## Mississippi State University

## Scholars Junction

College of Education Publications and Scholarship

College of Education

6-2022

# COVID-19 Best Practices & Innovations Brief: Supporting the Social and Emotional Needs of Mississippi's Students

Kellie Fondren Mississippi State University, pkb22@msstate.edu

Peggy Hopper Mississippi State University, pfh7@msstate.edu

Kristin Javorsky Mississippi State University, kj911@msstate.edu

Melody Dale Mississippi State University, mcp67@msstate.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsjunction.msstate.edu/coe-publications



Part of the Education Commons

### **Recommended Citation**

Fondren, Kellie; Hopper, Peggy; Javorsky, Kristin; and Dale, Melody, "COVID-19 Best Practices & Innovations Brief: Supporting the Social and Emotional Needs of Mississippi's Students" (2022). College of Education Publications and Scholarship. 31.

https://scholarsjunction.msstate.edu/coe-publications/31

This Report is brought to you for free and open access by the College of Education at Scholars Junction. It has been accepted for inclusion in College of Education Publications and Scholarship by an authorized administrator of Scholars Junction. For more information, please contact scholcomm@msstate.libanswers.com.

# **COVID-19 Best Practices & Innovations Brief:**

# Supporting the Social and Emotional Needs of Mississippi's Students



# **Supporting Social and Emotional Needs of Students**

In March of 2020, schools across the nation had to develop and implement emergency crisis procedures for students from preschool to high school. Most of these procedures included closing school buildings and transitioning to online/virtual learning environments. The lines between home and school began to blur. Thus, the roles of parents and teachers began to change.

School was not the only area of student's lives that changed.

Activities such as extracurricular sports or hobbies, grocery shopping, running errands, and hanging out with friends all came to a sudden stop. In addition, there was the worry of sick family members or lack of ability to keep family members from getting sick. Students experienced a huge social-emotional transition from one normal to another. The new experiences, ever changing transitions, and unknown futures set the stage for a new challenge for students. Teachers began to realize the need to support social-emotional skills and enhance systems for students' mental health. This shift added a new challenge for teachers to not only move to online teaching but to support students' social emotional needs online as well.

According to the recently released statewide study, teachers in Mississippi met this new challenge to teaching with over half (52%) reporting that online learning had a negative impact on students' social emotional wellbeing (Javorsky et al., 2022). Teachers reported that motivation for students declined, students struggled with content, and there was an increase in general confusion. They reported a lack of motivation to complete assignments, actively participate, or even sign on to online learning sessions as a challenge to daily instruction. In a National Survey of Public Education's Response to Covid-19, many districts reported "going above and beyond" to support students (Jackson & Bowden, 2020). AS one Mississippi teacher from the K-12 statewide

# ISSISSIPPI TEACHERS SUPPORTED STUDENTS IN MILITIPI F WAYS

#### **Social Support**

- Worked in virtual small group or individually.
- Used consistent check-in procedures such as home visits, texts, or ReMind messages.
- Attempted to attain consistency to create a new norm for students.
- Held open-office nights for parents and students to join and ask questions or have conversations.
- Planned purposeful conversations into online learning sessions to allow students time to socialize with peers.

### **Academic Support**

- Intentionally ensured each student asked or answered questions.
- Utilized interactive computer based instruction to engage students in the content.
- Provided both video or synchronous online "how to" tutorials for new skills and technology for students and parents.
- Established online learning classrooms for a consistent location for finding materials.
- Provided organizational scaffolds.

Students starts with supporting teachers

Teachers reported districts and school administration acknowledged appreciation for their hard work by providing:

- Professional development
- Lunches
- Appreciation gifts
- An hour at the end of each day for planning
- Decorated school facilities for holidays and events
- An Easter egg hunt for teachers and staff
- "Teacher of the month" incentives
- Extended grace for learning and implementing new strategies.

teacher's survey succinctly stated, "we did the best we could."

Rural geographical locations like Mississippi only enhanced the challenge to meet students' social emotional needs (Nichols, Goforth, Sacra, and Ahler, 2017). It was evidenced that while rural geographic locations impact the need to support social emotional needs, the strong relationships that develop in the community aspect of a rural area foster a support system of their own (Nichols, Goforth, Sacra, and Ahler, 2017). This was also evident in our research focused on Mississippi, as local businesses and churches stepped in to meet needs by addressing connectivity issues, fostering online activities, and/or providing meals.

The COVID-19 experience allowed educators to understand the need to provide support for the social-emotional health of students in any future crisis. It also provided an opportunity to reflect on the need and method to incorporate social emotional learning into curricula to increase students' abilities to problem solve and develop resiliency in the event of future crisis.

# **Supporting Social and Emotional Needs of Teachers**

Teachers dealt with the added stressors of the pandemic in the classroom and at home. The social and emotional health of teachers had a significant impact on the effectiveness of instruction and their students' achievement (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Mississippi teachers (69%) reported that their social-emotional health impacted the quality of online learning. Teachers were "physically and emotionally exhausted."

The high stress levels reported by 41% of teachers presented another challenge for online learning. The Comprehensive Center's report on teacher self-care reported that it is "critical" to support and meet the social and emotional needs of teachers (Manian, Belfield, & Berger, 2021, p.2).

Authors: Dr. Kellie Fondren & Dr. Peggy Hopper

#### REFERENCES

- ▶ Jackson, D., & Bowdon, J. (October, 2020). Spotlight on students with disabilities. American Institutes for Research: National Survey of Public Education's Response to COVID-19.
- ▶ Jennings, P. A., & Greenberg. M. T. (Spring, 2009). The prosocial classroom: Teacher social and emotional competence in relation to student and classroom outcomes. *Review of Educational Research*, 79(1), 491-525.
- Manian, N., Belfield, W., & Berger, C. (2021). Prioritizing Teachers: Importance of Self-Care and Adult Social and Emotional Competences. Rockville, MD: National Comprehensive Center at Westat.
- Nichols, L. M., Goforth, A. N., Sacra, M., Ahlers, K. (Winter, 2017). Collaboration to support rural student social-emotional needs. *Rural Educator*, 38(1), 38-48.

### **FULL REPORT**

Javorsky, K., Alley, K.M., Miller, N.C., Fondren, K.B., Lemley, S.M., & Hopper, P.F. (2022, June). Mississippi's K-12 public education response to the COVID-19 pandemic: From remote learning to recovery and beyond. Emergency online teaching - What works for Mississippi. <a href="https://guides.library.msstate.edu/c.php?g=1156773&p=8479156">https://guides.library.msstate.edu/c.php?g=1156773&p=8479156</a>

Images from Pixaby: https://pixabay.com/