

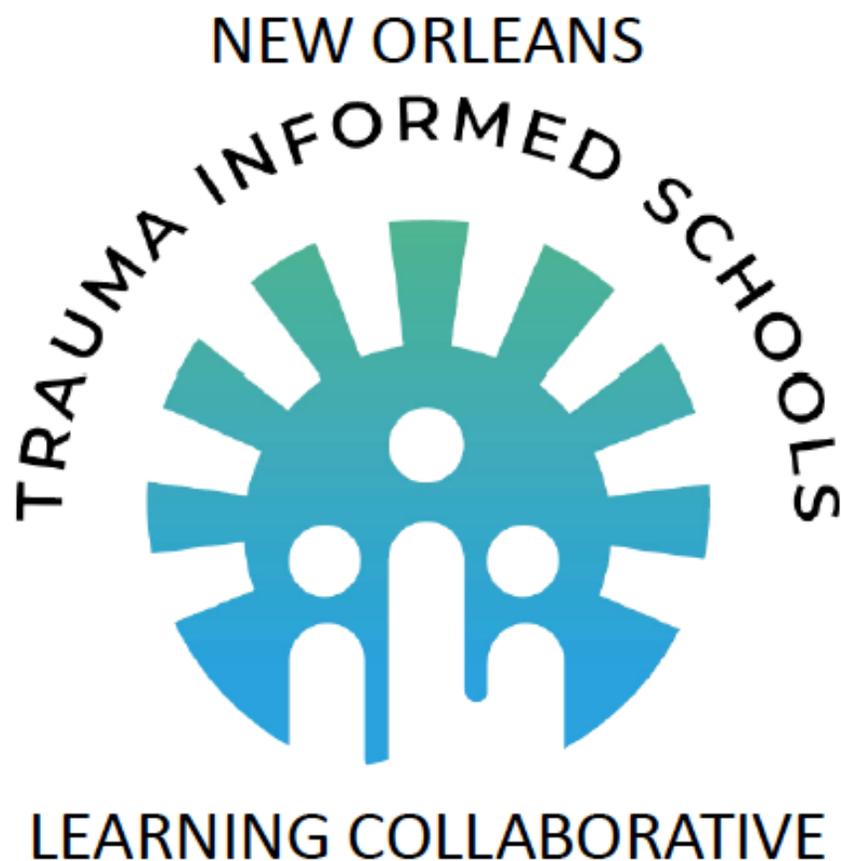
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# COVID-19 Impacts on Educator Well-Being

A report from the Trauma-Informed Schools Learning Collaborative

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November 15, 2021



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## Acknowledgements

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## Background

The New Orleans Trauma-Informed Schools Learning Collaborative (TIS-LC) conducted a survey in May 2020 to understand the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on educators, their school community, and their teaching. The survey of 454 New Orleans charter school educators found that, on average, educators experienced seven stressors (out of 18 surveyed) and four protective factors (out of six surveyed). Educators who experienced more stressors reported worse mental health and found it harder to cope and teach. Experiencing more protective factors was associated with finding it easier to cope and teach. In comparison to White educators, Black educators reported better mental health, more protective factors, less of a negative impact of stressors, and more of a positive impact of protective factors. Lack of connection and online teaching challenges were the most difficult aspects of teaching during the pandemic; support from coworkers and administrators were the most helpful. Recommendations were offered to charter network and school leaders to support the well-being of their educators so they, in turn, could devote themselves to student learning and well-being. Click [here](#) to view the final report.

The TIS-LC conducted a follow up survey of 171 educators in June 2021 to understand the ongoing stressors experienced by educators one year into the pandemic. The survey was designed to identify educator needs and gain insight about factors that influence their well-being and their decision to remain in their current roles. This report includes findings related to educator stressors, personal resilience, and mental health. A forthcoming report will include findings related to educator retention. Information on the sample of educators who completed the survey is provided in Appendix A.

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## Executive Summary

Educators, like other first responders, have been called upon to go above and beyond to do their jobs and support students during the pandemic. Findings from the survey indicate that the mental health toll associated with this additional work is substantial and should not be overlooked by policy makers and school leaders as they plan for greater support and improved retention of educators moving forward.

### ***Nature of Educator Stressors***

- Educators reported being impacted by myriad COVID-related stressors; the most challenging included demands of hybrid instructional contexts and student learning loss.
- Although pandemic-related stressors touched everyone, the specific nature of the stressors varied by race. Black educators were more impacted by having a loved one with a high-risk health condition and managing child-related responsibilities. White educators were more affected by inadequate technical support and their reduced ability to have an impact on students.

### ***Sources of Educator Resilience***

- Personal resilience can be thought of as how well one is equipped to bounce back after stressful events, a tragedy, or trauma. The majority of educators reported feeling equipped to cope with stress and adapt to change often or nearly all of the time.
- Black and White educators reported similar levels of personal resilience.
- Sources of personal resilience included support from family and friends, self-care habits and routines, faith and faith-based supports, work-life balance, counseling, and specific personal attributes.

### ***Educator Well-Being***

Educators reported rates of emotional distress similar to or higher than those observed in a national sample of health care workers<sup>1</sup>:

- 36% screened positive for anxiety (vs. 33% of health care workers).
- 35% screened positive for depression (vs. 17% of health care workers). The rate of depression among educators is also higher than the rate observed in the US population (27.8%) in the middle of the COVID pandemic<sup>2</sup>.
- 19% screened positive for PTSD (vs. 14% of health care workers).
- Consistent with findings from our educator survey at the beginning of the pandemic, Black educators rated their mental health more positively than White educators.

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Educational systems and school leaders can and should adopt organizational strategies to minimize workplace stressors for educators and maximize their resilience.

### ***CMO-level Recommendations***

- Recognize and respond to the evolving conditions that educators face.
- Assess policies, procedures, and structures already in place to address educator stressors.
- Investigate (and invest in) policies for bereavement, mental health, and hazard pay and address barriers to accessing benefits.
- Prioritize the development and access to professional development opportunities for school leaders related to best practices in responding to the pandemic.

### ***School-level Recommendations***

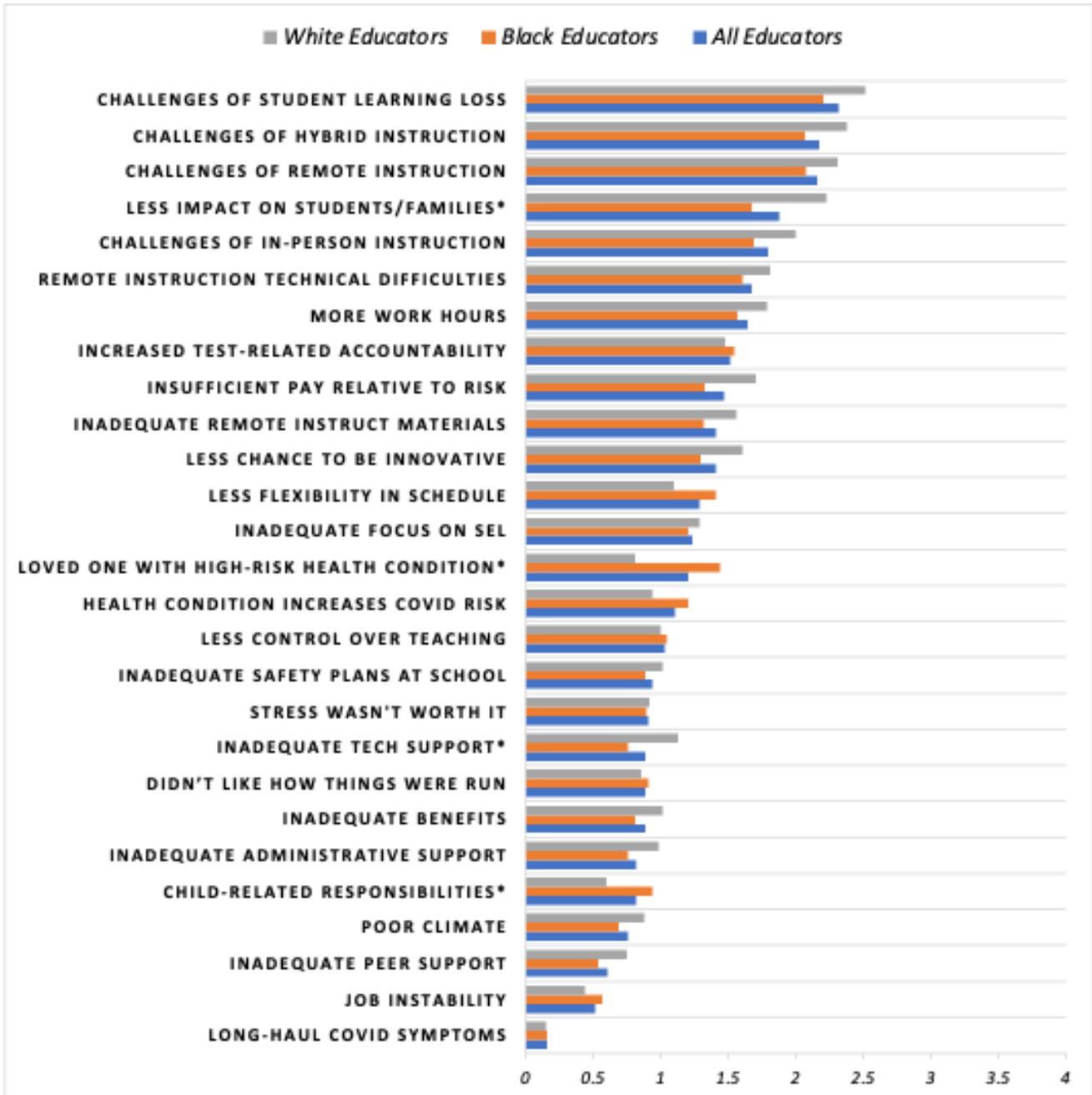
- Build a team to take the lead on creating and carrying out an intentional plan for staff well-being in collaboration with the entire school community. Share information about health care benefits for wellness services.
- Listen to educators about the supports they need for wellness and healing-centered initiatives for staff and students. Trouble shoot challenges and manage competing priorities or barriers to sustainable implementation of those supports.
- Create opportunities for meaningful feedback from students, parents, and community members.
- Provide time during the day for educators to access peer support and wellness routines (e.g., planning time, coordinated student support, coffee chats, well-being breaks).

### ***Educator-level Recommendations***

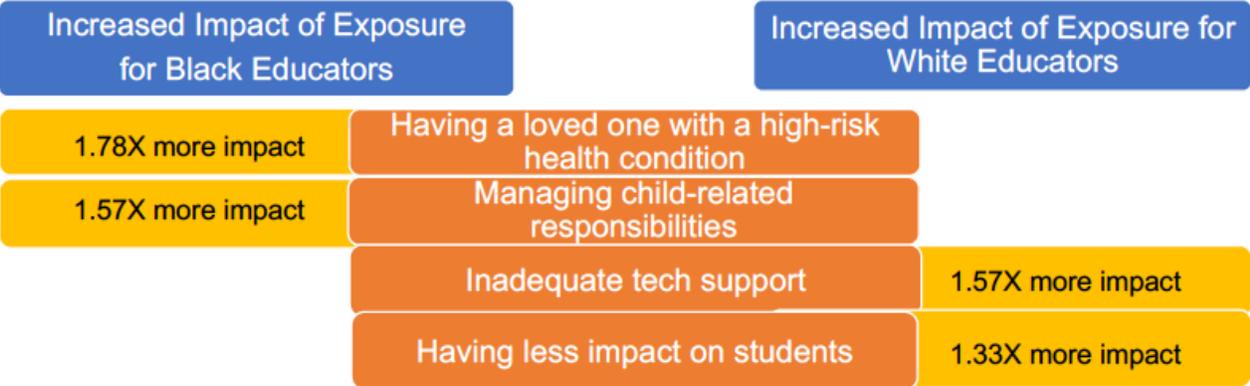
- Recognize the increased load you are carrying and practice self-compassion to foster personal resilience (see <https://self-compassion.org/category/exercises/>).
- Reflect upon your own reactions and typical ways of coping. Prioritize self-care routines like healthy eating, sleeping, and movement.
- Focus on maintaining healthy boundaries that balance professional duties and personal joy and find places in your work that join the two.
- Stay connected to peers and support networks. For educators of faith, continue to utilize faith communities for support.
- Learn about trauma-informed and healing centered teaching principles and practices (see <https://ginwright.medium.com>).

## COVID-19 Stressors and Challenges

Participants responded to the question: "Over the past year, how much has each stressor affected your ability to teach?" Participants rated the impact of each stressor on a 5-point Likert scale where 0 = Not at all; 1 = A little; 2 = A moderate amount; 3 = A lot; 4 = A great deal. The average impact of each stressor is presented below for all educators (blue line) and for Black and White educators separately. Stressors that resulted in a significantly different impact for Black and White educators are indicated with an asterisk.



Although the overall impact of stressors was similar for Black and White educators, Black educators reported greater impact from two personal stressors than White educators, who reported greater impact from two different professional stressors.



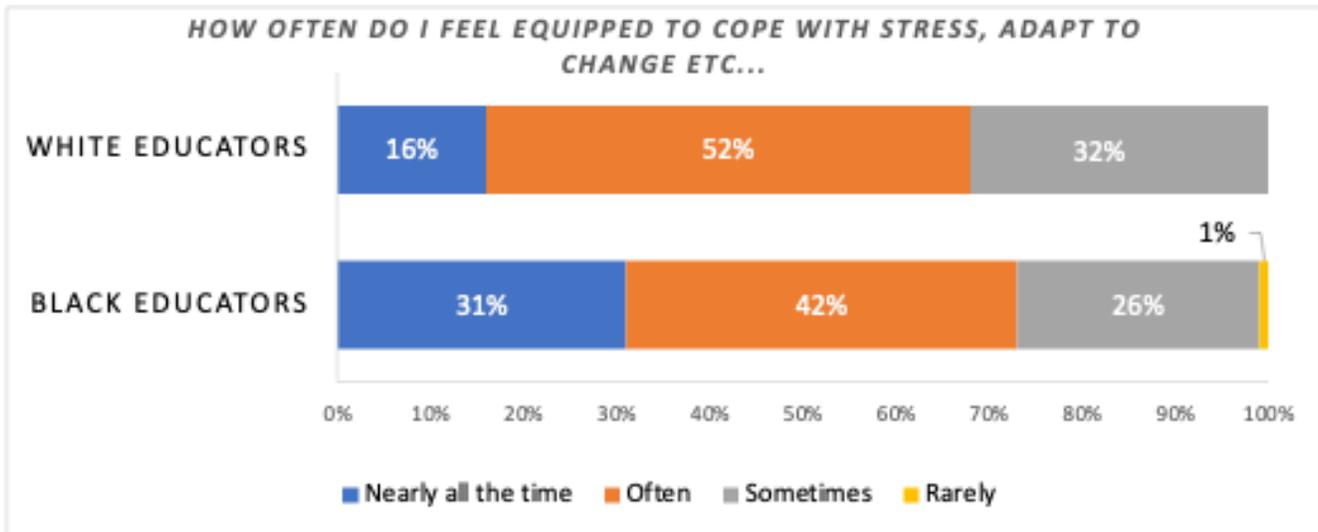
Despite these differences, the five most impactful stressors were the same for the groups and are listed below.

Most Impactful Stressors	Average Impact
Challenges of student learning loss	2.32
Challenges of hybrid instruction	2.18
Challenges of remote instruction	2.16
Less impact on students and families	1.88
Challenges of in-person instruction	1.80

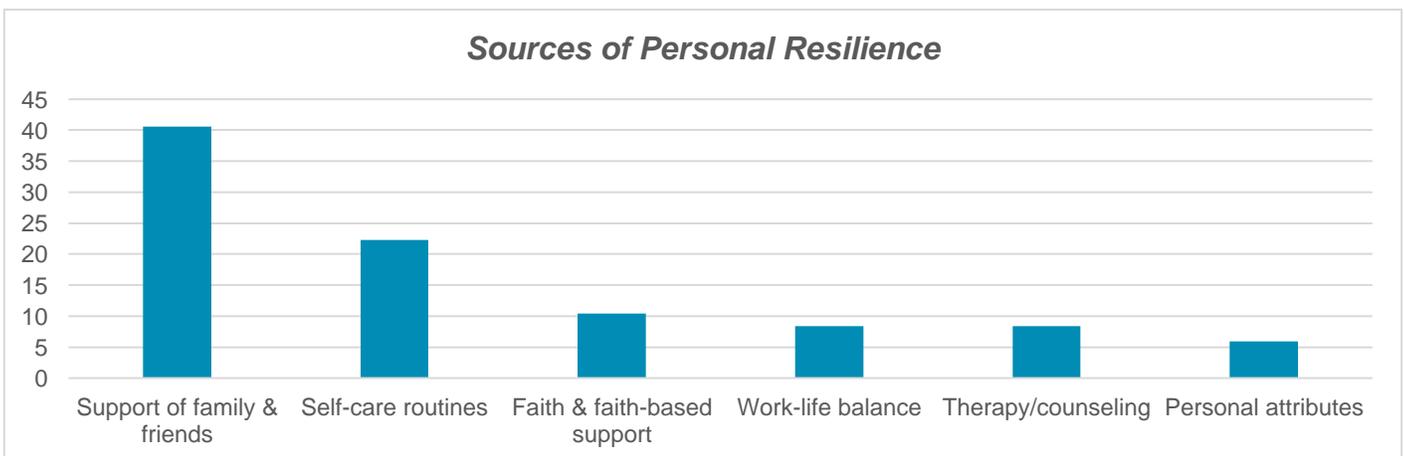
Note. 0 = No impact; 1 = A little impact; 2 = Moderate impact; 3 = A lot of impact; 4 = A great deal of impact.

## Personal Resilience

Personal resilience can be thought of as how well one is equipped to bounce back after stressful events, tragedy, or trauma. Educators rated their individual resilience on 10 items (e.g., ability to adapt to change, cope with stress, not get discouraged in the face of failure). A total resilience score was calculated by averaging across the 10 items on the scale. Ratings of individual resilience were similar for Black and White educators; the percentage of participants whose average score fell within each response category is presented below for Black and White educators.



Teachers were asked about what supports and structures would need to be in place in their personal lives to ensure they will be teaching in a positive and productive classroom in the Fall. About 78% (N = 133) of the sample provided responses. Responses were grouped into six larger themes representing sources of personal resilience, including the support of family and friends, self-care habits and routines, faith and faith-based supports, work-life balance, therapy/counseling, and personal attributes. The percentage of responses included in each theme is illustrated below; percentages do not sum to 100% because some responses contained multiple themes and a handful of responses could not be coded.



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## Educator Well-Being

All participants were screened for symptoms of depression, anxiety, and posttraumatic stress (PTSD).

The screen for PTSD first assesses for prior trauma exposure, such as a serious accident, physical or sexual assault, a natural disaster, seeing someone be killed or seriously injured, or having a loved one die through homicide or suicide. Only individuals who endorse trauma exposure complete the PTSD symptom screening.

The percentage of educators who scored above the screening cutoff for each measure is presented below. A score above the screening cutoff indicates the presence of significant symptoms. Black educators reported statistically significantly lower levels of depression and anxiety than White educators. They tended to report lower levels of PTSD as well, although the difference was only marginally statistically significant.

	All Educators	Black Educators	White Educators
<i>Depression</i>	35%	26%	48%
<i>Anxiety</i>	36%	26%	46%
<i>PTSD</i>	19%	14%	24%

### **Correlates of Well-Being**

Although no significant associations were observed in relation to PTSD symptoms, several factors were significantly associated with symptoms of depression and anxiety:

- Younger educators and White educators reported more symptoms.
- Educators who reported greater stressor impact reported more symptoms.
- Educators who reported greater levels of resilience reported fewer symptoms.

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## Recommendations

Unsurprisingly, educators are not a monolith. The sources of their stress and needs for support look different across individuals and groups. The following recommendations provide a number of mechanisms that can be used to address the evolving needs of educators.

### *Compensation, Benefits, and Instructional Supports*

The Center on Reinventing Public Education has developed a [tool](#) to guide and evaluate school district planning in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The tool highlights innovative, clear, and helpful strategies utilized by school districts to support their staff, students, and communities. Rather than expecting staff to adapt to new expectations, schedules, and guidelines regardless of their circumstances at home, the tool encourages creative solutions to support unique staff needs in the face of changing demands. Some examples include providing daycare for staff with children and creating policies that explicitly accommodate needs such as flexible work schedules and leave policies for educators who have lost loved ones due to COVID-19.

Many industries have compensated front-line workers with bonuses to incentivize retention and compensate them for going above and beyond during the pandemic. Some school districts are using COVID-19 school aid to compensate educators in the same manner. The pandemic required dedicating extra hours towards preparation, learning new technology, and providing support and outreach to students and families, all while educators accepted increased risk as they transitioned back into classrooms for in-person instruction. State and federal COVID-19 aid is being used to provide stipends and hazard pay for educators and to incentivize their return to campuses following prolonged closures<sup>3</sup>. However, it is also important to keep in mind that more sustainable increases in compensation will also be critical to retain educators in the workforce.

Schools must be mindful of the ever-evolving needs for instructional support. Technology support was highlighted as a need in the current survey, which is consistent with previously identified needs for resources and training to support distance education and for equitable student access to distance learning. However, educators also noted challenges with hybrid learning and those challenges may not be related to technology. Hybrid learning poses specific challenges to student engagement and classroom management; challenges that may not be solved through technology alone. One strategy to keep up with rapidly changing needs for support is to establish a teacher advisory group to identify instructional successes and challenges to inform planning and to provide periodic feedback on plan implementation. Schools should create systems of support for teachers so they do not feel like they, alone, are responsible for the learning and well-being of their students.

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### *Supports for Well-Being and Mental Health*

Educators reported mental health concerns at levels similar to those observed in health care workers. The percentage of educators who screened positive for anxiety, depression, and posttraumatic stress symptoms was significant across the board, but positive rates were lower among Black educators than among White educators. We caution against essentializing assumptions about Black educators' innate 'toughness,' which tends to reinforce racist stereotypes. Rather it is likely that Black teachers have developed this resilience as a necessary set of strategies to cope with the daily interpersonal and institutional impacts of racism. Although dealing with the stress of a pandemic is new to most people, it is possible that Black educators were able to draw upon resiliencies developed in response to racism-related stress to cope more effectively with the pandemic. For example, factors shown to buffer the impacts of racism-related stress may also serve a protective function in the context of the pandemic, including racial socialization, racial and ethnic identity, hope, and faith<sup>4</sup>.

The following strategies can be used support the individual and collective resilience of educators:

- Review mental health benefits included in employee health insurance packages with teachers so they know how to activate benefits.
- Improve access to mental health services through access to telehealth services, an on-site adult mental health service provider, flex time in teacher schedules, and increasing financial feasibility through benefits packages.
- Consider how policies and practices may differentially affect different staff members. School leaders can increase their intercultural competencies to understand how adaptations in practice can be made to center marginalized communities and decrease the occurrence of microaggressions (interpersonal and systemic) that can compound stress.
- Check in with teachers to learn what has been most stressful and most helpful to them during the pandemic.
- Consider universal screening for educators to support early identification and supports. Screening could focus on symptoms of emotional distress as well as indicators of well-being, such as belongingness and teaching efficacy. Disaggregate the data to determine specific needs based on a range of identity markers, including race, gender, and caregiver status.
- Educate staff about the impact of chronic stress and trauma and strategies to foster well-being. Encourage educators to take time throughout the school day to manage their stress, utilize professional development time to offer strategies for coping with stress, and sponsor wellness activities such as yoga or meditation.
- Be creative in the use of limited resources by partnering with local community-based organizations to provide well-being services designed specifically for educators.

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- Lead by example. School leaders should prioritize wellness activities and accountability for their own self-care, which communicates the importance of self-care to their staff. Schools and school leaders can center wellness by:
    - Hiring a professional wellness coach to lead activities that center rest and wellness for school leaders.
    - Create space during existing meeting structures to center wellness (journaling, mindful movement, etc.).
    - Include mental health and wellness goals in strategic plans and link them to qualitative and quantitative data.

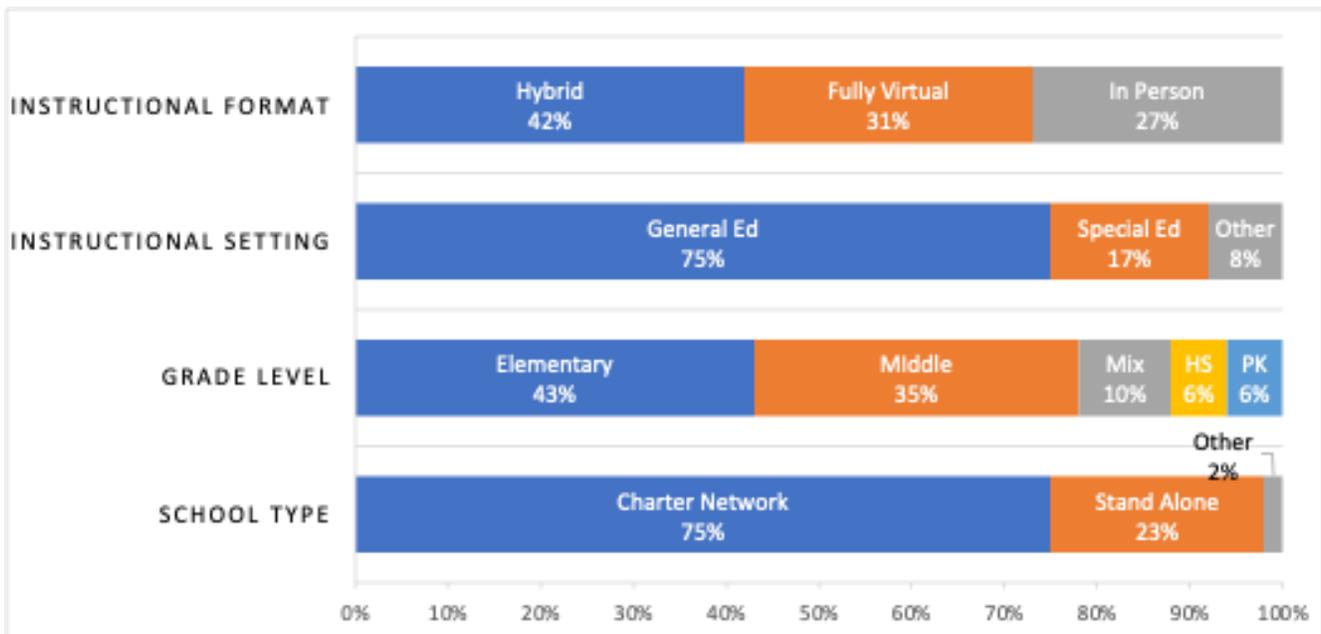
## Appendix A: Survey Sample

### Survey Sample

One hundred seventy-one educators from 24 different schools in Orleans Parish completed the survey, which represents about 5% of the total population of educators, 29% of New Orleans public schools, and 45% of charter school operators<sup>4,5</sup>. Educators from 4 schools within two charter networks comprise 48% of the sample; educators from 2 schools within different charter networks comprise 12% of the sample; educators from 2 independent charter schools comprise 17% of the sample. The remaining 16 schools comprise 23% of the sample.

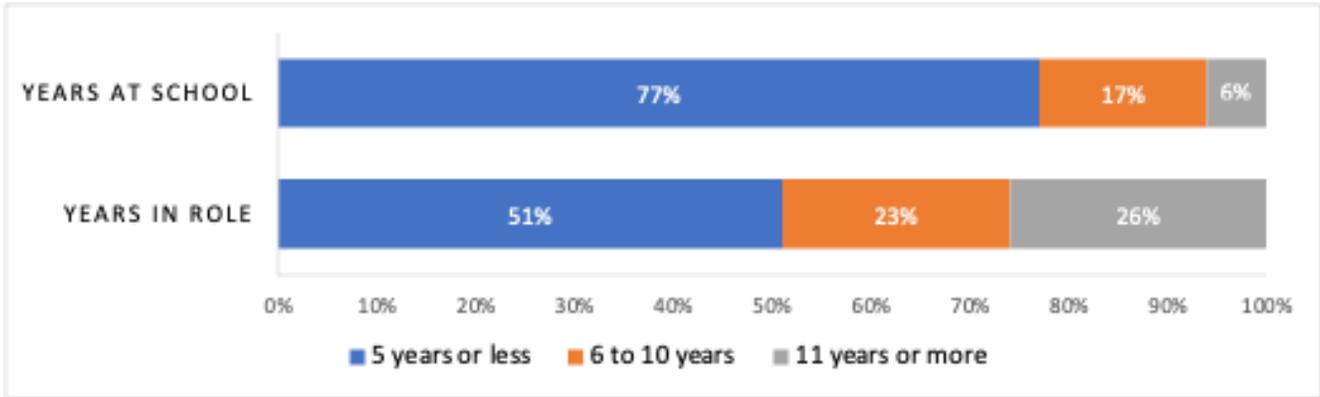
### Employment Contexts

The sample represents a variety of school contexts, including school type, grade level, and instructional context. Most educators reported a combination of in-person, hybrid, and remote teaching during the 2020-21 school year.



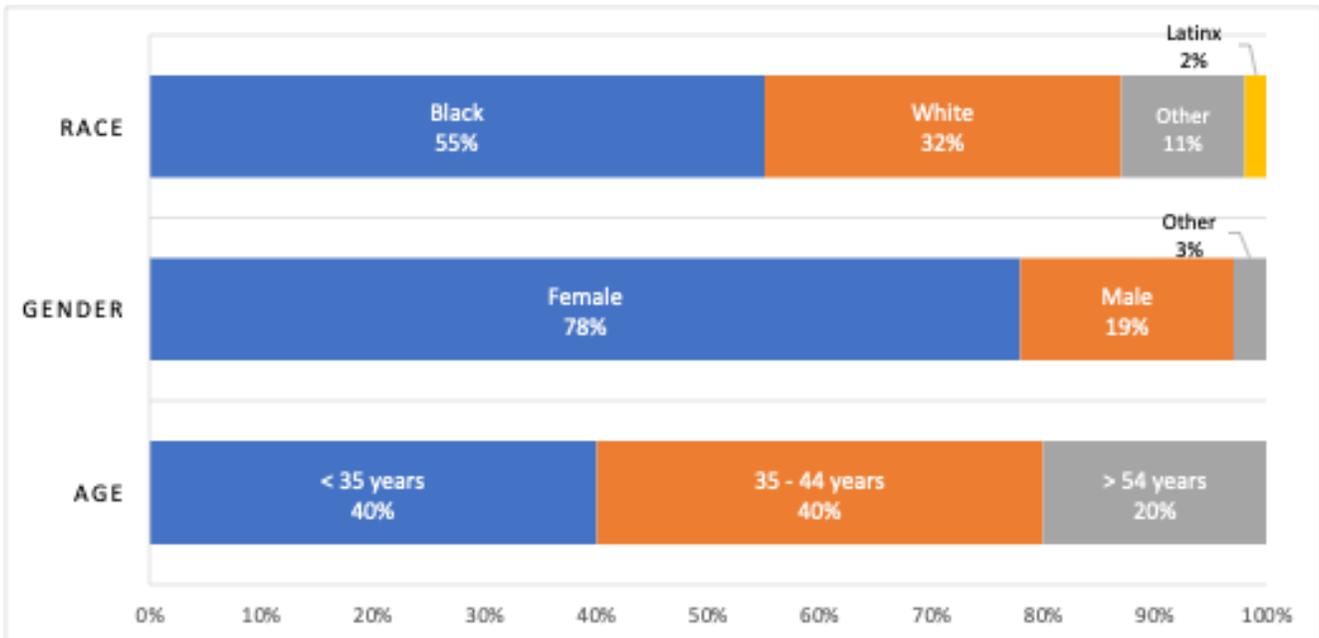
### Employment History

The experience level of educators in this sample matches citywide data. Just over half of the educators in our sample (51%) have been teaching 5 years or less and only 26% have more than 11 years' experience<sup>4</sup>.



**Educator Demographics**

The percentage of Black educators in our sample matches recent citywide estimates of 53%<sup>4,5</sup>. Male educators are somewhat underrepresented in our sample based on estimates that they make up between 26% and 28% of the citywide educator workforce<sup>4,6</sup>. As illustrated below, there were significant differences between Black and White educator representation within the youngest and oldest age groups. Because of these differences, comparisons between Black and White educators throughout the report statistically control for age.



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## Appendix B: About the Trauma-Informed Schools Learning Collaborative

The New Orleans Health Department assembled a number of community agencies in 2013 as part of the NOLA for Life initiative to provide crisis response and clinical services to schools following student-involved violence and other public-facing traumatic events. The Health Department led these efforts because New Orleans is a portfolio school district comprised of autonomous charter schools without a centralized system to coordinate school crisis response. We quickly realized that our work was necessary, but not sufficient, to promote healing and resilience. If students were leaving services and going back to classrooms where they didn't feel safe or where they were facing discipline policies that only sought to punish rather than provide opportunities for growth or change—what were we doing?

In the Spring of 2015, we coalesced as the New Orleans Trauma-Informed Schools Learning Collaborative (TIS-LC) under the leadership of Chris Gunther, Manager of Strategic Initiatives in the New Orleans Health Department. The objectives of the TIS-LC were to provide support to schools as they transformed school climate to become trauma-informed and to build schools' organizational capacity to implement, sustain, and continue to improve the delivery of trauma-informed approaches. The multi-agency collaborative included representatives from the New Orleans Health Department, Children's Bureau of New Orleans, The Institute of Women & Ethnic Studies, Louisiana Public Health Institute, Mercy Family Center's Project Fleur-de-lis, NOLA Public Schools and Tulane University. We put a call out to all New Orleans public schools to find partners for the collaborative. We built the collaborative with 5 schools during the 2015-16 school year and received our first funding for the work through the Department of Justice and United Way of Southeast Louisiana. This first cohort of schools participated in school-wide trainings in the summer of 2015. Throughout the 2015-16 school year, the schools worked with TIS-LC faculty to conduct needs assessments and create trauma-informed action plans. These plans were implemented during the 2016-2017 school year.

In 2016, we received funding from the National Institute of Justice to rigorously test whether the strategies we were using were effective in helping schools move forward with trauma-informed practices. That project, Safe Schools NOLA, allowed us to expand the work of the collaborative to 6 additional schools over 4 years (2016-2020). In doing that work, we also realized our next challenge. We built a model that relied on the training of teachers and leaders in the school—but many of those teachers and leaders leave, which threatens the integrity of the work.

The current iteration of our work aims to build capacity not just in the schools, but in the organizations that run them, so they have the tools they need to initiate and sustain the work

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themselves. With support from the Department of Justice, United Way of Southeast Louisiana, Baptist Community Ministries, and the LoveTruth Foundation, we have developed the Training of Trainers in Trauma-Informed Schools project (ToT project). Since 2019, eight participating schools in Orleans and Jefferson parishes have sent school and administrative staff to become certified in the implementation model we've developed to create trauma-informed schools. Those staff then spend a school year implementing the model with our support to become certified in implementation. And then they teach a new cohort of school and network staff how to do this work to complete their certification as a Trainer for Trauma-Informed Schools. And so on and so on, we hope.

**Over the past three years, the ToT project has:**

- Certified 21 educators/administrators in Orleans Parish and 17 in Jefferson Parish to deliver foundational training in trauma-informed schools.
- Certified 17 educators/administrators in Orleans Parish and two in Jefferson Parish to carry out implementation of the trauma-informed schools model. In turn, those certified:
  - Trained a total of 345 school personnel in Orleans and Jefferson Parish in foundational training in trauma-informed schools.
  - Trained approximately 300 educators in skill building trainings focused on creating safe and supportive classrooms and supporting student regulation through teacher regulation.
  - Supported six of the eight partners schools in the development of trauma-informed actions plans to carry trauma-informed practices into the next school year. Foci of action plans included implementation of restorative discipline approaches to reduce suspensions and expulsions and adoption of social and emotional learning curricula to support the well being of students.
  - Led the expansion of trauma-informed approaches into three new schools within their respective charter networks.
- Certified four educators/administrators in Orleans Parish to train others in the implementation of the trauma-informed schools model. In turn, those certified participated in the training of 26 school personnel in foundational training in trauma-informed schools.

**Publications and products from the TIS-LC:**

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<sup>2</sup>Ettman et al. (2021), *JAMA Network OPEN*,  
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<sup>5</sup>Cowen Institute (2020). 2019-2020: The state of public education in New Orleans. Retrieved from: [http://www.thecoweninstitute.com.php56-17.dfw3-1.websitetestlink.com/uploads/SPENO\\_2019\\_FINAL-1583842221.pdf](http://www.thecoweninstitute.com.php56-17.dfw3-1.websitetestlink.com/uploads/SPENO_2019_FINAL-1583842221.pdf)

<sup>6</sup>New Schools for New Orleans (February 7, 2020). The number of teachers of color in New Orleans is increasing. Retrieved from: <https://www.newschoolsforneworleans.org/the-number-of-teachers-of-color-in-new-orleans-are-increasing/>

<sup>7</sup>New Orleans Education Equity Index (2017). Equity matters: A look at educational equity in New Orleans public schools. Retrieved from: <http://neworleansequityindex.org/files/downloads/New-Orleans-Education-Equity-Index-Report-2017.pdf>