

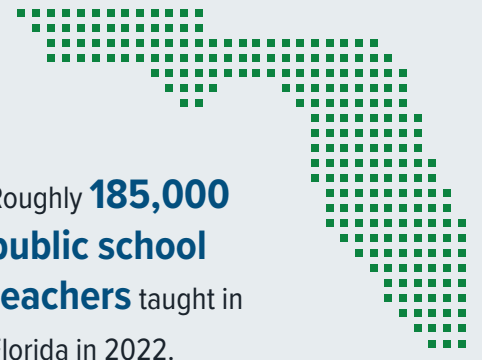


Teacher Perceptions on How to (Re)build School Community Well-Being in the Aftermath of COVID-19



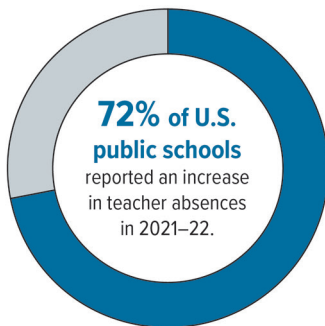
Educator well-being—and working in a school environment that nurtures well-being—is critical to engaging students and supporting their emotional needs and academic success.¹ In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic placed a unique and intense set of stressors on educators; it contributed to disruptions in individual and schoolwide educator well-being. There is evidence that demonstrates a sharp increase in educator retirements and resignations, likely prompted by these stressors. Listening to teachers and acting on their lived experiences is key to creating a supportive school environment.

Roughly **185,000** public school teachers taught in Florida in 2022.

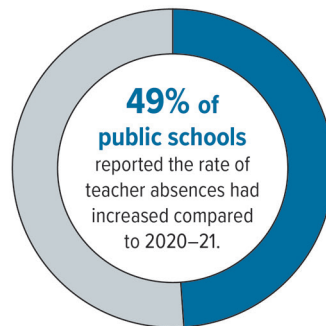


CRITICAL TEACHER ABSENCES DURING COVID-19

Compared to a typical school year before the COVID-19 pandemic

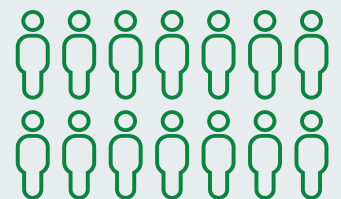


During the 2021–22 school year



Across the state in 2021, teaching position vacancies reached **4,961** and increased to **6,006** in 2022.

Nearly all public schools (99%) reported challenges in obtaining substitute teachers to cover these increased absences. Schools reported relying on administrators (74%), nonteaching staff (71%), and other teachers on their preparation period (68%) to cover classes.²



Miami-Dade County has **344** vacancies as of September 2022.

¹ RAND Corporation. (2022). *Restoring teacher and principal well-being is an essential step for rebuilding schools: Findings from the State of the American Teachers and State of the American Principal surveys* (RR-A1108-4). https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1108-4.html

² National Center for Education Statistics. (2022). *School responses to COVID-19*. <https://ies.ed.gov/schoolsurvey/>; Sachs, S. (2022, September 21). Florida teacher vacancies down to 4,442, according to FDOE. *WFLA.com*. <https://www.wfla.com/news/education/florida-teacher-vacancies-down-to-4442-according-to-fdoe/>

School culture and climate comprise one key factor to retaining teachers. Although many statistics highlight postpandemic educator shortages³ and challenges for teachers, students, and families returning to school, very little is known about what teachers are experiencing. Understanding what teachers are going through is essential to uncovering areas of need and developing solutions to address those needs.

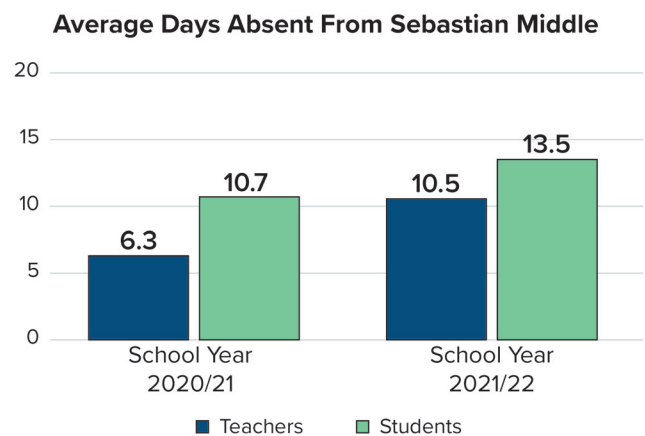
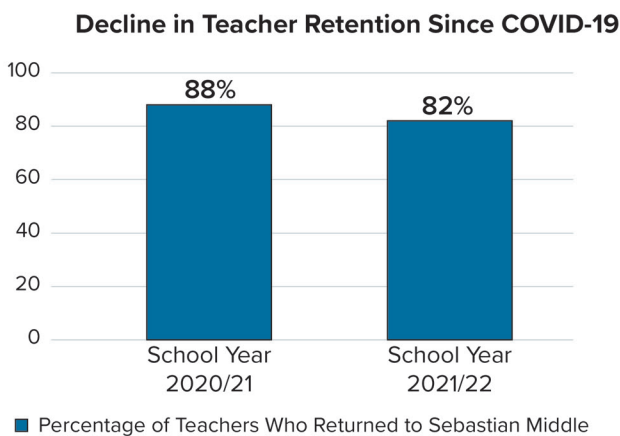
The Miami–Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) research–practice partnership (RPP)⁴ conducted a pilot study to understand individual educator experiences; the RPP recognized that school and district leaders must listen to and understand educators’ needs in the postpandemic environment. The study, piloted in a single middle school, gathered information about middle school teachers’ perceptions of challenges related to COVID-19 disruptions. The findings are based on an analysis of qualitative data from focus groups and one-on-one interviews with seven teachers⁵ at Sebastian Middle School.⁶

Overview of District and School-Level Student Enrollment Characteristics, 2021–22

Students	Latino	African American	White	Low-Income	Special Education	English Learners
Miami-Dade County Public Schools	73%	19%	6%	73%	25%	17%
Sebastian Middle School	97%	1%	2%	73%	18%	18%

RELEVANT FINDINGS

Mirroring national trends, teacher and student absences in the middle school increased on average annually by 4 days since prior to the pandemic for teachers and 3 days for students.



³ Berkshire, J. C. (2022, February 21). Why teachers are dropping out. *The Nation*. <https://www.thenation.com/article/society/teachers-covid-culture-wars/>; Steiner, E.D., & Woo, A. (2021). *Job-related stress threatens the teacher supply: Key findings from the 2021 State of the U.S. Teacher survey* (RR-A1108-1). RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1108-1.html

⁴ The M-DCPS RPP is a collaboration between Miami–Dade County Public Schools and the University of Miami (Florida).

⁵ 16% African American, 34% Latino, and 50% non-Hispanic White; of those, 67% were female and 33% male.

⁶ Sebastian Middle is a pseudonym for the M-DCPS middle school selected for this study.

Teacher perspectives converged on challenges to and recommendations for improving the school environment and home–school involvement in ways that can increase student and teacher well-being. Four key teacher perceptions relate to areas of great influence within Sebastian Middle: school environment, student well-being, teacher well-being, and home-school involvement. The key findings are listed along with representative verbatim quotes from teachers.



School Environment

1. Changes to school leadership during COVID-19 disruptions presented a challenge for teachers in the development and follow-through of academic and behavioral expectations for students.

“This past year was a little challenging: We had two new administrators at the same time, and it was very hard, because you know, there was no continuity from the year before to this year. Everything was kind of dismantled, and it’s just a different style of administration. It was hard for all of us.”



Home-School Involvement

2. Teachers identified challenges with parent communication and parent–child communication that impacted student engagement with home learning during COVID-19 disruptions.

“Even sometimes trying to make contact with parents, it was very, very difficult because...the kids are home alone. Parents are at work. So, when you call them at work, they’re like, ‘Hey, I’m not at home, you know? I’m going to try to get in touch with them, to see if they could log in.’ Then, even when they got in touch with the students to log in, they still weren’t logging in.”



Student Well-Being

3. The impacts on student well-being identified by teachers included challenges with (re)socialization and behavior and mental health support needs that affected student engagement.

There “was a platform where [students] had the opportunity to kind of speak their mind. Okay, whatever they were going through there, [they] were able to express it. It was like a no-judgment zone...my kids, like, they opened up, you know, like things that [they] were telling you, like, oh my God. I mean, I’m not a counselor, but how do I, you know, help this kid that you can see? I need to help you know.”



Teacher Well-Being

4. Teachers identified another major challenge: They believe expectations of teachers increased without additional support. They said the loss of teachers and staff contributed to an increase in responsibility for remaining teachers.

“The math department [had] a lot of losses...It had an impact on the teachers themselves as far as stress. [For example] all of a sudden the amount of kids that [teachers were] responsible for...IEPs, you know, almost doubled, and you don’t want to be picking up the slack and somebody else’s IEP in the middle of the year. It’s kind of a stressful situation.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

Overarching recommendations include a focus on rebuilding the foundation and structure needed within schools to foster healthier relationships for a stronger community.

Recommendations Based on Practices Previously or Currently Enacted

Counseling support for students after return to school	Monday parent night
SEL programming (and evaluation of fidelity)	Use of interactive instruction/activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kahoots • Quizlets • Small group activities
Grade-level assemblies	Supporting teachers could help struggling students through pull out/intervention
Sports and clubs for students	Paraprofessionals in inclusion classes for student with disabilities' support

New Recommendations

Community building in school across administration, teachers, and staff, through gestures such as <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • hallway greetings and • structured and ongoing connections with liaisons and team leaders 	Creating systemic structure and following through
Reciprocal compassion/empathy at all levels (administration, teachers, students)	Outline expectations by communicating consequences clearly because “students are watching”
Acknowledgement of structural/systems factors that impact student performance (not just teachers)	Grade-level assembly to discuss school expectations
School and home to work in tandem to instill values; parental involvement, especially for students “falling in the cracks”	Behavior contracts
Train parents how to access and use student portal to be more involved/have more knowledge regarding student’s status	Need for creating and communicating policies for misconduct
Need for formal onboarding back to live learning from online learning	Smaller class sizes or intervention to increase student engagement (i.e., create learning environment with balanced teacher/student ratio)
More support for special education students <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Class size affects ability to conduct best practices. 	Small group learning environments and mixed-ability grouping to support students performing below grade level
Full instructional staff	Need for resources, such as paper to make copies

RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS TO FACILITATE STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

(1) [*A Teacher's Testimony About Resistance in the Classroom*](#)

A teacher's testimonial about resistance in the classroom and how resistance can be used as an opportunity to engage students.

(2) [*Managing Oppositional Defiance in the Classroom Through the Resistance Theory Lens*](#)

A video-recorded skit featuring Jameca (an oppositional defiant teen), his classmate, and his teacher. The skit demonstrates inappropriate and appropriate reactions to oppositional defiance and resistance in the classroom. The appropriate teacher response to Jameca's defiance includes an understanding of Jameca's culture, his medical condition, and a sense of his home life. Also, you will find teacher testimonials discussing the resistance by Jameca and experiences in our own classes.

(3) [*An Introduction to Funds of Knowledge*](#)

An explanation of the place of Funds of Knowledge in the classroom and how it can be used.

(4) [*Engagement Survey Tool Kit*](#)

This tool kit includes a research-based survey to measure the various facets of engagement, either as a measure of student growth or to measure the effectiveness of an activity or PBL in increasing student engagement. It is specifically designed for STEM disciplines in Grades 6–12, but it can be modified. The tool kit includes a link to a Google Form for the engagement survey, a presentation explaining the importance and multi-faceted nature of engagement, an introductory video and an instructions document.

(5) [*Developing Relationships and Emotional Intelligence for School Well-Being*](#)⁷

Educators need to look beneath the surface of acting-out behaviors to tune into students' needs. As schools transition back to in person, we must realize our most vulnerable kids may have been most harmed by the intense changes of the pandemic year. Teachers should respond to all acting-out behaviors with expressions of support that leave the door open to identify students in real distress. The author cautions against isolating students showing even serious behavioral issues this fall. She recommends using relational discipline techniques and instructional choices that helped kids feel very academically engaged.

(6) [*Retention of Veteran Teachers*](#)

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly disrupted our education system, changing what classrooms and learning look like on a day-to-day basis. Educators are navigating a constantly shifting landscape, with the health of students, teachers, and the community at large at stake. In this series, AIR experts provide their insight into evidence-based practices and approaches for facilitating high-quality instruction—from attracting, preparing, and retaining teachers to providing them with professional learning opportunities—even during uncertain times.

⁷ Keels, M. (2021). What schools need now: Relational discipline. *Educational Leadership*, 79(2). <https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/what-schools-need-now-relational-discipline>