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COVID-19 Best Practices & Innovations Brief: Supporting the Social and Emotional Needs of Mississippi's Students

Kellie Fondren

Mississippi State University, pkb22@msstate.edu

Peggy Hopper

Mississippi State University, pfh7@msstate.edu

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Supporting Students starts with supporting teachers

Teachers reported districts and school administration acknowledged appreciation for their hard work by providing:

- Professional development
- Lunches
- Appreciation gifts
- An hour at the end of each day for planning
- Decorated school facilities for holidays and events
- An Easter egg hunt for teachers and staff
- "Teacher of the month" incentives
- Extended grace for learning and implementing new strategies.

teacher's survey succinctly stated, "we did the best we could."

Rural geographical locations like Mississippi only enhanced the challenge to meet students' social emotional needs (Nichols, Goforth, Sacra, and Ahler, 2017). It was evidenced that while rural geographic locations impact the need to support social emotional needs, the strong relationships that develop in the community aspect of a rural area foster a support system of their own (Nichols, Goforth, Sacra, and Ahler, 2017). This was also evident in our research focused on Mississippi, as local businesses and churches stepped in to meet needs by addressing connectivity issues, fostering online activities, and/or providing meals.

The COVID-19 experience allowed educators to understand the need to provide support for the social-emotional health of students in any future crisis. It also provided an opportunity to reflect on the need and method to incorporate social emotional learning into curricula to increase students' abilities to problem solve and develop resiliency in the event of future crisis.

Supporting Social and Emotional Needs of Teachers



Teachers dealt with the added stressors of the pandemic in the classroom and at home. The social and emotional health of teachers had a significant impact on the effectiveness of instruction and their students' achievement (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Mississippi teachers (69%) reported that their social-emotional health impacted the quality of online learning. Teachers were "physically and emotionally exhausted."

The high stress levels reported by 41% of teachers presented another challenge for online learning. The Comprehensive Center's report on teacher self-care reported that it is "critical" to support and meet the social and emotional needs of teachers (Manian, Belfield, & Berger, 2021, p.2).

Authors: Dr. Kellie Fondren & Dr. Peggy Hopper

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FULL REPORT

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