



4-21-2023

The Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Online Learning on Teacher Morale and What that Means for Students: A Systematic Review of the Literature

Madison Thomas
Western Michigan University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/honors_theses



Part of the Elementary and Middle and Secondary Education Administration Commons, and the Special Education Administration Commons

Recommended Citation

Thomas, Madison, "The Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Online Learning on Teacher Morale and What that Means for Students: A Systematic Review of the Literature" (2023). *Honors Theses*. 3701. https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/honors_theses/3701

This Honors Thesis-Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by the Lee Honors College at ScholarWorks at WMU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at WMU. For more information, please contact wmu-scholarworks@wmich.edu.



**The Effects of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Online Learning on Teacher Morale and
What That Means for Students: A Systematic Review of the Literature**

Madison L. Thomas

Western Michigan University

Presented at Western Michigan University

A Lee Honors College Undergraduate Thesis

2023

Dr. Sarah Summy, Honors Thesis Committee Chairperson

Dr. Katherine LaLonde, Honors Thesis Committee Member

Dr. Rena VanDerwall, Honors Thesis Committee Member

Abstract

Teacher shortages have occurred in the United States over the past ten years and continue to rise (Darling-Hammond & Podolsky, 2019). Teacher shortages have continued to rise at an increased rate since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since 2020, multiple studies have addressed teacher morale and retention in the wake of a global pandemic (Matthews et al., 2022; Bill et al., 2022). Through a systematic review of the literature from the last three years, this review explored the factors most affecting teacher morale and retention following the pandemic. The keywords used within the literature review were: teacher morale, teacher retention, COVID-19 and teachers, and online learning and teacher morale. Specifically explored were what school districts are currently doing to combat teacher turnover and increase retention.

Keywords: Teacher Morale, Teacher Retention, COVID-19, Online Learning, K-12 Education, Michigan

Introduction/Purpose

In the spring of 2020, COVID-19 was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO), and no one knew just how much the world of education and the condition of educators would change (Katella, 2021). White (2022) found that over 70% of educators in Michigan were unsatisfied with their working conditions. From fall 2021 to fall 2022, the percentage of educators in Michigan who said they wanted to leave the field of education grew from 11% in 2021 to 20%. A significant contributing factor stated by educators was that teacher shortages were a leading cause of their stress at work, resulting in them wanting to leave the field. The 2020-2021 Michigan school year had 63 more vacancies than the previous school year and 1,502 more temporary positions filled by not fully accredited individuals (MDE, 2022). This systematic literature review explored the factors most affecting teacher morale and retention following the pandemic as compared to just prior the pandemic in Michigan. The definition of Morale in this study aligns with the Merriam-Webster definition which is “the mental and emotional condition (as of enthusiasm, confidence, or loyalty) of an individual or group with regard to the function or tasks at hand”. This literature review attempted to answer the following research questions following a nine-step process to look deeper into this connection and the lasting effects on the field of education in Michigan.

R1: Through a systematic review of the literature using a nine-step process what were the effects of COVID-19 on teacher morale in the K-12 setting?

R2: How did teacher morale affect K-12 students?

R3: How has the State of Michigan changed what they are doing to support educators after the pandemic?

Methods

The methods and process of conducting this systematic literature review included a nine-step process. All steps were derived from the resources used to research how to conduct systematic research (The Iowa State University Library Guide *How to Conduct a literature review: A Guide for graduate students: Systematic Reviews*, The Charles Sturt University Library Guide *Literature Review: Systematic Literature reviews*, and Margaret J. Foster, Professor at Texas A&M University and Systematic Reviews Coordinator, *Introduction to Review Methods* presentation).

Step 1. Define the research questions for the study.

Step 2. Explore how to review the literature systematically.

Step 3. Create a research timeline and systematic review tracking document to analyze all articles in the three selected databases.

Step 4. Search the literature for any similar systematic reviews that exist.

Step 5. Record possible search terms and their synonyms.

Step 5. Select the three databases to use in the review.

Step 6. Use the search terms (or their synonyms) from each database to find articles that meet the criteria.

Step 7. Filter articles through the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Step 8. Extract all relevant information from the articles and record themes.

Step 9. Analyze the data.

Introduction of Reviewed Literature

Eight peer-reviewed articles met the criteria for this study to the research question investigating the correlational relationship between the COVID-19 pandemic and teacher morale.

The following chart shows the articles used in this review (see *Table 1*).

Table 1: Reviewed Articles

Authors	Year	Title	Database
Yunjo An, Regina Kaplan-Rakowski, Junhe Yang, Jenna Conan, Widad Kinard, and LeaAnne Daugherty	2021	<i>Examining K-12 Teachers' Feelings, Experiences, and Perspectives Regarding Online Teaching During the Early Stages of the COVID-19 Pandemic</i>	ProQuest (PsycINFO)
Docia L. Demmin, Steven M. Silverstein, and Tracey J. Shors	2022	<i>Mental and Physical Training with Meditation and Aerobic Exercise Improved Mental Health and Well-Being in Teachers During the COVID-19 Pandemic</i>	ProQuest (PsycINFO)
Russell A. Matthews, Julie H. Wayne, Claire Smith, Wendy J. Casper, Yi-Ren Wang, and Jessica Streit	2022	<i>Resign or Carry-On? District and Principal Leadership as Drivers of Change in Teacher Turnover Intentions During the COVID-19 Crisis; A Latent Growth Model Examination</i>	ProQuest (PsycINFO)
Matthew A. Kraft, Nicole S. Simon, and Melissa Arnold Lyon	2021	<i>Sustaining a Sense of Success: The Protective Role of Teacher Working Conditions During the COVID-19 Pandemic</i>	ERIC (EBSCOhost)
Keith C. Herman, James Sebastian, Wend M. Reinke, and Francis L. Huang	2021	<i>Individual and School Predictors of Teacher Stress, Coping, and Wellness During the COVID-19 Pandemic</i>	ERIC (EBSCOhost)
Karye Wells and Elizabeth Foster	2022	<i>Implementing Strength-Based Coaching to Support Teachers During COVID-19</i>	ERIC (EBSCOhost)

Annie A. Hemphill and Bradley D. Marianno	2021	<i>Investigating How Teachers' Unions Handled COVID-19 and Transitions to Online Learning</i>	Scopus
Kayla Bill, Amanda Bowsher, Betty Malen, Jennifer King Rice, Jason E. Saltmarsh	2022	<i>Did COVID-19 Make Teacher Recruitment Worse?</i>	Scopus

Each study was conducted/written in 2020-2023, in the United States of America, in K-12 public schools, in English, and relevant to the research question. The only article not conducted in a K-12 public school was the study by Bill et al. (2022). Although the study was conducted in higher education, it related to college students' attitudes toward education as a profession.

This systematic review of the literature was conducted because while there are reviews that draw conclusions about teacher well-being, no such studies connect these to Michigan and students. This review aimed to investigate the connection between teacher morale during/post COVID and how that has been handled in Michigan and connecting that to students. It was also essential to look into how to support teachers during these times, as supported by literature.

Step 1. Through a systematic literature review, the research questions for this study were defined.

R1: Through a systematic review of the literature using a nine-step process what were the effects of COVID-19 on teacher morale in the K-12 setting?

R2: How did teacher morale affect K-12 students?

R3: How has the State of Michigan changed what they are doing to support educators after the pandemic?

Step 2. How to review the literature systematically was researched. The thesis committee provided resources and articles to review before continuing the study. Those resources were;

- The Iowa State University Library Guide *How to Conduct a literature review: A Guide for graduate students: Systematic Reviews*.
- The Charles Sturt University Library Guide *Literature review: Systematic literature reviews*.
- Margaret J. Foster, Professor at Texas A&M University and Systematic Reviews Coordinator, *Introduction to Review Methods* presentation.

Step 3. A research timeline and systematic review tracking document to analyze all articles in the three selected databases were created. Databases: Scopus, ERIC, and ProQuest. All databases were found by using the Western Michigan University Library website and searching the available databases under the subject of Education and Human Development. Keywords: Teacher Morale, Teacher Retention, COVID-19, Online Learning, K-12 E the included articles.

Step 4. The literature was searched for any similar systematic reviews that existed. While some studies reviewed literature and drew conclusions, no such reviews connected these topics. With this in mind, the systematic review continued.

Step 5. Possible search terms and their synonyms were recorded. Below is the table of search terms and their synonyms (see *Table 2*).

Table 2: Search Terms and Synonyms

Search Terms	Synonyms
Teacher Morale	Teacher: Educator
	Morale: Motivation, Attrition

Teacher Retention	Teacher: Educator Retention: Turnover
COVID-19 and Teachers	COVID-19: COVID, Coronavirus,
	Teachers: Educators
Online Learning and Teacher Morale	Online Learning: Remote Learning, Distance Learning
	Teacher: Educator
	Morale: Motivation

Step 5. The three databases used in the review were selected. The selected databases were Scopus, ERIC (EBSCOhost), and ProQuest (PsycINFO). Through refining, the articles were all in English, peer-reviewed, and conducted in the United States.

Step 6. The search terms (and their synonyms) from each database were used to find articles that meet the criteria.

Step 7. Then the articles were filtered through the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Listed in the chart below are those criteria (see *Table 3*).

Table 3: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Conducted/Written 2020-2023	Conducted before 2020
In the United States of America	In private schools.
In K-12 public schools	In childcare settings not a part of a K-12 school
In English	In higher education, outside of K-12 schools
Relevant to the research question	Not written in English

Step 8. All relevant information was extracted from the articles and recorded for analysis and comparison. Once included studies were determined, there were eight studies. Two included studies were from Scopus, three were from ERIC (EBSCOhost), and three were from ProQuest (PsycINFO).

Step 9. After all relevant information was extracted, it was reviewed and analyzed. The analysis looked into similarities and commonalities between the articles and differences in results.

Summary of Results

Following the nine-step process outlined above, there were a total of eight peer-reviewed articles that met the review criteria. Through those articles, several themes were found. Themes found included: the transition to online learning, teacher mental health and wellbeing, teacher recruitment, teacher's unions and the connection to teacher morale, and interventions used to support teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic and online learning (An et al. (2021); Demmin Silverstein & Shoes (2022); Matthews et al. (2022); Kraft et al. (2021); Wells & Foster (2022); Hemphill & Marianno (2021); Bill et al. (2022)). This systematic literature review compared the factors most affecting teacher morale and retention following the pandemic from the above eight studies. The review ended by comparing themes of several promising Michigan-based interventions and how the findings could affect students.

Common Themes in Systematic Literature Review

1. The Transition to Online Learning

Starting in March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic caused schools throughout the United States to close. This sudden change forced schools and teachers to change direction and move into fully remote instruction without preparation, warning, or specialized training. This section discusses the transition to online learning and how it affected teachers.

The pandemic upended the traditional approaches to education used in the United States (Kraft, Simon, & Lyon, 2021). There were many struggles initially faced by teachers when starting to teach remotely. Teachers stated that less student engagement, finding a new balance between their professional responsibilities and those at home, and a lack of familiarity with using the technology needed to teach remotely made this transition especially difficult (Kraft, Simon, & Lyon, 2021). Teachers also stated concerns for students without access to the necessary technology and general concern for their overall well-being (An et al., 2021).

An et al. (2021) surveyed 107 teachers from 25 states in the United States and found that 60% of the population found online teaching stressful, while 19% preferred teaching in person in the classroom. Researchers found that 80% (a majority) of their participants felt prepared for online teaching, and almost 70% felt confident. Their findings suggested high levels of self-efficacy among teachers, with teachers saying they switched to online teaching without issue. However, the study neglected to look into how educators' well-being is related to their sense of self-efficacy.

This section shows that current literature regarding the transition to online learning during the pandemic suddenly caused teachers to face new work and home challenges. Many people may think, many educators felt confident in their ability to teach online using available resources. Given these facts, it is essential to consider what other factors may have made this time more difficult for educators.

2. Teacher Mental Health and Well-Being

Many studies state that one of the most significant negative impacts on educators due to the COVID-19 pandemic was their sense of personal/professional success and job satisfaction. The pandemic increased preexisting mental health outcomes associated with high-stress jobs like

teaching, showing the need for mental health support for teachers (Demmin, Silverstein, & Shors, 2022). This section discusses how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected teachers' mental health and well-being.

Herman et al. (2021) examined teacher stress, coping, and wellness predictors during the pandemic. The study included 639 teachers surveyed in Fall 2019, before the pandemic, and May 2020. Concerning mental health, the study analyzed educators' depressive mood, anhedonia, anxiety, and overall school organizational wellbeing. The pandemic amplified the typical stressors teachers have, causing them to deal with additional job stress that directly resulted from the pandemic.

On average, teachers reported above-medium levels of job stress and that their jobs required high levels of coping (Herman et al., 2021). However, the study showed that teachers reported significantly lower stress, higher coping, well-being, and job satisfaction after the start of the pandemic. The measure of depression and anxiety found that 9% of teachers' survey results indicated that of major depression, and 16% of the results showed a risk for generalized anxiety disorder.

The most significant indicator of positive teacher health was self-reported confidence in managing student behavior, concluded Herman et al. (2021). Concerns about students and their families predicted lower levels of health. With this in mind, considering the constant need for more highly qualified teachers, it is essential to research how new teachers entering the field feel about this topic.

This section showed how the COVID-19 pandemic affected teacher mental health and well-being. While the pandemic exacerbated already pre-existing mental health conditions in educators, the most significant indicator of teacher well-being was their self-confidence in

teaching. Understanding that self-efficacy in educators plays a substantial role in their well-being is the first step in being able to support them in their roles as teachers.

3. Teacher Recruitment

With a national teacher shortage in the United States already being prevalent before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, solutions to increasing teacher recruitment were already on the minds of many states. This section discusses how the COVID-19 pandemic has caused new concerns regarding teacher recruitment and how these concerns have affected teacher morale as a whole.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continued to increase the shortage, the need to look into teacher recruitment became a necessary focus. Teaching, an already at-risk profession, experienced new work stressors, safety concerns, and work-life challenges, according to Russell A. Matthews et al. (2022). The study said that the pandemic only magnified teacher retention concerns.

Bill et al. surveyed 1,676 University of Maryland undergraduate students looking into teacher recruitment in 2022. They investigated how views of teaching as a profession have changed since the COVID-19 pandemic. 35% of their focus group reported less interest in teaching due to the pandemic. 12% reported becoming more interested in teaching. The reason stated for why more than half of the respondents stated being less interested in the profession was because the response to the COVID-19 pandemic strengthened their concerns about the workload, low social respect, and salary of teachers. The pandemic also created new concerns about school systems' safety protocols and support during the transition to distance learning. The study concluded that changing how teaching is structured could expand the teacher workforce.

This section shows how the COVID-19 pandemic magnified an apparent concern for teacher recruitment. The research showed that even teacher recruitment may have been negatively affected by the pandemic, decreasing interest in teaching. With growing teacher retention concerns, retaining existing teachers and recruiting additional highly qualified teachers is essential.

4. Teachers' Unions and The Connection to Teacher Morale

Teachers' unions were created to help organize teachers and advocate for their needs. During the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers' unions were even more necessary. This section examines the impact of teachers' unions and the decisions of school districts during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Bradley D. Marianno et al. (2022) researched how teachers' unions advocated for teachers during school reopening decisions. The study concluded that teachers' concerns about teaching in person, when voiced through their unions, shaped fall 2020 semester district decisions. This study was possible by tracking the reopening decisions of 250 school districts in the United States. Some ways in which teachers' unions in the United States advocated for the teachers they represented were by protests, broadcasting official statements, member surveys, and filing lawsuits.

When they looked into what impacted school districts' decisions on school reopenings, the researchers discovered that politics, demographics, and per-pupil expenditures positively correlated to a return to in-person instruction (Marianno et al., 2022). However, COVID-19 hospitalization rates in the district did not affect reopening decisions. While this study showed how some school districts seemed to support their constituents, it is also essential to look at how other leadership roles in education tried to support teachers during the pandemic.

This section showed the connection between decisions made by school districts and teachers' unions' actions during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research concluded that teachers' unions' efforts during the pandemic positively correlated to re-opening decisions, while hospitalizations due to COVID-19 did not have an effect. School districts must utilize teachers' unions' power to support teachers. Teachers' unions representing their constituents' collective voices and opinions can help advocate for the support needed to retain qualified teachers in their districts.

5. Interventions to Support Teachers During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Online Learning

Schools, districts, and educators attempted to find and implement support to encourage educators during these difficult times. This section discusses the interventions suggested/implemented to help boost teacher morale and support teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers more likely to maintain success were in schools that offered: effective communication, targeted professional development, teacher recognition, opportunities for meaningful collaboration, and fair expectations during the COVID-19 pandemic (Kraft, Simon, & Lyon, 2021). To support teachers, schools could develop systems for solid communication and recognize teachers' efforts, doing so would ensure that teachers do not feel isolated.

Russell A. Matthews et al. (2022) looked into school leadership, namely principals, and how they worked against teacher turnover during the COVID-19 pandemic. During times of crisis, leader actions affect access to resources related to sufficient safety procedures and family support, which affects teacher turnover. Actively addressing employees' health and safety concerns and promoting a productive work-life balance could lower teacher turnover.

School leaders can equip teachers for success if they provide the resources needed to feel safe and balanced (Matthews et al., 2022). To address initial turnover intentions, rational decision-making, safety communication from school districts, and empathy from principals are shown to be effective.

An et al. (2021) identified four major themes that could better equip teachers for future emergencies like a global pandemic. These four major themes were providing professional development for online teaching, access to technology, technology training for teachers and students, and action plans paired with communication.

Herman et al. (2021), rather than asking teachers what they think would help support them, looked into what qualities in educators predicted a positive correlation to teachers adapting to the COVID-19 school shutdowns. They saw a positive correlation between teachers with good classroom management, strong self-efficacy, and positive adaptation to the pandemic. Shared responsibility in leadership and consistent school discipline practices also predicted teacher well-being. The best way to help support teachers during the pandemic is to enhance classroom management skills, especially in online environments. It was also equally as essential to encourage confidence in those skills.

Bill et al. (2022) looked into teacher recruitment and concluded that while policymakers cannot mandate respect for teachers, they can address some signals of disrespect. Those most notably being teachers' low salaries, pressure for teachers to return to classrooms they saw as unsafe, and uneven support given during the changes in teaching environments.

Two ways studied and proven to help support educators during the COVID-19 pandemic were strength-based coaching and Mental and Physical (MAP) training. Wells and Foster studied the effects of strengths-based coaching on teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2022.

Demmin, Silverstein, and Shors researched the use of MAP training to improve mental health and well-being in teachers during the pandemic in 2022. Both studies showed promising results showing how these strategies could support teachers in-person and remotely.

Wells and Foster (2022) looked at using the MyTeachingPartner-Secondary (MTP-S) program with teachers. It focused on flexibility and relationship building, both being harder during the pandemic. It was also strengths-based, which provided positive reinforcement to exhausted teachers. In the program, teachers worked with a strengths-based coach where they watched video clips of themselves teaching, reflected, and discussed with their coaches. It is a realistic way to support teachers, given that it does not overwhelm them with more work.

MTP-S strength-based coaching program could support teachers by helping teachers feel supported and motivated consistently, providing structure during uncertain times (Wells & Foster, 2022). MTP-S coaches listened to the needs of teachers and capitalized on their strengths allowing teachers to keep teaching and learning moving forward. The article also provided information on where high-needs districts could access the free MTP-S coach training programs.

In 2022 Demmin, Silverstein, and Shors studied how Mental and Physical (MAP) training could help the overall well-being and mental health of educators actively teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. MAP training combines meditation with aerobic exercise and showed positive mental and physical health outcomes in clinical and subclinical settings. Participants showed improvements in depressive symptoms, overthinking, work-related quality of life, stress, and self-compassion.

The combination of meditation and aerobic exercise, as used in MAP training, can improve mental health and well-being among K-12 teachers (Demmin, Silverstein, & Shors, 2022). This intervention can be online or in person, as the study showed. Participants reported

improved depressive symptoms, self-compassion, less secondary traumatic stress, improved cognitive flexibility, control, and sleep quality.

This section showed what teachers stated they needed as support and what some studies have tested as interventions to address these needs. Teachers indicated that they performed best when their efforts were recognized and praised, which can be addressed by strength-based coaching and recognition from school leadership and principals. Interventions like MAP training can address teachers' mental health and well-being concerns. With MAP training, teachers may see improvements in many aspects of their well-being, with results apparent in their work and personal lives.

The Michigan Connection

In addition to the responsibilities of teachers in the classroom, like many people across the globe, they faced increased needs for sick and bereavement leave (Wells & Foster, 2022). As teachers, they were also forced to deal with increasingly worsening staff and substitute shortages, as well as requests to cover other duties regularly. These shortages exhausted educators with already demanding expectations and responsibilities. Looking at the state of Michigan as an example, it can be examined how emergency funds, teachers' unions, and stipends/fellowships have been used to support the Michigan education system.

Addressing students' academic and mental health needs while supporting overstretched educators was the most urgent use of federal school COVID-19 rescue funds, stated an article by the Michigan Education Association (MEA) in April 2022. The president of the West Ottawa Education Association and other educators went to the White House to discuss the federal aid provided by the American Rescue Plan, stating that funding was still needed to support schools.

This support improved students' lives and academic experiences and helped staff who have continuously taken on additional roles.

The Michigan Education Association (MEA) sent a *Dear Colleague* letter to school districts in 2022. The letter was written by the U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona. In the letter, Secretary Cardona pleaded with school leaders to urgently direct money from federal COVID relief packages to help students access the teachers and other critical staff they need. Following this letter, Lansing schools acted, and their teacher's union fought for teacher retention bonuses, which the district granted in December.

The state of Michigan has put supports in place to combat the teacher shortage and support those pursuing a career in education through new fellowships and stipends for future teachers. The Michigan Education Association (MEA) circulated two programs proposed by Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer in 2022. Fellowships for Future Educators and stipends for student teachers; both programs intended to lower costs associated with higher education so more highly qualified teachers could be prepared and hired to address the teacher shortage.

This section showed how Michigan addressed new education concerns brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic by emphasizing the importance of using emergency funds and looking into teacher recruitment.

Effects on Students

While this literature review primarily focused on research relating to teacher morale and turnover, an additional theme explored was how the aforementioned issues affected students. Emphasizing a students-first approach to teaching is heavily emphasized in teacher preparation programs. With that in mind, it is essential to look into the connection between decreasing teacher morale and increases in teacher turnover/shortages to student behavior, academic

performance, and mental health. The studies found during this systematic review only revealed the occasional hint at the implications. Further research in this subject area is needed to help educators and students affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This section aims to look into the importance of positive and consistent teacher-student rapport and how teachers' mental health can, in turn, affect their students.

The Effect Teachers Have on Students

As well as additional stresses incurred by educators during COVID-19, the need to promote relationships between educators and students is growing; *Strengths-Based Coaching Supports Teachers During COVID* (Wells & Foster, 2022) briefly stated. Isolation, anxiety, and poor emotional regulation leave students vulnerable and educators stretched. In the book *Relationship, Responsibility, and Regulation: Trauma-Invested Practices for Fostering Resilient Learners*, Souers and Hall (2018) discussed is the importance of good relationships between teachers and students, stating that relationships are the foundation for success with students. They also state the importance of students seeing educators working together. When students see their teachers working together they know teachers are working to create a safe space for students at school.

Teacher-student relationships can be affected by how teachers handle stress, approach challenges, and their overall demeanor (Souers & Hall, 2018). Given these facts, how might teachers' increased stress levels and lack of morale impact building relationships between students and their teachers? That is what the next step in research related to COVID-19 and the field of education should investigate.

This section showed that further research should be conducted to ascertain the connection between a decrease in teacher morale and retention to student behavior. Some research suggested

that teachers' mood and cooperation with others is observed by their students and, in turn, affects their relationships with them.

Discussion

As a student teacher who began working in Michigan public schools in 2021, after the start of the pandemic, I saw firsthand the effects on teacher morale. Many teachers told me why they thought their job was more difficult and stressful than previous years. These statements made me think about the real reasons why the job of educators may be more difficult, how teachers having low morale could affect students, and what the state of Michigan is currently doing to help support educators. At first, I planned on investigating this as a survey; however, due to time constraints and logistical issues, this plan changed to doing a systematic review of the available literature. Through this, I made connections and comparisons to find ways forward for educators in this permanently changed profession.

The COVID-19 pandemic forced K-12 public school educators to face a public health emergency, a quick transition to remote online teaching, and lasting effects on their personal and professional lives. Current studies looking into the impact of COVID-19 on teachers reiterate the importance of educators feeling valued and influential in their field. Teachers that stated they did not feel successful were more than twice as likely to leave their current school than those that felt successful there, and 53% of teachers said that feeling successful as a teacher declined while teaching remotely (Kraft, Simon, & Lyon, 2021). The reviewed studies showed a link between this feeling of being unsuccessful and decreasing teacher retention, increasing the current teacher shortage.

When looking at the studies reviewed and what Michigan is currently doing to support educators, more support still needs to be given. The COVID-19 relief fund packages can fund

these changes. How can these changes be determined? I believe in using resources such as teachers' unions, as suggested by Marianno et al. (2022), or by surveying teachers in Michigan directly, as indicated by most studies, we can better support teachers.

While I could not find recent research connecting a lack of teacher morale due to the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on students, this should be an investigative priority. Available research shows the importance of teacher-student relationships and positive teacher modeling. The lack of teacher morale and inconsistent teacher presence could harm students. This result may continue to add to the burdens, and job-related stress teachers suffer in the wake of the pandemic.

Limitations

The most significant limitation of this systematic literature review relating to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and online learning on teacher morale is student researcher inexperience with this type of research. The primary researcher conducted an in-depth search and study on how to do systematic research reviews; however, the primary reviewer has yet to gain experience with this kind of research. It is still to be determined if the review was completed with fidelity and met the expectations of other literature reviewers.

Conclusion

This study was a systematic review of the available research to answer the research questions:

R1: Through a systematic review of the literature using a nine-step process, what were the effects of COVID-19 on teacher morale in the K-12 setting?

R2: How did teacher morale affect K-12 students?

R3: How has the State of Michigan changed what they are doing to support educators after the pandemic?

The research suggested that the COVID-19 pandemic forced K-12 public school educators to come to terms with a public health emergency, a quick transition to remote online teaching, and lasting effects on their personal and professional lives. These changes have led to an increase in the national teacher shortage in the United States and an overall decrease in teacher mental health and well-being.

However, there is hope that these issues will gradually decrease when looking at available interventions to help support teachers and what the state of Michigan is doing to combat teacher burnout and shortages. While there was plenty of available research on the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers, there is little research on how those impacts on teachers affect students. A way this connection can be measured is both through the emotional/mental effect on students as well as the academic effects. Some tools that could be used to collect and analyze academic effects are standardized testing data such as DELTA, NWEA, and the M-STEP. This connection should be a priority for future studies looking into the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on K-12 students.

References

- Katella, K. (2021, March 9). *Our pandemic year-A covid-19 timeline*. Yale Medicine. Retrieved April 17, 2023, from <https://www.yalemedicine.org/news/covid-timeline>
- Darling-Hammond, L., & Podolsky, A. (2019). Breaking the cycle of teacher shortages: What kind of policies can make a difference? *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, pp. 27, 34. <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.27.4633>
- Michigan Department of Education. (n.d.). Educator workforce report 2022 - Michigan. Michigan.gov/mde. Retrieved April 10, 2023, from https://www.michigan.gov/mde/-/media/Project/Websites/mde/educator_services/research/annual_educator_workforce_data_report_2020_full.pdf?rev=4ba7b854e4e44f2997ebfc8cae903209
- Emma White Research LLC, & MEA. (2022). 2022 Educator Shortage Research - Michigan Education Association. MEA.org. Retrieved April 10, 2023, from <https://mea.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/MEA-2022-Educator-Shortage-PUBLIC-RELEASE-2-14.pdf>
- Iowa State University Library. (n.d.). Library guides: How to conduct a literature review: A guide for graduate students: Systematic reviews. Library subject and class guides. Retrieved April 9, 2023, from <https://instr.iastate.libguides.com/gradlitrev/TypeSR>
- Charles Sturt University. (2023, March 29). Library guides: Literature review: Systematic literature reviews. Systematic literature reviews - Literature Review - Library Guides at Charles Sturt University. Retrieved April 9, 2023, from <https://libguides.csu.edu.au/review/Systematic>
- Foster, M. J. (n.d.). Intro to reviews Aug 2020. Google Slides. Retrieved April 9, 2023, from <https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/14hdVXLeGz5HUIKhyR4YSZ1sA9fMNL1yyxQByHM18HgQ/present?token=AC4w5ViTihgQQ4R-ZpJVAAzB->

[Cg8X1ahqA%3A1582756696380&includes_info_params=1&eisi=CPXRnZWk8OcCFa2WSgodmPcK3g&slide=id.p42](https://doi.org/10.1080/19345747.2021.1938314)

PRISMA. (n.d.). PRISMA Flow Diagram. Prisma. Retrieved April 9, 2023, from

<http://www.prisma-statement.org/PRISMAStatement/>

Xiao, Y., & Watson, M. (2019). Guidance on Conducting a Systematic Literature Review.

Journal of Planning Education and Research, 39(1), 93–112.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/0739456X17723971>

Bill, Bowsher, A., Malen, B., Rice, J. K., & Saltmarsh, J. E. (2022). Making matters worse?

COVID-19 and teacher recruitment. Phi Delta Kappan, 103(6), 36–40.

<https://doi.org/10.1177/00317217221082808>

Marianno, B. D., Hemphill, A. A., Loures-Elias, A. P. S., Garcia, L., Cooper, D., & Coombes, E.

(2022). Power in a Pandemic: Teachers' Unions and Their Responses to School

Reopening. AERA Open, 8. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23328584221074337>

Wells & Foster, E. (2022). Strengths-based coaching supports teachers during COVID. The

Journal of Staff Development, 43(2), 36–39.

Herman, K. C., Sebastian, J., Reinke, W. M., & Huang, F. L. (2021). Individual and School

Predictors of Teacher Stress, Coping, and Wellness during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Grantee Submission, 36(6), 483–493.

Kraft, S., N. S., & Lyon, M. A. (2021). Sustaining a Sense of Success: The Protective Role of

Teacher Working Conditions during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Journal of Research on

Educational Effectiveness, 14(4), 727–769.

<https://doi.org/10.1080/19345747.2021.1938314>

An, Y., Kaplan-Rakowski, R., Yang, J., Conan, J., Kinard, W., & Daugherty, L. A. (2021).

Examining K-12 teachers' feelings, experiences, and perspectives regarding online teaching during the early stage of the COVID-19 pandemic. © Association for Educational Communications and Technology.

<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-021-10008-5>

Demmin, D. L., Silverstein, S. M., & Shors, T. J. (2022). Mental and physical training with meditation and aerobic exercise improved mental health and well-being in teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, pp. 16, 18.

doi:<https://doi.org/10.3389/fnhum.2022.847301>

An, Y., Kaplan-Rakowski, R., Yang, J., Conan, J., Kinard, W., & Daugherty, L. A. (2021).

Examining K-12 teachers' feelings, experiences, and perspectives regarding online teaching during the early stage of the COVID-19 pandemic. © Association for Educational Communications and Technology.

<https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/s11423-021-10008-5>

Pratt, D. (2022, April 28). *Mi teacher briefs U.S. Ed secretary on Uses of Federal Rescue Funds*.

Michigan Education Association. Retrieved April 10, 2023, from <https://mea.org/mi-teacher-brief-ed-sec-fed-rescue-funds/>

Garcia, M. (2022, February 17). Leaders urge spending to address educator shortage. Michigan

Education Association. Retrieved April 10, 2023, from <https://mea.org/leaders-urge-spending-to-address-educator-shortage/>

Garcia, M. (2022, October 27). Applications to open for brand new fellowships for future

educators and stipends for student teachers. Michigan Education Association. Retrieved

April 10, 2023, from <https://mea.org/applications-to-open-for-brand-new-fellowships-for-future-educators-stipends-for-student-teachers/>

Souers, K., & Hall, P. A. (2019). Chapter Four: Relationship. Essay, ASCD. In Relationship, responsibility, and regulation: Trauma-invested practices for Fostering Resilient Learners (pp. 77–114).

Merriam-Webster. (n.d.). Morale. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved May 30, 2023, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/morale>