

# The Wellbeing of Orleans Parish’s Early Educators during COVID: Findings from the Study of Early Education in Louisiana Fall 2020 Workforce Survey

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The COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic (COVID) upended early childhood education (ECE) throughout Louisiana. Early childhood programs—including child care settings, school-based programs, and Head Start centers—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 describes the concerns that early educators in Orleans Parish have about COVID in their workplace using survey data collected in the fall of 2020. It then outlines the emotional and financial wellbeing of these educators, and highlights major differences in the experiences of teachers across the three sectors.

The Study of Early Education in Louisiana (SEELA) workforce survey was fielded from October

through December of 2020. We invited early childhood teachers from all publicly-funded child care sites, school-based pre-kindergarten programs, and Head Start programs, including 81 child care sites, 46 schools, and 14 Head Starts in Orleans Parish to participate in the survey via email. Nearly two-thirds of teachers invited, including 58% of child care teachers, 55% of school teachers, and 61% of Head Start 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, 80% identified as Black, 15% as White, 2% as Hispanic, and the remainder as another race or ethnicity. About three-quarters (74%) 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, 41 years old. Forty-six percent of teachers reported some college experience as their highest level of education, 38% had a bachelor’s degree or more, and 17% had a high school



degree or less. In Orleans, 58% of teachers reported teaching exclusively in person. Of the 42% who reported doing at least some remote teaching, 88% 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.

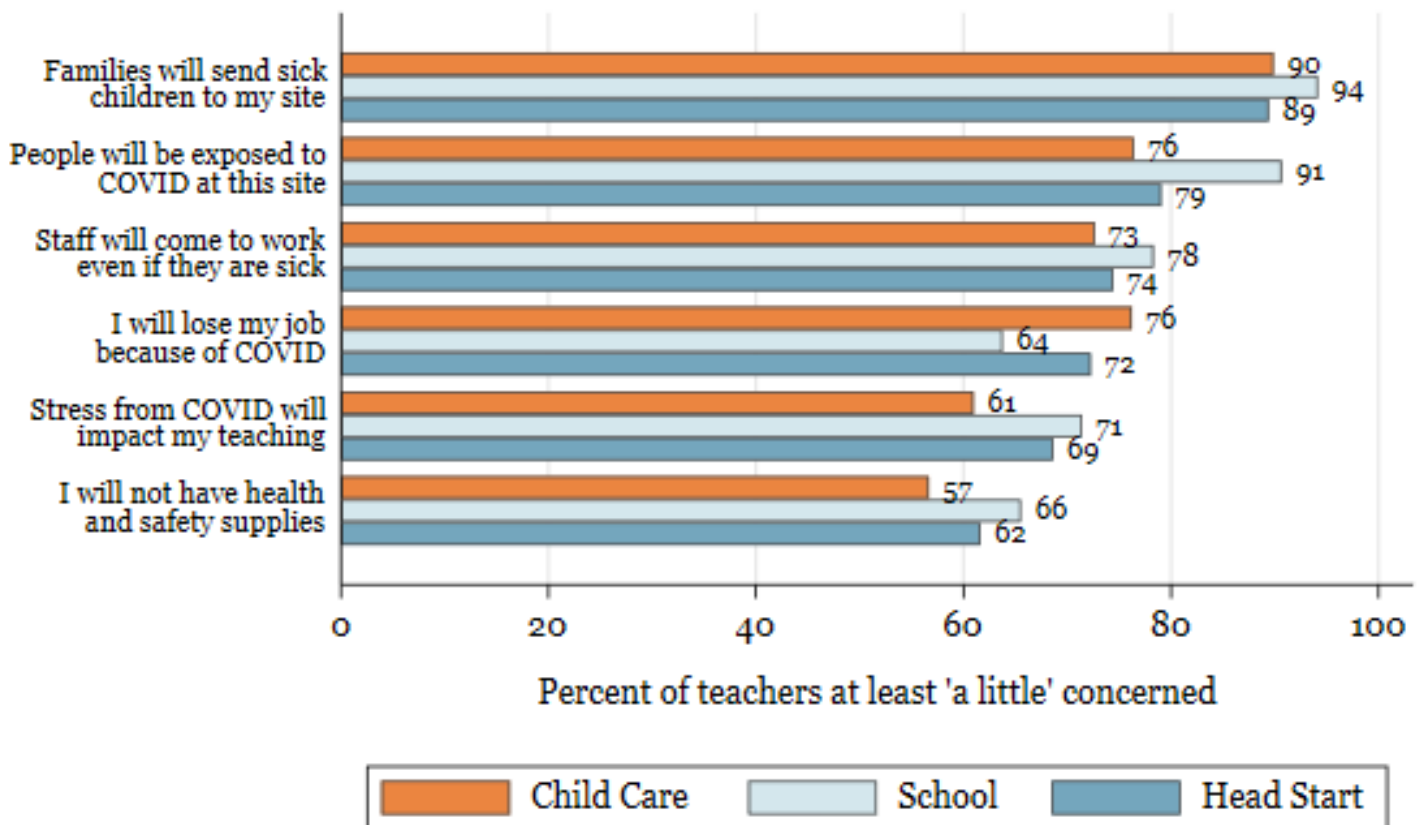
## COVID-RELATED CONCERNS

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

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

- 91% were concerned that families would send sick children to the site
- 80% were concerned that children, families, or staff would be exposed to COVID at their site
- 74% were concerned that staff will come to work even if they are sick
- 59% 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



Showing responses from 539-574 teachers

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

- 65% were concerned that stress from COVID would impact their ability to teach and care for children
- 73% were concerned that they would lose their job or income because of COVID

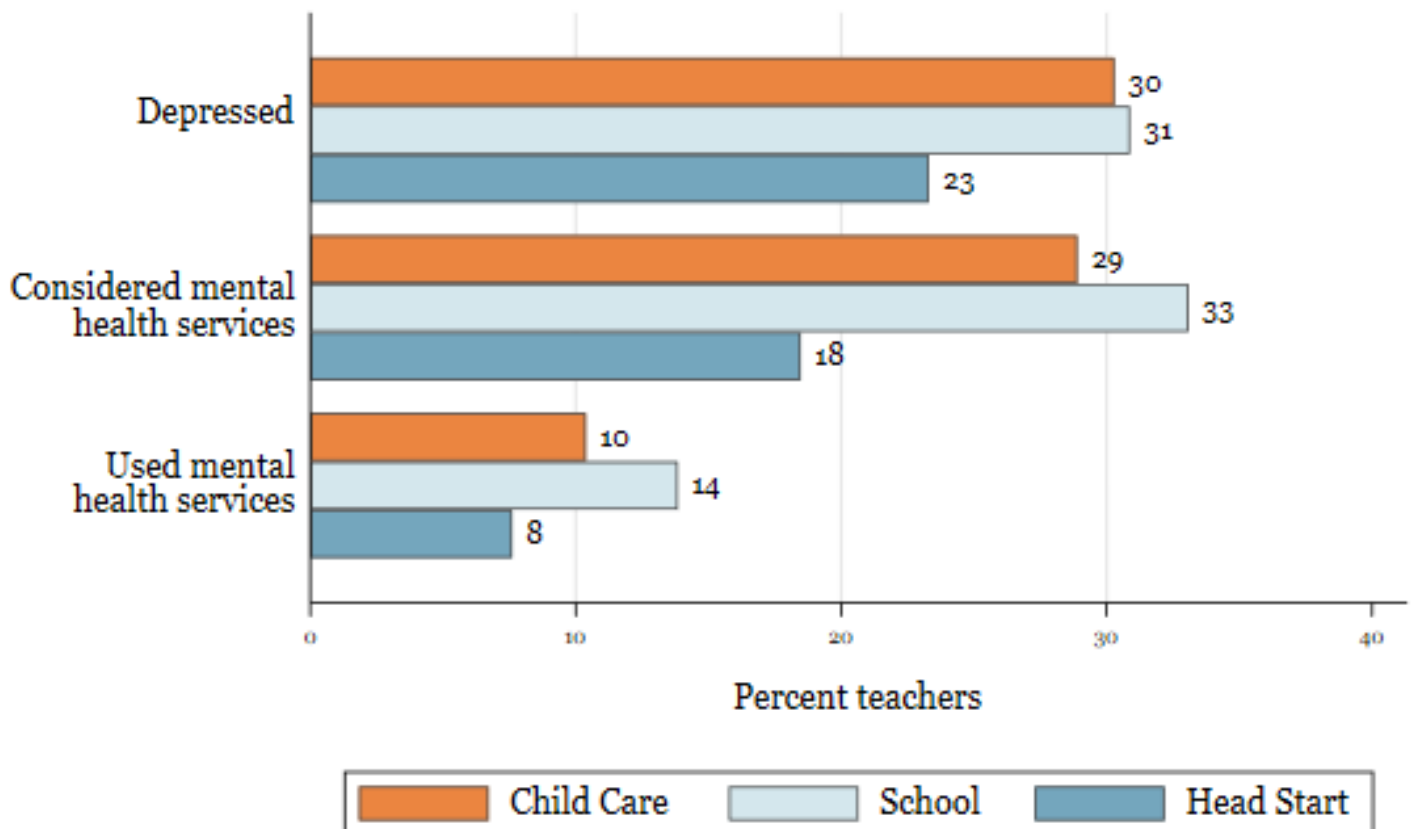
The prevalence of these concerns varied substantially by site type. Figure 1 shows that although the concerns were quite common across all three groups, concerns about

exposure were particularly high among school-based teachers whereas concerns about job loss were high among Head Start and child care teachers. Concerns that COVID would affect teaching were lowest in child care.

## EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

Early educators reported high rates of depression. Twenty-nine percent reported clinically-relevant levels of depressive symptoms on the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale, a widely-used, well-validated depression scale.<sup>1</sup> This figure is higher

Figure 2. Depression and mental health support by site type



Showing responses from 530-579 teachers

than observed in an earlier wave of this survey conducted in Louisiana in the fall of 2018, conducted in Jefferson and Rapides parishes (24%<sup>ii</sup>).

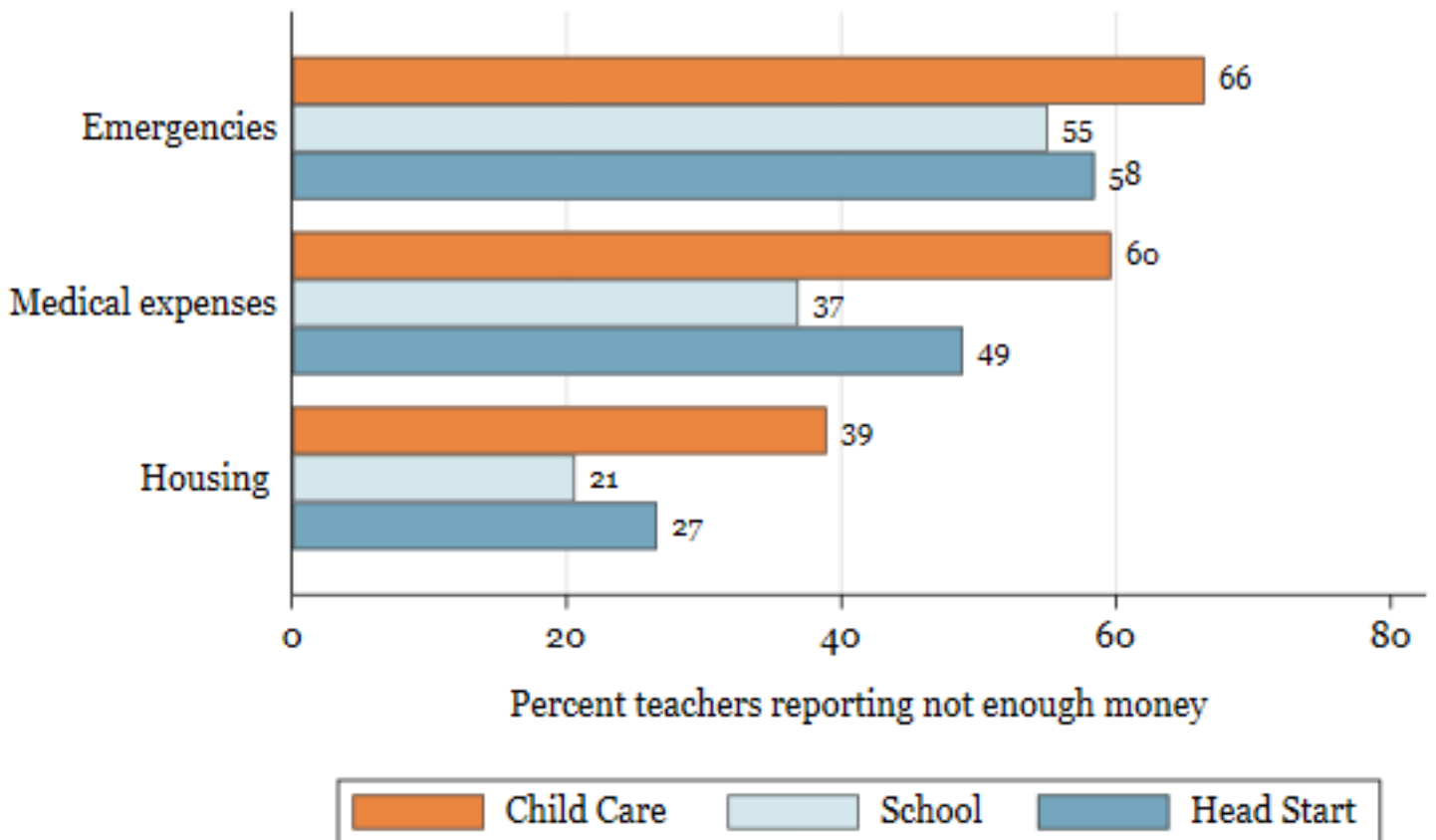
There was variability in depression by site type; 30% of teachers in child care sites reported clinically-relevant levels of depressive symptoms as compared to 31% of school-based teachers and 23% of Head Start teachers (Figure 2). Twenty-nine percent of child care teachers, 33% of school-based teachers, and 18% of Head Start teachers considered using mental health services. Roughly one-third to

one-half of these teachers ultimately did access mental health resources: of the overall sample, a total of 10% of child care teachers, 14% of school-based teachers, and 9% of Head Start teachers ultimately did so.

## FINANCIAL WELLBEING

Many early childhood educators in Orleans reported struggling financially, especially child care teachers. As shown in Figure 3, 66% percent of child care teachers worried that they would not have enough money to pay for an emergency, compared to 55% of school-based

Figure 3. Financial wellbeing



Showing responses from 481-541 teachers

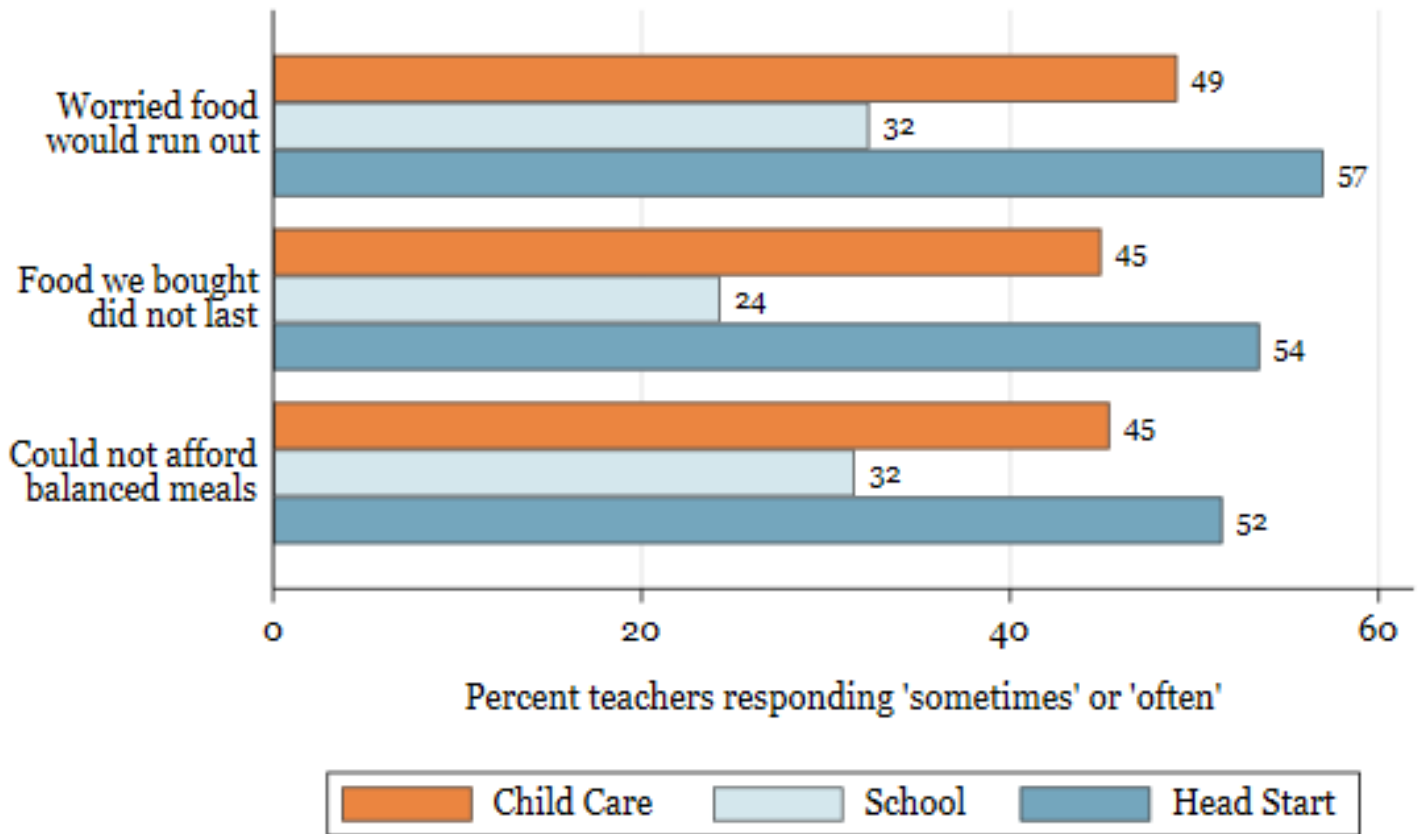
teachers and 58% of Head Start teachers. Sixty percent of child care teachers reported that they did not have enough money for medical expenditures, compared to 37% of school-based teachers and 49% of Head Start teachers. Similarly, 39% of child care teachers reported that they did not have enough money for housing, while 21% of school-based and 27% of Head Start teachers reported the same.

Lack of funds for medical expenses and emergencies may be related to teachers' employee benefits: 18% of child care teachers, 3% of school-based teachers, and 12% of Head

Start teachers reported that they did not have health insurance. Moreover, 34% of child care teachers, 11% of school-based teachers, and 37% of Head Start teachers do not have sick leave (not shown).

Teachers also reported high levels of food insecurity. Fifty-four percent of early educators in Orleans were food insecure. These rates were highest among Head Start teachers and lowest among school-based teachers. For instance, more than half (54%) of Head Start teachers reported that in the past three months the food they bought just didn't last and they

Figure 4. Food insecurity



Showing responses from 547-556 teachers

didn't have the money to get more (Figure 4). This was also true for about 45% of child care teachers and a quarter of school-based teachers.

Overall, 83% of teachers said it was at least somewhat difficult to live on their income, and 34% said it was very or extremely difficult to do so (not shown).

## CONCLUSION

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Data from the fall 2020 SEE-LA survey suggest that many teachers in Orleans 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.

## REFERENCES

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- <sup>i</sup> 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.
- <sup>ii</sup> 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://www.see-partnerships.com/our-findings.html>