

The Wellbeing of Rapides 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 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 describes the concerns that early educators in Rapides 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 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 27 child care sites and 27 schools in Rapides Parish to participate in the survey via email. Over two-thirds of teachers invited, including 60% of child care teachers and 72% 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, 65% identified as White, 31% as Black, 1% as Hispanic, and the remainder as another race or ethnicity. Seventy 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, 38 years old. Thirty-seven percent of teachers reported a high school degree as their highest level of education, 32% had some college experience, and 31% a bachelor’s degree or more. In Rapides, 84% of teachers reported teaching exclusively in person. Of the 16% who reported



doing at least some remote teaching, about half (46%) 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.

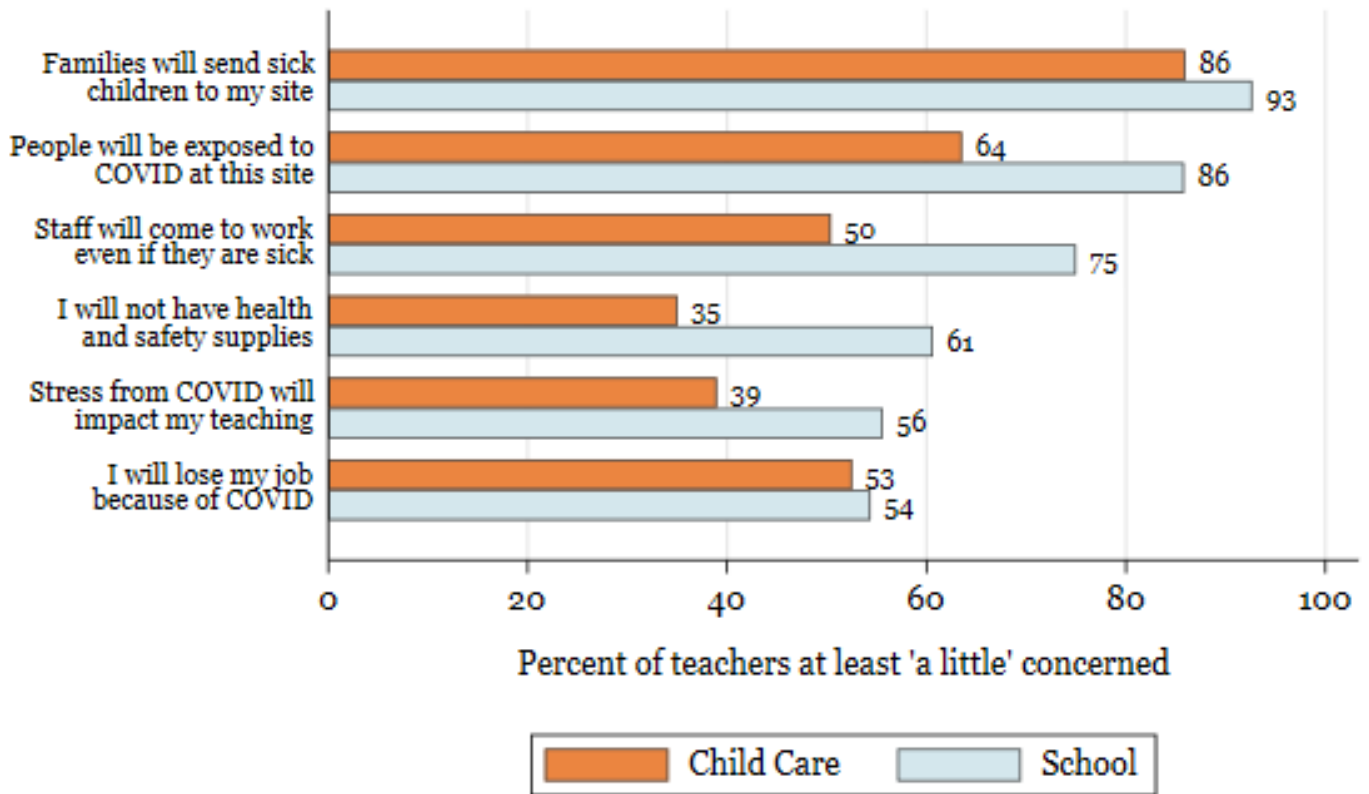
COVID-RELATED CONCERNS

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

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

- 90% were concerned that families would send sick children to the site
- 76% were concerned that children, families, or staff would be exposed to COVID at their site
- 64% were concerned that staff will come to work even if they are sick
- 49% 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 238-245 teachers

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

- 49% were concerned that stress from COVID would impact their ability to teach and care for children
- 55% were concerned that they would lose their job or income because of COVID

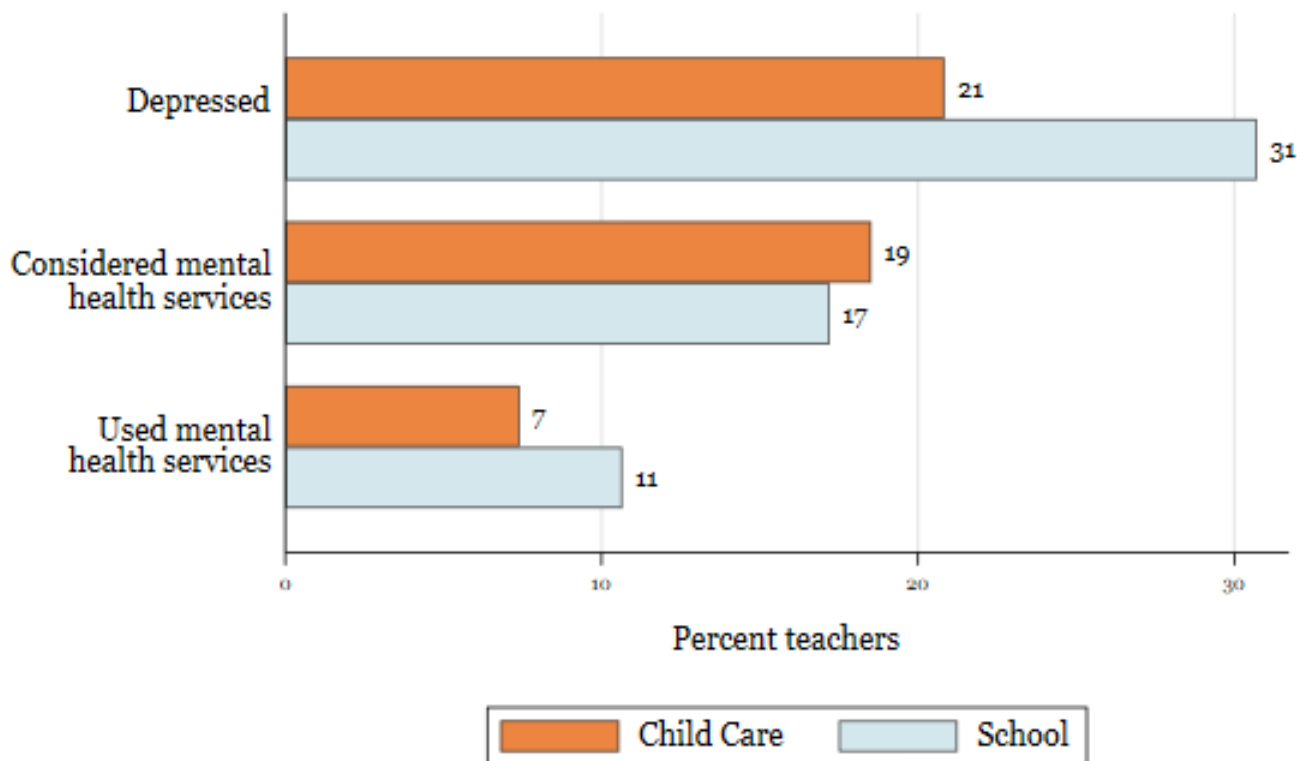
The prevalence of these concerns varied substantially by site type. Figure 1 shows that although the concerns were quite common among both groups, they were particularly high among school-based teachers.

EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

Early educators reported high rates of depression. Twenty-five 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 Louisiana in the fall of 2018 (24%ⁱⁱ).

There was variability in depression by site type; 21% of teachers in child care sites reported

Figure 2. Depression and mental health support by site type



Showing responses from 230-247 teachers

clinically-relevant levels of depressive symptoms as compared to 31% of school-based teachers (Figure 2). Nineteen percent of child care teachers and 17% of school-based teachers considered using mental health services; 7% of child care teachers and 11% of school-based teachers ultimately did access mental health resources.

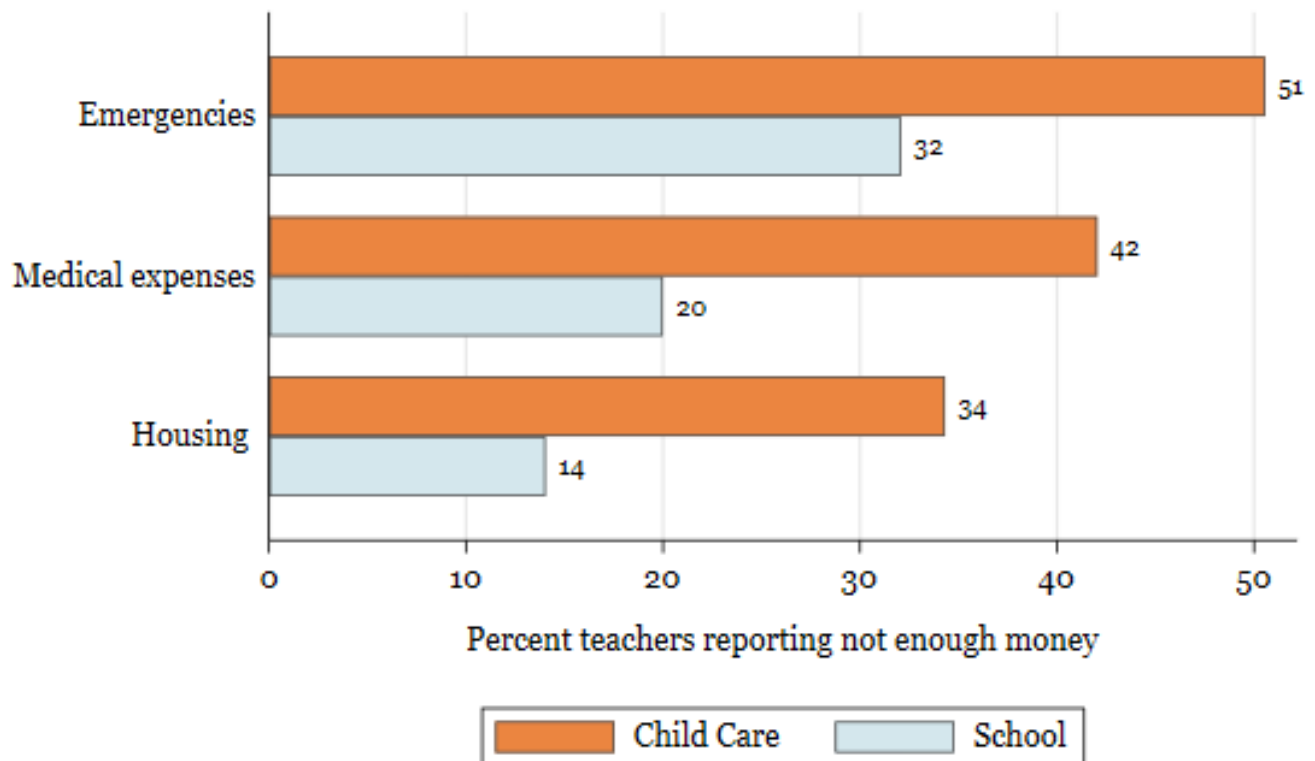
FINANCIAL WELLBEING

Many early childhood educators in Rapides reported struggling financially, especially child care teachers. As shown in Figure 3, 51% percent of child care teachers worried that they

would not have enough money to pay for an emergency, compared to about one-third (32%) of school-based teachers. Forty-two percent of child care teachers reported that they did not have enough money for medical expenditures, compared to 20% of school-based teachers. Similarly, 34% of child care teachers reported that they did not have enough money for housing, while 14% of school-based teachers reported the same.

Lack of funds for medical expenses and emergencies may be related to teachers' employee benefits: 25% of child care teachers and 8% of school-based teachers reported that

Figure 3. Financial wellbeing



Showing responses from 195-223 teachers

they did not have health insurance, and 68% of child care teachers and 12% of school-based teachers do not have sick leave (not shown).

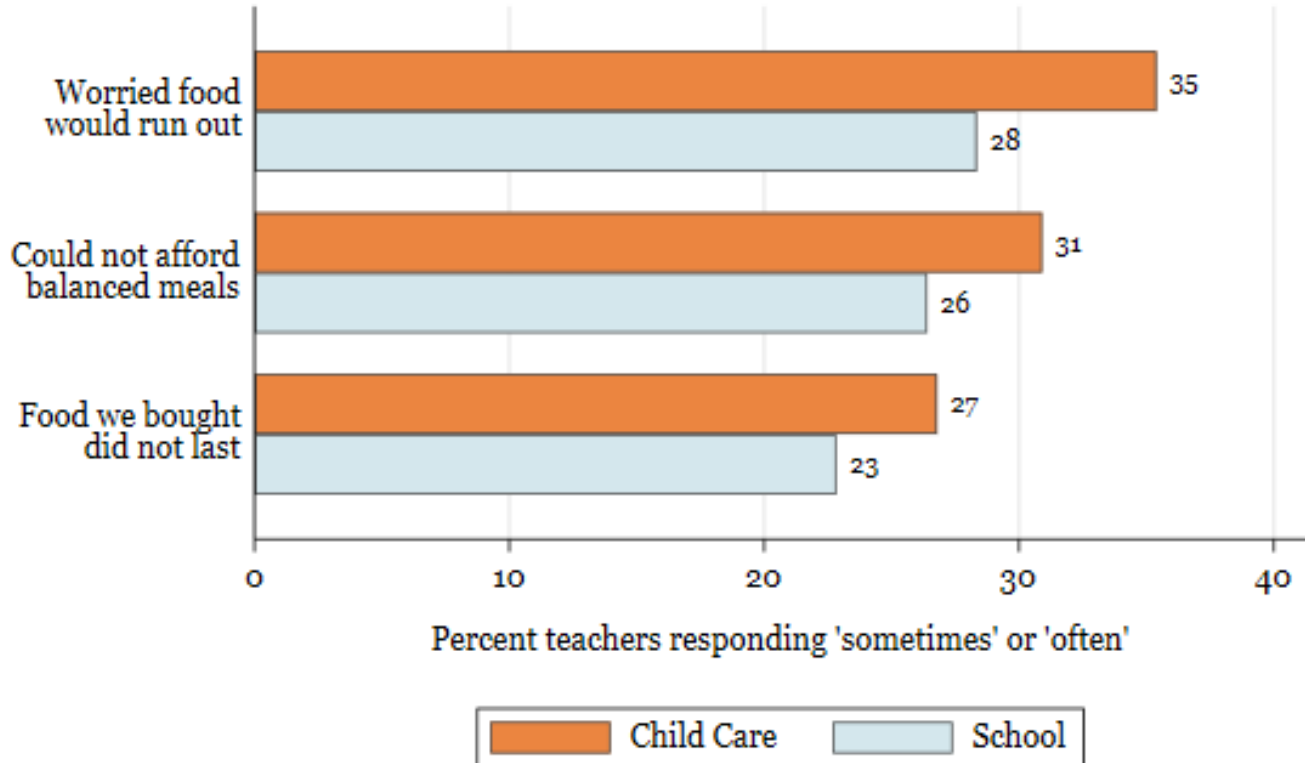
Teachers also reported high levels of food insecurity. For instance, 35% of child care teachers reported that in the past three months the food they bought just didn't last and they didn't have the money to get more (Figure 4). This was also true for about a quarter of school-based teachers.

Overall, more than three-quarters of teachers said it was at least somewhat difficult to live on their income, and 24% 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 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 235-240 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://www.see-partnerships.com/our-findings.html>