research, they candidly explored their experiences and called for the reevaluation of work/life boundaries and the need for flexibility and fluidity of work expectations during this time. With the broadened responsibilities that are occurring seemingly simultaneously, there is a call for grace and deviation from what have been established as traditional work/learning expectations.

The relationships between student’s homes and schools are an example of professional responsibilities that can result in fatigue, loss of teaching motivation and absenteeism in educators (Dahl, 2017). Nevertheless, with the onset of distance learning, these relationships became even more important. Kaden (2020) noted the challenges of connecting with students and their families throughout the pandemic. Particularly, contacting and engaging with transient students or students without internet access added to educator professional responsibilities.

The professional responsibilities of educators are nuanced and spread across several domains, including relationship building and content delivery. Arthur and Guy (2020) also highlighted strengthened professional relationships as a result of the vulnerabilities exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and associated isolation. The abrupt switch to remote learning caused an increased workload for educators, but also provided the opportunity for new learning experiences. Kaden’s (2020) single-party case study highlighted how remote learning allowed for more individualized learning experiences for students. However, the same study also noted
disparities and inequities in our communities. Inequities like lack of WiFi and the lack of access to remote learning platforms for socioeconomically disadvantaged and transient students must be addressed in order to ensure equity in education.

Data details the changes, complications, and challenges of teaching during COVID-19. Although classrooms have become smaller due to COVID-19 regulation, teacher workload and stress have not decreased. Instead, because of infections, comorbidities, rotational teaching arrangements, teacher workload has increased. Responsibility for learner outcomes remains high on teachers’ minds and one of the top stressors. Inadequate parental involvement, another teacher’s concern before COVID-19, continues and to some extent increased during COVID-19 because children spend more time at home and are expected to complete some self-learning (Steiner & Woo, 2021).

Coping with digital incompetence or gaps in technological knowledge also added to educator workload throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The digital divide between locations and socioeconomic statuses was pushed to the forefront of public conversation throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. For educators, according to Bilbao et al. (2020), a gap in technological skills caused higher stress levels. Further, such gaps were more present in older educators. As a result, there is a recommendation for continuous learning opportunities to increase digital competence of educators (Bilbao et al., 2020).

With the implementation of academic standards, and educator evaluation systems, instructional expectations have been at the forefront of educator concerns. Such concerns became even more prevalent with the onset of COVID-19. With COVID-19 changing the way that learning looks, Cai et al. (2020) recommended that educators reimagine what assignments and workload look like. Through the use of peer-review, limiting of grading, expert
collaboration, and educator flexibility, educators can begin to reimagine their instructional practices and subsequently make their workload more manageable.

**Teacher Response to Change**

Dispositions were defined as educators' tendencies to think and behave (Colliander, 2019). These are representative of their knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about teaching. Educators face constant change, and as a result, professional identity is often impacted. Some of these changes can be identified as more critical than others. Commitment is an essential element of successful teaching. Employees with high efficacy beliefs perceive crises and dilemmas as challenges. Further, such employees think strategically to resolve problems, and recover easily from predicaments (Baloran & Hernan, 2020).

Educators’ responses to change can be influenced by personal and professional matters, including age and career stage. How educators respond to change can be seen as stepping up or pushing back. Graber and Kern (2018) found minor changes were self-initiated without involvement from administration. Externally initiated change mostly involved professional development and was infrequent (Graber & Kern, 2018). Educators may either exceed the expectations (stepping up) or resist policies that they do not agree with (pushing back) (Colliander, 2019). Further, it is noteworthy that certain changes may have an emotional effect on the identity of educators. This is evident in the politicization of education and educators during the COVID-19 pandemic. Such events may have an emotional effect on educators by putting personal, moral, and social concerns at risk. As a result, there is a need to explore how educators adapt and resist change. Such an examination could benefit the field of education by evolving the ways in which change is introduced or considered. The understanding of educators'
experience and response to change is essential if reform efforts are to be more successful and sustainable.

According to Colliander (2019), teacher response to change depends on their judgment about the meaning for their teaching and impact on learners. With their actions, teachers come to both embrace and reject change by integrating new education tools by speaking up against changes that negatively influence students. When changes were seen as positive developments in teaching and learning, they were embraced and utilized in the learning experiences (Colliander, 2019). Juxtaposed, educators often opposed changes that were seen to have a negative effect on teaching and learning. Considering these two viewpoints on change, the exploration of COVID-19 related changes and subsequent teacher responses could benefit decision makers by utilizing these viewpoints to alter the way change is instituted within the field of education.

Nostalgia is defined as a wistful or excessively sentimental yearning for the past (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Such a yearning can be found as a component of professional identity within educators. Goodson and Umarik (2020) explored the role of nostalgia as a tool for both resisting and adapting to educational change. Nostalgia can be a positive concept since it can aid educators in making sense of change. Further, it can allow educators a lens for critical reflection on change. The research of Goodson and Umarik (2020) called for the acknowledgement of nostalgia’s positive functions and the creation of support tools to facilitate change. Further, the consideration of nostalgia could reduce the danger of unintended consequences from ignoring educators’ responses to change.

As mentioned above, educator response to change can be impacted by age and career stage. Aging is more than just growing old, but also a gradual accumulation of weariness or
wisdom. Age, career stage, and generational identification matter in relation to organizational-wide change. Hargreaves (2005) analyzed how teachers respond emotionally to educational change at different ages and stages of their careers. Early-career educators are seen as optimistic individuals that have learned adaptability that is necessary to their generational survival because their occupational and social environments are characterized by insecurity. Juxtaposed, educators towards the end of their career find themselves weary of their repetitive educational change, and most educators end up becoming resistant to change efforts outside of the classroom. Hargreaves (2005) highlights the three M’s (Mixtures, Mentoring, and Memory) as crucial to sustainable educational change. By respecting the memories of late career educators, creating mentoring relationships, and mixing various groups of educators, sustainable change can be upheld.

**Trauma**

The term trauma is a broad term that encompasses the emotional response to a negative event. There is an incredible depth of knowledge regarding trauma across disciplines. In many fields that deal directly with individuals who have experienced trauma, professionals are trained to recognize indicators of secondary or shared trauma, or compassion fatigue. Further, within these employment preparation programs, professionals are equipped with coping and self-care strategies to help mitigate the effects of these events.

**Shared Trauma & Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder**

Nuttman-Shwartz et al. (2012) defined shared trauma as the impact on the therapeutic situation, as well as the profession and personal alterations that may result from the professional’s dual exposure to trauma. They discuss the importance of articulating one’s own trauma narrative and attending to self-care prior to resuming work. Agencies can provide
necessary support, supervision, and education to mitigate the negative effects of shared trauma. Figley’s (1995) definition of compassion fatigue states that it is long-term cumulative stress resulting from the “cost of caring.” The narratives from this study demonstrate that shared trauma offers professionals the opportunity for personal and professional growth. Social and professional support can make an important contribution to aid the negative effects of shared trauma. Further, essential sources of professional support include agency-based support, and private and peer supervision (Nuttman-Shwartz et al., 2012). If such resources aren’t available, professionals should consider advocating for changes in their work settings, institutions, and associations to make their organizations more responsive.

Fan et al. (2021) found that educators can experience Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. There were two types of trauma exposures within the pandemic that had a significant impact on PTSD: confirmed COVID-19 diagnoses of educators, and the death of a loved one from COVID-19. Such findings indicate that the prevalence of PTSD in educators would be higher in areas that were hit harder by the pandemic. As a result, the need for grief counseling and mental health services were identified as key pieces to reduce symptoms of PTSD in educators.

**Secondary Trauma & Compassion Fatigue**

It is important to note that the terms secondary trauma and compassion fatigue are often used interchangeably and represent the same phenomenon. Further, the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (APA’s DSM-5) recognizes secondary trauma as a form of PTSD (Barza et al., 2020). Such findings can infer that educators can experience forms of PTSD from multiple points of their lives simultaneously. While working through the pandemic, educators can experience the form of PTSD outlined by Fan et
al. (2021), with primary exposures to trauma. However, they can also experience secondary trauma through the trauma experienced and disclosed by their students.

Baum (2012) discussed the concept of communal disasters and how professionals can be doubly exposed to the disaster both as professionals and as members of the stricken community. Shared trauma is characterized by two central components. The first is that both the professional and the person receiving help must belong to the stricken community. The second is that the professional is providing services to those adversely affected by the same disaster. Baum (2012) argued that at least some of the widespread distress reported by professionals is not because of their empathy, rather because of their self-perceived lapse of empathy. These lapses result from moments of not being fully available to their clients and subsequently not being entirely empathetic with them. The social support enabled by connection with family members and other group affiliations where one works, or being a part of a community, can help the distress felt by professionals working in shared traumatic reality.

According to Abu-Raiya et al. (2016), educators can suffer from secondary trauma and compassion fatigue as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. If left untreated, traumatic stress can lead to negative behavioral, psychological, and health consequences (APA, 2013). Due to the central role of educators in the lives of students, educators can find themselves as clinical mediators, working through skills training and socioemotional lessons with students. Subsequently, coping with the dual trauma of COVID-19, while providing satisfactory care for students, calls for immense strength and resilience in educators. However, very few interventions have been developed that focus specifically on teachers dealing with primary or secondary trauma (Abu-Raiya et al., 2016).
Teacher Burnout

Burnout is a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, reduction of personal achievement, and depersonalization that can occur within people who work with people (Jackson et al., 1996). According to Cartwright et al. (2005), teaching has been ranked as one of the most stressful professions. There were several contributing factors to this ranking, including day-to-day responsibilities, and emotional stress. Burnout is defined as a psychological condition that is considered a reaction to chronic stress. Work-related stress can be associated with burnout and a number of negative outcomes, including low job satisfaction, poor student outcomes, and attrition (Fox & Walter, 2022). Răducu and Stânculescu (2022) asserted that burnout symptoms can appear anytime. The appearance of these symptoms has increased alarmingly during the COVID-19 pandemic. This puts educators’ mental health at risk. It can lead to exhaustion, depersonalization, and decreased professional achievement and self-worth (Raines-Evers, 2011). Teacher burnout often results in high turnover rates and poorer quality teaching. These implications can directly impact student engagement and achievement (Allen et al., 2019). They also undergird the necessity of exploring the causes and solutions for this psychological phenomenon to better support educators for the benefit of students.

Contributing Factors

Organizational Level Factors

A thorough examination of the contributing factors to teacher burnout allowed for the classification of said factors into organizational, teacher, and student levels. Organizational factors like support and educator satisfaction with school decisions have been associated with reduced burnout (Trinidad, 2021). Organizational level factors include teacher job specific tasks, class size, school size, and availability of support (Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021). Educators
reported deficiencies with support in engaging with technology to reach and deliver content to students (Achieng & Auma, 2020). Further, the lack of equity in resource availability proved to be a hindrance to online learning. Both educators and students experienced inadequate access to technology like laptops and WiFi access (Alea et al., 2020). As a result, it is imperative that organizations evolve to the changing learning environment.

Chang (2009) asserts that the repetitious nature of the negative experiences within these factors also lead to educator burnout. The manner in which school leaders work to prevent and counteract educator stress are considered school specific features that could potentially have an impact on educator stress levels (Akerstedt et al., 2019). Educators reported stress levels, fatigue, and depressed mood as being associated with school satisfaction and perceptions of educator caring. Akerstedt et al. found a negative correlation between teacher stress levels and student satisfaction (2019). By recognizing this, school specific features such as the degree of support systems and school leaders’ role in preventing and managing stress can be altered or improved. In order to ensure students have access to the most beneficial and positive learning experiences, it is imperative that educational leaders address teacher stress levels and other contributing factors to educator burnout.

**Educator Personal Level Factors**

Teacher level factors include demographics, efficacy, and relatedness with students. Student level factors include the ages of the students, behaviors, and their support needs (Saloviita & Pakarinen, 2021). Interestingly, Gielen et al. (2020) examined the social influences of burnout. They asserted that concepts like burnout are social phenomena. Long term results of a cross sectional analysis of data found that social relationships can impact emotional exhaustion. Subsequently, the importance of interpersonal relationships within teaching staff cannot be
denied. Negative emotions and constant commiseration must be avoided because of potential short- and long-term impact. As a result, there is a call for positive social interactions amongst staff to mitigate the long-term effects of burnout (Gielen et al., 2020). Pervasive negative emotions can become rooted within a staff. Subsequently, there is a need for leaders to go beyond simple in-network social support and find external support for staff members to break the negative emotional cycles.

**Student Level Factors**

The adaptations in the learning environment throughout the COVID-19 pandemic produced several barriers that alter the way educators interact and engage with students. For example, the way students and educators are able to build relationships looks vastly different in the virtual environment. The inability to see students in-person presents challenges in relationship building because educators no longer have access to the nonverbal cues that students emit when struggling both with academics and socioemotional challenges (Alea et al., 2020). The loss of foundational aspects of their educational pedagogy and the subsequent need to rebuild this lost foundation can add to feelings of stress and ultimately burnout.

**Teacher Stress & Resilience**

The COVID-19 pandemic had a paralyzing impact on the educational process, causing educators great uncertainty about the current and future state of teaching and learning. In traditional learning experiences, educators are the harbingers of information. They are responsible for disseminating information from school, district, and governmental officials to students. Asbury and Kim (2020) found that educators’ discomfort with uncertainty was rooted in being given information about learning experiences and professional responsibilities at the same time the information was public. COVID-19 removed that layer of communication, and in
some instances lumped educators in the same information pool as their students. According to Asbury and Kim (2020), this shift in communication processes led to higher stress levels in educators. Subsequently, it is charged that government officials and other decision-making entities should include classroom educators and school leaders in the decision-making process. By doing so, the high stress levels associated with uncertainty can be reduced.

According to Brothers et al. (2022), educator stress was linked to their practices with children and children’s own well-being. Further, educator stress can lead to fatigue and inattention may negatively impact relationships (Beltman et al., 2019). Chirca et al. (2020) aimed to offer insight on how motivation (both intrinsic and extrinsic) relates to occupational stress to gain a better understanding of the nuances of performing online instruction within the unstable work context that school closures have created. The differences between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation lie in the concept of ability versus obligation. Intrinsic motivation is behavior that is driven by internal interest or rewards. Therefore, this form of motivation is highlighted by self-perceived ability. Extrinsic motivation is behavior that is driven by external interests or obligations (Chirca et al., 2020). Subsequently, this form of motivation is characterized by perceived obligation to those outside of yourself. Chirca et al. (2020) concluded that intrinsic motivation influences educators’ intention to continue online teaching. Further, intrinsic motivation had a strong negative effect on burnout and technostress.
Theoretical Framework

Figley’s Theory of Compassion Fatigue

In his book, Charles Figley (1995) defined compassion fatigue as “the cost of caring” for those that are engaging with people that have experienced trauma. When professional work is centered on the relief of the emotional suffering of others, it often results in the absorption of the suffering itself (Figley, 1995). The definition of compassion fatigue has evolved over time, and several instruments have been developed to measure compassion fatigue in individuals. Universally, compassion fatigue references the emotional and physical exhaustion that can impact professionals over time. Compassion fatigue has been associated with gradual desensitization to shared stories, high rates of burnout, depression, and anxiety disorders. This also leads to rising rates of stress related leaves and degradation of workplace climate (Mathieu, 2012).

While the use of this theory was initially centered on those in healthcare, Charles Figley (1999) has explored the nuanced application of this theory across professions, including social
work and police. This application across fields supports the use of compassion fatigue theory to examine the impact of consistent exposure to traumatized or troubled students on the socioemotional well-being of educators throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs**

![Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs](image)

In his Theory of Human Motivation, Maslow (1943) identified five needs as the foundation of human physical and emotional desires. These five needs are physiological needs, safety, love and belonging, esteem and self-actualization. Maslow stressed that failure to have all of one or more of these needs met impacts an individual’s motivation in completing or performing tasks (Maslow, 1943).

Physiological needs represent people’s most basic needs, for example food and clothing. These needs relate directly to the human body’s ability to function. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, food and housing security were addressed on a state and federal level through Executive Orders. These orders halted evictions, expanded unemployment benefits, and even
increased allotments of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program to ensure that as many people were fed and housed as possible (Ackley, 2020; Whitmer, 2020).

After these basic needs are met, Maslow (1943) argued that the need for safety or security is incredibly important. People want to have control over their lives, and they require order and predictability. This notion of safety includes physical safety, emotional security, and financial security. Safety is the first need we see interrupted in the COVID-19 pandemic related shutdowns. Employment was unstable for many, but state and federal level government agencies worked to minimize the interruption of this need. This was accomplished through Executive Orders through state level governments. For example, unemployment benefits were expanded through state governments and their utilization of federal funds (Whitmer, 2020).

However, the third need that Maslow (1943) identified is the need for love and belonging. This need was also disrupted by COVID-19 pandemic related shutdowns. The notion of belonging refers to the need for interpersonal relationships and connectedness. The need for quarantine and isolation erected immediate and strong barriers to connectedness that forced society to reexamine the way people connect and share space and relationships.

The fourth need Maslow (1943) identified was esteem, which focuses on self-esteem and respect from others. This need includes things like mastery and independence. The final need that Maslow highlights is self-actualization, which is the realization of personal potential and self-fulfillment.

Examining COVID-19 and the socio-emotional well-being of educators under the lens of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs framework can be utilized to understand teachers’ socio-emotional needs of teachers and resulting challenges that arise when those needs go unmet.
Summary

This literature review has identified and discussed the following themes: COVID-19 and professional responsibility, COVID-19 and emotional well-being, teacher response to change, trauma, and teacher burnout. These themes are important because they highlight potential areas of focus and limitations within the field. The methodologies employed by the researchers varied across themes, however, quantitative methods were the most prominent. This proves important because it demonstrates a lack of educator voice across the literature. Our nation’s experiences with COVID-19 are ever-evolving, and educators are evolving alongside these experiences. Focusing more on educator voice, through the use of qualitative research measures, addresses one critical gap in the literature. This also makes the body of literature richer, accurate, and more diverse. While current literature will inform research relating to educator experiences throughout the COVID-19 pandemic moving forward, a thorough examination of relevant methodology associated with this topic is necessary.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This narrative research study explored the lived experiences of secondary educators in relation to their socioemotional well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic and state government mandated shutdowns, by employing a narrative research design. This study’s primary focus was understanding educators' lived experiences through their voices. This research design allowed for in-depth exploration of educator experiences, through the nuanced examination of the elicited responses.

The research site was the sole public high school serving students within a small suburban city in Southeast Michigan. The school has been a fixture in the community since 1954, serving upwards of 1,300 students each year. There are 76 educators employed at the high school level. The high school boasts robust athletic and extracurricular activities that are mostly educator sponsored. Currently, 83% of the district's student population has been identified as “at-risk” either through the receipt of free/reduced lunch, reading three or more stages below grade level, receipt of Special Education or English as a Second Language services.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the school had very little explicit learning technology experiences. Within the high school, there were approximately 250 school-owned laptops to be shared across content areas. At the onset of the COVID-19 state government mandated shutdowns, the school district scrambled to ensure that educators and students had access to the necessary resources to continue learning experiences. This resulted in a mix of laptop and paper packet usage across the district until more computers were ordered. In March 2020, all teachers that needed a laptop were issued one by the district. By mid-fall 2020, the district ensured that every student had access to a school issued laptop, if needed. Families were also able to get WiFi hotspots for internet access through the district.
Through the examination of educators’ stories through the lenses of Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and Figley’s Compassion Fatigue Theory, this study aimed to highlight the necessity of attentiveness to educator socioemotional well-being to the profession. Figure 3.1 demonstrates the relationship between educator well-being, Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and Figley’s Compassion Fatigue Theory. In taking the time to acknowledge and address these experiences, administrators and policymakers can continue to better serve educators. In turn, educators can better serve students.

**Research Question**

How do secondary school teachers describe their socioemotional well-being resulting from the adaptation of their work environment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?

**Research Design**

Within qualitative research, the researcher seeks to understand how people make sense of their experiences with a final product that is richly descriptive (Merriam, 2002). Qualitative research methods are uniquely exploratory and descriptive; subsequently, such methods are the best to truly explore the stories of educators throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. In seeking to
highlight the stories of educators and their voices, a narrative research design was employed.

Narrative research is qualitative in nature, and therefore supported the aims of this study.

   Narrative research is rooted in storytelling. Experiences are considered the starting point or foundation of narrative inquiry. Narrative research focuses on the social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional narratives within which individual experiences were, and are constituted, shaped, expressed, and enacted (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Narrative researchers collect stories from individuals and artifacts about their lived experiences. The stories come together as a collaborative effort from the researcher and participant through dialogue and interaction between the two parties. The researcher then restories the narratives as told by the participants. The act of “restorying” brings the significant events of participant stories to the forefront of the narrative (Kim, 2016). Multiple data sources can be used to achieve the goals of the narrative research tradition, such as interviews, observations, written artifacts, and pictures.

   Narrative research design can take a multitude of genres. For the purposes of this study, the Bildungsroman genre was employed to tell the stories of the participants. The term “bildungsroman” is derived from German for “formation” novel. This genre focuses on the personal growth and identity development of the participant, their journey of becoming (Kim, 2016). Within this genre the emphasis is placed on the participants’ journey, rather than the happy conclusion of the story. Such a genre was chosen because this research aims to explore the evolution of educator socioemotional well-being throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

   Traditional research focuses on the interpretation and analysis of data. However, Leggo and Sameshima (2014) stressed the importance of the representation of data. Through the narrative inquiry process, the development of educator socioemotional well-being throughout this time period was revealed. In order to fully represent the themes that the participant
interviews revealed, a composite narrative was crafted. The purpose of this composite narrative is to tell the stories of the participants to demonstrate opportunities for understanding.

Population and Sampling

The context of this study was within a small suburban high school in southeastern Michigan. Voluntary response sampling was utilized to obtain the five-person sample for this study. Such a small sample size supported the need for in-depth restorying of each participant’s narrative (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This specific sample size number allowed for representation of educators across content areas. Recruitment for this study was done via a staff wide email blast requesting participants. In cases that multiple participants volunteered from each department, the first individual that responded was asked to participate. It is important to note that this form of sampling can lead to bias, because it can be inferred that those who volunteer to participate are likely to have strong opinions about the topic, and subsequently, their responses may not be representative of all educators.

Research Techniques

The specific instruments used to operationalize the research process were open-ended interviews and participant journaling. Due to the narrative research tradition being centered on the lived experiences of participants, these instruments were deemed the most appropriate to achieve the goal of the study. Interviews and the writing samples yielded from the participant journals produced the raw data necessary to allow the researcher to bring forth the significant events of the narratives told by the participants.

The importance of the individual as a source of knowledge is foundational to the use of interviews within narrative research. Interviews happened in two phases. The narration phase occurred first and involved the participant telling their story with minimal interruptions. It was
crucial that the participant and their story, told as organically as possible, took center stage. The conversation stage was the second phase. This phase represented the more traditional in-depth interview process. The goal was for the researcher’s questions and participants' answers to continue to inform the conversation (Kim, 2016). The researcher was no longer a passive participant in the narrative construction, but an active co-constructor. This final stage of the interview employed a conversational nature, where the researcher clarified details from the participants' stories told in the first phase.

Following the two-phase interview, participants were provided with the link for a participant journal. Journaling was selected as a method for data collection because such methodology can increase data quality and offer different insights that may not be revealed in the limited time period of an interview. The journaling processes required participants to respond to a prompt related to their narratives. Participants had one week to complete the journaling process. All of the journal prompts were given at the same time, but it was expected that a prompt would be completed every 48 hours. While journaling does offer high quality data, one of the shortcomings of this data collection method was the recruitment and retention of participants throughout this process (Dansereau et al., 2019). With no true manner of enforcement, due to the voluntary nature of the participant sampling, there was a possibility that this could result in variation in length and coherence of responses across participants. Nevertheless, the reason for this structure was to allow for the fluidity of nostalgia. Since this research is centered around the participants’ story, the overall story will be crafted with the information provided by the participant. Certain prompts may evoke responses at different times. However, by instituting a time frame on the completion of responses, it was the goal of the researcher to embed accountability measures within the activity. These accountability measures included automated
reminders, as well as personal check-ins every two days. These answers built upon the data collected from the first round of interviews.

**Data Collection Sources and Techniques**

To ensure that adequate rich data was collected, multiple data points were considered. Participants completed open-ended interviews and semi-structured journaling. The data for this study emerged from the multiple phases of data collection. Each phase of the interview yielded field notes and transcripts of the interviews. Journal responses were collected using Google Forms for analysis. Responses were analyzed to address research questions.

The use of multiple data collection sources was intentional for this study. In interviewing for narrative study design, it is often recommended that the interviewing process takes place in two phases (Kim, 2016). The narration phase was represented in the first interview of our data collection process. This phase was characterized by the intentional absence of researcher/interviewer interruptions, and the goal of this phase was to allow the participant to organically narrate the events and from their own life experiences. The second phase of the interview process was considered the conversation phase (Kim, 2016). This was the point in which the researcher became a co-constructor of the narrative through the structured interview process that consisted of questions and responses.

The combination of the narrative interviewing and guided journaling provided substantial data and gave participants multiple opportunities to tell their stories with as much nuance as possible. Further, the use of multiple data collection sources allowed for detailed stories to be revealed for retelling by the researcher.
Data Analysis

There are several methods for analyzing and retelling participant stories within the narrative tradition. For the purposes of this study, Polkinghorne’s narrative analysis was utilized (Kim, 2016). This particular mode of analysis focuses on the data elements to put them together in a plot. It makes a range of seemingly disconnected data elements coherent and appealing to the reader. To achieve this, this method utilizes narrative smoothing techniques. Narrative smoothing can be problematic, in that its purpose is to remove redundant information from the narrative; however, such a process can lend itself to bias. It was up to the researcher to decide what was redundant, and there was a possibility of selective omission, or the researcher making assumptions about prior knowledge.

Connelly and Clandinin (1990) highlighted the use of the analytical tools of broadening, burrowing, and storying and restorying. This is emphasizing the broader context, while noting the more specific details of the data. Finally, storying and restorying was the final analytical tool that was employed. This tool focused on the act of restorying to ensure the lived experiences of the participants was at the forefront of the data. It is important to note that narrative analysis and interpretation often occur in tandem and is the act of finding narrative meaning (Kim, 2016)
Subsequently, data interpretation and coding occurred simultaneously, although interpretation of the data continued after the coding process. The coding process involved three rounds of coding. The initial coding utilized in vivo coding. In vivo coding uses words or short phrases from the participants’ own language as codes (Saldana, 2021). This specific process was selected because the use of the participants’ own words as codes prioritizes and honors their voice. After the development of several Nvivo codes, emotion coding was conducted (Saldana, 2021). Emotion coding was useful because it identified the emotions recalled or experienced by the participants. Such a coding process provides insight to the participants’ perspective, worldviews, and life conditions. The choice to use both of these processes in tandem was to ensure that the captured data highlighted the emotions of the participants, while honoring their voices as a valuable component of this research process. Finally, pattern coding was employed to identify similarly coded data (Saldana, 2021). Pattern coding led to the development of major themes from the data.

Interrelatedly, thematic narrative analysis is supported by the use of the aforementioned tools. Such analysis aims to uncover the commonalities or differences that exist across the multiple data sources, and produce a general knowledge (Kim, 2016). Thematic narrative analysis focuses on the themes and their meaning as emerged throughout the storytelling, rather than the form of the narrative (Mishler, 1986). The coding process involved multiple readings of journals and interview transcripts. Repetitive or emphatic ideas were noted. Data was coded piece by piece, then again thematically. As codes emerged, from the repetitive concepts found in the data, they were gathered into themes. These themes were created to represent similar patterns. From this point, the findings were systematically presented by describing each theme, and supporting said themes with evidence from the field notes data. The researcher retold the
participants' stories, focusing on the themes and patterns elicited through the initial analysis (Kim, 2016).

In considering the representation of data in narrative inquiry, it is imperative to recall that narrative inquiry is rooted in storytelling. While research is often focused on the interpretation and analysis of the data, Leggo and Sameshima (2014) emphasized the need for attention paid to discourse or how the data is conveyed. For the purposes of representing and conveying the data in a manner that presents ample opportunities for understanding of the findings, each theme will be represented by a composite narrative at the conclusion of the findings chapter.

**Validity and Reliability**

Validity in narrative research has been a source of debate. The challenges in ensuring validity of narratives lies in the disjunction between experienced meaning and language descriptions of said meaning. Simply put, the disconnect between the lexicon of the interview participants and the true nuanced meaning of the experience can present a barrier to validity, and ultimately compromise the trustworthiness or compellingness of the narrative. Polkinghorne (2007) recommended several ways to guard against this disjunction and ensure validity.

Within this study, validity was ensured by the researcher assuming an open listening stance and engaging in focused listening and exploration. This aids in bringing forward the complexities of experiences. Validity was further ensured by encouraging participants to use figurative expressions. Further, the multiple engagements between participant and researcher through the interviews and focused journaling offered opportunities for the participants to become more comfortable sharing their experiences.

Reliability focuses on the replication and consistency of a study (Lin & Wang, 2010). Narrative research focuses on the lived experiences of individual participants; therefore,
replication is not possible and that is a barrier to the traditional notion of reliability (Kim, 2016). However, one aspect of reliability that can be ensured is the consistency of the data and story being told. This was done through review of interview transcripts for consistency and errors. The story is the foundation of a narrative study and ensuring that story is accurate is key to the success of a narrative study. Therefore, the transcripts were reviewed with each participant to ensure accuracy and consistency.

**Research Ethics**

For the purposes of this study, the researcher complied with all relevant research ethics. Such ethics include, but are not limited to, confidentiality, anonymity, consent, and authorization. All names and other personal identifying information were removed from transcripts and participant artifacts. Consent forms and authorizations were obtained where appropriate, in compliance with the Institutional Review Board of the University of Michigan-Flint. The necessary and appropriate documentation for the IRB and consent letters are included in the appendices and filed where appropriate.

**Summary**

This chapter described how the researcher plans to use a narrative research design to explore how secondary school teachers describe their socioemotional well-being resulting from the adaptation of their work environment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter highlighted plans for sampling, research technique, data collection and analysis. Population sampling was done voluntarily, with the goal of recruiting one educator from at least five content areas at the sampling location. Participants engaged in three phases of data collection: a two-part interview and a journaling period. Data collected from each phase of the collection process was analyzed and coded using thematic narrative analysis. While reliability in narrative research can
be challenging to achieve due to barriers in replication, consistency was ensured through the focused review of participants' stories. Validity was upheld through multiple engagements between participants and researchers to ensure the nuanced nature of the lived experience was captured. Finally, this research complied with all relevant research ethics, with all relevant documentation provided in the appendices.
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The purpose of this narrative inquiry was to explore the lived experiences of educators working throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Narrative inquiry is considered to be the study of experience. Clandnin and Connelly (2000) purported that narrative inquiry is an appropriate methodology because “education in and of itself is a development within, by and for experience.” The use of narrative inquiry allowed the authentic voices of educators to be used to share their stories. The use of such voices allowed for detailed and emotion rich examination of their experiences within education.

The focus on secondary educators allowed for a greater understanding of the nuanced experiences felt when in this role. This study strived to fill a gap in the research through a focus on educator voice, storytelling, and meaning making. Through interviews and participant journaling, data was collected and analyzed to answer the following question:

1. How do secondary school teachers describe their socioemotional well-being resulting from the adaptation of their work environment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?

This chapter includes brief descriptions of the setting and participants. Findings are organized by three emergent themes: Isolation, Relationships, and Resiliency & Silver Linings. Following the in-depth examination of these themes is a single composite narrative illustrating the themes.

Description of Setting and Participants

This sample included five secondary educators from Overlook High School (pseudonym), a public, suburban high school in Southeast Michigan. Overlook High School has a population of approximately 1,500 students and a teaching staff of 73 educators. The overall
tenure of the staff varies greatly, with the most senior educator teaching at the high school beginning in 1975, and the newest educators concluding their student teaching while transitioning into full-time teaching roles within the school. The largest content area teaching population can be found in the English department with 12 educators. The smallest content area teaching population can be found in the World Languages department with five educators. The educator-participants and campus setting in this study have been identified with pseudonyms to protect confidentiality and anonymity.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Pseudonym</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Content Area</th>
<th>Years Teaching</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Millicent</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>English/Language Arts (ELA)</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Steven</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruce</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Science</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natalia</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Valencia</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The profiles that follow are meant to add context and background information to the shared stories of the participants. These are by no means all-encompassing, simply meant to provide additional insight into their experiences.

**Millicent**

Millicent characterized her socioemotional well-being as “neutral” prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and the COVID-related shutdowns. According to Millicent:
I’ve always had generalized anxiety, but I was able to manage through basic self-care (deep breathing, journaling, doing things that brought me joy, etc.) I was mostly good at separating my anxiety from my professional life… Overall, I was happy and felt a sense of excitement about the future.

Millicent is a secondary English educator. She has been teaching for 10 years, and at Overlook High School for three years. In her time at Overlook High School she has taught 9th-grade ELA, 10th-grade ELA, and Mythology. However, through the government mandated, COVID-19 related shutdowns, Millicent exclusively taught 9th-grade ELA. In addition to being an educator, Millicent is also the parent of a young child that was at home with her. During the course of the pandemic, Millicent was completing her Master of Arts degree to fulfill the requirements of her employment with Overlook High School. In considering the impact of the pandemic on her socioemotional well-being, Millicent recounted:

Working through the pandemic was an experience… I was challenged to be more creative than ever before and coming up with lessons was exciting and a point of pride in many instances. However, the lacking interaction (sic) from students and lack of communication from admin (sic) only added to feelings of isolation…

Steven

Steven characterized his socioemotional well-being prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated shutdowns as “good.” He found joy in his job and family. He stated:

Politically things were a bit weird with the conservatives, but for the most part things were good. Everybody knew what was going on and what was expected of them, classes were being taught, kids were learning, and there was time to prep our classes and critically evaluate what we had done in the classroom. Good times.
Steven is a secondary Social Studies educator. He has been teaching for 18 years, and at Overlook High School for his entire teaching career. He has taught a myriad of courses within the Social Studies department and served as department chair. He is also the coach of the Quiz Bowl Team which gives him the opportunity to get to know a smaller group of students that he may not have gotten to know otherwise. This allows him to watch them develop into innovative and creative thinkers.

During the state government-related COVID-19 shutdowns, Overlook High School was running a trimester calendar. This meant that classes changed for both educators and students every 12 weeks. Steven taught four classes, World History, Psychology, Sociology, and AP Psychology. Steven is also the parent of two elementary-aged children, who were learning from home simultaneously while he was teaching from home. When considering the impact of the pandemic on his own socioemotional well-being, Steven recounted:

Working through the pandemic was a double-edged sword… conducting class talking to a screen of icons left me feeling quite isolated and disconnected from students and people in general. However, working through the pandemic also meant that I had a roof over my head … and I was not going to deal with the financial hardships that many of my students and their families had to deal with.

Bruce

Bruce noted that his socioemotional well-being prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and associated shutdowns was “low.” However, he highlighted that this may have been due to an inability to really understand or shape his own well-being:
Low well-being and low ability to shape/understand my well-being. I felt I had been waiting a long time to get to the next phase of my life, yet not having the ability to reach or realize what that meant. I had a lot of growing up to do.

Bruce is a secondary Science educator and has been teaching for 1.5 years. He has been at Overlook High School for the duration of his teaching career. During his time at Overlook High School, he taught Physics and Energy, a science collaboration class with a local company. Bruce’s experiences during the pandemic spanned two distinct periods of his professional career, teacher preparation and “teacher of record” teaching. In recounting the relationship between the pandemic and his socioemotional well-being, Bruce stated:

I feel as if it generated many feelings of self-doubt and isolation. Being a first-year teacher during the pandemic made me unsure of what my efforts and results should look like.

Natalia

Natalia described her socioemotional well-being before the COVID-19 pandemic as “high/strong.” She indicated that she did things that she loved, and enjoyed her job:

Overall, before COVID I would describe my socioemotional well-being as being fairly high/strong. I was happy with my job, had a healthy exercise/routine and was eating well/balanced.

Natalia is a secondary Spanish educator and has been teaching for 12 years. She has been teaching Spanish and Academic Support classes at Overlook High School for 1.5 years. During her time at Overlook High School, she advocated for students and successfully restarted the Spanish Club. According to Natalia:
It was absolutely exhausting. I was working around the clock, constantly recreating lessons & activities so that they would work virtually. I felt like I had no off switch, especially since we were at home. There was no separation between home life and work life; they all melded together.

Valencia

Valencia characterized her socioemotional well-being prior to the COVID-19 pandemic as being “okay.” She considered herself being an extrovert, and highlights the challenge of identifying as extroverted, but living through the isolation of the COVID-19 pandemic:

Before COVID, my life was so fun. I was able to go out and do things with my friends. My job was easy, the kids were good. Even when the kids weren’t so good, I was able to decompress outside of my house. I could separate work and home. Honestly, I was good.

Valencia is a secondary Mathematics educator and has been teaching for seven years. Six of those years have been at Overlook High School. She taught Algebra 1 to mostly 9th-grade students during the state government related COVID-19 shutdowns. In describing her socioemotional state during the pandemic related shutdowns, Valencia reported feelings of loneliness:

COVID-19, COVID-19, it made my life horrible. I was all alone. I am actually grateful that I live with my family, otherwise I wouldn’t have seen anyone for months. Even though I was working from home, most of my family worked in healthcare, so I didn’t see them a lot. My mom was home, but you know… I couldn’t see my friends; the kids didn’t log on. It was awful.
Findings

Research Question

How do secondary school teachers describe their socioemotional well-being resulting from the adaptation of their work environment caused by the COVID-19 pandemic?

Purpose of Research Question

This question was designed to explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on educators’ socioemotional well-being. By gathering the lived experiences of educators throughout this period, themes were uncovered and further refined, due to the qualitative nature of this study.

Emergent Theme 1: Isolation.

“Conducting class talking to a screen of icons left me feeling quite isolated and disconnected from students and people in general.” – Natalia

Social isolation is defined as the voluntary or involuntary absence of contact with others. Social isolation often produces abnormal behavioral and physiological changes in both humans and nonhuman animals (American Psychological Association, 2022). With the issuance of Governor Gretchen Whitmer’s “Stay Home, Stay Safe” orders (2020) that prohibited large gatherings and prompted the closure of all nonessential businesses, including schools, most Michiganders found themselves isolated at home unless they were considered essential workers. While research is still emerging about the impacts of COVID-19 related isolation on mental health, researchers have long asserted the negative impacts of isolation on one’s mental health. The isolation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic was compounded by the need to behave as if other people are dangerous to our health, and the health of our loved ones (Pietrabissa &
Simpson, 2020). In describing their experiences and socioemotional well-being during the COVID-19 related shutdowns, participants highlighted feelings of uncertainty about safety as a factor that had a negative impact on their socioemotional well-being.

**Isolation and Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs.**

“Personally, being shut in with my family for a year, facing uncertainty about how to keep my family and myself safe took a toll on my well-being. It became the center of my focus and made it hard for me to navigate everyday stuff without fear.” –Millicent

Journal Prompt #2 asked: How did the pandemic impact your socioemotional well-being, overall? Within the responses, participants highlighted increased feelings of stress and anxiety, uncertainty about safety, and the need to separate for safety. In Abraham Maslow’s Theory of Motivation, he highlighted a hierarchy of needs that identifies safety as a low-level need, meaning that it must be met in order for any of the higher level needs to be met (Maslow, 1943). This need was also disrupted by COVID-19 pandemic related shutdowns.

The need for quarantine and isolation erected immediate and strong barriers to connectedness that forced society to reexamine the manner in which people connect and share space and relationships. With the uncertainty and ever-changing nature of the information received about COVID-19 and its transmission made safety a focus for many participants. Due to the inability to have the basic or low-level need of safety met, participants’ well-being suffered. Bruce stated:

It became difficult to picture and predict what would be happening in the near future. I felt more anxious and depressed about what was happening in our world and in my life. I even experienced chest pain related to this, so much so I went in to see if I had experienced a heart attack (I didn't.) While I think this will have a long-lasting negative
impact, like scarring. I think this journey has made me more aware of socioemotional well-being and the steps I can take to support my own well-being.

**Isolation and Professional Responsibility.**

In considering social isolation further, there is the added nuance of professional responsibility throughout the state government related COVID-19 shutdowns. At Overlook High School, educators were still expected to provide instruction or learning experiences to students throughout this time. In addition to providing instruction, educators were also learning and navigating the challenges regarding videoconferencing. Such challenges, coupled with the social isolation led to stress in educators (Bilbao et al., 2020).

The specific expectations were ever evolving, and often changed based upon the most up to date recommendations by the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. At its most restrictive, during the 2020-21 school year, educators conducted two 2.5-hour blocks of instruction to regular class groups and 1.5 hours of academic intervention daily, from home. Even with a solidified schedule, the shift from face-to-face connections with students and parents transitioned to virtual or phone conversations. Educators volleyed between this model and following the exact same schedule from classrooms. Such changes required educator adaptation, and subsequently increased educator workload (Steiner & Woo, 2021). As educators worked within their classrooms, they were still required to maintain social distancing with their colleagues. This volley and social distancing requirements led educators to alter the way in which they communicated (Kaden, 2020). Eventually, students were given the option to return to the classroom in a hybrid setting in March 2021, for the remainder of the school year.

Participants highlighted the professional challenges presented by isolation.

Steven recounted:
We were told, you know, have students turn on their cameras and be there but you can’t force them. And you can’t make a directive like that and not have a consequence. And so, it was the one thing that was really hard about teaching virtually is you show up every day, and you’re the one who’s making the effort and you’ve got a blank screen… a screen full of avatars that you’re talking to. Icons that you are talking to, and you’re not sure who is on the other side. It was lonely, frustrating, and lonely.

According to Pietrabissa and Simpson (2020), this feeling of uncertainty was particularly unique to the COVID-19 pandemic and the ever-changing guidelines about what was safe and unsafe. This disconnection from social networks increased the likelihood of depressive and anxious symptoms emerging. Subsequently, this disconnection made it harder for educators to cope with the challenges presented to them. As stated by Bruce, “It became difficult to picture and predict what would be happening in the near future. I felt more anxious and depressed by what was happening in the world and my life.”

**Emergent Theme 2: Relationships**

“The biggest thing was learning how to do our job that relies so heavily on relationships and forming good relationships with our teaching peers and our students… and suddenly having that face-to-face relationship kind of go away.” – Millicent

Relationships are defined as a continuing and often committed association between two or more people, as in a family, friendship, marriage, partnership, or other interpersonal link in which the participants have some degree of influence on each other’s thoughts, feelings, and actions (American Psychological Association, 2022). Further, Baumeister and Leary (1995) asserted that relationships are a fundamental human need. Education is an incredibly relational field, in which student engagement is often rooted in relationships. While COVID-19 changed
what traditional educator-student relationships look like, educators continued demonstrating commitment to creating and sustaining relationships with students (McLennan et al., 2020). Further, Bericat (2013) asserts that socioemotional state is inherently rooted in relationships. As one’s access to relationships fluctuates, as does their socioemotional well-being.

**Relationships, Compassion Fatigue & Secondary Trauma**

“Relationships were hard during COVID. We were online, the kids didn’t turn on their cameras. But, when we did talk with them, it was all sadness. Death became like second nature. We were obligated to make contact with students, even if they didn’t attend a virtual class session. This meant that even if my kids weren’t there, I knew what was happening. There was so much illness, death, and just a ton of responsibility. It was really heavy. It got hard.”

–Valencia

Communal disasters strike professionals in the community doubly. Such disasters, like COVID-19, impact professionals both as professionals and as members of the stricken community (Baum, 2012). Such secondary trauma can result in a lack of availability and empathy with those they serve. Compassion fatigue is defined as the long-term cumulative stress resulting from the cost of caring (Figley, 1995). Compassion fatigue can lead to negative consequences if left untreated (APA, 2013). According to Abu-Raiya et al. (2016), educators can suffer from secondary trauma and compassion fatigue as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, very few interventions have been developed that specifically focus on educators dealing with primary and secondary trauma. COVID-19 may have led to disconnection in some respects, but Overlook High School was determined to engage with students on a regular basis. However, according to Valencia and other participants, this was often at the expense of educator socioemotional well-being.
Valencia described:

...it got to the point where it was so draining, so much sadness that I didn’t want to go to work. Like, my heart just hurt every day. My family was healthy, we were safe. I mean, we were bored out of our minds, but safe. But my heart still hurt, every single day. I dreaded logging on, sending emails, making calls. You know it's bad when you don’t want to work from your couch.

*Relationships and Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs*

In Abraham Maslow’s (1943) Theory of Motivation, the need for love and belonging, or social relationships is considered a basic need. Much like safety, when this need is not met, educators experience deficits in their socioemotional well-being. As a result of the state government mandated shutdowns, there were strong and immediate barriers to connectedness. As such, society was forced to reexamine the manner in which people connected, built relationships, and shared space. Teaching is an inherently relational process, which relies heavily on knowing your students, and using relationships to ensure students are learning and engaging with the content (Shann, 1998). Therefore, in order for educators to have their basic socioemotional needs met, and to feel confident about their professional abilities, educators need relational interactions with their students and colleagues. Subsequently, educators had to grapple with this societal shift regarding relationships and communication that was very integral to their jobs.

Millicent shared:

So, I think that the biggest thing was learning how to do our jobs that relies so heavily on relationships and forming good relationships both with our teaching peers and our students. Suddenly having that face-to-face relationship kind of go away… It was so
much harder to as a teacher be invested in what I was doing. And then it was so much harder for the students to be invested in what we were doing. And so that just made navigating, navigating, how I would normally run a classroom so much more difficult because they didn't really know me. I really didn’t know them. I was talking to like circle icons all day for five hours a day. And so, it was just incredibly hard to feel like part of the community there. It just kind of felt like we were all sort of floating around.

**Collegial Relationships**

Collective identity or association are also linked to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. Weller (1982) asserts that Maslow’s “belonging” stage includes the collective identity often held by groups of people within the same profession. Such collective identity can provide educators with the opportunity to feel less isolated. The collective identity of educators connects to collegial relationships. The connections that educators make within their mutual communities can be a source of strength, growth, and evolution. Arthur and Guy (2020) noted the existence of strengthened professional relationships as a result of the vulnerabilities exposed by the COVID-19 pandemic and associated isolation. Participants highlighted the differences and shifts in collegial relationships.

Steven elaborated:

...We started doing things we’d always done. I was teaching world history with two other teachers. I would collaborate with them; we worked out a system where we were kind of team taught (sic). One guy would plan lessons for one week, so you were planning, you were planning every third week. It was a way to spread the wealth, but we were able to guarantee that all of our students were getting the same experience across.
According to Bottiani et al. (2022), collegial relationships are a natural resource in schools. Subsequently, collaboration across colleagues was also found to be an integral part of educators’ practice. Participants indicated that collaboration was both something that happened with ease but was also challenging. Collaboration amongst educators looked different during the pandemic, partially due to the use of social media. However, the traditional model of collaboration, using the Professional Learning Community (PLC) model, and working in small teams was challenged due to social distancing guidelines.

In a different department, Valencia, a math teacher recounted:

The pandemic allowed us, like as a department, to change the way we do things. We switched to a flipped classroom method, where we prerecorded our notes and like our lectures for the kids to watch for homework, and we spent the whole 2.5-hour block on practicing the skill. We were then able to do breakout rooms across teachers for remediation. So, like, all the Algebra one kids would be spread out around all the teachers, and each teacher would focus on one skill.

### Emergent Theme 3: Resiliency & Silver Linings

According to Seery (2011), adversity is traditionally associated with negative outcomes. However, the experience of facing difficulties can also promote greater resiliency (Seery, 2011). Silver linings are considered to be the good things found in a bad situation. The term is often attributed to John Milton’s 1643 poem Comus. While all participants highlighted challenges they experienced in the pandemic, they each highlighted things that brought joy to them during this time.

Bruce’s cheery disposition throughout his interview carries over in the tone of his journal responses. He acknowledged that his entry to the field of education was not traditional and was
anxiety inducing. However, he saw the silver lining in his unique situation. “That’s the beauty of it, though. If this hadn’t unfolded the way they did, odds are I wouldn’t be at Overlook, and met all these people, and had so many great opportunities.”

According to the American Psychological Association (2022), resilience is defined as the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demand. Camaya and Lazatin (2022) highlighted several coping mechanisms utilized by educators to maintain professional responsibilities were social support, adaptive instruction, and teaching resilience.

Natalia, as a veteran teacher, demonstrates resilience in her discussions of instructional adaptation:

I didn’t realize exactly how much of my practice relied on face-to-face communication. I spent a lot of time remediating and reteaching based on what I saw. When that was taken away, I was forced to adapt. I spent hours and hours revamping my curriculum. Well, my resources. I had to focus on my practice and figure out how to give students the skills needed to be successful, without me. The good thing is, COVID made me a better teacher.

COVID-19 made the world realize how essential educators were. However, it also forced educators to reckon with themselves. Many of our participants, like Natalia, rose to the challenge and ensured they were doing what was best for their students regardless of the environment they were in.

Resiliency, according to Beltman (2015), is the capacity to source resources to overcome challenges, and subsequently experience commitment, satisfaction, and personal growth as a
result. Natalia and Bruce both highlighted the silver linings of their experiences throughout COVID-19, and showed evidence of their personal development of coping mechanisms needed to navigate the tumultuous, uncertain times. The cultivation of educator resilience to support or maintain workplace well-being during periods of high stress should involve attention to the structural and institutional aspects of educators’ work (Fox & Walter, 2022).

Thematic Composite Narratives

Narrative inquiry is rooted in storytelling. While research is often focused on the interpretation and analysis of the data, Leggo and Sameshima (2014) emphasized the need for attention paid to discourse or how the data is conveyed. These researchers advocated telling stories that create opportunities for understanding and wisdom. Further, such stories deserve to be told in a way that holds attention and calls out to the reader. Subsequently, to aid in the narrative structure of this research, the themes and commonalities uncovered from the five narrative iterations with the participants from Overlook High School were gathered into a summative, fictional narrative. The educator at the center of these narratives, named Penelope, is the culmination of the narratives gathered.

Penelope’s Story of Experiences as a Secondary Educator during the COVID-19 Pandemic

My name is Penelope Breadson, and I’ve been teaching at E.Till High School for over six years. I’ve been teaching about eight years total, and I finally felt as if I was getting the hang of it. You know, I was finally grasping what it meant to be the adult-in-charge of a bunch of adolescents learning something. I knew what that was supposed to look like. I knew what worked well in my classroom, as far as behavior expectations, and measuring student success.
Dare I say, I was pretty damn good at my job. It felt so good to be good! Then, COVID-19 happened.

First, it seemed like another “disease” that happened elsewhere. I distinctly remember thinking, “Oh, this is going to be like Swine Flu, or that random Ebola outbreak. It probably won’t really get to the United States.” Then it was here in the United States. Then in Michigan. Then in our neighboring district. Fear welled up in the pit of my stomach, like I was at the top of a roller coaster waiting on it to drop. Students stopped coming to school, there were rumors of school closures, but no one said anything to us. The night before it happened, my phone pinged for hours. Group texts were going crazy.

“What if they make us come in tomorrow?”

“Absolutely not, our kids don’t wash their hands or cover their mouths on a good day. I will not be there.”

The volleys of messages went on for hours. It did absolutely nothing for my anxiety. Around midnight, I received a notification:

This is an automated message from E. Till High School. There will be NO SCHOOL tomorrow, March 12, 2020, for students. Staff are to report to the building.

The call ended just as abruptly as it began. I rubbed my eyes and sat up in the bed, I scrolled through my email until I saw the message from my principal. It was brief and instructed us to come in and prepare enough work to cover two weeks of content, post it online, and create paper packets for our students. Two weeks. Two weeks. I can do two weeks. It’ll be like… winter break.
Penelope in Isolation

I approached my desk. I grabbed my “work sweater” from the back of my chair and slid it over my pajamas. I redid my ponytail and adjusted my glasses. I grabbed the necklace I kept hanging on my laptop and tossed it on, just to look like I tried a little. I looked at my camera and checked my appearance. I looked just professional enough to not get in trouble.

I opened the meeting, and put on a practiced smile as students began to trickle in. Nadine unmutes and says cheerfully, “Good Morning Ms. Beardson!” I responded in kind, and a few more students unmute, and echoed Nadine’s greeting, albeit groggily. Very quickly, the rapid fire joining of the meeting stops, and I took this as my cue to begin class. I opened with a review question and waited for what feels like an awkward amount of time for someone to unmute and respond. No one does. “Teacher waits time” feels like an eternity when staring at a camera.

“C’mon, what were the MAIN causes of World War I? Y'all know this… just drop it in the chat if you don’t want to unmute!”

The chat erupted in students listing causes

“Militarism”
“Imperialism”
“Nationalism”
“Alliances”
“Imperialism”
“Alliances”

I can’t help but smile a bit. They may not turn on their cameras or mics, but at least they are learning the facts. I began my lecture, going over the Treaty of Versailles, resigned to teaching to a silent screen with 34 pictures of anime characters, dancing fruit, and musicians. The
twelve minutes of lecture felt like they lasted forever. This unit is usually enjoyable, full of interaction and lots of questions. This time there were no questions, and no signs of life on the other sides of the computer screens.

I split them into their preassigned breakout rooms to work on their group work, and I bounced in and out of meetings. I hoped to hear some discussion about the pros and cons of the Treaty of Versailles, and even a prediction about how this will impact the world moving forward, but each group was silent, with each students’ red mic symbol on their icon. I went to each group’s assignment, and watched them work, talking in the comments of the slides. No spoken words, no cameras on. No visual or auditory signs of engagement, outside of the blinking cursors on the shared document.

Class finally ended and I sank deeper into my desk chair, leaning my head back and rubbing my eyes. There is an almost constant ache in my eyes now that I spend at least six hours a day in front of a computer screen. A harsh laugh bubbles and escapes my mouth as I think about my own foolishness. Seven months ago, I was confident that everything would be back to normal in two weeks. It has been seven months since I stepped foot in my classroom, saw a student or colleague. To be honest, it's also been seven months since I wore pants with a button.

E.Till High School spent the last trimester of the 2019-2020 school year surviving. Our administrators and tech staff did what they could to get each student access to content. Thanks to grants, and a preexisting push for one-on-one technology for students, we were well on our way to having a Chromebook for every student. So, we began the 2020-2021 school year virtually, with the knowledge that the School Board would reevaluate their decision regarding our return to face to face learning every month. So, for now, I teach five hours a day and provide one-on-one academic support to struggling students for two hours each day, from home.
There are definite perks to this experience. My commute is non-existent, my dress code is lax, and I get to hang out with my new puppy Ciabatta all day. The downside is I only see Ciabatta all day, every single day. My groceries are delivered to my door, dropped off with no contact, so is my Chinese food. I teach 75 9th-graders every day, but I’m lucky if one of them has their camera on. In my mind, these kids are actually anime characters, or little dancing pink pineapples. I know their names; I even know their writing. My heart aches because I don’t know them. I don’t know their faces or how their eyes light up when they understand new content. I don’t know their friends or have any inside jokes to share.

I rubbed my eyes again, this time fighting a losing battle against the tears that are pooling in the corners of my eyes. I miss my kids, I miss my colleagues, even Arnold’s incessant desire to interrupt staff meetings with “just one thing.” If this is that “new normal” I don’t want it.

**Penelope and Relationships**

I lean back in my chair and stretch my arms in the air, rotating my wrists. My slight movements trigger the motion sensored lights of my classroom. I always keep the lights low; it makes the kids feel comfortable and calm throughout the day. It's a habit that I haven’t been able to break, even though kids aren’t here. The sudden shift in light is jarring.

Our central office has made us return back to the building to give students a sense of normalcy, even though they’re still at home. Perhaps this is a good idea for elementary kids, but it seems foolish for us at the high school. Kids see my face, and the window behind me. The flutter of the chat on my screen refocuses my attention. I unmute myself and broadcast my voice to all the breakout rooms. “Alright friends, I am closing breakout rooms in about a minute. Let’s wrap up what we’re working on and come back to the main room.”
I return to the main room, and watch my students trickle back into the room, icons blinking in. Once all 34 of my icons are back in the room, I review our objectives for the day and remind them of their schedule for the remainder of the day.

“Remember, after 5th hour today you’re done until January! I am not assigning any work for you to complete over winter break. Please take some time to disconnect and recharge your brain batteries. If there are no other questions, enjoy your break!”

“Ummm, excuse me, Miss?” Yasmina speaks quickly into her mic.

I perk up a bit, they never have questions. I wasn’t expecting any, especially the day before break. “Hey Yasmina, what’s up? Do you have a question?”

“Actually, we just wanted to tell you something…” Yasmina pauses again, and one by one each student’s camera flickers on. Each of them is holding a sign that either says, “We Love You, Ms. Breadinson” or “Thank you Ms. Breadison.” After all the cameras are on, Yasmina continues, “We know that this year has been weird, and we just wanted you to know that even though we don’t always talk, we appreciate you and all the work you’re doing to make sure that we are still learning.”

I am speechless. I don’t think I’ve ever been truly speechless. “Thank you so much,” I managed to sputter out. “You are each amazing, and I hope you have a wonderful break.”

Penelope and Hope & Resiliency

I straighten my shoulders and look back at my reflection in the mirror. I slowly and carefully recite, “I am capable, I am equipped, I am ready, I am worthy, and I am grateful.” It is easier to say this now. The words aren’t slimy anymore. My tongue is getting tied up over the words. This new habit started on a whim, after watching TikTok, of course. We’ve been at this whole pandemic learning thing for over a year, and even though that silly video was meant for
little kids, I’m willing to try anything to feel in control of my feelings. COVID-19 and all of its drama made me feel anything but in control. The constant rollercoaster of changes made it hard to stay afloat.

Things have changed, yet again. We’re back face-to-face, which still doesn’t feel normal. Face to face, but with masks, and computers. It’s just not the same, but it is still better than the alternative. I shake my head, catching myself before I fall deeper down the rabbit hole.

Bringing myself back to reality, I check my phone, grab my bag, and race out the door. Face to face learning also means commuting again.

The bell chimes a warning. “One minute left, y’all! Don’t be late!” I yell loudly at the steady stream of kids passing in front of my door. I’m leaning against the door jamb waving at kids, monitoring behavior. This almost feels normal, until a kid passes by, “Hey Ms. Beardson!” I wave, but a knot in the pit of my belly spins a bit. I have NO idea who that kid is. That means I had him online, and he never turned his camera on. Moments like this are bittersweet. It’s nice to be remembered, but my guilt is a constant reminder of how alone we all were just a year ago.

The bell chimes, interrupting my thoughts, and I enter my classroom.

“Good morning, friends! Your bell work is on Google Classroom. Go ahead and get started while I take attendance.” I sit at my desk, and quickly take attendance, noting where everyone was in the room. I’m excited to see everyone actually working and talking with each other about their first task of the day. Since we’ve returned to in-person learning, everything is different. I only assign digital assignments, which means the desks are full of laptops, the soft glow of the screens serves as a source of light for the classroom. I am able to provide real time feedback on students’ writing. They are able to collaborate with each other in ways that we just could not pre-pandemic. This “new normal” isn’t all bad.
I begin to walk around the room, checking in with each group of students. Their chatter is mostly on task, with the exception of a group of boys arguing about who is the best basketball player amongst them. I reach and tap one student’s laptop. He quickly switches his browser back to his assignment. He was playing a game, instead of working. Despite these distractions, this level of engagement is what I dreamed of during virtual learning. Seeing students grappling with hard concepts, engaging in academic discourse is refreshing. This is yet another reminder that despite all, we’ve made it, and we’re all better for the experience. I let them engage with the task for a few more minutes before interrupting.

“Alright, it's 9:05, make sure your bell work has been submitted. Let’s look at our activity for today.” I pull the assignment up on the Smartboard. It's one of the things I made during the pandemic. I’m actually really proud of it. But kids didn’t engage with it online. I’m hoping it goes better this time around. I slowly go over the instructions, and even model the first step for them.

“OOO! Miss!” Rukaya yells. “I remember this, we did this online. I loved this; it was so fun!”

My smile widens, “Well– I’m glad you liked it, let's do this again with these new documents.”

Rukaya pointed something out that I’d just begun to realize. The pandemic, all of the drama, confusion and changes, made me a better teacher. It forced me to reconsider how I was engaging my students with content. It was hard, but I made it out, and I’m better for having the experience. So are my kids.
Summary

In conclusion, the participants in this study shared the challenges and triumphs they experienced working throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and associated government shutdowns. The participants expressed stories of isolation, relationships, and hope and resilience. Isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic was compounded with a social fear for one’s safety. Nevertheless, the participants persisted. Relationships, both with students and colleagues were still fostered, despite the challenges of virtual communication. Despite the challenges and barriers, the participants were still able to see the positives in otherwise negative situations.
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION

Summary of the Study

The phenomena examined within this study was the impact of the state of Michigan’s shutdowns as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic on educator socioemotional well-being. The purpose of this study was to explore how educators tell reflective stories regarding their socioemotional well-being throughout this time period. Participants were interviewed via video conference to collect rich data. Data was collected from narrative interviews utilizing voluntary response sampling. Informed consent was obtained digitally prior to study participation. The narrative interviews were recorded and transcripts of the narrative interviews, as well as five journal prompts, were analyzed using Nvivo and emotion coding. The results included three themes related to the educators' socioemotional well-being throughout the COVID-19 pandemic: (a) Isolation; (b) Relationships; and (c) Hope and Silver Linings. This chapter organizes the discussion on the research question of this narrative study. It also includes recommendations and directions for future research. The conclusions are summarized at the end of this chapter.

Overview of the Problem

The body of knowledge regarding other communities of frontline workers (healthcare and mental health workers) and socioemotional well-being, and the concepts of compassion fatigue and secondary trauma is expansive (Barza et al., 2020; Nuttman-Shwartz et al., 2012). However, there is minimal evidence of such studies being conducted with a focus on educators. The examination of secondary trauma, and its impact on educators is still evolving, and the addition of educator told experiences will add to that body of knowledge.
Further, Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs highlights the humanistic need for interaction that COVID-19 related shutdowns hindered. According to Pietrabissa and Simpson (2020), the isolation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic was compounded by the need to behave as if other people are dangerous to your health, and the health of your loved ones. However, the nuanced examination of this concept, as it relates to educators, is still emerging. The exploration of this topic is another area in which the yielding of educator voices could assist with. Addressing the relationship between social isolation that is compounded by fear, anxiety, or lack of safety is critical to educator recruitment and retainment. By exploring the impact of social isolation and interaction-based fears regarding safety on educator socioemotional well-being, education leaders can address the inequities presented in the field. The use of a narrative approach assisted in acquiring the experiences of educators.

**Major Findings**

While each participant experienced a uniquely individual journey throughout the course of the COVID-19 pandemic’s state government related shutdowns, all participants highlighted experiences of both isolation and resilience. Each story, uniquely poignant, referenced the necessity of relationships for a thriving learning experience. These findings lend themselves to a direct discussion of the implications of these experiences on the field of education.

While isolation was a necessary consequence to ensure public safety, it is considered against the needs of humans, according to Abraham Maslow (1943). Maslow (1943) identified both safety and connectedness as basic human needs. However, they were found to be in conflict with each other throughout the pandemic, which made it particularly difficult to cope, but educators highlighted instances of connection with their students which made such conflicts easier to deal with.
Relationships have long been known as the cornerstone of education. Such interconnectedness was highlighted by each participant as being at the core of their practice. COVID-19 made the fostering of relationships challenging. The barrier of computer screens, WiFi connectivity, and adolescent engagement made fostering relationships hard, which made working throughout the pandemic challenging. Despite the challenges faced, the continuous thread that was present in all participant interactions was resiliency and hope for the future. participants saw joy in varied aspects of their life.

Limitations

The limitations in this study are as follows:

1. One of the most prominent challenges of narrative research is the generalizability of the findings. While the findings of this study are not applicable to all secondary educators throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, they may be applicable to similar cases. Nevertheless, narrative studies are valuable and can help guide future researchers.

2. The number of participants in a study can also be seen as a limitation. However, by limiting the number of participants to only six, this study ensures that each participant’s story can be told authentically and with fidelity. The focus of narrative research is the storied experiences of the participants, and it is imperative that those stories are represented correctly.

3. Another limitation to this study is researcher bias. As the researcher, I must recognize my positions as a researcher and as a secondary educator who taught throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. It is also crucial that I examine my own assumptions and experiences to understand and limit researcher bias.
Delimitations

The delimitations of this study are as follows:

1. The sample of this study is limited to educators from the same school.
2. The narrative responses were limited to the participants' experiences with COVID-19 protocols and willingness to be honest.
3. This study does not cover experiences impacted by non-COVID-19 related issues.
4. This study excluded surveys, Likert scale questions, and focus groups.

Positionality

In the spirit of self-reflectivity, I acknowledge my standpoint as an educator at the study location, who also taught throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. While I lived through these experiences as well, my experiences were not representative of the experiences of all educators throughout this time. In observing my colleagues navigate these new spaces with a grace unrivaled, I found myself in a space of admiration.

As school and political leaders began to call for a return to traditional learning, there was a very poignant call for the protection and uplift of student socioemotional well-being. This focus, in conjunction with my anecdotal observations of my peers led me to desire to explore how the socioemotional well-being of educators was influenced by working throughout the government mandated shutdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In living and working through the pandemic and considering my own opinions regarding how decisions were made in the field of education, it was paramount that this study centered around the voices of educators. Subsequently, I found the narrative research tradition to be the most appropriate for this study.
I offer these findings as only one possible interpretation of these individuals’ experiences based on my standpoint as an educator who conducted research regarding educators. Further, I recognize that my role as a colleague might influence the study. However, I feel that my role as a fellow educator, a colleague, and researcher permitted a deep level of vulnerability and a richness of data. As a researcher, I accounted for this reality by acknowledging my role as a colleague from the outset of each interview. Further, acknowledging that while I was entrenched in the same environment, my experiences differed from that of the participants, in that they were both shaped by our own unique contexts. I noted that my experiences were noteworthy, but they certainly did not tell the full story of educator experiences working throughout the pandemic. I emphasized that without their unique stories and voices, the body of knowledge on this topic would not be as rich or meaningful. Finally, participants were informed and reminded of both my pledge to keep all of their responses anonymous and confidential outside of the parameters of this study.

Implications

Each participant’s story emphasized a different tool used for the improvement or preservation of socioemotional well-being in educators. Ensuring access to these tools or strategies is one of the most salient ways that educational leaders can work to improve recruitment and retention of quality educators. Mental health has been at the forefront of conversations nationwide as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and numerous strides have been made in relation to increasing access to mental health professionals throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. Subsequently, leveraging this increased public awareness and access can yield positive benefits on educators’ socioemotional well-being.
By focusing on providing mental health resources to teachers, reexamining employee benefit packages, and resource based professional development sessions, perhaps educational leaders can begin to improve floundering educator recruitment and retention rates.

Another implication of this study is the potentiality of reimagining the definition of an educator. The pandemic certainly redefined the concept of the traditional workday in other fields, and it is time the same is done in education. This period has caused a paradigm shift in how the profession is viewed and operated.

Overall, the implications of this study highlighted the resiliency of educators throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. These educators were able to seek out and utilize tools and strategies to support their own socioemotional well-being. However, through the nuanced lived experiences there is also a demonstrated need for additional socioemotional support for educators. These additional supports can take multiple forms, including mental health coverage within employee benefit packages, and in-building mental health supports and resources. This study met its goal of exploring the impact of working through the COVID-19 pandemic and related shutdowns, through examining the lived experiences of secondary educators.

**Recommendations**

When considering teachers’ socioemotional well-being, there are many factors that can cause an impact. The COVID-19 pandemic brought to forefront some of these factors and their consequences. This research highlighted the challenges and opportunities for hope as outlined by educators. Subsequently, a wealth of knowledge was gained that offers insight to potential solutions to challenges with educator attrition. Recommendations are broken down into three categories, recommendations for the local level and the state level, and recommendations for further research.
Local Level Recommendations

In examining the rich data provided by participants, it revealed several recommendations regarding local or district level recommendations. Professional development, educator workloads, and employee benefits are all areas of examination that can lead to improved or sustained positive educator well-being.

The insurgency of COVID-19 was abrupt, and frankly districts were unprepared for such a drastic change to traditional learning experiences. However, now that this experience has happened, it is crucial that school districts and schools have a plan for emergency shifts to virtual learning. In August 2020, Governor Whitmer (2020) signed a package of bills, including Public Act (PA) 149, that outlined requirements for “Return to Learn” plans for the 2020-21 school year. These plans call for school districts to outline how instruction can/will be delivered. While Public Act 149 calls for district assurance that students have equitable access to technology and WiFi.

However, in order for such plans to be effective, they must be revisited frequently, and updated to represent the current needs of the school district. It is recommended that these plans should include an inventory of all technological resources, and accountability measures for technology assignments. This plan should also include details for resource dissemination and collection for repairs. While PA 149 calls for equitable access to technology, it is imperative that districts take that directive a step further. The instructions for technology dissemination and repair must be clear and accessible to students and families.

Further, it is important that educators and all stakeholders are aware and prepared to implement said plan. It is imperative that all educators within the district have knowledge of and access to said plan. Classroom educators often serve as frontline interactors with parents and
students. Therefore, educators must be knowledgeable of the plan, so they are able to address inquiries and concerns from students and parents. By doing so, the process for transitioning to and from virtual learning can be streamlined. Ideally, this will diminish the uncertainty around said experiences, and allow educators to continue to function at their professional best.

In considering employee benefits, district level health insurance benefits should be examined to ensure that they encompass affordable, accessible options for mental health support for employees. Further, school districts should ensure that there is an Employee Assistance Program in place that includes free sessions with a mental health provider. This addition also covers educators who are not a part of the district’s insurance plan. This demonstrates an effort on the part of the district to ensure all employees have access to mental health support.

At a building level, it is recommended that training regarding socioemotional well-being and coping strategies be implemented. By having this implementation occur at a building level, it allows for training opportunities to be tailored to the needs of each building’s unique staff. School leaders can also work to foster relationships with local businesses and community organizations. Such collaborations could lead to team building events at local businesses, or even self-care events with local esthetician training programs.

**State Level Recommendations**

The Michigan State Board of Education was established by the State of Michigan Constitution in 1963. It is an elected executive agency of the state government. The Michigan State Board of Education is responsible for managing the state’s public K-12 education system. In managing the state’s public K-12 education system, it is imperative that the Michigan State Board of Education make efforts to address the socioemotional well-being of educators. This
can be done through identifying sources of educator stress and the development and implementation of sustainable solutions.

In considering the issue of educator burnout and workload, a potential solution can be found in examining the work expectations of educators. In many cases, educators are contract or salaried employees, meaning they are not compensated for additional hours worked beyond 40 hours. Through collaboration with the state legislature, one such solution could be to craft legislation that would prohibit educators from being required to work more than the 40 hours-a-week outlined by federal labor law without compensation for overtime.

In considering the nuanced importance of collegial relationships in mitigating burnout, the development of a statewide educator mentorship program could be a potential solution. According to Bowman (2014), educator mentorship aids in educator attrition and consistency among educators. Further, such programs can not only allow educators to become school leaders, but also have a positive impact on student engagement and achievement (Bowman, 2014). Particularly, such programs can equip educators with the socioemotional skills necessary to combat structures that could hamper their socioemotional well-being by including strategies like mindfulness as foundations of the program.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

This study offers the voices of educators to the conversation of educator socioemotional well-being in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. There are several avenues for further research to be considered within this topic. This study had a small sample of five participants at a single high school in southeastern Michigan. The nuance of this sample allows for the expansion of this study in multiple directions. However, the purpose of the small sampling was
to understand secondary educator well-being while working through the state government related shutdowns due to COVID-19 pandemic.

Since this study was performed within a small suburban high school in Southeastern Michigan, similar studies could be done throughout the state, at a variety of districts. If more studies are conducted in different areas of the state, researchers may uncover more information regarding educator socioemotional well-being. Further research is needed to explore this phenomenon in primary educators, and even educators within higher education. Moreover, the exploration of how educators navigated their personal lives throughout the government mandated shutdowns would also add to this body of knowledge.

Future studies can also employ other methodologies. Narrative inquiry allows for rich, participant centered data. However, the sample size is limited. To continue the exploration of this topic, it would be beneficial to conduct further studies using other qualitative methods, or even quantitative or mixed methods approaches. The employment of such methodology would allow for a larger sample size, which could reveal a wider array of educator perspectives.

Concluding Remarks

In conclusion, COVID-19 entered our society abruptly, and forever altered the way our society operates. This is particularly evident in the field of education. It is important to consider the impact that COVID-19 has had on people of various professions and include educators in that consideration. This narrative inquiry into secondary educators' socioemotional well-being throughout the COVID-19 pandemic state government related shutdowns found that educators experienced isolation, which had a negative impact on their socioemotional well-being. However, these educators also reported resilience. Despite all of the challenges, this research demonstrates that educators adapted to the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic, however,
their socioemotional well-being was impacted due to the unique isolating conditions. The educators that participated in this study shared stories of the impact of isolation on relationships, but also on the resiliency they experienced. Through this study, the authentic voices of educators were heard, allowing for expanding knowledge and future research to be conducted into the socioemotional well-being of the workers within this essential field. From here, there will be more visibility on the experiences of educators to add to the body of knowledge concerning the pandemic.
REFERENCES


Bottiani, J., Bradshaw, C., & Kaihoi, C. (2022) Teachers Supporting Teachers: A Social Network Perspective on Collegial Stress Support and Emotional well-being Among Elementary and Middle School Educators. *School Mental Health*  
https://doi.org/10.1007/s12310-022-09529-y


https://www.michigan.gov/-/media/Project/Websites/mde/Year/2020/03/20/Guidance_Instructional_Time.pdf?rev=e083aad558ac448597a6ad6928d7bc35

https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781071802861


Whitmer, G. E. (2020). *Executive order 2020-19: Temporary prohibition against entry to premises for the purpose of removing or excluding a tenant or mobile homeowner from their home - rescinded*. Whitmer- Executive order 2020-19: Temporary prohibition against entry to premises for the purpose of removing or excluding a tenant or mobile homeowner from their home RESCINDED. Retrieved March 18, 2022, from https://www.michigan.gov/whitmer/0,9309,7-387-90499_90705-522509--,00.html
To: Mercedes Harvey-Flowers

From:
Riann Palmieri-Smith
Thad Polk

Cc:
Nathaniel McClain
Mercedes Harvey-Flowers
Jeramy Donovan
Pamela Ross McClain

Subject: Initial Study Approval for [HUM00212512]

SUBMISSION INFORMATION:
Study Title: The socioemotional well-being of Secondary Educators in the Midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Narrative Inquiry
Full Study Title (if applicable): The socioemotional well-being of Secondary Educators in the Midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Narrative Inquiry
Study eResearch ID: HUM00212512
Date of this Notification from IRB: 7/28/2022
Review: Expedited
Initial IRB Approval Date: 7/26/2022
UM Federalwide Assurance (FWA): FWA00004969 (For the current FWA expiration date, please visit the UM HRPP Webpage)
OHRP IRB Registration Number(s): IRB00000246

Approved Risk Level(s):
Name Risk Level
HUM00212512 No more than minimal risk

**Continuing Review Required:** No

**NOTICE OF IRB APPROVAL AND CONDITIONS:**
The IRB HSBS has reviewed and approved the study referenced above. The IRB determined that the proposed research conforms with applicable guidelines, State and federal regulations, and the University of Michigan's Federalwide Assurance (FWA) with the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). You must conduct this study in accordance with the description and information provided in the approved application and associated documents.

The research meets the following regulatory criteria for expedited research:
- **HHS Category 7:** Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior
- **HHS Category 6:** Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

https://errm.umich.edu/ERRM/sd/Doc/0/5AUQ3N8EJ08URSK149HQMLIG00/fromString.html

10/29/22, 9:29 PM
https://errm.umich.edu/ERRM/sd/Doc/0/5AUQ3N8EJ08URSK149HQMLIG00/fromString.html

**RENEWAL/TERMINATION:**
The IRB has determined, consistent with 45 CFR 46.109(f), that annual continuing review is no longer required for this research.

You will receive an annual message reminding you of your responsibilities to manage this research application. Submit a Termination Report once you only hold or are analyzing deidentified data, or the research has ended.

**IMPORTANT REMINDERS AND ADDITIONAL INFORMATION FOR INVESTIGATORS**

**APPROVED STUDY DOCUMENTS:**
You must use any date-stamped versions of recruitment materials and informed consent documents available in the eResearch workspace (referenced above). Date-stamped materials are available in the “Currently Approved Documents” section on the “Documents” tab.

**AMENDMENTS:**
All proposed changes to the study (e.g., personnel, procedures, or documents), must be approved in advance by the IRB through the amendment process, except as necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to research subjects. Should the latter occur, you must notify the IRB Office as soon as possible.

**AEs/ORIOs:**
You must inform the IRB of adverse events (AEs) and other reportable information and occurrences (ORIOs) according to your IRB’s required reporting timetable (IRBMED and
UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS INVOLVING RISKS TO SUBJECTS OR OTHERS (UPIRSOs or UaPs): Investigators must inform the IRB promptly of any potential Unanticipated Problems (UaPs or UPIRSOs) that come to the attention of the study team. Unanticipated Problems meet all of the following criteria:

1. Unexpected (in terms of nature, severity, frequency).
2. Related or possibly related to participation in the research; and
3. Suggests that the research places subjects or others at a greater risk of harm than was previously known or recognized.

SUBMITTING VIA eRESEARCH:
You can access the online forms for continuing review, amendments, and AEs/ORIOs in the eResearch workspace for this approved study (referenced above).

MORE INFORMATION:

Riann Palmieri-Smith    Thad Polk
Co-chair, IRB HSBS      Co-chair, IRB HSBS
APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENTATION

UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

CONSENT TO BE PART OF A RESEARCH STUDY

1. KEY INFORMATION ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS AND THIS STUDY

Study title: The socioemotional well-being of Secondary Educators in the Midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Principal Investigator: Mercedes Harvey-Flowers, EdS, Educational Leadership, University of Michigan-Flint

1.1 Key Information

Things you should know:

- The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of educators throughout the COVID-19 pandemic as it relates to their socioemotional well-being.
- If you choose to participate, you will be asked to participate in an hour-long interview about your experiences and socioemotional well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic and complete five related journal prompts. This entire process will take about 2.5 hours over the course of 6 consecutive days.
- Risks or discomforts from this research include breach of confidentiality and emotional pain as a result of the storytelling experience.
- The research subjects can benefit from expressing their personal experiences and deriving meaning from them. By reflecting on and expressing the impact of their professional environment on their socioemotional well-being throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, participants will potentially strengthen their self-awareness surrounding their socioemotional well-being and associated needs. Therefore, participants can be better able to articulate their needs related to support for their socioemotional well-being. Furthermore, the results of the study may be used by school and district leadership to make changes to employee benefits, and overall workplace culture to focus on the socioemotional well-being of educators.

Taking part in this research project is voluntary. You do not have to participate, and you can stop at any time. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

2. PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

- The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences of educators throughout the COVID-19 pandemic as it relates to their socioemotional well-being. The specific focus of this study is on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and associated state government mandated shutdowns on the socioemotional well-being of six secondary educators. In examining these lived experiences, this research hopes to identify methods for educational leaders to employ to further support educators’ socioemotional well-being, and subsequently increase the number of highly qualified educators in the classroom.

3. WHO CAN PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY
3.1 Who can take part in this study? Secondary Educators that taught high school level courses during the COVID-19 related mandated shutdowns of schools are eligible to participate in this study.

4. INFORMATION ABOUT STUDY PARTICIPATION

4.1 What will happen to me in this study?
- Data Collection, Interview: Subjects will participate in an approximately hour-long virtual interview about their experiences throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. This interview will be audio recorded.
- Data Collection, Journaling: In addition to the interview, participants will be asked to respond to a series of journal questions over the span of a week. You will be sent the link to one prompt every business day for 5 days after your interview. Each journal prompt should take you approximately 15-30 minutes to complete.

4.2 How much of my time will be needed to take part in this study?
- The initial interview will take approximately an hour. This time can be shorter or longer depending on how much you wish to share.
- The journal prompts should take 15-30 minutes daily to complete.

In total, you should anticipate spending approximately 2.25 hours participating in this study.

4.2.1 When will my participation in the study be over?
Your participation in the study will be over upon the completion of all parts of the study or your voluntary termination of participation.

5. INFORMATION ABOUT STUDY RISKS AND BENEFITS

5.1 What risks will I face by taking part in the study? What will the researchers do to protect me against these risks?
The known or expected risks are the focus of educators has often been on the well-being of students, the focus on one’s own socioemotional well-being can be emotionally painful.

The researchers will try to minimize these risks by: To mitigate risk, through every phase of the research, careful attention will be made to the participants’ psychological, emotional, and physical well-being. If at any time a subject appears distressed, the interview will be terminated, and it will be made clear to the subjects throughout each interview that they may choose not to answer a question or stop the interview at any time.

Additionally, there may be a risk of loss to confidentiality or privacy. See Section 8 of this document for more information on how the study team will protect your confidentiality and privacy.

As with any research study, there may be additional risks that are unknown or unexpected.
5.2 How could I benefit if I take part in this study? How could others benefit?
The research subjects can benefit from expressing their personal experiences and deriving
meaning from them. By reflecting on and expressing the impact of their professional
environment on their socioemotional well-being throughout the COVID-19 pandemic,
participants will potentially strengthen their self-awareness surrounding their socioemotional
well-being and associated needs. Therefore, participants can be better able to articulate their
needs related to support for their socioemotional well-being. Furthermore, the results of the
study may be used by school and district leadership to make changes to employee benefits, and
overall workplace culture to focus on the socioemotional well-being of educators.

6. ENDING THE STUDY
6.1 If I want to stop participating in the study, what should I do?
You are free to leave the study at any time. If you leave the study before it is finished, there will
be no penalty to you. If you decide to leave the study before it is finished, please tell one of the
persons listed in Section 9. “Contact Information.” If you choose to tell the researchers why you
are leaving the study, your reasons may be kept as part of the study record. The researchers will
keep the information collected about you for the research unless you ask us to delete it from our
records. If the researchers have already used your information in a research analysis it will not be
possible to remove your information.

7. FINANCIAL INFORMATION
7.1 Will I be paid or given anything for taking part in this study? You will receive a $25 gift
card for your participation in the study. If you choose to leave the study early, you will receive
prorated compensation in the amount of $10 gift card.

8. PROTECTING AND SHARING RESEARCH INFORMATION
8.1 How will the researchers protect my information?
All participants will be asked to log out of google accounts or employ an anonymous browser to
complete journal responses. Further all personal identifiable information will be removed from
data collection. Once participants enter the virtual interview, they will be renamed to a unique
identifier. All virtual interview links will be password protected. Further, the audio recordings
of the interview will be deleted as soon as transcription is complete. Notes and transcripts will
be stored in Google Drive at U-M and labeled with participants' ID number with no personally
identifiable information recorded. All journal prompts will also be password protected and
stored in Google Drive at U-M with participants ID number, and no personally identifiable information recorded.

8.2 Who will have access to my research records?
There are reasons why information about you may be used or seen by the researchers or others during or after this study. Examples include:

- University, government officials, study sponsors or funders, auditors, and/or the Institutional Review Board (IRB) may need the information to make sure that the study is done in a safe and proper manner.

8.3 What will happen to the information collected in this study?
We will keep the information we collect about you during the research for study recordkeeping. Your name and other information that can directly identify you will be stored securely and separately from the research information we collected from you.

The results of this study could be published in an article or presentation but will not include any information that would let others know who you are.

8.4 Will my information be used for future research or shared with others?
No

9. CONTACT INFORMATION
Who can I contact about this study?
Please contact the researchers listed below to:

- Obtain more information about the study
- Ask a question about the study procedures
- Report an illness, injury, or other problem (you may also need to tell your regular doctors)
- Leave the study before it is finished
- Express a concern about the study

Principal Investigator: Mercedes Harvey-Flowers, EdS
Email: harvey.mercedes@gmail.com
Phone: 313-971-7038

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or wish to obtain information, ask questions or discuss any concerns about this study with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact the following:

University of Michigan
Health Sciences and Behavioral Sciences Institutional Review Board (IRB-HSBS)
2800 Plymouth Road
Building 520, Room 1169Ann Arbor, MI 48109-2800
Telephone: 734-936-0933 or toll free (866) 936-0933
10. YOUR CONSENT

Consent to Participate in the Research Study
By selecting “I understand” and “I agree” on the dropdown boxes below, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you agree. I will give you a copy of this document for your records and I will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you agree this document, you can contact the study team using the information in Section 9 provided above.

*I understand what the study is about, and my questions so far have been answered. I agree to take part in this study.*

Print Legal Name: __________________________________________________________

Date of consent (mm/dd/yy): ____________________________________________
June 17, 2022

Crestwood High School
1501 Beech Daly
Dearborn Heights, MI 48127

RE: Mercedes Harvey-Flowers
  Socioemotional Well-being of Secondary Educators in the Midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic, A Narrative Inquiry

To University of Michigan IRB:

This letter is to convey that I/we have reviewed the proposed research study being conducted by Mercedes Harvey-Flowers intended to investigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on educators’ socio-emotional well-being at Crestwood High School and find Socioemotional Well-being of Secondary Educators in the Midst of the COVID-19 Pandemic acceptable. I/we give permission for the above investigators to conduct research and recruitment at this site. If you have any questions regarding site permission, please contact me:

Roni Abdulhadi
rabdulhadi@csdm.k12.mi.us
313-278-7475

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Roni Abdulhadi
Principal
Crestwood High School
APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL & QUESTIONS

Interview Protocol

Introductory Protocol/Verbiage

To assist with my note taking and ensure that I capture the breadth and depth of your story, I would like to record our conversation today. These recordings will be immediately transcribed, and the recording destroyed. I will be the only person privy to these transcriptions, as they will be stored in a password protected folder for three years, and then destroyed.

Will you please sign this consent form that acknowledges that your information will be held confidential, and that your participation in this study is voluntary? Thank you for participating.

This initial interview should last around an hour; however, the exact timing will be based on the story you choose to share. I will ask several questions to help you build the story you wish to tell, and ultimately, the bulk of our time together will be you saying that story.

Thank you for volunteering to speak with us today. You have identified yourself as an educator who taught throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and related state government shutdowns. This research study focuses on educator socioemotional well-being throughout that time period. This study is not aimed at evaluating your teaching methods or abilities during that time. Rather, the aim of this study is to add educator voice to the academic conversation about the impact of the professional changes caused by COVID-19 pandemic on educator socioemotional well-being.

As you reflect and craft your responses, please do not name or identify others in any way. Use language such as “a student,” “a parent,” or “my partner.”
Interviewee Background

What is your current role?

What was your role during the 2019-2020 school year?

How long have you been teaching?

How long have you been teaching at your current institution?

Interview Questions (adapted from Mueller, 2019)

1: Define: Can you tell me what the term socioemotional well-being means to you?
   
   Define: Can you tell me what the term COVID-19 Pandemic means to you?

2: Can you tell me how your socioemotional well-being has been impacted by working throughout the COVID-19 pandemic?

3: Please tell a story about your socioemotional well-being being impacted by working throughout the COVID-19 pandemic

   Allow for think time

Now- I will ask you to tell me the story in as much detail as possible.

Include information about the following:

→ the environment where the story took place

→ the people involved

→ how you felt about the moment

→ the intended and actual results of the event
4. Additions or amendments The participant should have the opportunity to add to or amend any parts of the narrative that they have shared.

Adapted from:

Prompt 1: Think back to prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and related shutdowns. How would you describe your socioemotional well-being?

Prompt 2: How did the pandemic impact your socioemotional well-being, overall?

Prompt 3: How did working throughout the pandemic impact your socioemotional well-being?

Prompt 4: How do you understand or process your socioemotional well-being at this point in time?

Prompt 5: Where do you find support, resilience, and joy to continue moving forward, professionally, and personally?

Gloria Itzel Montiel, Tatiana Torres-Hernandez, Rosa Vazquez, Adelin Tiburcio & Fatima Zavala (2022):