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## Turn Your Cameras on Please: The COVID-19 Pandemic's Impact on Public School Teachers

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Turn Your Cameras on Please: The COVID-19 Pandemic's Impact on Public School  
Teachers

Senior Project Submitted to  
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by  
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## **Abstract**

COVID-19 has redefined what it means to teach. New challenges have arisen as a result of the pandemic such as distance learning, classes on Zoom, and changing pedagogical practices. Through this project, I document the work experiences of K-12 teachers before and during the pandemic to gain a better understanding of how COVID-19 has affected the work of teachers. I have specifically chosen K-12 teachers because they have had to undergo so much change in their social, academic, and personal lives and are expected to resume teaching under constantly changing policies and work environments, and to educate multitudes of students that are also navigating life during a pandemic. This research shows the specific ways in which COVID-19 prompts challenges to the career itself, records how teachers are combatting this new frontier, and analyzes what new methods and procedures educators take to teach during a pandemic.

Keywords: COVID-19, Pandemic, K-12, Teaching Profession, Teacher Impact, Schools, Education, American Education.



This project is dedicated to my family. Here is to finally bring the honor of a college education to our home. Many obstacles have stepped in the way of you all to gain this accomplishment. Allow me to carry this honor not only to show accomplishment, but to acknowledge the obstacles that have always challenged us. This proves that we can achieve whatever we put our minds to.

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Thank you for all of your words. Your stories motivate me to become a great teacher and educator. I will carry your experiences with me as I enter the classroom and I am grateful that we all connected.

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## Preface

Numerous college students, including myself, will become educators. through this research project, I chose to acknowledge not only the anxieties surrounding the pursuit of becoming a teacher, but what this looks like in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a survivor of Hurricane Katrina that plowed New Orleans back in 2005, I had been well aware of what it was like to live through a disaster. One difference between COVID-19 and Katrina is that COVID-19 has proven and continues to be more expensive than the hurricane that pummeled an entire gulf coast. The cost of damages for Hurricane Katrina are at \$170 billion<sup>1</sup> while COVID-19 is costing the U.S. more than \$16 trillion, 90% of the country's GDP.<sup>2</sup> In addition to this, COVID-19 at this writing has taken more than 738,000 American lives.<sup>3</sup> This is more than 30 times the amount of lives taken by Hurricane Katrina.<sup>4</sup> Right now, the origins of the virus are still being investigated as more and more people are becoming sick or dying every day.

My motivation for this project has been primarily from seeing news headlines regarding teachers throughout the pandemic. Whether it was from Critical Race Theory coverage or the media keeping us up to date with the state of schools. I felt it was

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<sup>1</sup> Alexandra Kelley, "Damage from Ida Estimated to Cost \$18B," Text, TheHill, September 1, 2021, <https://thehill.com/changing-america/resilience/natural-disasters/570493-damage-from-ida-estimated-to-cost-18-billion>.

<sup>2</sup> David M. Cutler and Lawrence H. Summers, "The COVID-19 Pandemic and the \$16 Trillion Virus," *JAMA* 324, no. 15 (October 20, 2020): 1495–96, <https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2020.19759>.

<sup>3</sup> "Covid in the U.S.: Latest Map and Case Count - The New York Times," accessed October 26, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/us/covid-cases.html>.

<sup>4</sup> Sarah Pruitt, "Hurricane Katrina: 10 Facts About the Deadly Storm and Its Legacy," HISTORY, accessed May 4, 2022, <https://www.history.com/news/hurricane-katrina-facts-legacy>.

important to know what was really happening from someone that was experiencing all of this in real time.

The research process included long interviews and unpacking the transcripts from them. Transferring all of this information into writing was a completely different component of this process. I considered an innumerable number of avenues to take this research and how to tie it all together. However, I focused this research on the damage that was inflicted upon teachers during this unpredictable and constantly changing period of time.

## **I. Introduction**

“Turn on your cameras, please!” is a phrase most of us know a little too well. This command would often be used by teachers or professors in an attempt to get their students to engage with the rest of the class virtually. One would often see grids of dark gray boxes with white lettered names across their Zoom screens. This occurred throughout the COVID-19 pandemic and often indicated student disengagement as teachers struggled to get their students to turn on their cameras. Students would have their cameras off for various reasons, ranging from not being in a proper space to record in, to actively eating, to having the anxiety of being seen on a screen, to just lounging in their bed.

The question I sought to answer through this research is how has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the work that public school teachers do. I was especially interested in their working conditions, their experiences with the added labor they had to perform, and support for new kinds of teaching. In this project, I focused on K-12 teachers who work(ed) in the U.S. I hoped to understand the specific ways in which COVID-19 prompted challenges to the career itself, record how teachers are combatting this new frontier of education, and analyze what new methods and procedures educators take to teach during a pandemic. This research is intended for anyone making education policy in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, but is especially intentional for emerging teachers.

COVID-19 has rearranged much of the daily life we were used to before 2020. There are various studies and articles that record the current issues we endure with COVID-19 and schooling, but there is a dearth of studies that encompass how the

pandemic is continuously shaping the roles of educators in these new virtual environments, altering traditional classroom settings, and forcing school systems to adjust to a world dictated by a virus.

Inequality in public school funding is another issue that is hypervisible because of COVID-19. Given that predominantly low income students lacked access to crucial resources such as laptops, textbooks, and other school materials for a swift transition to at home learning<sup>5</sup>, it contributed to an even worse situation with a change from the traditional classroom setting to, in many cases, home environments that were not equipped to maintain student learning. Situations ranged very differently from student to student in the U.S. For instance, one student can learn at the table uninterrupted in their kitchen while others have to be online in more crowded and potentially disruptive living spaces.

Along with the challenge of students being at home, likely in spaces that did not contribute to an engaging learning environment, teachers had an even harder time connecting with students. To add to this, teachers were being tasked with learning new practices, finding access to more professional development resources, using primarily online programs to apply to virtual classrooms, and attempting to effectively teach students during a time of sickness, death, unexpected living arrangements, and financial hardship.

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<sup>5</sup> Karessa Morrow and Bertha Richardson, *The Future of Education: Teaching Black and Brown Students in a Virtual World* (Independent, 2021), 16.

## **COVID-19 & K-12 Schools**

The first reporting on mainstream news outlets of this unknown virus was on December 31, 2019. I had not become aware of coronavirus until February of 2020. By mid-March, the U.S. had started calling off travel by sea, and air travel soon followed. Schools across the country either told students not to come or had started their spring breaks earlier than expected. Many anticipated they would be able to operate normally within the following two weeks. This is why most assumed at first that it would be a short time until we were able to regain a sense of normalcy. “Give it two weeks” soon turned into “at the end of next month.”

Little did we know that schools and institutions were soon to be put on hold indefinitely for in-person learning. There was plenty of uncertainty, not only about the state of health the country would be in but also because the curve took a long time to flatten over the course of those few months placing a halt on aspects of life we used to consider normal. We have anticipated normalcy ever since.

Today we are still tasked with adjusting to the virus and its newer variants. Administrations like the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and World Health Organization strongly urge citizens to take the most effective precautionary measures. The CDC & WHO regulated methods such as mask wearing and social distancing. These seemed to be the only physical measures that kept us safe from the virus and prevented us from spreading it to one another.

Something remarkable about this moment of time was that, for a moment, the world came to what seemed to be a halt. City life across the country became desolate. Hospitals became overcrowded due to the amount of people that had fallen ill to the



virus and sought care. Service employees such as healthcare workers, grocery store employees and fast food workers were still expected to work at the start of the pandemic. Essential workers were put at the forefront of the pandemic while others were mandated to stay within the limits of their homes.

Throughout the beginning of the pandemic, essential workers were put in the spotlight. Essential workers conduct a range of operations and services that are typically essential to continue critical infrastructure operations. Critical infrastructure is a larger, umbrella term encompassing sectors from energy to defense to agriculture.<sup>6</sup>

The notion of essential work, however, typically does not extend to teachers. Therefore, teachers were not considered essential workers despite their work being essential. Instead, teachers, students, and other employees were reduced to the online/virtual realm by the stay at home order at the very start of the pandemic. Morrow and Richardson argue that teachers, despite them not being considered essential workers, were in fact, at the frontlines of the pandemic.<sup>7</sup> Because they were restricted to work at home, many might assume jobs that did not continue in-person services were considered non-essential work. This possibly led parents and other members of the community to think that school did not play as important of a role as it did before the pandemic.

This then provoked an extraordinary situation for everyone involved with schools. During these initial weeks of the pandemic, schools scrambled to provide an approach to online learning. This put more pressure on teachers carrying out the regular class sessions and tasks of an average day at school all on a zoom link. Since the start of

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<sup>6</sup> "COVID-19: Essential Workers in the States," accessed November 30, 2021, <https://www.ncsl.org/research/labor-and-employment/covid-19-essential-workers-in-the-states.aspx>.

<sup>7</sup> Morrow and Richardson, *The Future of Education: Teaching Black and Brown Students in a Virtual World*, 14.

the COVID-19 pandemic, there has remained a presence of uncertainty, in regards to how to proceed with schooling but also a more broad uncertainty of what would happen with anything involving school because of day-to-day changes. Teaching did not resume for in person attendance until the fall semester of 2020.

## The Politicization of a Pandemic

Throughout 2020, there was a boiling political situation occurring across the country, from one county to the next in every state. The pandemic contributed to growing political divides. It even became a strong predictor of behavior and attitudes about COVID-19, even more powerful than local infection rates.<sup>8</sup> Once the former President, Donald Trump, gave states the power to declare safety protocols to take throughout the pandemic, safety measures became more of a choice for citizens.

Tension between partisan affiliations increased back in 2016 due to the election held that year between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. This provoked forms of racial aggression (among other things) that had not been seen since eras like the Civil War and Civil Rights Movements. This tension swelled even throughout 2020 because of the pandemic, and the latest election between Donald Trump and Joe Biden even led to an insurrection at the capital at the beginning of 2021. These tensions have bled into schools in ways no one could have imagined.

Bleeding into the work experiences of teachers, politics have found their way into the functions of schooling. Politics have been shaping the landscape surrounding education for quite some time in the U.S. This includes famous cases like *Brown v. Board of Education* and *Tinker v. Des Moines* that represent the disbanding of segregation in the U.S. and freedom of self expression in schools, respectively. Schools, according to my research participants, are responding to most of this with leniency and little recourse. To add to this fire, trends on social media like TikTok and Instagram

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<sup>8</sup> Jonathan Rothwell and Christos Makridis, "Politics Is Wrecking America's Pandemic Response," *Brookings* (blog), September 17, 2020, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/09/17/politics-is-wrecking-americas-pandemic-response/>.

incite behaviors among students that are inherently discriminatory, disruptive, and in some cases violent.

COVID-19 interrupted daily life dramatically, and teachers were the main people to feel its impact because they were tasked with teaching and keeping up with numerous students (that had also been enduring the impacts of COVID-19) while navigating their own personal lives and adapting to ongoing changes. Schools in the U.S. have changed completely due to the pandemic. At this point, it is difficult to predict where education may be heading due to this being a more recent occurrence. However, understanding the responses of teachers, students, administrations, and districts throughout the pandemic does give us a sense of how the crisis will shape education.

## Literature Review

### I. Understanding the Initial Impact of the Pandemic on K-12 Schools

In March of 2020, schools were shut down across the country. This left teachers and administrators in a scramble to find a way to address their students' needs in the midst of a pandemic. Teachers, both new and experienced, had to transition to online teaching regardless of if they had prior exposure to online learning. Sumitra Pohkrel and Roshan Chhetri, educators at the University of Bhutan, summarize this by saying “online teaching infrastructure was weak and their [teachers] limited exposure”<sup>9</sup> meant that most teachers had to adopt new methods and strategies to teach and administer work over platforms like Zoom, Google Workspace, and Microsoft Teams.

Students and their parents were then left to navigate these platforms and online expectations for an indefinite amount of time. David Marshall, David Shannon, and Savanna Love, professors at Auburn University, pointed out that schools also worked to put together physical packets of work for students and delivered them to homes and that this helped students that lacked internet access.<sup>10</sup> They also claim that most teachers were not allowed to penalize students or their academic standings after March of that year.

Many school systems changed grading procedures so that students could not earn a lower grade than they had before the pandemic, and while this policy was meant to address concerns related to equity of access, it also

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<sup>9</sup> Sumitra Pokhrel and Roshan Chhetri, “A Literature Review on Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Teaching and Learning,” *Higher Education Council*, 2021, 134, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2347631120983481>.

<sup>10</sup> David Marshall, David Shannon, and Savanna Love, “How Teachers Experienced the COVID-19 Transition to Remote Instruction,” *Kappan*, November 2020, 47.

removed an extrinsic motivator for students who did have the means to complete assignments.<sup>11</sup>

As this happened, students' needs were not being addressed. Instead, some students received merit for the bare minimum amount of effort as others continued to work hard despite how the pandemic was affecting them. What this meant was that students, in most cases, did not fail. They were only given opportunities to improve their grades despite what their underlying circumstances allowed them to do.

## II. Teaching and Learning

The pandemic has caused a paradigm shift in the way teachers deliver education through various online platforms.<sup>12</sup> This has also been the case even after teachers and students returned to the classroom. Educator Linda Washington-Brown and other authors claim that “there is wide-spread agreement that virtual learning among school-age children is a poor substitute for in-person classroom learning and has limited social interactions among children.<sup>13</sup> Marcella Bombardieri, a reporter from POLITICO, also states, “Online learning has been disastrous for many, many children, whether because the screen is a barrier to building teacher-student relationships, or because they lack a strong internet signal or a quiet place to work.”<sup>14</sup> Teachers are tasked with

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<sup>11</sup> David Marshall, Shannon, and Love, 48.

<sup>12</sup> Pokhrel and Chhetri, “A Literature Review on Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Teaching and Learning,” 134.

<sup>13</sup> Linda Washington-Brown et al., “Psychological Impact of Covid-19 on Inner- City Children,” *Journal of Cultural Diversity* 28, no. 4 (Winter 2021): 86.

<sup>14</sup> Marcella Bombardieri, “Covid-19 Changed Education in America — Permanently,” POLITICO, 8, accessed May 4, 2022, <https://www.politico.com/news/2021/04/15/covid-changed-education-permanently-479317>.

addressing unfinished learning, reading loss, social-emotional growth and psychological issues.

Learning loss has been one of the biggest concerns that the pandemic has raised for teachers. The impact of the pandemic on K-12 student learning has been significant, leaving students on average five months behind in mathematics and four months behind in reading by the end of the school year.<sup>15</sup> Finding ways to accommodate students and their needs is where the challenge comes in, especially when teachers have been in a situation like the pandemic where there is limited control over the conditions that learning is taking place in. This presents a bigger problem in the long run because as the leader for knowledge development at McKinsey & Company, Emma Dorn states, “Fallout from the pandemic threatens to depress this generation's prospects and constrict their opportunities far into adulthood. The ripple effects may undermine their chances of attending college and ultimately finding a fulfilling job that enables them to support a family.”<sup>16</sup>

Dorn also states, “Using the term unfinished learning allows us to capture the reality that students were not given the opportunity to complete all the learning they would have completed in a typical year.”<sup>17</sup> The pandemic has placed students further behind and now it is up to teachers to build them up academically and equip them with the knowledge and skills to proceed through their educational experiences.

Reading is another fundamental part of unfinished learning that has presented an additional challenge for teachers. As the students do not progress at the rate they

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<sup>15</sup> “COVID-19 and Education: The Lingering Effects of Unfinished Learning | McKinsey,” 1, accessed May 4, 2022, <https://www.mckinsey.com/industries/education/our-insights/covid-19-and-education-the-lingering-effects-of-unfinished-learning>.

<sup>16</sup> “COVID-19 and Education: The Lingering Effects of Unfinished Learning | McKinsey,” 1.

<sup>17</sup> “COVID-19 and Education: The Lingering Effects of Unfinished Learning | McKinsey,” 2.

should, teachers are forced to alter the materials they give students. According to an analysis done by reporter and data journalist of *Education Week*, Sarah Sparks explains more than 1 in 3 children in K-3 have little chance of reading on grade level. To add to the challenge of unfinished learning among students, studies found that Black and Hispanic students, who had lower reading scores compared to white students before the pandemic, fell even further behind on average during school disruptions.<sup>18</sup> This ultimately means that Black and Brown students are even further behind because of the pandemic and have been hit harder than most students. Given this, teachers and administrators now need to come up with strategies to recover students' reading levels with their respective grades, with special attention to Black and Brown students.

Aside from the challenges of unfinished learning, teachers have also been tasked with addressing the mental health issues affecting their students. Another education reporter at *Education Week*, Evie Blad states, “39% of respondents said that ‘compared to prior to the pandemic in 2019, the social skills and emotional maturity levels of their current students are ‘much less advanced.’”<sup>19</sup> To address this, administrations and teachers are finding ways to address this in curriculum such as promoting safe school environments and reinforcing positive behaviors. Schools have also begun to place a heavy emphasis on assisting students with their mental health, emotional stability, and regaining a sense of normalcy.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Sarah D. Sparks, “More Than 1 in 3 Children Who Started School in the Pandemic Need ‘Intensive’ Reading Help,” *Education Week*, February 16, 2022, sec. Reading & Literacy, 1, <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/more-than-1-in-3-children-who-started-school-in-the-pandemic-need-intensive-reading-help/2022/02>.

<sup>19</sup> “Educators See Gaps in Kids’ Emotional Growth Due to Pandemic,” 2, accessed May 4, 2022, <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/educators-see-gaps-in-kids-emotional-growth-due-to-pandemic/2022/02>.

<sup>20</sup> “Educators See Gaps in Kids’ Emotional Growth Due to Pandemic,” 2.



Teachers have also been forced to take into account the social landscape of our country during the pandemic and why there is a need to address mental health among students. Blad also states that, “Some children have seen their parents sick or dealing with job loss. Some have absorbed heated arguments about masks or politics.”<sup>21</sup>As these situations are playing out for students, this often impacts their performance. It is even more imperative that mental health be addressed specifically for students of color. Brown states, “Unfortunately, people of color and underserved vulnerable communities are disproportionately impacted”<sup>22</sup> as a direct result of the pandemic.

### III. Effects on Teachers’ Professional Lives

The transition to working remotely has proven to be especially difficult for teachers. Marshall and Shannon state that, “The nature of teachers’ work has shifted radically, and practically overnight.”<sup>23</sup> In truth, the work that teachers do has been completely changed in terms of juggling the amount of time they put in for work, the added stresses of COVID-19, and dealing with family in general.

The COVID-19 pandemic has negatively impacted teachers trying to maintain their professionalism and competence. Working from home has contributed to this greatly and as a result, the lines of work and home have been blurred. For instance, teachers would be tasked with checking in with their students and/or their families over the course of the day. Often, checking in would occur in time frames outside of normal

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<sup>21</sup> “Educators See Gaps in Kids’ Emotional Growth Due to Pandemic,” 4.

<sup>22</sup> Washington-Brown et al., “Psychological Impact of Covid-19 on Inner- City Children,” 4.

<sup>23</sup> David Marshall, Shannon, and Love, “How Teachers Experienced the COVID-19 Transition to Remote Instruction,” 47.

school hours (9am-5pm). Checking in with students and their families is considered to be administrative work, however teachers were performing this additional labor.

As teacher duties are being blurred, teachers are doing this work from their home spaces. This includes shared spaces with their children or other family members. When the pandemic started, many families lost childcare and had to take care of their children during that time while also working and tending to their other responsibilities.

Childcare, in most cases, would fall on one parent. This scenario is highlighted in a study by sociologist Arlie Hochschild. Hochschild focused on the domestic realities for women entering the workforce in the 1980s. Their book, *The Second Shift*, was especially focused on women because usually they were responsible for general childcare and upkeep of homes in this era. However, during the pandemic, this has also shifted. The key difference between now and when Hochschild's study took place is that now these responsibilities fall onto a parent regardless of gender. The responsibility of childcare would fall onto whoever was most present at home.

Hochschild also revealed that the biggest rise in statistics was that of women going into the labor force making up half of that population.<sup>24</sup> This is where the second shift comes in. The second shift is characterized by women that feel their home life is like a second shift of work. Women especially felt this way because in many cases, men did not share the workload at home and even refused to perform household duties and tasks.<sup>25</sup> Contemporarily, COVID-19 has reduced everyone to their homes and has combined both shifts for partners.

COVID-19 remained as an additional stress on teachers and schools in general.

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<sup>24</sup> Arlie Hochschild, *The Second Shift: Working Families and the Revolution at Home* (The Penguin Group, 1989), 2.

<sup>25</sup> Hochschild, 7.

As the pandemic went on, many noted that there's been a decline of teachers in schools however this is not the case. The decline in teachers is being confused for another happening. Based on research by the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER), their studies suggest that there is an "insufficient amount of new teachers being recruited to meet a growing demand and the retention rate for newly qualified teachers has been falling."<sup>26</sup> The decline is occurring with attempts to get new teachers in schools.

Although this is the case for teachers overall, another study suggests that there has been an increase in exits by teachers of color. Heidi de Marco, a reporter for Kaiser Health News, notes, "a nationwide surge of teachers who are leaving the profession—especially evident among members of the profession with minority backgrounds."<sup>27</sup> Reporter, de Marco claims that non-white teachers are important educational resources, especially for the communities. However, she notes that these teachers are leaving the profession because of a "lack of support and poor working conditions."<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Matt Walker, Caroline Sharp, and Sims, David, "Job Satisfaction and Workload of Teachers and Senior Leaders," n.d., 6.

<sup>27</sup> "Exits by Black and Hispanic Teachers Pose a Threat to Learning Recovery," 1, accessed May 4, 2022, <https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/exits-by-black-and-hispanic-teachers-pose-a-threat-to-learning-recovery/2022/02>.

<sup>28</sup> "Exits by Black and Hispanic Teachers Pose a Threat to Learning Recovery," 3.

## **Research Design**

To investigate the way the pandemic has affected K-12 educators, I facilitated interviews. From mid-September to early December 2021, I held ten in-depth, open-ended interviews with teachers. I relied primarily on my existing connections through my prior educators, my mentor, and advisors. Through mention of my project, I received emails from eager people that wanted to take part in the interviews.

I made a poster detailing the study I was doing and that I was looking for participants that have had at least one year worth of teaching experience before the pandemic. Despite this, all of my participants hold a minimum of nine years worth of experience. I have also shared the poster to my social media platforms including Instagram, Facebook, and to select emails. I wanted the interviews to consist of school teachers in primarily urban areas. However, due limited time, I interviewed participants in both urban and rural areas. I did not require participants to be teaching currently. The participants also did not need to be currently employed due to the fact that many teachers had to quit their jobs, could not adjust to new policies/procedures, or recently retired from the profession altogether. An overview of the interview participants is provided in the following table.

Table 1. Summary of Interview Participants

Name	Gender	Age	Race/ Ethnic Identification	Location	Employment	Education	Household Composition
David	Male	45	White/ Non-Hispanic	Albany, NY	11 & 12 Grade Global History/G eography	P.hD	Married w/ Children
Mariah	Female	28	Black/ Non-hispanic	New Orleans, LA	11 Grade English and General Education	B.A. in Communi cation , Women & Gender Studies, Creative Writing	Single, Living Alone
Anne	Female	39	White/ Non-Hispanic	Sacramento , CA	8 Grade ELA	Masters in Teachin g Literatu re	Married w/ Kid
Lucy	Female	47	White/ Non-Hispanic	Rhinebeck, NY	K-6 General Education	Masters in Educati on	Married w/ Kids
Caque	Female	58	Latinx/ Multiracial	Washingto n Heights, NY, NY	K-8 General & Special Education / Retired	Masters in Bilingua l Special Educati on	Married w/ Family Members
Erica	Female	43	White/ Non-Hispanic	Wappinger s Falls, NY	11 & 12 Grade AP Biology	Masters in Teachin g	Married w/ Kids

George	Male	36	White/ Non-Hispanic	Kingston, NY	8 Grade Social Studies	Masters in Educati onal Psychol ogy B.A. in History	Married w/ Kids
Tia	Female	60	White/ Non-Hispanic	Kingston, NY	8 Grade English	Masters in Teachin g	Married
Phillip	Male	67	White/ Non-Hispanic	Schenectad y, NY	9-12 Grade Theater	Masters in Directin g and BFA in General Theater	Married
Gabby	Female	39	White/ Non-Hispanic	Bronx, NY, NY	11 Grade US History	Masters in History and Educati on	Domestic Partnership w/ Kids

Table 1: This table shows the total sample of K-12 teachers interviewed for my study and indicated their location at the time my interviews were conducted. In addition, this table describes their status of employment, educational level, household composition, race/ethnicity, gender and age.<sup>29</sup>

The sample of respondents consists of seven White Americans (three of which are the only men in the entire study), with one African American respondent, and one identifying as Latinx. The participants ranged in age from 28-67. These were all primarily based in New York State with the exception of two participants, one from Louisiana and the other from California. These teachers are mainly located in areas of

<sup>29</sup>Names in the table were replaced with pseudonyms to protect participants' identities.

New York State such as the Hudson Valley, New York City, and the Schenectady/Albany region.

After doing the first few interviews, I felt that there was a disconnect in the questions that I asked my participants and why they were so eager to take part in this research. Even though there was a lot of interest, I started to feel as if there was nothing significant about my work. Yes, we know that the pandemic has impacted pretty much everyone in the world. Yes, many people have experienced the loss of loved ones, job losses that have led to financial hardships, and innumerable stressful situations. But every time I returned to this topic about COVID-19 and teachers, I faced a sort of ambiguity. It was worthy to note that, so far with those first five interviews, I had only been interviewing white teachers in mostly upstate New York and one other in California.

All of this to say that this study is clearly not a representative sample. This study does not reflect American teachers as a whole but it does represent ten individuals who do value their profession, are dedicated to their students, and feel that the pandemic has impacted their work to one extent or another.

Following the completion of interviewing in December of 2021, I focused on transcribing my interviews averaging 55 minutes in length. Reviewing a few of the transcripts, along with my advisor who served as a second rater, resulted in 22 codes that I used to analyze the remaining interviews and reduce to 5 overall themes.

The themes that were identified appeared the most across the interviews and seemed to be the most prominent. They also mirror elements in the literature review. The themes I recorded are: the stresses regarding the fast transition to a new way of teaching; managing student struggles with the pandemic; perceptions of lack of support

and administrations antagonizing teachers; the pandemic turning social media into a tool that influences bullying and violence among students; and stresses in teachers' professional and personal lives.



## II. Findings from the Interviews

### “Building an Airplane as You Fly It”

The initial questions to the interviewees were aimed at gathering a sense of what they went through at the beginning of the pandemic. I refer to “the beginning” as the period of time between when places around the world began to lock down and the following summer (approximately March-June 2020). Despite it being about a year and a half later at the time of these interviews, most of what the interviewees experienced at the beginning of the pandemic was still fresh in their minds, as if it had happened a week prior.

From the information I gathered from my interviewees, teachers were put in a bind at the start of the pandemic. As Marshall and Shannon summarized, The beginning of the pandemic instigated a major life shift, radically and practically overnight.<sup>30</sup> This forced teachers and administrators to go into a sort of scramble: a scramble to find the right approach to teach and manage students while the world was seemingly falling apart.

Erica is an interviewee who has been teaching 11th and 12th grade biology for 21 years at Rock Hills High School in Wappingers Falls, NY. She teaches in a large school district in a suburban area. Rock Hills High contains about 2,000 students, and she noted that the school is “growing in diversity because of an influx of people from New York City.”

Erica’s response indicated that COVID-19 was something that crept up and took

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<sup>30</sup> David Marshall, Shannon, and Love, “How Teachers Experienced the COVID-19 Transition to Remote Instruction,” 47.

everyone by storm. As schools and places were shutting down, she tried to instill a sense of normalcy within herself and her students despite uncertainty and disbelief.

Spring of 2020, school is going on, the relationships are built. It is March and we all know each other. We are in a very comfortable place with each other. We are in the middle of the curriculum, we're looking for the spring, and we all know each other very well. Then we start to hear the news about these cases in California or these cases somewhere else. The kids that week were saying to me, 'Are we going to close? Are schools going to close down?' I'm saying, 'No, it's fine.' I honestly didn't believe that we would. I'd say, 'No, stop. We're fine. Just come on, keep doing this.' Then, Friday, I drove home from school, and on the radio, I found out that Dutchess County Schools were closed for the next two weeks.

Here, we can see that the start of the pandemic was an overwhelming time for Erica. It loomed over her well after that semester as things proceeded to get worse.

On a similar note, one of my other participants, Tia, expresses what she had gone through at the beginning of the pandemic as well. Tia had been teaching 9th and 10th grade English for more than 21 years at Snow Valley High School in Kingston, NY. Tia's school and district are very similar to Erica's being that her school has a population around 2,000 students, with a mix of high and low-income students.

Tia and Erica are both veteran teachers, however Tia expressed that she was somewhat inept at technology. This was an especially hard transition for her because she had to learn the ropes of online education as opposed to usually logging information manually and keeping up with grades, attendance, and other records by physical documentation. Tia said:

As we started to hear about this possible virus and pandemic. I remember saying, 'Should we be pulling some, maybe stuff together, and should it be for a week or two?' We were told, 'Yes, it'll probably be a good idea. Maybe pull two weeks together.' Really, not top-down thought-out information. The next day, we were told that afternoon or the next day, don't come in and we had no access to our materials whatsoever. After a couple of weeks, and it was super lockdown, we were allowed 25 minutes by appointment to come into the building, mask, the glove, shields, everything, to grab whatever quick materials we needed because- I take my grade book everywhere, I had that. I had my plan book, but I didn't have

student work. We were given, as I recall, maybe a week of, ‘The school will get back to you soon. We're figuring this out.’ It was assumed that we had computers at home and that we had the internet. Some people were sitting in parking lots on their computers, or just trying to find Wi-Fi wherever they could. This was just in the beginning. We were learning how to do Teams on Teams. We hadn't had much training in this and we didn't even know how to access the meetings. It was very crazy.

Both Erica and Tia’s statements reveal that the start of the pandemic was something for which there was no gameplan. They, like educators Morrow and Richardson suggest, “they [teachers] were not prepared to pivot into a virtual world.”<sup>31</sup> The lack of preparedness contributed greatly to the initial impact that COVID-19 had on school closures and sent teachers into a scramble for a sense of direction or guidance.

The start of the pandemic also put a halt to internship programs. This was the case for all programs that were not able to be converted into an online session. This included an internship program that my next participant founded at her school.

Gabby has been teaching 11th Grade U.S. History for 17 years in the Bronx. She was excited that the internship program she designed for high schoolers was finally picking up. The program was set to be an influential experience for high school students to participate in being hands-on with everyday people performing different professions throughout New York City.

I was in love with this program. It was like my baby. Basically, we were really using New York City as our classroom. The kids were getting out in the field working with architects, lawyers, doctors, three days a week out in the field doing this hands-on learning. We were loving it, and it really felt like it was working. It was a great program. I was growing this program, I had been building it from the ground up, so I was pumped about it. Then the pandemic hit, and I started to feel really nervous because I was like, ‘Nobody's talking about this’, yet look what's happening in Italy right now. We're two weeks behind them, I know it. It's coming. Then people started to get sick, and we were all like, ‘Stuff's going to get shut down.’ It was just a matter of when. Then things got shut down, and my

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<sup>31</sup> Morrow and Richardson, *The Future of Education: Teaching Black and Brown Students in a Virtual World*, 16.

program was stopped in its tracks. It was a very abrupt end to the program that I was working on, and we all transitioned to online learning.

Gabby was looking forward to this new challenge and opportunity for her students and was enthusiastic about getting this program off the ground. The pandemic eliminated any chance of seeing this come to fruition. Along with that came everything shutting down and shifting to online abruptly with no chance to revisit running the program indefinitely because it relied heavily on in person contact.

In the nearby neighborhood of Washington Heights, another teacher was dealing with an influx of students placed into the classes she taught. Caque taught K-8 special education for 31 years in Manhattan. The day of her interview was the day after her official retirement. She experienced students being added to her class when the pandemic started. This in turn, increased the amount of students she was responsible for keeping up with while exhausting her efforts well into the rest of the 2020 semester.

I think the class limits were lifted. I had 38 children in my remote classroom. Also, I'm the special education teacher. It was an inclusion class, and I didn't have a co-teacher for a while, till January actually, and because the excuse was 'We're in the middle of the pandemic, we don't have anybody to help you. We don't have any teachers.' Just the fact that they were allowed to have one teacher in a classroom with 38 children, where there were supposed to be two and at most 32 kids. What else? I think that was the hardest issue. The most difficult issue was the 38 kids by yourself in a classroom. I didn't even complain because my union rep was like, 'You need to put in a complaint,' but I was like, "What's going to happen? Nothing. What's going to really change? They're just going to get mad that I complained."

Caque points to a bigger concern here. The usual procedure is to ensure that there are at least two teachers taking on 30+ students, meanwhile Caque had nearly 40 students to maintain in her special education inclusion class.

From their statements, I gathered that picking up the pieces to hold classes and teach students after experiencing the start of a pandemic can be equated to “building an airplane as you're flying it.” This phrase was used by my participant George. He had been teaching 8th grade Social Studies at Miller Middle School in Kingston, NY. George used this phrase in reference to “no one ever doing this before,” talking about sorting through what the pandemic threw at them as he struggled to organize for online learning. The lack of preparedness and support for these teachers has contributed to the beginning of the pandemic being a vulnerable time for everyone involved as they figured out how to make all of the pieces move together in unison.

### Managing Student Struggles with the Pandemic

Teachers operating at the start of the pandemic were tasked with managing the struggles of students in the midst of maintaining themselves and adjusting to the changing social landscape caused by the shift to online learning. Moving into the year 2021, the return to in-person learning began to be incorporated in schools across the country. The shift back to in-person learning entailed constantly changing schedules and procedures that teachers and students were tasked with adapting to. Erica explains the schedule that she had to work around for a period at the beginning of 2021.

We had to come back Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday, and then half the kids came Monday, Tuesday if they wanted to. Then the other half came back Thursday, Friday if they wanted to. Then starting in, I think it was February, we added another hour to the day. The schedule changed at least five times throughout the year. That was very stressful and disruptive and overwhelming and confusing and hard on the kids and the teachers.

Adjusting to changing schedules was part of an ongoing process at the time as schools were finding approaches that seemed manageable. These processes, however, generally exhausted teachers and students as they attempted to adjust.

General burnout became a bigger problem among teachers and students. My next interviewee points at student burnout in particular and how he feels that it has gotten worse. Phillip is an interviewee that had been teaching since 2016 and was sick with COVID-19 while we interviewed over Zoom. He teaches 9-12 Grade Theater at Marshall-Washington High in Schenectady, NY. This school has a population of about 2,700 students. Phillip revealed that he had been laid off in August of 2020:

It was a Friday and we were supposed to report the following Monday or Tuesday for preschool meetings and so forth. They basically did a Zoom call with the 100 or so teachers and told us that we were being laid off.

Although he was laid off, he continued to work with the district through substituting or being given small tasks. He mentioned that other people had it worse because he did not have a family to support as his kids are adults. However, he was asked to return in March of 2021 to teach in the same position. Upon returning, here is what he had to say about student struggles:

One of the things that I've seen since returning to in-person instruction is a lot of students have developed a really passive approach to things. They want to sit there and have you give them things and they'll write or they'll do whatever the response is, but they're really not eager to engage either with the teacher or with each other. Activities that are intended specifically to encourage those interactions I sometimes find meet with resistance or refusal where in the past, that's been relatively easy to address. It's often much harder to overcome or in some cases impossible. I have students in an acting class who are unwilling to perform even just for each other and I don't recall that happening in the past. I don't know how much of that is the direct result of the effects of being online for a year, how much of it is the various kinds of traumas that people have been experiencing, how much of that is about the social processes that students have really not been able to go through that are really important in that phase of late adolescence. Just not being able to function in that environment in a way that they had been in the past.

All of the interviewees reported that it was difficult for them to retain the attention or engagement of a significant number of their students. They mentioned blank screens, muted computers, or students with an excessive amount of activity being shown on their screens. This did come up in a variety of ways in Caque's interview, but specifically, she said :

Sometimes, I was like, 'Can you tell your mom to lower the TV,' or, 'Go find some place quiet. I don't care if you're sitting in the bathroom with the door locked, so you can hear me because the TV is on and I'm talking, you're not going to hear.' I would ask a question, and they were like, 'I couldn't hear you. The TV is on.'

Caque and many other teachers had to deal with similar disruptions and because of this, teacher expectations were lowered significantly to compromise with students about their learning in these environments. Teachers made accommodations that were necessary as each student was in a different situation behind their screens.

Student disengagement carried over from Zoom to in-person sessions. School and COVID regulations contributed to this greatly. Classrooms were adjusted to accommodate distance between students and minimize the spread of COVID. Lucy, another interviewee, explains how this has impacted her students upon returning to teaching. She has been teaching K-6 Grade for 15 years<sup>32</sup> at an elementary school in Rhinebeck, NY. She describes her school as predominantly white in a rural area with 110-120 students per grade level.

I have recently learned that we are allowed to put them in pairs of desks facing each other, two desks like in little duos, little pairs. I'm contemplating that just to give them more social connection because right now, they're in very distanced rows and columns. I just knew I've always felt this way as a teacher, how

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<sup>32</sup> Lucy stated that she worked on and off for 15 years. She returned to teaching in the 2021-2022 academic year after being a leave replacement until March of 2020 and sitting out during the pandemic.

important the community of the classroom is, but I just knew how that was very, very important considering they all had not been together last year.

Lucy notes that distance learning has impacted the general social connection in the classroom. Because Lucy did not teach during the 2020-2021 academic year, she did not experience her school puzzling with approaches to learning and protocols for the classroom, whether they were virtual or in person. She got to skip the experimental phase of the pandemic in that way and walked in at the aftermath phase, when students and teachers were already back in the classroom.

Lucy felt the best way to address student disengagement and build a classroom community was by adjusting the seating arrangements. The rows and columns are emblematic of the broader scheme of social distancing and mirrors the goals stopping the spread.

Gabby also spoke to noting a lack of social-emotional growth among her students. Gabby speaks directly to this being an issue from her experience.

I think there's a certain maturity level that you don't see that kids develop over time in high school. My 11th graders, they're not there in terms of the work ethic. I feel like we're getting there. I'm hopeful and I feel we're evolving. The kids will tell you different things. Some students will tell you that they really miss being in quarantine because school is really anxiety-provoking for a lot of kids and they don't like being in the building and they don't like being in class. They liked the anonymity that came with Zoom in just being able to be behind a screen, hidden behind a screen. Then other students will tell you that it was really lonely, and it was really isolating and that being at home with their family was hard. That it took a toll on their mental state and that they're just grateful to be back in school. It's really a mixed bag. I think it depends on the kid. I think some kids really would have liked to have an option where they didn't have to come back to school.



Gabby validates the theory that students are deprived of the necessary social experiences to further develop their social-emotional skills.<sup>33</sup>

Caque reacts by engaging her students with social-emotional material in the class. This was similar to something she would do in the past. On Fridays, she would show her students videos on real-life situations and discuss with her students ways of working around those very problems:

That's why we have the social-emotional class every Friday, because I wanted to make sure that they were able to talk about anything that was bothering them or if they were struggling with anything. I will look for videos on empathy or if somebody-- how do I express my feelings? I will try to find videos, and then we will talk about, "What do you think was the message? What do you think happened? How could this person have done better," or, "If that happened to you, what could you have done to make the problem a little easier?" We did that a lot with the reading also. One of the stories we read was *The Year of Miss Agnes*, which is a story about a teacher who goes to teach in Alaska and how the kids struggle with learning and all of that. We talked a lot about that. We also read Malala, the story of Malala. They were third graders, but they really enjoyed all that, the discussions we had. I liked that a lot because we were able to have actual discussions about the reading.

social-emotional learning was a special challenge in the learning environment. Other participants emphasized the need for social-emotional development among their students. As an elementary teacher, she especially recognized the need for it. She had stated "in elementary school, you teach everything." So she had a free range of content to cover and connect across the curriculum.

Managing student struggles was already a task for teachers pre-pandemic, however COVID-19 has exacerbated this issue even more than before. Complications from the shift to online learning and further disruptions in scheduling, social distancing,

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<sup>33</sup> "Educators See Gaps in Kids' Emotional Growth Due to Pandemic," 2.

and the lack of effort and engagement as a result have contributed to the additional labor that teachers are required to perform.

## **Perceptions of a Lack of Support and Antagonistic Administrations**

I think the lack of support, the lack of empathy from the administrators, the disregard for the mental health of the children and us. For example, in the spring, I had a family where everybody got sick in their house. Their mom was sick, their dad was sick, their grandfather was sick. They all had COVID. I remember saying to the administrator, "Listen, so and so's family is very sick." I didn't want to punish him for not coming to class. The attitude was, "Make sure he logs on." Like, "Are you kidding me right now? Make sure he logs on? Everybody in that household was sick." I'm not worried about him coming to class. I'm worried about him getting sick also, or somebody dying at home. Nobody did, thank God. Just putting everything on the teachers.

-Caque, Special Education Teacher

Caque's experience resonates with those of other teachers that realized there was a lack of support from their respective administrations. Caque explains her frustration with her administration here. After getting a sense of what the interviewees felt in regards to the help they needed, the initial support that would have benefitted most teachers was training for online programs to help with coordinating classes virtually. I asked each of my participants, "Was there any training or help with troubleshooting?" Between March of 2020 and December of 2021, half of the respondents were not offered any additional training or additional pay, four of the respondents were offered training but no pay, and one was offered training but was required to ask for and be granted permission through administration to access the paid training.

Whether teachers got trained was dependent on how much money each district allotted to this additional support. It was clear that funding and investment were on a case by case basis as districts had certain resources that others did not. But it was also clear that some districts did receive some form of funding for COVID relief. To the

understanding of the respondents, this money was used in a variety of ways, some to benefit either students or the school, or it was channeled into other investments.

Lucy had a different experience than that of the other interviewees because her school supplied advanced technological resources to their students:

They have individual iPads. They each have their own iPad that stays at school. We have a lot of really good educational apps that the kids use, and they have logins for them. That's been great. I do use Google Classroom a little bit with that, but not a lot. They're given by the school, the school controls them.

In comparison, Phillip, who teaches in Schenectady, had a completely different experience. He noted that his district was having trouble receiving sufficient funding. Because he teaches in an under-resourced community, schools not getting what they needed put the teachers and students at a disadvantage. Phillip stated that, “It [Schenectady] is a community that went from being pretty wealthy to being predominantly middle-class, to having high rates of poverty and generally speaking, low income overall.” Phillip also states:

They had started in the spring developing, basically trying to get Chromebooks to every individual student in the district. They didn't complete that rollout over the summer but they were planning for a mix of in-person and online schooling in the fall. That planning process went on over the summer. The state had announced in July that they would be cutting Foundation Aid to districts by 20%. The details of that were not made clear. In late August, they sent the communication that seemed to say that that was going to be done on a district-by-district basis and every district would lose 20% of their funding. For a district that was relatively wealthy and relied on Foundation Aid for maybe 2% to 5% of their budget, the impact was minimal. Schenectady actually lost more Foundation Aid than any other district in the capital region, estimated about \$28.5 million. They closed most of the school buildings that they could and they laid off about 400 employees, including 100 or so teachers. I was one of the teachers who was laid off at that time.

Phillip explains how funding cuts in Schenectady further delayed students that did not have access to computers or wifi and also led to many teachers being laid off, including himself.

Unlike Lucy's account, Phillip describes a situation where his school of nearly 3,000 students lacked materials during this time. Lucy's and Phillip's respective accounts suggest that funds to support students in online learning seemed to be distributed unevenly across school districts. Understandably, Lucy's school population at 400 students was substantially smaller than the Marshall-Washington High School at approximately 2,700 students. Therefore Rhinebeck was able to support students that demonstrated need more specifically.

Erica talks about an experience she and her students shared regarding plexiglass being installed in her school.

We did for all of about three weeks have Plexiglass attached toward tables. The district, I think, spent, I want to say maybe 1\$ million on these Plexiglass. They spent a lot of money. It was a three-walled barrier that went up. This was in, I want to say May of 2021, because somehow maybe the CDC said that that was good...It was just so strange. Then a few weeks later they decided that Plexiglass doesn't really work and we don't really need it so they removed it all. That was pretty crazy.

Plexiglass was supposed to be an effective measure to combat the spread of the virus but in the case of this school, however it was later determined that it was not effective.

Tia addresses a similar scenario that took place at her school. Similar to the plexiglass instance, funds were going to be used to provide bulletproof doors and entryways instead of directing those funds to student learning.

We don't have Wi-Fi everywhere and not everybody has access that's equal. That's being figured out, but there's a giant influx of, I want to say \$26 million in COVID relief this year and this is a sideline, but as soon as we got this big amount of money, they announced immediately they were going to give us bulletproof doors and entryways. We said, "Whoa, whoa, whoa," maybe we could assess need first before we do that. The community stepped in and said, 'Could we please hear from everybody and see what our needs are?' That shifted. Thankfully, they're starting to listen a little better to their community. They did respond and give surveys to all teachers, families, students, community members, and taxpayers, and said, 'Oh, you mean, we need mental health workers and we need computers and we need supplies and we need more teachers?' It's been shifted, which is great.

I followed up with a question after Tia's response asking, "Why bulletproof doors and entryways? She replied "It was because somebody knew somebody." What she meant by this was that through someone's network, "someone had connections with people that could supply them with bulletproof doors and that is usually what happens with funding." What she means is that funds are being misused because people higher up are investing this money on non-pressing needs in order to appease their networks.

The community's input sparked a redirection of funding. By including others' input, the administration was able to make a decision in unison with the community as opposed to making it amongst themselves. Although this did not have immediate results, Tia was pleased with the fact that the decision had been shifted.

### Struggles with Administration

There were mentions of tension between the teachers and administration throughout the interviews. Some teachers experienced good or positive admin/teacher

relations like Lucy and Phillip, but others such as Caque, Mariah, and Tia have indicated quite the opposite.

Caque already started having problems with her administration in the beginning of the pandemic when her administration placed more students in her class, disregarding the capacity protocol and without a co-teacher to assist. She acknowledged several points of conflict with her administration in addition to having extra students being put into her class. She became frustrated and because of administrative decisions, she did not know what to plan for. In response to my question, “Did you do any planning during the summer of 2020?” she said:

No. Not because I didn't want to, but because I had no idea-- You have to know what grade you're planning for. I still didn't know if I was going to have third grade, or what grade I was going to have. One woman who was my co-teacher, actually two people. They had already set up their classrooms and were, 'Oh, I'm going to have blah, blah, blah grade,' and then all of a sudden, two days before, 'Oh no, sorry, you're going to have this grade instead.' You already set up your class-- You set up your classroom and you're like, 'Oh, I have blah, blah, blah grade,' and in your head, you're preparing for that grade, and then two days before, they're like, 'Sorry, but we need you in this grade instead.' I think she was supposed to have second grade. She ended up in fourth or vice versa. It was one of those two. Either she was supposed to be in fourth and ended up in second or, one of those two. Not only that, she ended up with a co-teacher. She was supposed to be by herself and ended up being in an inclusion classroom. My other friend, the same thing. I think she always had a co-teacher, but she ended up with somebody else. They switched the co-teacher maybe two or three days before the organization sheet changed. I'm telling you, I didn't have a co-teacher till January.

Caque expressed her frustration that she was not being communicated with about what grade she was going to teach. She mentioned earlier that “in elementary school, you teach whatever they want you to teach.” She then pointed at the situation one of her friends was in as she prepared for second grade but instead received fourth.

In addition, Tia explains a situation where her superintendent led a meeting. The superintendent made some concerning statements that she felt she needed to address.

Our superintendent, the first words out of his mouth at the beginning of this year were, 'I'm proud to say there were zero transmissions of COVID-19 in our district.' How is that even true or possible and why would one say that? That was an undermining of so many things for us all. I'm like, 'What?' [she chuckles] That's just very confusing. Basically--the superintendent greeted us all in a video, 'Welcome back to work for the '21-'22 year.' The first words out of his mouth were, 'I'm happy to say there were no COVID-19 transmissions last year in our district.' I guess nobody got COVID from anyone because of school or something, which just physically, scientifically, does not make any sense. The concerns now are that two, three weeks ago, we had 88 students sent home, and every day, we're told we have 17 teachers out, we need volunteers to cover classes. That's daily.

Saying that there were no COVID-19 transmissions was confusing and insensitive for Tia due to the fact that numerous people were being sent home on speculation that they had COVID-19 or were exposed to it. She felt that the spread of this misinformation was misleading, dishonest, and could have been detrimental to their school community because of how dire the virus and its impact had proven to be.

Another one of my respondents had to teach while she had COVID. Mariah, an English educator for 9 years working in New Orleans, indicated that she was expected to teach after being diagnosed with the virus.

You know I had COVID myself you know and I was expected to still teach while I had COVID. And I did, so I think because it's virtual. There wasn't a real understanding of like what this virus was, what it does for the body, and what the expectations are of the educator, so I almost quit my profession in 2020. I'm not gonna lie to you. I was like, 'Fuck education! Y'all tryna kill me.'

Mariah does address the fact that this was earlier on in the pandemic. However, she felt unsupported by an administration she thought did not care about her health. Although she did not go through with leaving education altogether, she did leave that job.



Tia addresses a more systemic issue among her administration and coworkers in regards to the now controversial topic of Critical Race Theory(CRT). CRT is a framework used to “explore and examine the racism in society that privileges whiteness as it disadvantages others because of their ‘blackness.’”<sup>34</sup> Critical Race Theory is not new however it gained prominence due to heightened tensions of political sides during the pandemic, when people were also in dispute over mask wearing and vaccinations. This point is controversial because legislation in the U.S. has been aimed at removing it from curriculum across the country and it has sparked numerous debates and social media attention.

In Tia’s department meeting, the topic came up and administration urged the teachers to welcome “tough topics.” Tia expressed her support for CRT publicly, but little did she realize that she would be ostracized for it:

I was full-on attacked for this. In private, the department had thanked me and said, I'd had so much more training in this area and people would catch up, but the repercussions have become enormous. I was challenged by colleagues and then supported by the department head. Then later on punished by the department head, as being difficult to work with. Like I have the highest APPR ratings you can get as a teacher for every year I've ever taught and I've never had problems and I'm being told, ‘Thank you for speaking up for us. Thank you for saying this.’

After voicing her support for CRT, she was praised in private by her department head, but then he punished her publicly.

Tia later explained that she received backlash and negativity from people that she worked with. In the aftermath of that meeting, she was reprimanded by her department head. Tia’s experience reflected the deep divide and politically charged tensions not only

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<sup>34</sup> Armando D Dunn, “Student, Athlete, or Neither at All: A Closer Look into the Experiences of Black Basketball Players in the NCAA,” n.d., 51.

within the school she works in, but also those present throughout the U.S. This points to the disconnect between individuals in general and the same issues that the pandemic exacerbated.

## **Social Media Incited Bullying and Violence**

Social media played a huge role throughout the pandemic, especially the platform TikTok. Social media became one of the primary forms of social interaction for plenty of people during initial lockdown given that in-person social activity was prohibited. Several of my participants claimed that students drifted away from direct school authority and were exposed to negative influences from TikTok.

The interviewees also point at social media having negative implications on students that in turn prompt difficult school situations. I asked respondents “How do you think the pandemic has affected student relationships?” From this, I wanted to gather more information on bullying during the pandemic. The interviewees had interesting responses that detailed political hostility and an increase in political hostility, cyberbullying, and violence.

The politics around COVID-19 remained a looming topic throughout the pandemic. It came up in a variety of ways from mask wearing to the George Floyd movement, to vaccine protests, and even the insurrection in January of 2021. All of these events came back to the classroom in some way or form. Tia said:

The political climate is so woven in. For instance, we were just told last week that there's some new sweatshirt. Was it, 'Go, Brandon?' I forget what it says. That is basically 'Fuck you, Biden,' and kids have been wearing them to school.

Students wearing these shirts was a form of opposition towards the Biden administration. It signaled the attitudes that many people carried throughout the pandemic.

Tia then touches on how social media had an influence on students.

They came back to lots of TikTok challenges to grab a teacher's breast or break things in the bathroom and film it. Every month has some challenges they're supposed to do, and some of them fall prey to it because they've been so into their social media. We're having to teach media literacy and that these are just clickbait and you can get in huge trouble for that.

She mentioned that during the pandemic “every month had a challenge that they’re supposed to do” which implied that TikTok had a form of authority over the actions of these students. This could also imply TikTok has replaced school in this sense. The students acted as if they were assigned to complete the tasks that TikTok advertises and seek gratification from it.

Tia notes this as one of the effects that increased usage of social media has had over the period of the pandemic. Tia then describes a form of deviance. She noted that students would defy mask wearing and social distancing protocols in school to challenge regulations against close contact between students:

They're like, ‘You can't get COVID from touching.’ I said, ‘Okay, that's what you're doing this for?’ They said, ‘Well, there's hand sanitizer in every room.’... I'm exhausted of telling you to pull your mask up.’ They'll pull their masks down as a sign of showing off to their friends and bonding. There are these subtle little passive-aggressive behaviors that are happening, that they're showing off to their friends. That's their thing.

Through common defiance, the students sought approval from each other. In addition to this, Tia said that some students would shake hands repeatedly to challenge the idea of COVID.

## Violence

Violence at school is not a new occurrence at all. However, my respondents suggest that violence has become more of a problem since the pandemic started. The

prior tensions of social media, COVID deviance, and politically influenced behavior have contributed to a more violent social landscape at schools according to Phillip, Erica, and Gabby. They all detail the ways in which schools have become a scarier workplace than before the pandemic.

Phillip reiterates that violence in the school is certainly not new. He does feel that it has changed and been made more difficult:

I think it's devastating. I think at least for the students in my district, it's [the pandemic] taken something that was already precarious and difficult. The idea of what learning is supposed to be and what they're supposed to be learning is a very abstract and disconnected idea for them... Conflicts that would begin on social media would turn into fights in the hallway several times a day. It's students predominantly who are freshmen and sophomores who had never physically been in the high school building before and have been having their beefs on social media for the last year and a half and now all of a sudden, they're physically in the same space. The consequences of that have been significant, especially for a lot of kids. The environment in the hallways was pretty explosive for a while. The building has gone into a rescheduling and a total closed campus lockdown approach to things in an effort to curb that.

Phillip expresses that students, especially freshmen and sophomores, are primarily engaging with these behaviors. He feels that they lack an understanding of how to learn in this environment and this is because they were deprived of actually experiencing their first years of high school in a school building.

The pandemic has compromised institutional intervention in general, and the resulting shutdown has caused increased isolation for individuals. As a result and due to job departures, students had limited avenues of support. The lack of resources available to these students signified that there was an increase in the amount of barriers to resources and they instead resorted to their own violent means of conflict resolution.

Gabby details an even more dire situation that happened upon the reopening of her school in the Bronx and then ties it back to the points made by both Erica and Phillip . She stated:

That was how we started the year. It's day three, stabbing. One of our kids had stabbed another kid in the building. We have metal detectors but, apparently, they don't do their job. Day three we went into lockdown for two hours because a student stabbed another student and then ran and was loose in the school with a weapon and so consequently they had to go into lockdown mode and track the student down. The NYPD is rolling around the school. That was the tone of the year right then and there. And then there's just been fights every day. Fights in the cafeteria, fights in the hallway, fights spilling into the classroom and it's just been really, really violent. It's really painful to see and experience all of that. The most recent one that I was in the middle of, got caught in the middle of, was afterwards when we were mediating and talking about it, it was old stuff. They were like, 'This goes back to two years ago.' The kids, like our current 9th graders, didn't have middle school in person, and that's such a fundamental point of development. They basically went from elementary school to high school when they were at home. They didn't really experience those years.

Gabby captured the feeling of this theme by saying "NYPD is rolling around the school." The unfortunate event of stabbing occurring at her school only reflects some light of what is really happening around the country. Gabby, Erica, and Phillip highlight the fact that fights occur on a daily basis and that this happens among the younger classes that transitioned into high school at the start of the pandemic.

The pandemic has pushed students to engage more with social media. Social media has since influenced and perpetuated much of the behaviors and deviant behavior demonstrated among students that entered high school as transitions took place. Social media has also drawn their attention away from school and has led to an increase of cyberbullying and violence. This has impacted students' lack of social connection, emotional development, and maturity and has caused an increase in cyberbullying and violence.

## **The Effects on Teachers Professional & Personal Lives**

COVID-19 has taken yet another toll on both the professional and personal lives of teachers. This has impacted the relationships between teachers and coworkers, teachers and parents, and teachers and their families. In the professional aspect, teachers have been disconnected from their coworkers and have had to deal with students' parents more directly than before the pandemic. On a personal note, they describe how the pandemic has affected their personal lives while teaching.

### **I. Professional**

Maintaining their professional lives has been challenging because teachers have had to undergo losing connection with their coworkers. All of the interviewees have specified that the connection between themselves and their coworkers has ranged from minimal to having no connection at all. Respondents talked about how they used to socialize or be really close to their coworkers before the pandemic and how COVID-19 has driven people apart from one another.

David, a teacher of 24 years at Harriet Tubman High School in the Hudson Valley, was fairly close with the people that he worked with for at least 12 years. David was diagnosed with Lupus a while before the pandemic. For this, he was considered immunocompromised, and he opted to teach online for the 2020-2021 academic year until he was forced back into in-person teaching this year. In response to my question, "Did the pandemic impact your relationship with you coworkers," he replied:

Yes, significantly! One thing I should impart upon you is how close my department was. The vast majority of our department with 17 people in high school have been together for 27 years. Ten of whom were hired back in the late 90s, including myself. So I have worked with these people for a little over half of my life...Everybody's trying to be respectful, especially my colleagues because they know my scenario healthwise and so they don't they don't really know how to be around me. We care about each other tremendously, but there is a lot of disconnection that is happening.

The pandemic drove relationships apart, isolating teachers from one another during this vulnerable time.

Mariah also spoke to coworker relations during the pandemic:

Yes, I mean I kind of just forgot what they look like in real life. and I think it's like.. It just like stopped. I believe in co-organizational structure right, so like the kids are going to mirror our reality and our reality became kind of cold and overworked and constantly trying to create... interpersonal relationships were just not prioritized.

Stating that these relationships were mirrored by the students resonated with another point made by Lucy and Gabby regarding the social connectedness of their students, or the lack thereof, and the need for social-emotional growth.

### Parent Interactions

The shift to Zoom, in a way, contributed to more teacher/parent interaction than before. This is because usually students are logging in on devices, near their parents or are in spaces that are easily accessible by their parents. In addition to this, since the pandemic started, administration transferred more responsibility of checking in with students and their parents to teachers.

For example, Caque noted that she was expected to check in with students' families via her personal cell. She also mentioned that this contact would take place at



various times throughout the day, outside of normal school hours. Caque began to realize that her personal schedule was not her own anymore at that point:

I had a parent-teacher conference on a Friday at 6:00 PM in the afternoon. Not my time, not the day that I was supposed to have it, but that's when the mom could make it, so that's when I had it. Just your schedule was totally not yours.

Aside from schedule conflicts and the added task of checking in with students and their families, Tia gives us insight into “family drama” she had to deal with in regards to parents during the pandemic:

I had students cutting and pasting from Google and tests and homework and just totally caught plagiarizing. There would be a lot of family drama because families would stick by their children and use it as a bonding moment rather than as a learning moment. That was tricky. In the spring--here's the first thing on the Google page that your child cut and pasted right into the test or the assignment. Could we maybe speak about that and say, there are better choices and it's illegal and wrong, and doesn't support your learning, but you're welcome here, it's a learning time, no judgment, but you shouldn't be doing this and parents in total denial. ‘She didn't cheat.’

Tia had been struggling to deal with parents for this reason. She had never encountered going back and forth with defensive parents about their children being accused of academic dishonesty. To add to this, Tia mentioned that there were also a lot of parents she would call and say, “Hey, I haven't seen your child in class for a while,’ or, ‘She's missing 11 assignments.”

Caque gives another example of parental interaction when she noticed one of her students was logging in from the Dominican Republic. She then talked with their parents about it after:

I think out of the 38, 36 of my kids showed up all the time and 38 showed up most of the time. I had kids logging in from the Dominican Republic, where I could see you're in the yard. They're not even in the city, and I don't care. Listen, I said to the parents, ‘I don't care where you're logging in from. I'm glad you're here. I am glad that the kids are coming to class.’ People were very secretive. They

thought I was going to tell on them. I don't care where you're logging in from. Just make sure your kid shows up to class and that they're listening.

Caque had endured additional pressures from her administration. It got to the point where she considered retiring from the position altogether. Caque retired because of “harassment from her admin, fear of the virus, and she felt that it was time.” Here she explains more:

I didn't want to be in a classroom with unvaccinated children. I also felt like my principal was harassing me. I feel like I understand that I'm an expensive teacher, I get that. When you've been in the system a long time, you make a lot of money and people feel like you cost them a lot of money. Like the money was coming out of their pocket or something. I think there should be something said about experience and dedication, which I think I have, which I think I'm a dedicated teacher. I really love my kids and I really love what I do. I didn't want to retire. I really didn't. I didn't want to retire, because I love my job. I really do. I love teaching and I love being in the classroom, but I also don't want people harassing me.

Caque noted that she was being harassed by the assistant principal. She said he would do “classroom observations more than often.” She noted 6 visits. Out of all of those times, she did not receive any form of feedback. Caque said that usually teachers get feedback from these observations, but she did not receive it in any form. She noted that “it felt more like he was trying to catch her not doing her job.” Caque speculated that the harassment must have come from the fact that she would address how he handled the pandemic. She said, “I'm not one to stay quiet.”

## II. Personal

Working as an employee during the pandemic was increasingly hard for teachers as they had to face students every day, whether they were blank boxes on the computer screen or eyes accompanied with a mask in the classroom. The pandemic was hard on

everyone, but it has been harder on teachers having to conceal their struggles and provide a semi-normal space (virtually or in-person) as best they could.

Erica describes her experience of seeing students she once taught and lost connection with. She saw them for the first time since the pandemic struck:

I never talked to those kids that year again, which is really weird because now they've stopped by my classroom this fall, and they'll come in and they'll look at me with their mask, and I'll have tears in my eyes because they're grown up. They were 14 years old and now they're 17, or almost 17, and they look different. In ninth grade, they were little kids. Now, they're juniors in high school and they're 17 years old. They're young adults. It was so weird. I'd never talked to them again, but I feel more connected to them than I did to my students last year because I knew them already.

Erica felt more connected to students she had two years ago as opposed to all of the students she has had over the course of the pandemic. This retelling draws a picture of how the social landscape for teachers and students has changed so much over the last year and a half.

To add to the looming feeling of disconnectedness, teachers were fearful of contracting the virus. They took numerous measures to thwart the spread of the virus despite the overwhelming nature of life prompted by the pandemic. Gabby explains this in her words:

I don't think I can come into work anymore given what's going on because I feel like I need to do my part to flatten the curve. This is really scary. I think I'm not going to come into work. I don't feel safe. 'Then, of course, everything got shut down after. I reached out and said, 'This isn't okay.' I think everyone felt like maybe it should have gotten shut down sooner. In our school community, we lost a student who died of COVID in our school, which was really serious and sad. A lot of people were sick, a lot of colleagues were sick, a lot of kids were sick, a lot of families were sick, and it was definitely hard to know what to do or how to support them.

Gabby stated that because she lived in the Bronx, she was "in the epicenter of the epicenter." Gabby felt that losing a student was hard. For her to be a supportive figure as

she was figuring all of this out for herself along with seeing the virus rampage through New York City proved to be even more difficult.

David experienced loss, but in a way no one could have imagined. He describes his situation with his family:

It's been very difficult to see my own parents. My mother is 70, my father is 69. My mother has advanced Alzheimer's. It came on when she was in her early 60s. So her own memory is slipping. In the last year and a half, I've seen her twice because of concerns relating to COVID for most of that time. So at this point she doesn't recognize me or know who I am.

The Zoom call felt heavy as he responded. He was asked about the other hardships he had experienced relating to COVID-19. David did seem enthusiastic about a research trip he wanted to take to Zimbabwe and Mozambique, but these plans also had to be put on hold because of COVID. It sounded like he was anticipating this trip to take his mind off of what had been happening in his life.

Tia and Lucy are two other teachers that experienced the loss of loved ones along with David. Lucy had experienced the loss of her son and father within months of each other. She said that "they didn't pass away due to COVID," but she noted that this was going on around the "same time that refrigerator trucks were holding the bodies of people that died of the virus because there were no available spaces to hold them." The pandemic made it harder for people to grieve as participants could not attend or hold funerals or visit loved ones in a hospital, or were divided by quarantine in their own homes.

Tia experienced the loss of her best friend:

I would say my best friend dying from COVID was a personal-- one of my best friends. It was a complication from something else too. I can't grieve that. I can't even bring it into my head. I haven't even visited that. Thinking about that and that happened eight months ago, because I've got to preserve my energy to do this work and be here for my family.

She was not able to completely process the loss of her friend but has been consistently there for her students. Tia's way of coping with this hard time was by teaching. It was her outlet in a really stressful time.

Tia along with the rest of the interviewees have had to endure sickness, the fear of getting COVID, facing departure from their profession, and experiencing the loss of loved ones at the same time they gave students instruction. The pandemic has caused an immense load of stress on teachers during this time and continues to do so. This will leave a lasting impact on teachers as they navigate their professional and personal lives moving forward.

### III. Discussion

This research project was centered on finding out how the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the work that public school teachers do. In searching for this answer, I found through my research that teachers have been impacted in four main ways.

The first problem is the issue of the transition. The pandemic caused an immediate response from schools to transition from in-person classes to an online platform. In addition, the start of the pandemic marked a period of regulation against in-person gathering and put an instant halt on school related programs.

The pandemic caught schools off guard and this caused teachers to find ways to respond and continue educating their students. Professors Chhetri and Pokhrel pointed to a “weakness of online teaching infrastructure and limited exposure of teachers to online teaching”<sup>35</sup> as the interview participants claim this as well. Some teachers, like Tia, did not have adequate access to resources like wifi or a working computer to continue instruction virtually.

We were told not to come in and we had no access to our materials whatsoever. After a couple of weeks, we were allowed 25 minutes by appointment to come into the building. - Tia, 8 Grade English Teacher

Being put in this position forced them to obtain and understand the necessary materials to continue education online. Another result of this was that teachers had to manage students’ struggles along with navigating technology and teaching. This included addressing constantly shifting schedules, student disengagement, unfinished learning, and their social-emotional disconnection. Teachers also felt a general disconnect with their students after the 2020-2021 school year.

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<sup>35</sup> Pokhrel and Chhetri, “A Literature Review on Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic on Teaching and Learning,” 134.

The second issue has to do with antagonistic administrations. Conflicting situations have been caused by administrations and put teachers in difficult positions. Teachers suspected that they had a lack of support as they experienced improper distributions of school funding; some teachers also admitted to clashing with their administrations over various issues. Morrow and Richardson also claimed that, “A top priority in this battle is maintaining adequate supplies and resources; however, teachers have been asked to provide their own materials.”<sup>36</sup>

Funds were distributed differently in different districts. This was especially the case for Rhinebeck and Schenectady school districts, for instance. Rhinebeck focused on providing advanced materials and resources to their students as Schenectady lost funding and could not provide students with any resources. A number of teachers lost their jobs as another result.

Some teachers did not want to sacrifice their employment and let their struggles with administration stand. Others have defended themselves and stood up to administrations, but this often resulted in punishment or intimidation tactics. Both Tia and Caque experienced this as Tia noted being reprimanded by her department head and Caque being observed without feedback. Tia continues to work despite the issues she’s had with her school; however, this has contributed to Caque’s retirement from teaching.

The third issue is that social media incited bullying and violence. Given that social media became one of the primary tools for communication during the pandemic, increased usage of social media by students over the course of the pandemic has

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<sup>36</sup> Morrow and Richardson, *The Future of Education: Teaching Black and Brown Students in a Virtual World*, 14.

influenced defiance of COVID protocols, political hostility, cyberbullying, and violence in schools.

Platforms like TikTok have attracted attention from school-aged students. This has encouraged deviant behaviors in students. Participants reported a few instances that have been urged by the app. Tia even emphasized that every month had its new challenge that students fell prey to. Not only has social media played a role in this, but it has also urged behaviors among students. These students are deviating from imposed social restrictions prompted by COVID. Tia also noted that students would perform gestures like wearing their masks incorrectly or increasing physical contact with one another to challenge the notion of the virus.

Molly and Phillip touched on the violence happening at schools. They both explained that fights are an everyday occurrence now. Importantly, they agreed that this happens among high school freshmen and sophomores. Because freshmen and sophomores lacked a proper transition into high school due to the pandemic, they missed necessary components to enhance their maturity by being deprived of a typical high school experience. This aligns with Blad's findings as well, that "the social skills and maturity of students are much less advanced"<sup>37</sup> Morrow and Richardson also align with this as they state, "The social-emotional learning needs of students are magnified due to isolation and lack of peer interaction."<sup>38</sup> As a result, this left teachers and schools unable to address this problem as it took form in more difficult and complex situations, like the stabbing at Molly's school.

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<sup>37</sup> "Educators See Gaps in Kids' Emotional Growth Due to Pandemic," 2.

<sup>38</sup> Morrow and Richardson, *The Future of Education: Teaching Black and Brown Students in a Virtual World*, 7.



Social media has converted bullying from an in-person interaction to a behind-the-scenes occurrence. The interviewees stated that it is not happening in the classroom but it is still happening. Caque said:

I couldn't address it because it wasn't happening in my room and I never saw it. I noticed was that she never wanted to turn on her camera, she never wanted to present, she hardly ever spoke and it made me sad for her because she still felt apprehensive even though she was online, she still felt apprehensive about herself in that class because a lot of those girls were in the class. -Caque, Special Education Teacher

Teachers were not able to address bullying because of online learning. Since it was something that was not seen per se, they could not address this problem.

The fourth issue was that there were further effects on teachers' professional and personal lives. Teachers have been deprived of a social-emotional connection because of the lack of interaction between teachers and coworkers. Because of the pandemic, teacher/coworker relationships have been limited.

Despite how close or familiar they have been with one another, there has been an evident divide in these relationships. David speaks to this as he said, "We care about each other tremendously, but there is a lot of disconnection that is happening."

To add to this, parent interactions have become more of an integral part of education through online learning. Teacher interactions with student's parents have increased due to online learning. It was positive in the sense that it increased communication between parents and teachers. This allowed parents to be more hands-on with their children and their teachers by assisting this process or even to the point that Caque explained about parents making sure that their children were logging in despite their whereabouts. However it was negative in the way that Tia described as

she informed parents about their student cheating. Instead of the parent addressing the matter, they defended their child and the fact that they cheated.

Another aspect of this issue is the personal part. Teachers were already dealing with losing connection, fears of the virus, personal grief, and the loss of loved ones all while they taught. Many of them mentioned that teaching was their way of coping through this tough time or they looked forward to other things going on in their lives, such as David wanting to go to Mozambique and Zimbabwe to conduct a research project.

These were the four main issues pertaining to teachers who worked during the pandemic that I found throughout this research. There were other issues that arose across the interviews that included teachers employing ways of coping with everything going on, additional labor, and the blurring of home and school lines.

I imagined upon entering this research that COVID-19 would have impacted teachers' family lives deeply and that there would have been huge differences in the way that public, private, and charter schools were able to respond to the pandemic. I also thought that the pandemic would have an even bigger impact on teacher retention assuming that COVID-19 would make teachers rethink their professions.

It turned out that the family lives of teachers were impacted but to the point that they were more together than before and that it was difficult for teachers to manage their own children while working from home. Or if they were not working from home, it became a problem of delegating who would stay home with the children. I also was not able to make any final conclusions about the differences that took place between public, private, and charter schools. This would be something that I would love to explore further. And to teacher retention, I found that many of these teachers were grateful to

have their jobs throughout the pandemic, however it has been difficult to get new teachers in positions.

This study deepened my understanding of the intense amount of pressure that teachers are under. It gave me more insight into the relationships between teachers and administrators. It also deepened my understanding of the pandemic's impacts on administrators, students, and even parents.

## **Limitations**

If I were to further this study, I would interview students during and after the pandemic. I feel that there is a lot to learn from that side of the story as well. They have experienced so many changes and still have to adjust to whatever they are told. Understanding how they perceive the pandemic to be is a step closer to finding out how schools should approach student learning and engagement.

For future studies, I would take into consideration that mental health is an important piece to include in any study on teachers. In addition, I would focus on their wellbeing and find ways that will contribute to the betterment of it. Lastly, I would inquire about the ways in which they feel resourced by their schools.

Understanding that this study was conducted from a convenience sample, there were limitations. The duration of the project was a limitation. For this project to be a more in depth study, it would need to have taken place over the course of two to three years and include a bigger sample population.

Another limitation was that most of my participants were white and identified as women. Having a more diverse population could have produced more substantial findings surrounding equity and could have provided a broader range of experiences. The interviewees were also experienced teachers. Having recent teachers talk about their experiences right before the pandemic hit and after would also contribute a different perspective to this research.

## **Conclusion**

This study and my interviewees have allowed me to evaluate wanting to enter the teaching profession. All of the problems that come up within this study would make anyone think twice about pursuing a career in education as it seems like a system that is in desperate need of repair. However, the pandemic has only brought to light many of the problems that already existed.

Yes, COVID-19 swept the world and pushed everyone to their technology, but this does not mean that education is a lost cause. Instead, it is one that can be revived with the hard work and dedication that my interviewees speak to. The work is hard, but so is the world that we live in. Putting in that work will be challenging and at times frustrating. But this should not stop anyone wanting to pursue teaching.

What I learned from this study is that teachers and the work they do have been undervalued throughout this pandemic and even leading into it. I have also learned that teachers and students need to be considered in every aspect of schooling. If any decisions are to be made, they should be geared towards teachers and students.

What the problems in this study imply for the future of teaching is that the profession needs to be reinforced in a multitude of ways. This consists of giving teachers adequate funding and more pay for the work they perform. Allocating funds specifically to teachers will allow them to supply their students with more educational resources and opportunities. In addition to this, school and district funding needs to be a community-based process to ensure involvement and that the needs of the community are met.

Another reinforcement that needs to happen is installing a procedure that will take place if a wave of a virus threatens the health of any community. There should be a method or procedure to deploy in the event that viruses pose a challenge to the physical aspect of schooling.

By addressing bullying or violence in any capacity, schools need to put an emphasis on the services they offer. It is imperative that schools begin to employ more therapists and social counselors. Therapeutic resources need to be available and accessible to everyone that enters a school building.

School officials and teachers need to build a school identity with their students. This will contribute to the sense of community between teachers, students, and administration. Forming this identity will instill pride among students and teachers in addition to making a long-lasting impact on the actual community.

For the field of sociology, this research demands an investigation into the COVID-19 pandemic as it has changed many aspects of society. This study only focuses on the impact that the pandemic had on teachers and schools, but it suggests that many organizations, systems, and even behaviors have been shaped by this virus. This also calls for more research to be done in communities that have experienced high rates of COVID-19 and deaths resulting from it.

Lastly, to any person reading this, turn on your camera! In other words, tune in! This is the best way to combat the issues that have been prompted by the pandemic on your own. Turning on your camera shows that you are willing to engage yourself with education. We will need this engagement as we continue to navigate this changing world.

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## **Appendix A.**

### Interview Protocol:

Here are the specific questions that were asked to each of my participants during the interview process.

How long have you been a teacher? Are you currently teaching?

Where were you working when the pandemic started?

- Grade, subject [if applicable]
- How would you describe the school or district?

What new guidelines/ policy changes have you had to undergo changing to online learning? What changed?

- Spring 2020
- What planning did you do in the summer? Did you have summer classes?
- What was the policy in the fall?
- Spring 2021?

Did you have other changes in your life due to the pandemic, such as losing childcare?

What was a typical day like?

How was this different than before?

Did you have to learn new teaching techniques?

Was there any training? Support: paid training, time? Hire help?

How much time did this take each day?

Longer hours?

How much time throughout the day are you using technology?(on average)

Tell me about a regular class session in person.

Tell me about a regular class session on Zoom.

What were some of the challenges?

How did you deal with them?

How do you think the pandemic affected students' learning?

Their emotional wellbeing?

Their relationships? Bullying?

Did it change how you related to your co-workers?

What other hardships have you experienced relating to COVID-19?

Are you covered by health insurance? If so, does your employer provide it?

- a. If not, approximately what percentage of your income goes to health insurance?

Has the pandemic affected your income?

Do you have other sources of income? What?

Did you have to take on other jobs?

Final demographic questions:

Where are you from?

What is your Education level?

Your Age?

Your race/ethnic identification?

Your gender ?

Do you have kids?

Household composition (for example, married/partnered, single, with kids, roommates)?

**Appendix B.**

## Recruitment Poster

**I NEED TEACHERS!**

**COVID-19:  
TEACHING  
DURING A  
PANDEMIC**

**RESEARCH PROJECT**


*I'm Tahj, a senior at Bard College. For my senior project, I am studying the work experiences of public school teachers (K-12) during the COVID-19 pandemic. I am looking for participants with at least one year of experience teaching before the pandemic. You are not required to be teaching currently. If you or someone you know would like to take part in this research project, please contact me at [tf8344@bard.edu](mailto:tf8344@bard.edu). Looking forward to working with you.*

Must be willing to meet virtually

Flexible interview scheduling

The Consent Form can be accessed here.

SCAN ME



**Appendix C.**

Alternate Recruitment Method Scripts:

**Email recruitment text sample**

Hi I'm Tahj, a senior at Bard College. For my senior project, I am studying the work experiences of public school teachers (K-12) during the COVID-19 pandemic. I'm inviting you to participate in my research project. Please respond to this email confirming that you will take part in being interviewed for my project.

Sincerely,

Tahj Frazier

**Social Media Post Sample**

Hello,

I'm Tahj, a senior at Bard College. For my senior project, I am studying the work experiences of public school teachers (K-12) during the COVID-19 pandemic. I am looking for participants with at least one year of experience teaching before the pandemic. If you or someone you know would like to take part in this research project, please contact me at [tf8344@bard.edu](mailto:tf8344@bard.edu).

Looking forward to working with you.