

The Wellbeing of Early Educators in Jefferson, Orleans, and Rapides Parishes during COVID: Findings from the Study of Early Education in Louisiana Fall 2020 Workforce Survey

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March 2021

The COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic (COVID) upended early childhood education (ECE) throughout Louisiana. Early childhood programs—including child care settings and schools—had to navigate new challenges including enacting new cleaning and sanitation routines, purchasing and wearing personal protective equipment, and changing teaching and learning practices to accommodate both in-person social distancing and remote instruction. These new responsibilities put a real burden on early educators. This brief uses survey data collected in the fall of 2020 to describe the concerns that early educators from three Louisiana parishes—Jefferson, Orleans, and Rapides—have about COVID in their workplace. It then outlines the emotional and financial wellbeing these educators, and highlights major differences in the experiences of teachers in child care settings versus schools.

The Study of Early Education in Louisiana (SEE-LA) workforce survey was fielded from October through December of 2020. We invited early

childhood teachers from all publicly-funded child care sites and school-based pre-kindergarten programs, including 63 child care and 63 school-based sites in Jefferson Parish; 81 child care and 46 school-base sites in Orleans Parish; and 27 child care and 27 school-based sites in Rapides to participate in the survey via email. Nearly two thirds of teachers invited, including 61% of child care teachers and 63% of school teachers, completed the survey. Respondents included lead teachers, assistant teachers, paraprofessionals, and floaters. The data thus provide a rich picture of what early educators experienced during COVID.

Of the teachers who responded to the survey, 55% identified as Black, 38% as White, 4% as Hispanic, and the remainder as another race or ethnicity. Seventy-two percent of respondents were lead teachers, and the remaining included assistant teachers, floaters, or other individuals working in the classroom with children. Respondents were, on average, 40 years old. Thirty-nine percent of teachers reported some college experience as their highest level of education, 36% had a bachelor's degree or more, and 25% had a high school degree or less. Overall, 68% of teachers reported teaching



exclusively in person. Of the 32% who reported doing at least some remote teaching, most (86%) reported using a hybrid model.

In the following sections we highlight key survey findings related to teachers' COVID-related concerns as well as their emotional and financial wellbeing. In the following sections we highlight key survey findings related to teachers' COVID-related concerns as well as their emotional and financial wellbeing.

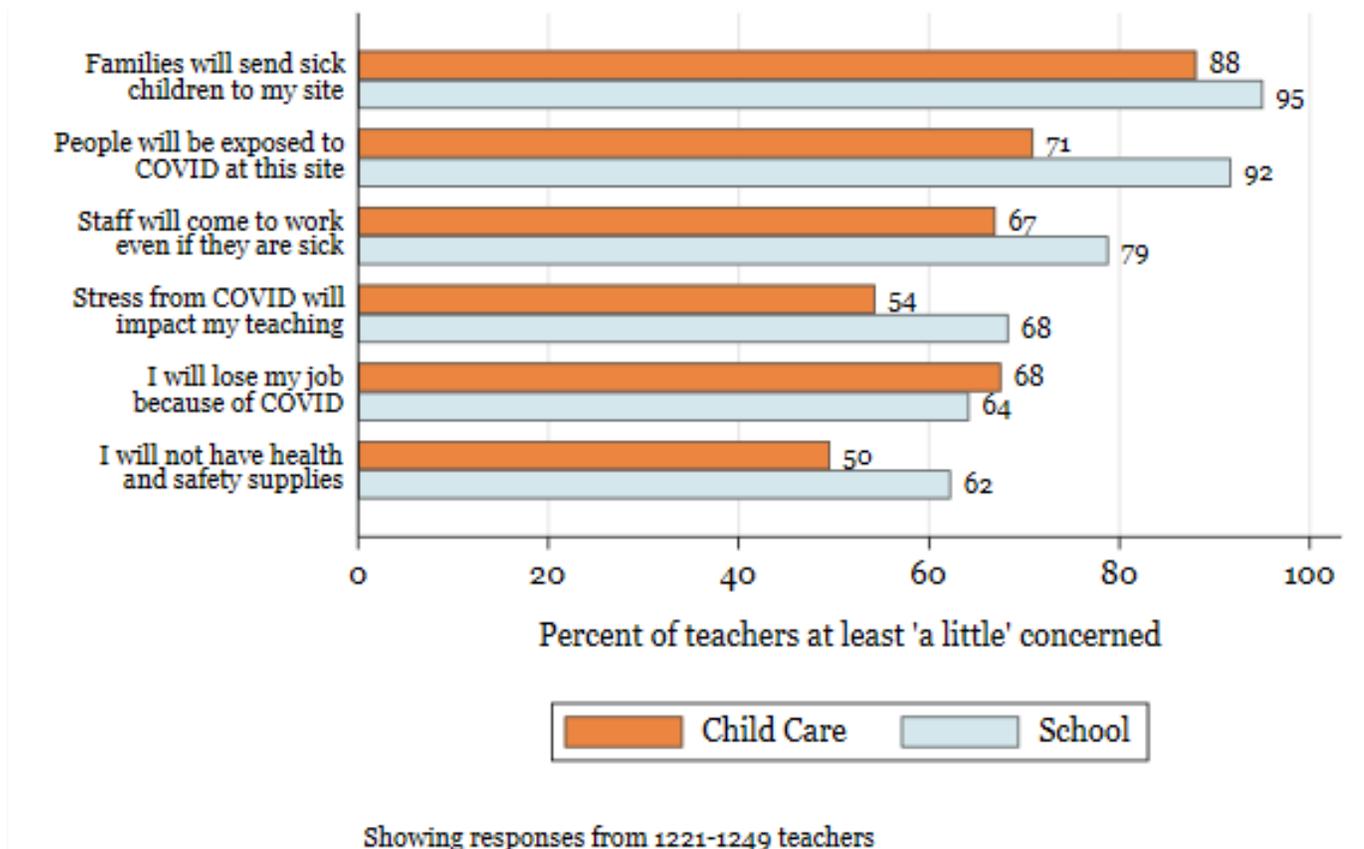
COVID-RELATED CONCERNS

Teachers reported many concerns about COVID in their workplace. Most reported concerns

related to safety and the spread of COVID at the workforce:

- 91% were concerned that families would send sick children to the site
- 79% were concerned that children, families, or staff would be exposed to COVID at their site
- 72% were concerned that staff will come to work even if they are sick
- 55% were concerned that they would not have the supplies they needed to keep themselves and others safe at their site

Figure 1. Teachers' COVID-related concerns by site type



Many also worried that COVID would impact the quality of their teaching, their ability to keep their job, and their finances:

- 60% were concerned that stress from COVID would impact their ability to teach and care for children
- 67% were concerned that they would lose their job or income because of COVID

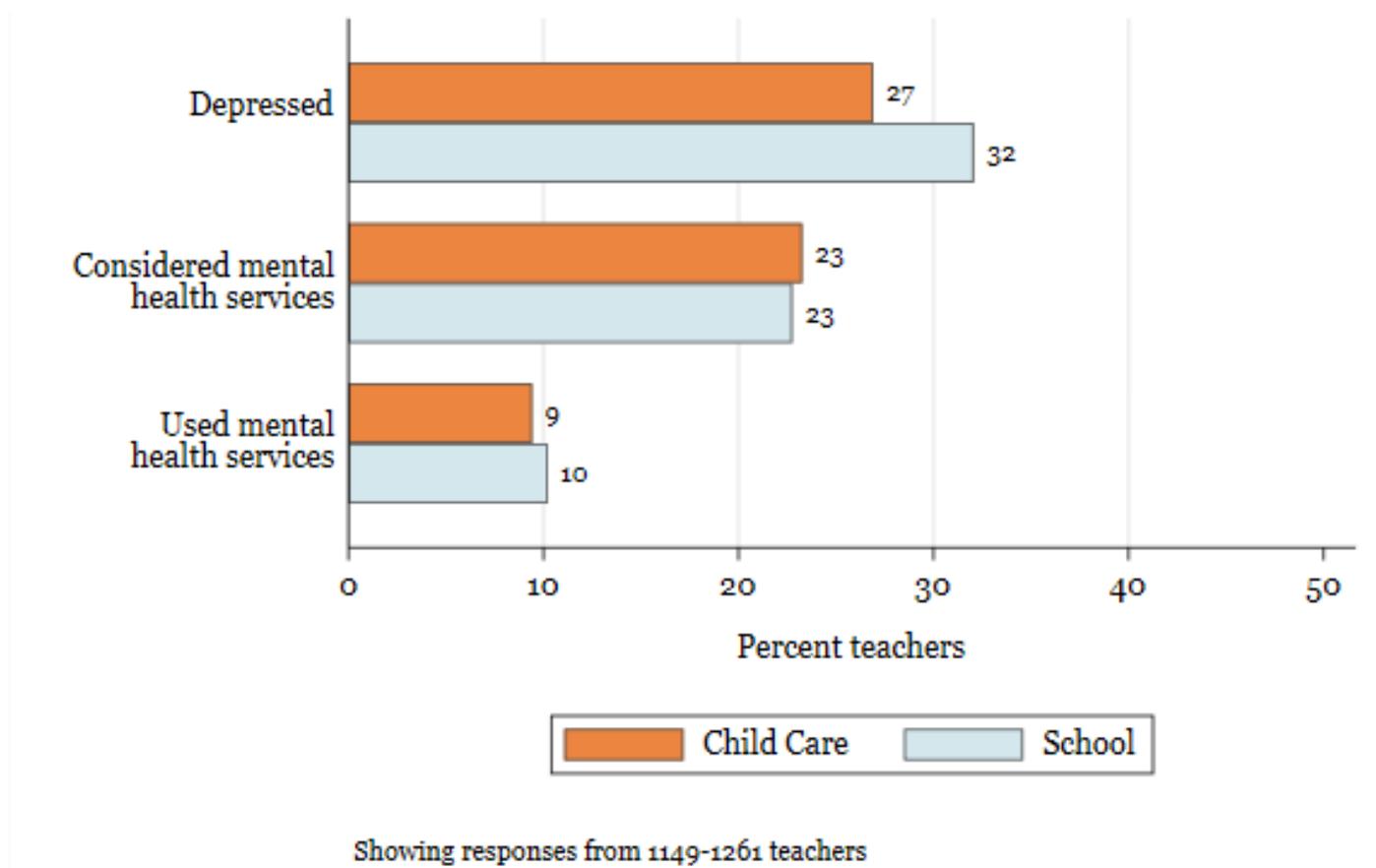
The prevalence of these concerns varied substantially by site type. Figure 1 shows that although the concerns were quite common across both site types, they were particularly high among school-based teachers.

EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

Early educators reported high rates of depression. Twenty-eight percent reported clinically-relevant levels of depressive symptoms on the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale, a widely-used, well-validated depression scale.ⁱ This figure is higher than observed in an earlier wave of this survey conducted in Jefferson and Rapides only in the fall of 2018 (24%ⁱⁱ).

There was variability in depression by site type; 27% of teachers in child care sites reported clinically-relevant levels of depressive

Figure 2. Depression and mental health support by site type



symptoms compared to 32% of school-based teachers (Figure 2). Approximately twenty-three percent of teachers in both child care and school sites considered using mental health services (note that the bars appear different in the Figure 2 because labels have been rounded to the nearest whole number); almost half of these teachers ultimately did access mental health resources.

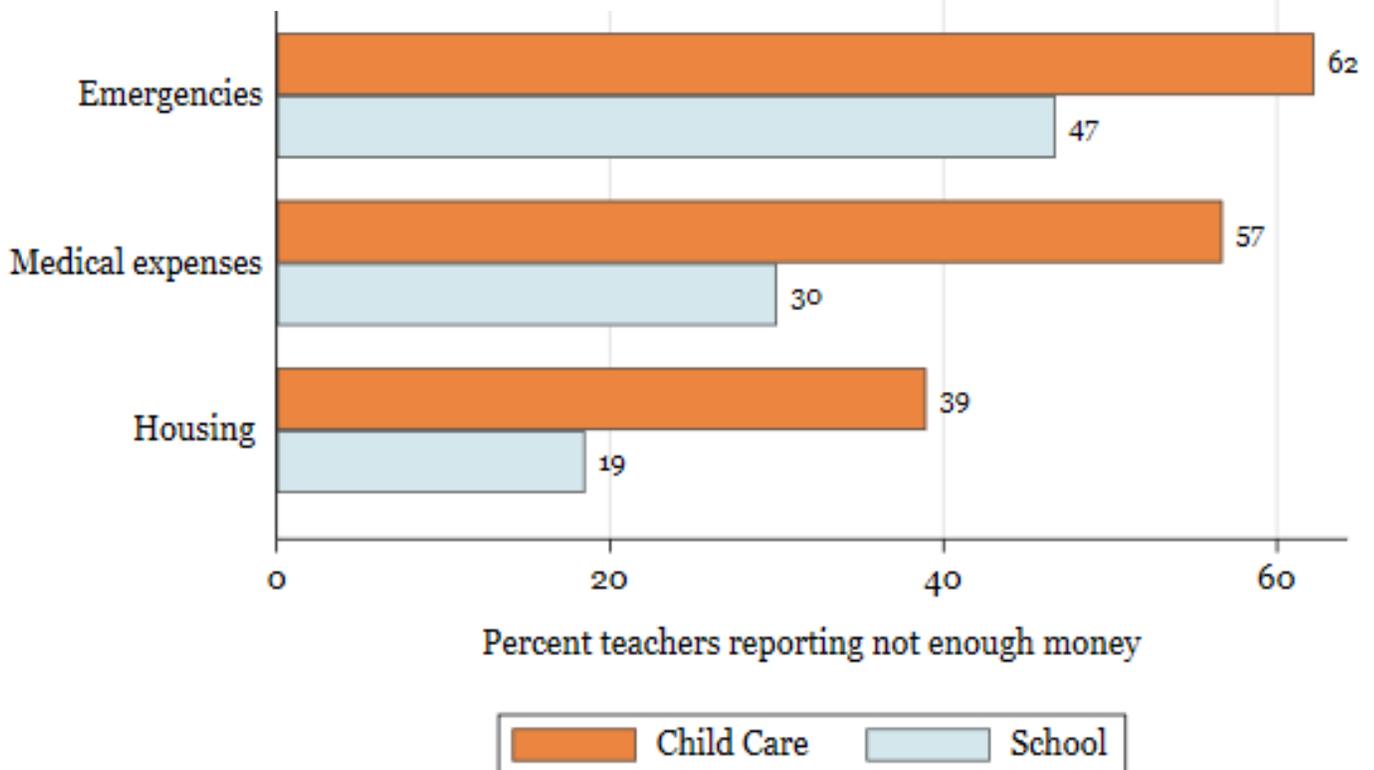
FINANCIAL WELLBEING

Many early childhood educators throughout the three parishes reported struggling financially, especially child care teachers. As shown in Figure 3, 62% percent of child care teachers

worried that they would not have enough money to pay for an emergency, compared to 47% of school-based teachers. Fifty-seven percent of child care teachers reported that they did not have enough money for medical expenditures, compared to 30% of school-based teachers. Similarly, 39% of child care teachers reported that they did not have enough money for housing, while about half as many school-based teachers (19%) reported the same.

Lack of funds for medical expenses and emergencies may be related to teachers' employee benefits: 21% of child care teachers and 4% of school-based teachers reported that they did not have health insurance; and 48% of

Figure 3. Financial wellbeing



Showing responses from 1033-1158 teachers

child care teachers and 14% of school-based teachers do not have sick leave (not shown).

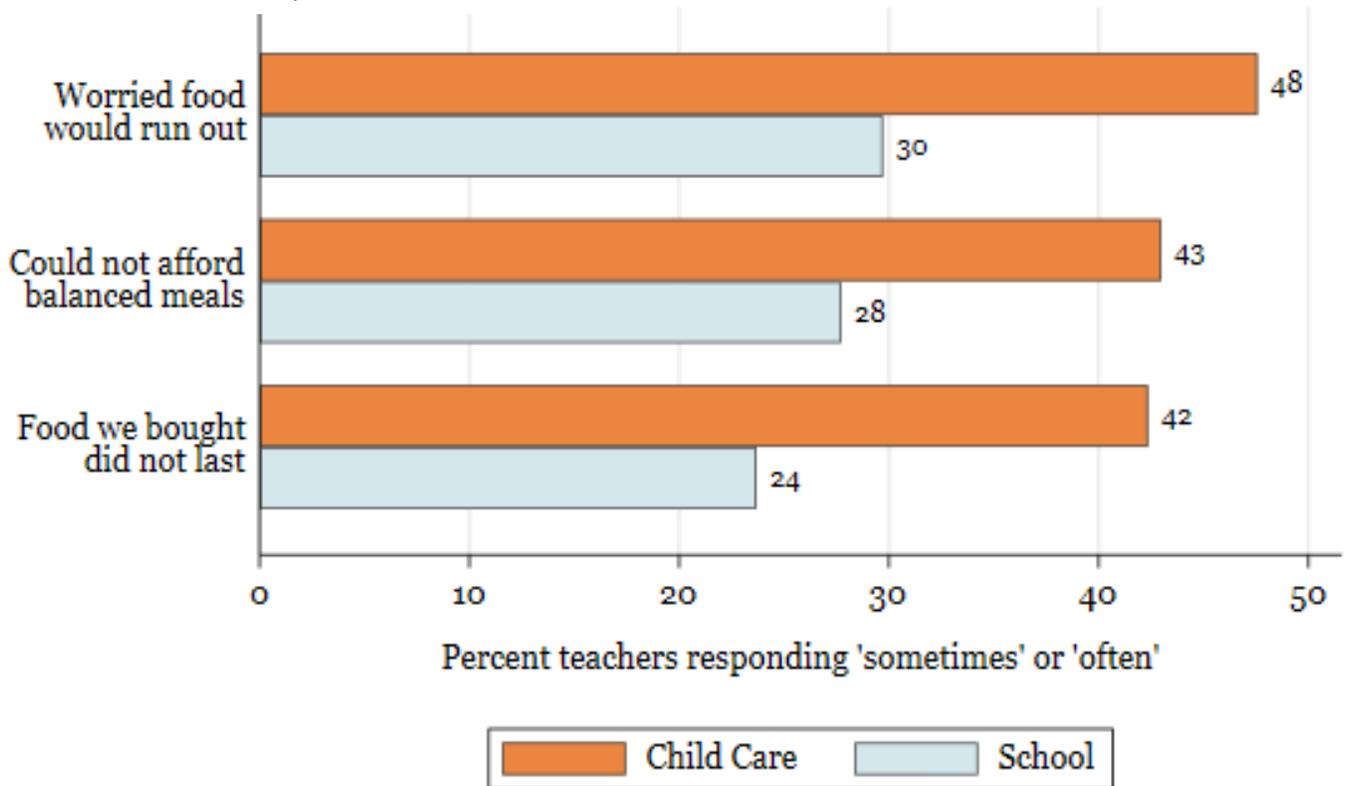
Teachers also reported high levels of food insecurity. For instance, nearly half of child care teachers (43%) reported that in the past three months the food they bought just didn't last and they didn't have the money to get more (Figure 4). This was also true for about a quarter of school-based teachers.

Overall, more than three-quarters of teachers said it was at least somewhat difficult to live on their income, and 32% said it was very or extremely difficult to do so (not shown).

CONCLUSION

Data from the fall 2020 SEE-LA survey suggest that many teachers in Jefferson, Orleans, and Rapides Parish are struggling with their emotional and financial wellbeing, and have significant concerns related to COVID at their workplace. The vast majority of teachers are concerned that they will be exposed to COVID while at their site. The high levels of stress, depression, and financial struggles negatively impacts teachers' ability to teach and care for young children, and compromises sites ability to offer stable, reliable, and high-quality care and education programs.

Figure 4. Food insecurity



Showing responses from 1192-1219 teachers

REFERENCES

ⁱ Levine, S. Z. (2013). Evaluating the 7-item Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale short-form: A longitudinal US community study. *Social psychiatry and psychiatric epidemiology*, 48(9), 1519-1526.

ⁱⁱ Bassok, D., Markowitz, A. J., Smith, A., & Oleson, L. (2019). *The Early Childhood Education Workforce in Louisiana: Findings from the 2018 Early Childhood Workforce Survey in Jefferson and Rapides Parishes* (Report No. 2). Retrieved from <https://curry.virginia.edu/study-early-education-louisiana>