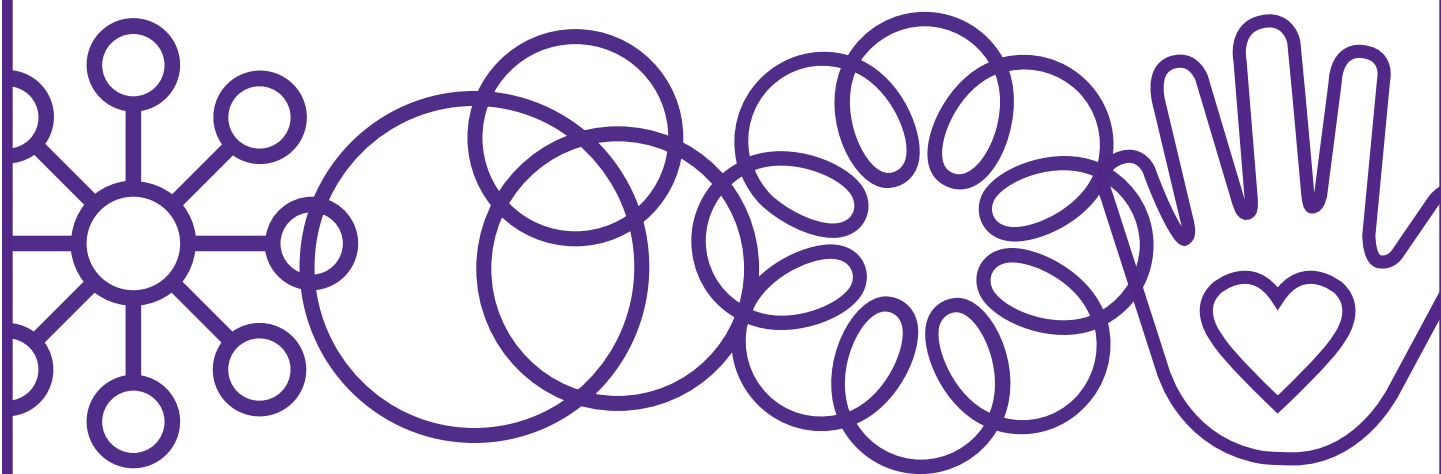




2020 WHITE PAPER

Access, Engagement, and Resilience During COVID-19 Remote Learning



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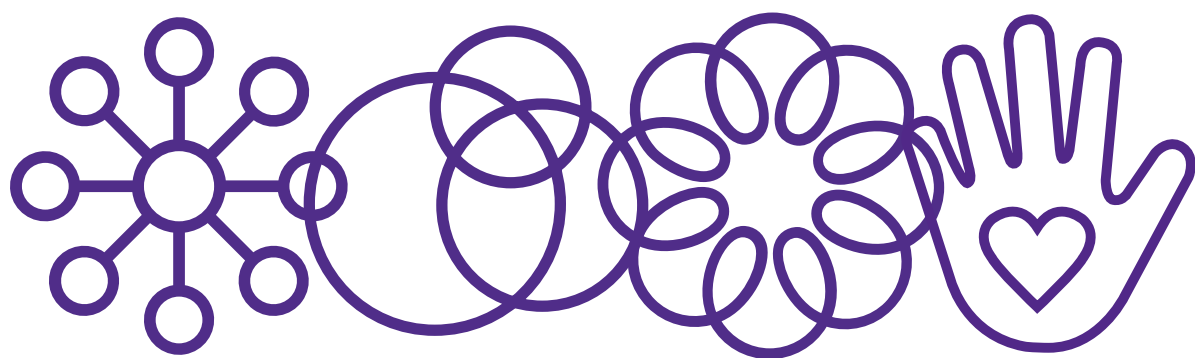
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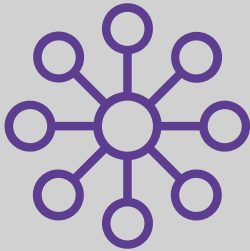
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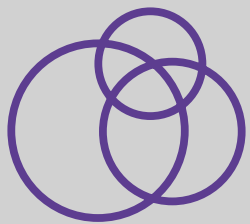
OVERVIEW

This white paper provides data, insight, and recommendations in the areas of educator and student well-being and delivery models. We have organized the document into various sections shown below.



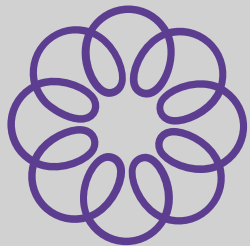
ACCESS

Access to educational technology and online connectivity is a dire need in creating consistent learning opportunities across schools in Kansas.



ENGAGEMENT

Engagement is a key factor for student success.



EDUCATOR SELF-CARE AND RESILIENCY

All elements of educators' health must be at the forefront of all decision-making models.



SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

The social-emotional well-being of students must be at the forefront of all decision-making.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Kansas was the first state to close P-12 schools and move to a continuous learning model in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. A multidisciplinary group of K-State College of Education faculty researchers conducted a survey in May, 2020 to capture the voices and experiences of Kansas teachers, school counselors, and administrators during that time related to technology and broadband access, engagement and educator resiliency and self-care. Survey links were posted on the Remote Learning P-12 platform (<https://remote-learning-p-12.mn.co/feed>) and on the Kansas Educators Facebook group. These open links provided a sample of convenience, with 829 educators from across the state responding to the survey. The findings have implications for school districts, administrators, school counselors, teachers, and students in the coming school year.

As schools begin to make decisions about what the current and critical needs are, three tenets must be addressed for optimal school re-entry: (1) Educator and student well-being, (2) Delivery models and high-quality instruction that are conducive and responsive to varied learning environments, and (3) School operations: Precautionary measures and logistics around COVID infection and contagion. This white paper provides data, insight, and recommendations in the areas of educator and student well-being and delivery models.

Recommendations for Action

It is important to frame our recommendations from the standpoint of continued stressors within homes, anxieties around school, and social unrest. This survey was concluding just as the first days of racial protests began in response to the recent murders of African American men and women across the country, so it did not assess these racial tensions on teachers. Three additional months of identified stressors—prolonged social isolation and minimal interactions, food insecurities, safety concerns, the aforementioned societal unrest, along with many uncertainties and anxieties surrounding the coming school year should be considered along with these findings. To be clear, the needs addressed in this study are representative of the first three months of response, and were likely underreported; those stressors have likely continued, or even compounded, during the summer months for educators, their families, and the students they serve.

ACCESS

Access to educational technology and online connectivity is a dire need in creating consistent learning opportunities across schools in Kansas.



While the closing of schools was a necessary measure to ensure student and community health and well-being, this decision created fundamental challenges and inequities, with far reaching impact on accessible education. This unprecedented change propelled the educational system to place critical demand on broadband. Broadband, or high-speed Internet access, is essential to virtual and remote education, and yet there are many areas of this country and state where high-speed Internet is inaccessible. While schools provided educational technology to students and families, access to the educational opportunities was a significant problem. When

asked how their districts addressed issues of digital access and connectivity for students and families, 35.6% of respondents shared that districts had hotspots at the schools and 16% reported the use of mobile hotspots—some using school buses for Internet delivery. Approximately one-third (32.6%) of educators surveyed indicated the use of personal hotspots for connectivity while the largest percentage of respondents, 68%, reported collaborating with community partners such as churches or other organizations to provide access. Undoubtedly, access to broadband technology impacts today's free, equitable, and appropriate public education.

More than 90% of educators reported using technology to provide instruction in the shift to remote learning. Approximately half of the teachers who reported using technology to support instruction indicated they used live meetings with students or synchronous class time. Nearly two-thirds (65%) used pre-recorded, learn-at-your-own pace instruction, also known as asynchronous instruction. Educators also reported using technology to provide virtual office hours (81%) for their students to ask questions and receive supplemental instruction.

While school districts have worked hard to diminish discrepancies in connectivity, unfortunately this effort does not always translate into in-home accessibility. The access to affordable broadband technology impacts equitable learning and high-quality instruction, and it could be a defining element of “haves and have nots” in today’s pandemic. Access to high-speed broadband becomes an equity and social justice issue. The research team implores schools and stakeholders to find ways to offer educational technology, and high-speed Internet to students to balance and strengthen learning opportunities for students.

Engagement is a multifaceted concept with many moving variables. The continuous learning model, put into action in response to the pandemic, challenged the construct of engagement in education. This study explored engagement in relation to not only student engagement with learning, but also parental and educator engagement. As school districts and educators prepare for the coming academic year, uncertainties still exist with legitimate possibilities that instruction may need to pivot, and stakeholders will need to work fluidly within various delivery models (on-site, hybrid, hyflex, or remote learning). Engagement is a key factor that must be addressed.

ENGAGEMENT

Engagement is a key factor for student success.



Findings in this study showed that too often teachers reported that their students were “engaged” if they attended class Zoom meetings, completed assigned work, or participated in online work. This idea that simply showing up constitutes student engagement in learning is a falsehood. “For learning to ‘stick,’ . . . the fullest range of our imaginative faculties needs to be engaged” (James & Brookfield, 2014, p.4). Learning opportunities must account for student autonomy so that they can learn about things in which they are interested; they must be given the tools and skills required to be competent and successful, while situated in a learning environment that is supportive

and fosters their sense of belonging. Without this, students are simply going through the motions, not truly engaged in their learning. The research team recommends high-quality professional development highlighting effective online teaching strategies, cross-curricular strategies, and supporting resources necessary for teachers to maintain and provide highly-quality instruction regardless of the delivery model.

In relation to educator engagement, a startling dichotomy surfaced in the study. During the continuous learning efforts in the spring of 2020, 49% of educators reported their engagement with their students decreased. They spent less time, energy, and involvement with them. However, 64% of educators reported their engagement with parents increased. Time is a finite resource, and while energy can be renewed it is evident that educator energy stores were taxed during continuous learning models, making it challenging for educators to be all things to all people all the time. Stakeholders need to be aware of this in order to help educators navigate priorities, responsibilities, and engagement needs of students and families in the future.

Parental engagement is more challenging to assess. Respondents felt 60% of parents were classified as engaged to highly engaged, however this finding was based on communication methods that may or may not have been accessible to all families, with the vast majority of communication being done via email. In order for true collaboration between families and schools to occur, basic communication and access to communication must first exist.

It is recommended that schools think creatively about how they connect and collaborate with their students and families. If, and when, schools are asked to alter their delivery model, particularly from in-person to remote, the constant and binding force for engagement will be the established relationships between students, staff, and families.

The needs of all teachers, school counselors, administrators and support staff in Kansas must be an essential consideration in preparation for the 2020-2021 academic year. For six months, March through August, students and educators were without the consistency, predictability, and supports that school provides. Educational professionals in Kansas and across the country are

EDUCATOR SELF-CARE AND RESILIENCY

All elements of educators' health must be at the forefront of all decision-making models.



not immune to the many demands and stressors of this unprecedented time, and their mental health, physical and psychological safety and well-being must be a priority in any plans moving forward.

Educators leaned most heavily on fellow teachers (88%), and educational leadership (70%) for support during the transition to online teaching following school closures. However, close to 30% indicated that they would have liked more support from educational leadership. Data from this survey indicates that now, perhaps more than ever, the need to support and care for our teachers, school

counselors, and administrators, so that they are healthy for themselves, their families, and the many students that they impact and serve is critical. The degree of stress experienced by educators and students during the spring into the fall will vary significantly. For some, the impact on emotional well-being and neurology can be long-lasting, even after a return to the previous status quo (American School Counselor Association & National Association of School Psychologists, 2020).

Having mentally healthy, well supported educators is important for their safety, well-being and longevity. Additionally, healthy educators are necessary to build a safe, healthy, and consistent environment for students. Such efforts also further the development of positive school culture, climate, and morale.

It is recommended that trauma-informed professional development and best practices as well as tiered supports be put in place for both student and staff well-being. The American School Counselor Association and the National Association of School Psychologists (2020) state "Schools should not rely on individuals to create and implement support plans in a patchwork fashion. District-level leadership can ensure a multi-tiered system of support that addresses both emotional and behavioral health along with academic support. Schools and districts must make sure these supports are consistently available to all students and adults in each building."

Likewise, intentional effort should be placed on strong communication, developing a supportive school culture and climate, offering mental health days or embedded breaks within the day, and establishing consistency to help support educators, and in turn, students. Relationships and mental wellness matter.

SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

The social-emotional well-being of students must be at the forefront of all decision-making.



As Kansas educators looked ahead to the 2020-2021 academic year, they reported their highest concern as students' social-emotional well-being. Four out of five survey respondents, or 82%, listed social-emotional well-being as their highest concern. This concern is held constant across all school classifications (1A-6A) and rural, suburban, and urban locations. Across the state of Kansas, regardless of school size or make-up, approximately one in five educators (18.7-22.3%) stated they felt ill prepared or extremely ill prepared in providing social-emotional support to students. The preschool through 12th grade survey respondents collectively see

social-emotional well-being as a top priority, but also identify a gap in their own abilities to address those growing needs.

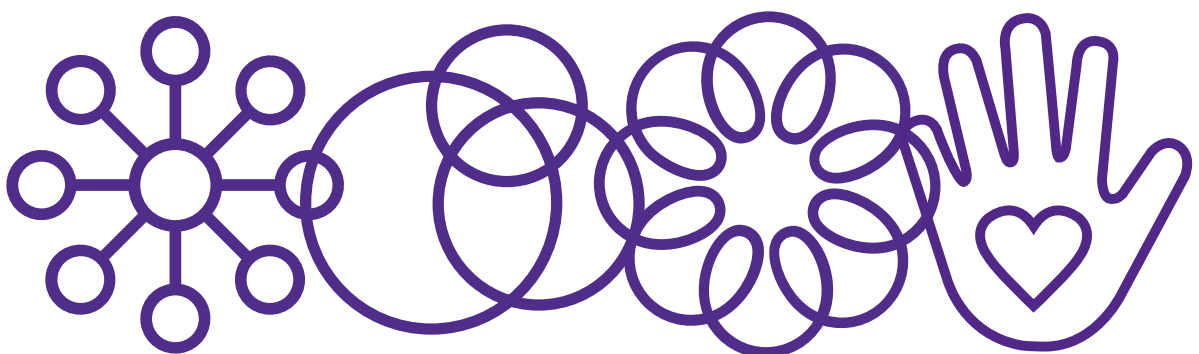
These findings confirm the research team's contention that schools must support the whole child, and additional training, high-quality professional development, and intentional focus on supporting social-emotional skills should be an area of enhancement for teachers. Schools must be trauma-informed. The top priority of social-emotional well-being once school begins should include: (1) developing relationships- recognizing that poor student behavior might not be disobedience, but rather, caused by social

and academic regression, or trauma responses; (2) establishing or reestablishing connections through check-ins, classroom/ morning meetings, psychoeducational lessons; (3) prioritizing informed and targeted professional development; (4) determining community and environmental factors, building and fostering a culture of connection, community and consistency; and (5) providing explicit instruction on social-emotional skill building (American School Counselor Association & National Association of School Psychologists, 2020; School Based Health Alliance, 2020).

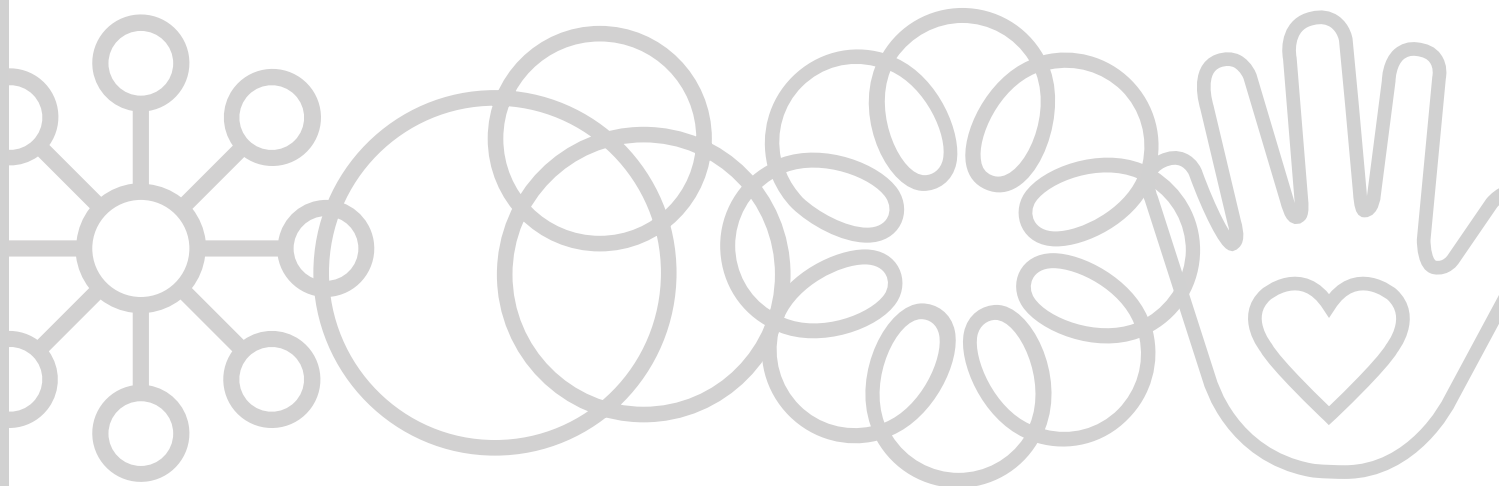
School counselors are uniquely trained in social-emotional well-being, and the research team recommends utilizing the leadership, training, and expertise of school counselors along with the use of a comprehensive school counseling program, to meet this critical need.

Conclusion

Kansas teachers, counselors and administrators did a phenomenal job of quickly adapting under unparalleled circumstances, and should be commended for their work. Their experiences, struggles and fears from the front lines are a critical part of informing the needs and direction of education moving forward. This survey seeks to inform best practices upon school reentry, with the need for: access to broadband, strengthening engagement in diverse learning environments, priority on educator well-being, and focus on students' social-emotional development. Beyond this white paper, the Kansas State University multidisciplinary research team will: (1) continue to complete further analyses from the data (2) develop best practices and advancements for teacher, counselor, and leadership preparation programs, and (3) support those in the field by offering professional development and continuous learning opportunities to meet the aforementioned needs of schools going forward.



Access, Engagement, and Resilience During COVID-19 Remote Learning



Abstract

This white paper gives voice to the Kansas educators who pioneered continuous learning and redefined the delivery of “school” during the COVID-19 pandemic. Kansas teachers, school counselors and administrators did a phenomenal job of quickly adapting under unparalleled circumstances, and they should be commended for their work. Thus, it is important that their experiences, struggles, and fears from the front lines are given credence and voice to inform the needs and direction of education moving forward. This survey seeks to inform best practices upon school reentry, with the need for access to broadband and educational technology, strengthening engagement in diverse learning environments, priority on educator well-being, and focus on students’ social-emotional development.

Introduction

As the flagship teacher preparation program in Kansas, the K-State College of Education’s primary charge is to design and deliver curriculum and instruction that prepares candidates for rural/urban/suburban school districts in ways that allow all students to flourish. Further, advanced programs—in special education, educational leadership and school counseling—draw teachers back to the college for further study and skill advancement. The College of Education’s

nationally recognized programs have produced teachers and education leaders capable of pivoting on a moment’s notice as evidenced by the professional agility demonstrated during the COVID-19 pandemic. For this reason, it is not surprising that Kansas was the first state to announce school closure for the remainder of the school year (Strauss, 2020). As our teachers transitioned to remote learning due to shelter-in-place orders, academic challenges and learning inequities emerged.

A multidisciplinary group of K-State College of Education faculty researchers surveyed more than 800 Kansas educators recently to gather data about what are teachers’ needs as they transitioned to remote learning. The survey asked teachers to self-identify as urban, rural or suburban to describe the remote learning environment for themselves and their students at all ages of learning. Of the 829 respondents, 56% indicated they were educators in a rural setting, while 14% were in urban and 30% were in suburban environments. A summary of preliminary findings is presented here. These findings have implications for school districts, administrators, school counselors, teachers, and students in the coming school year. This data is presented in four distinct sections: (1) access, (2) engagement, (3) educator resiliency and self-care, and (4) social-emotional well-being. A summary highlights our recommendations and areas for future research.



Access

A staple of educational equity for decades, accessibility to learning materials and technologies has increasingly been catching the attention of education stakeholders. Despite the heroic efforts of administrators and

educators, the pandemic has exposed multiple perspectives on what accessibility means, who requires it, and how the responsibility of education agencies is met. Schools have a responsibility to ensure online learning tools are accessible to students with disabilities and they must be compatible with the various forms of assistive technology that students might use to help them learn in accordance with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act. In addition, schools must follow the U.S. Civil rights laws to ensure that no student is discriminated against or denied access to the curriculum based on race, color, or national origin.

Student access to educational experiences during spring 2020 remote learning varied greatly. Teachers had a very short period of time in which to change their mode of instruction. Of course the mode of instruction was often based on the household's ability to access the Internet.

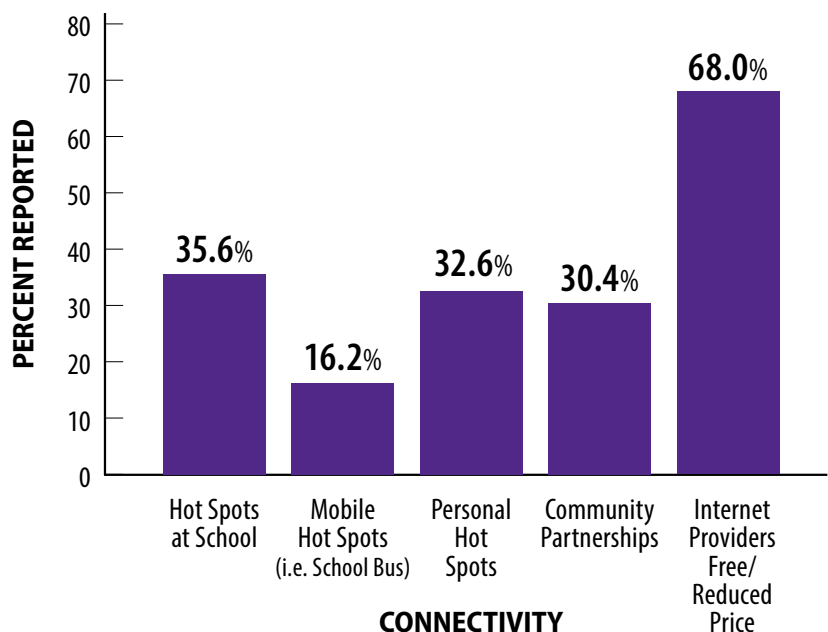
Half the teachers who reported using technology to support instruction indicated they used live meetings with students

or synchronous instruction. Approximately 65% used pre-recorded, learn-at-your-own pace instruction, also known as asynchronous instruction. Educators also reported using technology to provide virtual office hours (81%) for their students to ask questions and receive supplemental instruction.

Although schools provided educational technology to students and families, access to the educational opportunities was a significant problem. Teachers were asked how their districts addressed issues of digital access and connectivity for students and families (Figure 1). Of the respondents, 35.6% reported that districts had hotspots at the schools and 16% reported the use of mobile hotspots—some using school buses for Internet delivery. Approximately one-third (32.6%) of teachers surveyed indicated the use of personal hotspots for connectivity while the largest percentage of respondents, 68%, reported collaborating with community partners such as churches or other organizations to provide access.

When the shutdown was announced, decisions on how to provide instruction and support for students had to be made very quickly. Teachers were asked about their level of involvement in the decision-making process. Only about 17.5% of participants reported being greatly involved in the experience. Another 39.3% of teachers reported being somewhat involved while 42.9% reported no involvement in the process at all.

Figure 1 |
Digital access and connectivity during remote learning





Engagement

Engagement is a multifaceted concept in the field of education. The meaning of engagement varies across the three constituent groups. Teachers, parents, and students demonstrate engagement in different ways. In response to the

COVID-19 pandemic in which schools had to quickly pivot instructionally, engagement was a key concern explored.

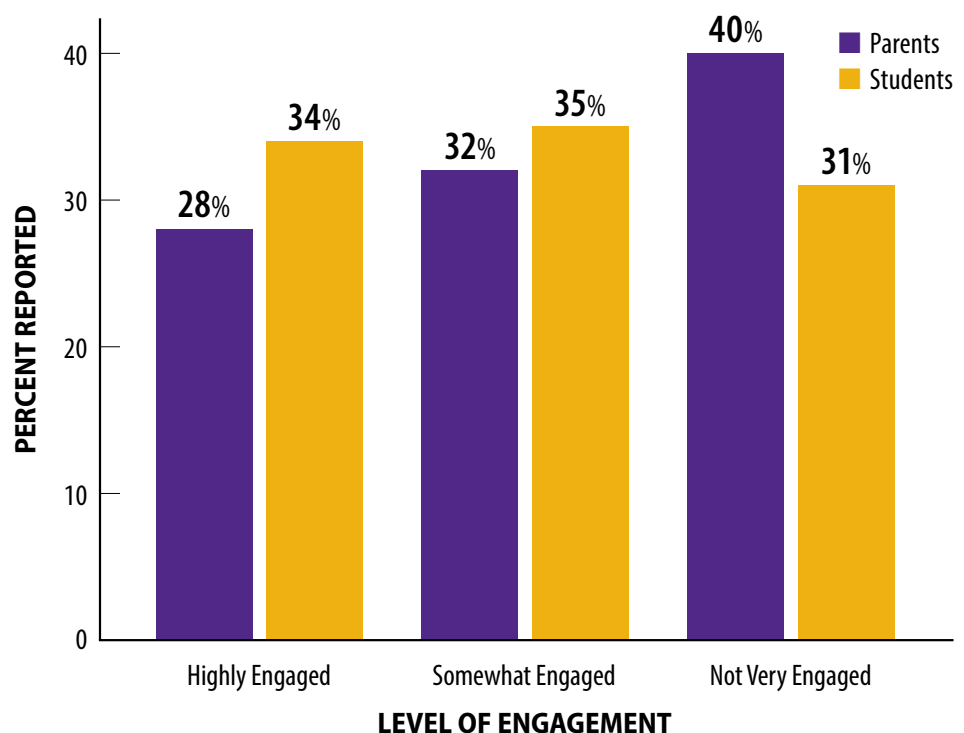
Student engagement focuses on students' active involvement in the learning process (Skinner, Kindermann, & Furrer, 2009). Student engagement can be viewed through the lens of Self-determination Theory (SDT) which says that there are three psychological needs that need to be met in order to have higher levels of motivation and performance; autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Deici & Ryan, 2000). Within education, the concept of engagement can often be used as an agent of motivation and performance (Reeve & Tseng, 2011). Survey data shows that 69% of students were considered highly to somewhat engaged in the learning and 31% were not very engaged (Figure 2).

Rural teachers reported a higher level of engagement with 36% of their students highly engaged, 44% somewhat engaged, and only 25% not very engaged. Urban teachers reported overall lower levels of student engagement,

reporting that 42% of their students were not very engaged. Suburban teachers reported a more even split with 31% of their students being highly engaged, 33% of their students being somewhat engaged, and 34% of their students being not very engaged. When looking at the metrics that teachers used to determine students' level of engagement, student attendance, completion of work, and participation in online meetings were readily reported. This data does not account for student autonomy, their sense of control; competence, feeling capable; or relatability, their sense of belonging. Parent engagement in schools can be defined as parents and school staff working together to support and improve the learning, development, and health of children and adolescents (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2018). During continuous learning efforts in response to the pandemic and change in instructional format, survey participants shared that communication with students and family were conducted via email (25.5%), phone calls (19.3%), text messages (17.0%), apps (14.0%), social media (11.7%), mail (8.8%), or other non-specified formats (3.8%) (Figure 3). A question remains, how many students and families did these communication methods actually reach?

Teacher engagement can be viewed through the lens of a motivational concept in which voluntary personal resources (time, energy, involvement) are directed at a range of professional tasks (Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011).

Figure 2 |
***Engagement since
COVID-19 remote
learning***



Interestingly, 26.59% of teachers reported that their personal engagement with students increased, 25.07% remained static (neither an increase or decrease in engagement), while 48.35% reported their personal engagement with students decreased (Figure 4). Encouragingly, the majority of educators (64.0%) reported an increase in personal engagement with parents during COVID-19, while only 14% decreased their personal engagement with parents, and 22% reported no change.

Former Latin teacher, Teller, now of the magic duo Penn & Teller, was quoted as saying “The first job of a teacher is to make the student fall in love with the subject. That doesn’t have to be done by waving your arms and prancing around the classroom; there’s all sorts of ways to go at it, but no matter what, you are a symbol of the subject in the students’ minds” (Lahey, 2016, p. 1).

Figure 3 |
***Communication
modes with
students
and families***

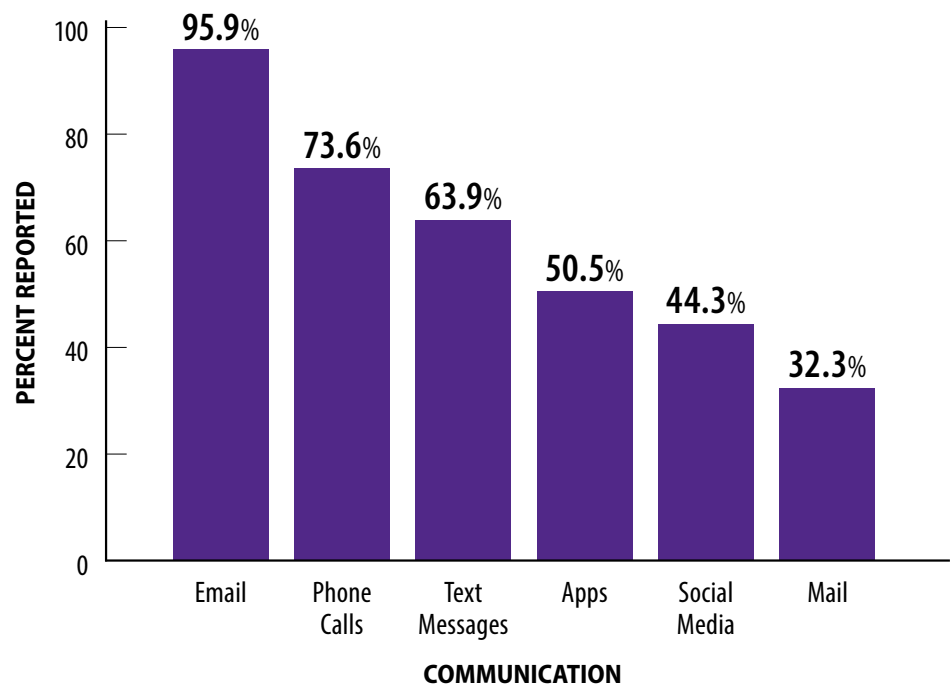
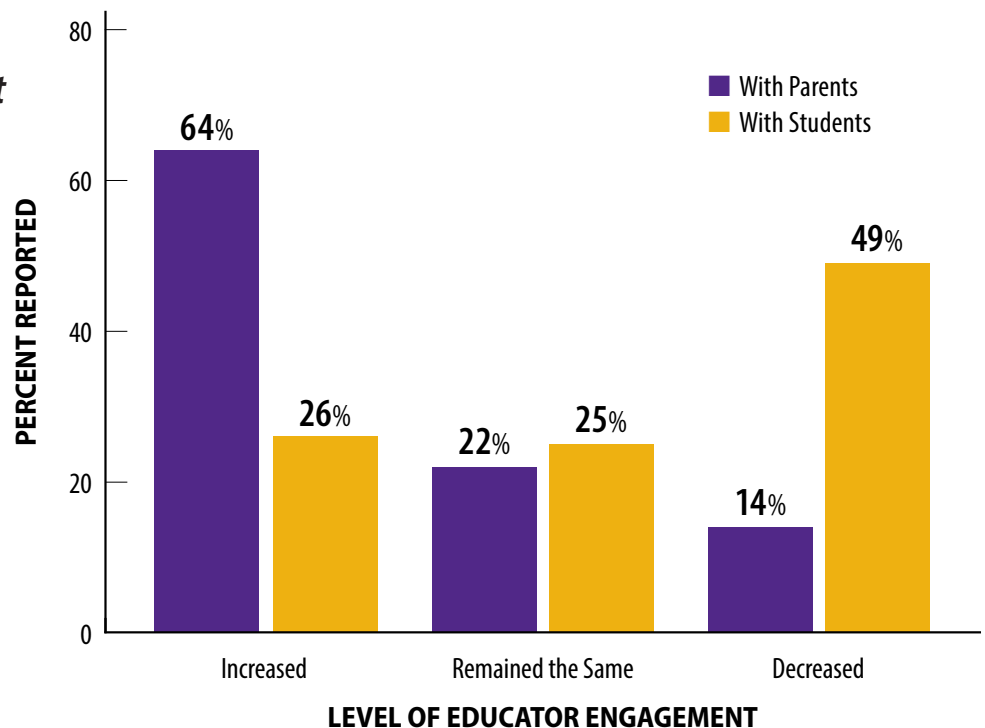


Figure 4 |
Educator engagement





Educator Resiliency and Self-Care

The survey asked questions to assess teachers' levels of resilience. The

American Psychological Association (2020) defines resilience as "the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats or significant sources of stress." The sudden move to online classes in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic created a new, unexpected, and stressful situation. On the positive side, about 40% of teachers indicated that their personal resilience has either increased or greatly increased since COVID-19 (Figure 5). About 40% indicated no change, and less than 15% indicated that it was decreased or greatly decreased. Despite this, close to 30% responded that their self-care was decreased or greatly decreased.

Educators leaned most heavily on fellow teachers (88%), and educational leadership (70%) for support during the transition to online teaching following school closures (Figure 6). However, close to 30% indicated that they would have liked more support from educational leadership. Ainsworth and Oldfield (2019) argue that "responsibility for adaptation should not be placed solely at the feet of teachers. While there might be a place for interventions/ training designed to boost teachers' ability to cope within

the workplace, equal attention (at the very least) needs to be paid to the nature of the conditions which teachers are expected to work in."

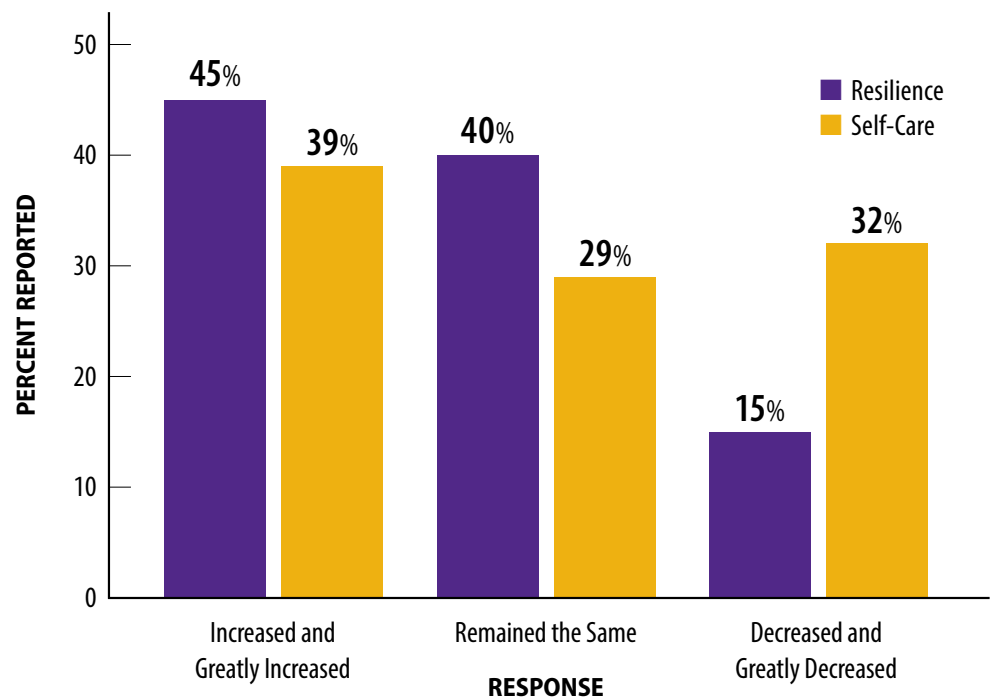
One bright spot in the data is that when educators rated their own self-care during the continuous learning experience, 37-44% of surveyed educators reported their self-care increased or greatly increased during this time. This is a favorable statistic and the research team hopes that the educators surveyed will continue to practice and increase self-care, and will continue to be supported in those efforts.

Stressors

Educators faced a multitude of stressors beyond the new teaching environment prompted by COVID-19. Atop the already strenuous demands of remote teaching, approximately two-thirds of suburban and urban teachers were simultaneously serving as caregivers to either their children, adults, or the elderly (Figure 7). For rural educators, this number rose to 4 in 5, or 79%, who were balancing teaching duties with caregiving.

Nearly half of all respondents, or 46%, reported they had an additional household member deemed as an essential worker who had to work outside the home. That number rose to nearly three-fourths (73%) in rural communities. In suburban districts, 14% of educator households faced the challenge of unemployment for another household member. These figures inform school districts about family and household stressors about which little was known, until now.

Figure 5 |
Educator perceptions of resilience and self-care



The data from this survey highlights that educators are facing situations in their homes that can, and do, impact their ability to meet the social-emotional needs of their students. Many respondents faced safety and health concerns in their own households. It is noteworthy that over half (56%) of the educators across the state of Kansas expressed mental health concerns in their household. Nearly 20% of responding educators faced food insecurity and 36% experienced some

economic insecurity. Additionally, 18% of respondents reported they experienced domestic violence or personal safety issues in their home. By design, educators are often nimble and adaptive, but while Kansas educators were experiencing the challenges of continuous learning, they were often taxed with additional stressors. Indeed Kansas' teachers, counselors, and administrators are strained.

Figure 6 |
Educator professional support networks

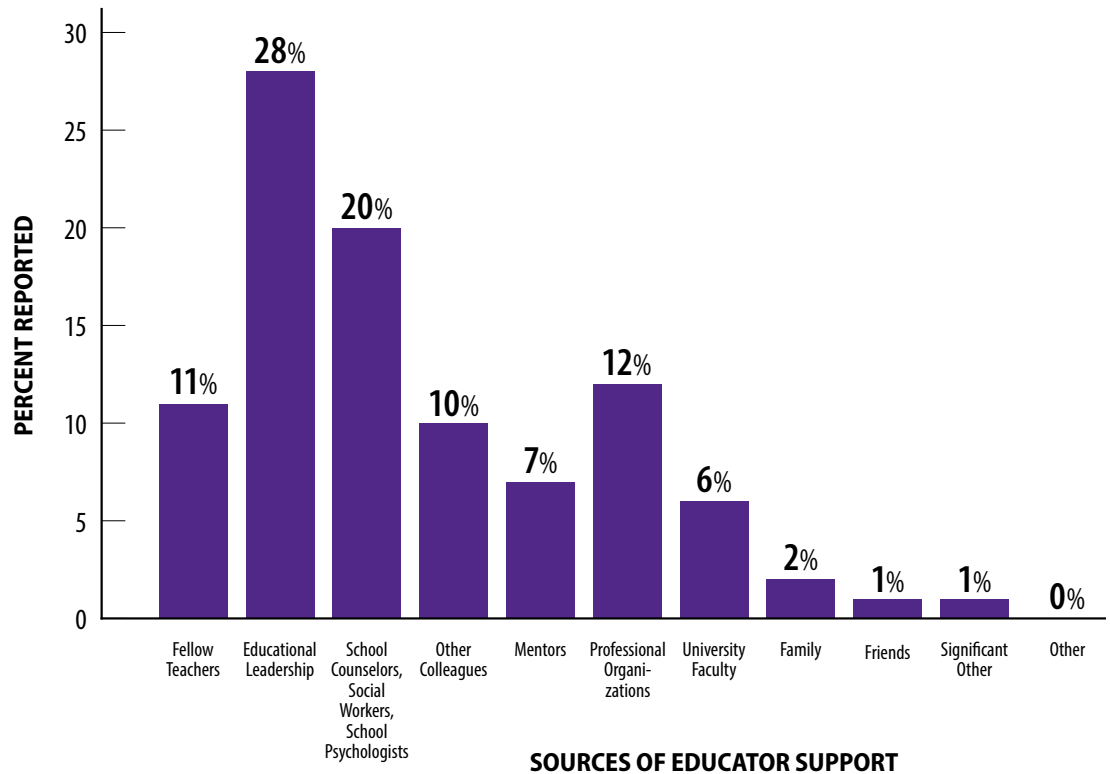
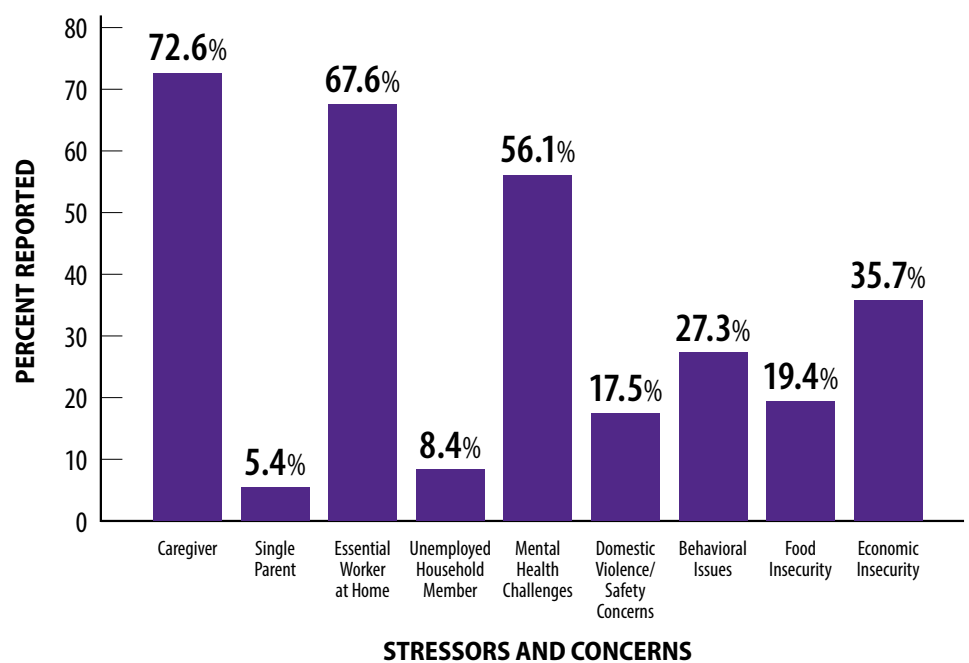


Figure 7 |
Additional educator stressors and concerns





Social-Emotional Well-Being

Looking ahead to the academic year, Kansas educators reported their highest concern for 2020-2021 as students' social-emotional well-being (Figure 8).

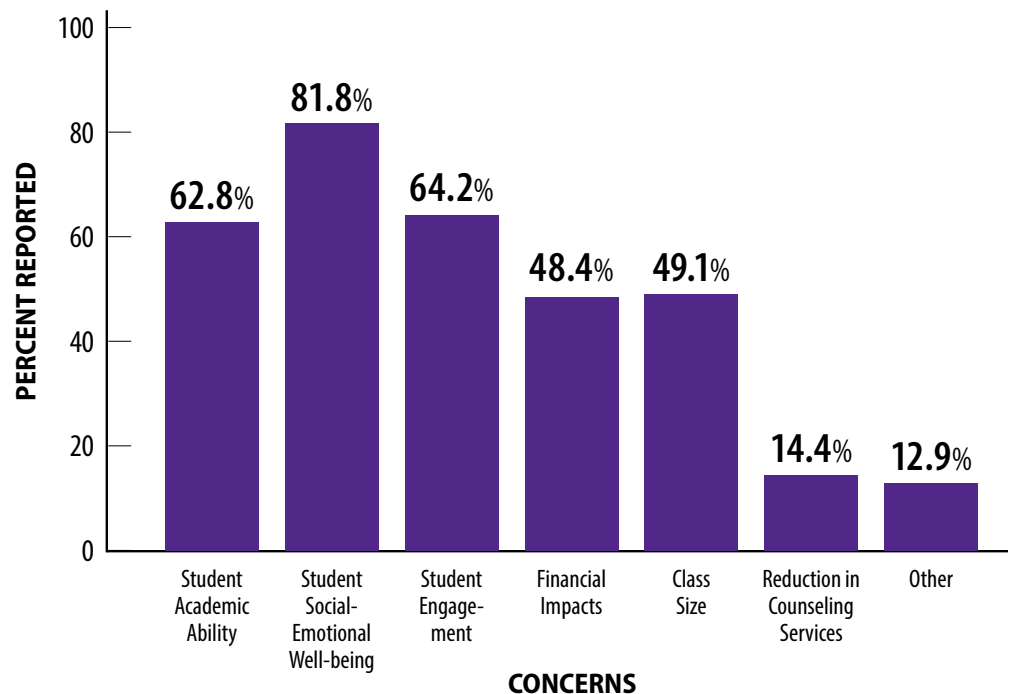
In fact, four out of five survey respondents, or 82%, listed social-emotional well-being as their highest concern; this concern superseded such items as academic concerns, student engagement, and financial considerations. Concern for students' well-being held constant across all school classifications (1A-6A) in Kansas, and across rural, suburban and urban locations. Interestingly, regardless of school size or make-up, approximately 1 in 5 educators (18.7-22.3%) stated they felt ill prepared or extremely ill prepared in providing social-emotional support to students.

For years, teachers have been skillfully trained in academic content and delivery, but with little to no focus on social-emotional development. However, the needs of today's students and society have been ever-growing. Schools have become fundamental to child and adolescent

development, academic instruction, and social and emotional skills, and schools also provide other benefits including food, safety, consistency, etc. Today's educators recognize that if they want to truly impact lives, they must also be attending to the personal, social, emotional, and developmental needs of the student (Lane, 2018; American Academy of Pediatrics, 2020).

Kansas educators and leaders have long known that addressing the social-emotional needs of students must be a consideration. In alignment with a broader look at academic success, the Kansas Department of Education (KSDE) developed the Kansans Can initiative and new accreditation requirements for schools in the state of Kansas. The new accreditation model, Kansas Education Systems Accreditation (KESA), uses the ideas of relationships, relevance, responsive culture, rigor, and results as key components of success. In fact, KESA requires schools to measure social-emotional growth locally.

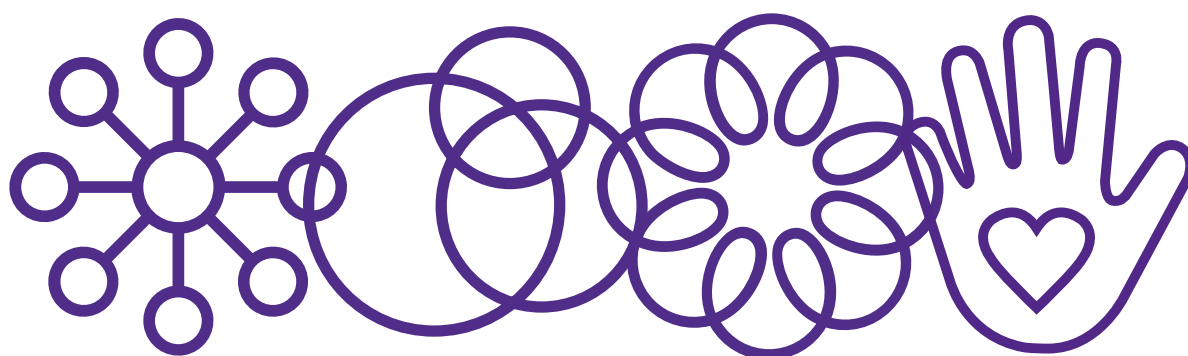
Figure 8 |
Educator concerns



Given the growing need for social-emotional training and support prior to the pandemic, the current social-emotional needs in our schools and in our Kansas communities will likely be even greater as students and educators return to school. According to the American Academy of Pediatrics (2020),

Students may have difficulty with the social and emotional aspects of transitioning back into the school setting, especially given the unfamiliarity with the changed school environment and experience. Special considerations are warranted for students with pre-existing anxiety, depression, and other mental health conditions; children with a prior history of trauma or loss; and students in early education who may be particularly sensitive to disruptions in routine and caregivers. Students facing other challenges, such as poverty, food insecurity, and homelessness, and those subjected to ongoing racial inequities may benefit from additional support and assistance.

This survey indicates that educators recognize the social-emotional needs of students, but also acknowledge their own need for more training in addressing those needs. Kansas educators need the training, skills, and capacity to develop meaningful relationships and connections with students who are experiencing a host of circumstances.



Recommendations for Action

Kansas was the first state to close P-12 schools and move to a continuous learning model in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This survey sought to capture the voices and experiences of Kansas teachers, school counselors, and administrators during that time.

To provide some additional context to the researchers' recommendations, it should be noted that an additional layer of stress has been added to educators since this survey was made available. This survey was released just as the first days of racial protests began in response to the recent murders of African American men and women across the country, so it did not assess these racial stressors on teachers. The protests continue across the country, including within and across the state of Kansas. Sadly, teachers across the state will return to their classrooms where racial stressors and tensions remain within our schools and all our Kansas communities.

The educator stressors reported here— mental health issues, safety, and food and economic insecurities— intersect with racial tensions to create new mental health stressors for our teachers and educators that have not been seen in decades since Kansas schools were desegregated following the Brown v. Topeka Board of Education decision. Indeed, educators are shouldering many societal issues and anxieties and are found at the crux.

This survey was offered in May, roughly three months into the continuous learning model. The reader must note that three additional months of identified stressors— prolonged social isolation and minimal interactions, food insecurities, safety concerns, the aforementioned societal unrest, along with many uncertainties and anxieties surrounding the coming school year should be considered along with these findings. To be clear, the needs addressed in this study are representative of the first three months of response, and were likely underreported. Those stressors have likely continued, or even compounded, during the summer months for educators, their families, and the students they serve. We urge school districts to frame our recommendations from the standpoint of continued stressors within homes, anxieties around school, social unrest, and racial tensions.

As schools begin to make decisions about what the current and critical needs are, three tenets must be addressed for optimal school re-entry: (1) Educator and student

well-being, (2) Delivery models and high-quality instruction that are conducive and responsive to varied learning environments, and (3) School operations: Precautionary measures and logistics around COVID infection and contagion. This white paper provides data, insight, and recommendations in the areas of educator and student well-being and delivery models.

Given the findings of this Kansas Educator survey, the Kansas State University College of Education Research group recommends the following priorities regarding the 2020-2021 academic year:



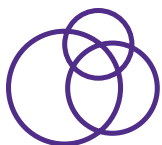
1. ACCESS

Access to educational technology and online connectivity is a dire need in creating consistent learning opportunities across schools in Kansas.

While the closing of schools was a necessary measure to ensure student and community health and well-being, this decision provided fundamental challenges and inequities, with far reaching impact on accessible education. This unprecedented change propelled the educational system to place critical demand on broadband. Broadband, or high-speed Internet access, is essential to virtual and remote education, and yet there are many areas of this country and state where high-speed Internet is inaccessible. Undoubtedly, access to broadband and educational technology impacts today's free, equitable and appropriate public education.

While school districts have worked hard to diminish discrepancies in connectivity, unfortunately this effort does not always translate into in-home accessibility. Access to affordable broadband technology impacts equitable learning, high-quality instruction, and could be a defining element of "haves and have nots" in today's pandemic. While there are many critical items to consider at this time, the implications of limited broadband have significant consequences (Lane, 2020).

Access to high-speed broadband becomes an equity and social justice issue. The research team implores schools and stakeholders to find ways to offer educational technology and high-speed Internet to students to balance and strengthen learning opportunities.



2. ENGAGEMENT

Engagement is a key factor for student success.

Engagement is a multifaceted concept with many moving variables. The continuous learning model, put into action in response to the pandemic, challenged the construct of engagement in education. This study explored engagement in relation to not only student engagement with learning, but also parental and educator engagement. As school districts and educators prepare for the coming academic year, uncertainties still exist with legitimate possibilities that instruction may need to pivot, and stakeholders will need to work fluidly within various delivery models (on-site, hybrid, hyflex, or remote learning).

Findings in this study showed that too often teachers reported that their students were “engaged” if they attended class Zoom meetings, completed assigned work, or participated in online work. This idea that simply showing up constitutes student engagement in learning is a falsehood. “For learning to ‘stick,’ . . . the fullest range of our imaginative faculties needs to be engaged” (James & Brookfield, 2014, p.4). Learning opportunities must account for student autonomy so that they can learn about things they are interested; they must be given the tools and skills required to be competent and successful, while situated in a learning environment that is supportive and fosters their sense of belonging. Without this, students are simply going through the motions, not truly engaged in their learning. The research team recommends the creation of high-quality professional development highlighting effective online teaching strategies, cross-curricular strategies, and supporting resources necessary for teachers to maintain and provide highly quality instruction regardless of the delivery model.

In looking at the results of the study in relation to educator engagement, a startling dichotomy surfaced. During the continuous learning efforts in the spring of 2020, 49% of educators reported their engagement with their students decreased. They spent less time, energy, and involvement with them. However, 64% of educators reported their engagement with parents increased. Time is a finite resource, and while energy can be renewed it is evident that educator energy stores were taxed during continuous learning models. These constraints made it challenging for educators to be all things to all people all the time. Stakeholders need to be aware of this in order to help educators navigate priorities,

responsibilities, and engagement needs of students and families in the future.

Parental engagement is more challenging to assess. Respondents felt 60% of parents were classified as engaged to highly engaged, however this finding was based on communication methods that may or may not have been accessible to all families with the vast majority of communication being done via email. In order for true collaboration between families and schools to occur, basic communication and access to communication must first exist.

It is recommended that schools think creatively about how they connect and collaborate with their students and families. If, and when, schools are asked to alter their delivery model, particularly from in-person to remote, the constant and binding force for engagement will be the established relationships between students, staff, and families.



3. EDUCATOR SELF-CARE AND RESILIENCY

All elements of educators’ health must be at the forefront of all decision-making models.

The needs of all teachers, school counselors, administrators and support staff in Kansas must be an essential consideration in preparation for the 2020-2021 academic year. Simply stated, for six months, March through August, students and educators were without the consistency, predictability, and supports that school provides. Additional stressors impacted learning and households across the state and country. Thus, there is the potential for higher rates of certain adverse childhood experiences (ACES) and/or stressors during school closures, and underreporting of those stressors, that may put students [and educators] at higher risk of trauma (American School Counselor Association & National Association of School Psychologists, 2020).

Educational professionals in Kansas and across the country are not immune to the many demands and stressors of this unprecedented time, and their mental health, physical and psychological safety and well-being must be a priority in any plans moving forward.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (2020) suggests:
In the same way that students are going to need support to effectively return to school and to be

prepared to be ready to process the information they are being taught, teachers cannot be expected to be successful at teaching children without having their mental health needs supported.

Data from this survey indicates that now, perhaps more than ever, it is critical to support and care for our teachers, school counselors, and administrators, so that they are healthy for themselves, their families, and the many students that they impact and serve. The degree of stress experienced by [educators and] students during the spring into the fall will vary significantly. For some, the impact on emotional well-being and neurology can be long-lasting, even after a return to the previous status quo (American School Counselor Association & National Association of School Psychologists, 2020).

Having mentally healthy, well supported educators is important for the safety, well-being and longevity of educators. Additionally, healthy educators are necessary to build a safe, healthy, and consistent environment for students. Such efforts also further the development of positive school culture, climate, and morale.

It is recommended that trauma-informed professional development and best practices as well as tiered supports be put in place for both student and staff well-being. The American School Counselor Association and the National Association of School Psychologists (2020) argue:

Schools should not rely on individuals to create and implement support plans in a patchwork fashion. District-level leadership can ensure a multi-tiered system of support that addresses both emotional and behavioral health along with academic support. Schools and districts must make sure these supports are consistently available to all students and adults in each building.

Likewise, intentional effort should be placed on creating strong communication, developing a supportive school culture and climate, offering mental health days or embedded breaks within the day, and establishing consistency to help support educators, and in turn, students. Relationships and mental wellness matter.



4. SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

The social-emotional well-being of students must be at the forefront of all decision-making.

These findings confirm the research team's contention that schools must support the whole child, and additional training, high-quality professional development, and intentional focus on supporting social-emotional skills should be an area of enhancement for teachers. Schools must be trauma-informed. The top priority of social-emotional well-being once school begins should include: (1) developing relationships- recognizing that poor student behavior might not be disobedience, but rather, caused by social and academic regression, or trauma responses (2) establishing or reestablishing connections through check-ins, classroom/ morning meetings, and psychoeducational lessons, (3) prioritizing informed and targeted professional development, (4) determining community and environmental factors, building and fostering a culture of connection, community and consistency, and (5) providing explicit instruction on social-emotional skill building (American School Counselor Association & National Association of School Psychologists, 2020; Kaiser Permanente, 2020).

School counselors are uniquely trained in social-emotional well-being, and the research team recommends utilizing the leadership, training, and expertise of school counselors along with the use of a comprehensive school counseling program, to meet this critical need.

CONCLUSION

This white paper gives voice to the Kansas Educators who pioneered continuous learning and redefined the delivery of "school" during the COVID-19 pandemic and shelter-in-place orders. Kansas teachers, school counselors, and administrators did a phenomenal job of quickly adapting under unparalleled circumstances, and they should be commended for their work. Thus, it is important that their experiences, struggles, and fears from the front lines are given credence and voice to inform the needs and direction of education moving forward. This survey seeks to inform best practices upon school reentry, with the need for access to broadband, strengthening engagement in diverse learning environments, priority on educator well-being, and focus on students' social-emotional development. Beyond this white paper, the Kansas State University multidisciplinary research

team will: (1) continue to complete further analyses from the data; (2) develop best practices and advancements for teacher, counselor, and leadership preparation programs; and (3) support those in the field by offering professional development and continuous learning opportunities to meet the aforementioned needs of schools going forward.

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