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# A Mixed Methods Study of How Elementary Teachers Cope Mentally, Physically, and Spiritually While Teaching in a Pandemic

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A MIXED METHODS STUDY OF HOW ELEMENTARY TEACHERS COPE  
MENTALLY, PHYSICALLY, AND SPIRITUALLY WHILE TEACHING IN A  
PANDEMIC

By  
Chavon Bryant

A Dissertation Submitted to the  
Gardner-Webb University College of Education  
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Gardner-Webb University  
2023

## Approval Page

This dissertation was submitted by Chavon Bryant under the direction of the persons listed below. It was submitted to the Gardner-Webb University College of Education and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Gardner-Webb University.

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“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Philippians 4:13. This Bible verse has been one of my favorites through my journey at Gardner-Webb University in the doctoral program.

I want to thank my son Jordan Bryant for his love, support, and understanding when I had to make sacrifices for school and the motivation he gave me when I felt like I was not going to be able to finish. He would always say, “Ma, you got this!” Being a single mom has its challenges, but I would not trade it for the world. Mommy is leading the way for you, son. Always remember no matter how tough a goal gets, Never Give Up.

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being there every step of the way and always giving me encouraging words. I always wanted to show my nephew Dwight that he could do anything he put his mind to no matter how tough it gets; I did it, nephew. He always looked up to me, and through the good and bad, our bond remains the same. Patricia, my gym partner, I do not know what I would have done without your amazing support and talks while working out. Kesha, you are truly amazing because I had to make so many sacrifices and you still supported me through them all. When I wanted to go into my shell and hide, you would get me out of the house for well-needed breaks to keep going. I would say I want to be alone, and you always told me I was your family, and you had my back no matter what. To my classmate from Gardner-Webb, Sherria, thanks so much for being my accountability partner. We did it! Sherise, where do I begin, you have truly been a blessing to me and my son. Our friendship began 2 years ago, and it has been an amazing journey to share with you. You heard me cry so many times, and you always told me you would not let me give up and we will cross that finish line together. You would pray with me and for me, give me tough love even when I did not want to hear it, and Girl, look we did it!!

I would also like to recognize my mom who always gives me tough love and tells me she is proud of me. I always tried to do my best in everything because I wanted my mom to be proud of me. Mom, I did it, and I am Dr. Chavon Bryant. To my dad, I am blessed that you are in my life and here to see me make it to the finish line.

Overall, I have overcome many obstacles, and I am proud of the successes I have made in my life. I never imagined that I would have graduated with my doctorate degree. I was always told I would not succeed in life and that I could not do it, but I kept a positive attitude and worked hard to achieve my goals. My greatest accomplishment is

that I made a positive impact for others that will last a lifetime. I am looking forward to my future as Dr. Chavon Bryant.

## **Abstract**

A MIXED METHODS STUDY OF HOW ELEMENTARY TEACHERS COPE MENTALLY, PHYSICALLY, AND SPIRITUALLY WHILE TEACHING IN A PANDEMIC. Bryant, Chavon, 2023: Dissertation, Gardner-Webb University.

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to examine coping strategies for teachers in elementary schools who taught during the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers experienced mental, physical, and spiritual challenges throughout the pandemic, and this study shared how teachers coped. Through this study, 48 teachers serving in three different elementary schools in North Carolina completed ten 4-point Likert scale response items. The survey tool's validity was established using the Lawshe content validation index. Interviews were conducted, in addition to a focus group session. Resilience theory, a framework for improving a teacher's ability to adapt successfully when under stress or adversity, was one of the theoretical frameworks used to investigate this topic. The second theoretical framework chosen was social-emotional learning theory. This framework provides how teachers can improve their own well-being and the social, emotional, and academic development of their students. From this research, a collection of coping strategies, trainings, support, and future planning for the benefit of teachers was established.

*Keywords:* teachers, elementary schools, Covid-19 pandemic, coping strategies

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

The COVID-19 pandemic began to surface in China in 2019 and continued to spread to the United States, which resulted in millions of school children being sent home to learn versus in school or childcare (Garcia & Weiss, 2020). As a result of Governor Cooper issuing an executive order to close schools for face-to-face learning for 2 weeks effective March 16, 2020, teachers had to learn quickly how to teach remotely. During the 2-week period, North Carolina tried to create a continuous learning plan for students while assessing the impact COVID-19 had on schools. After the 2-week period, students were not allowed to return for the remainder of the school year. This decision was made in collaboration with the State Board of Education Chair, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, and North Carolina Health and Human Services Secretary (NC Governor Roy Cooper, 2020). This was a challenge for teachers who were not prepared for remote teaching. Teachers were overwhelmed and had to be willing to provide virtual instruction. There was not enough time to provide training for teaching online synchronously or asynchronously. Since the COVID-19 pandemic began, the focus was on supporting students. Teachers were expected to work through professional challenges, regardless of what their personal struggles were. According to McClintock (2022), there were resources related to mental health to support students and parents but not enough focus on educator well-being and their adaptation to remote teaching.

### **Statement of the Research Problem**

During the school shutdown in North Carolina, I was in a first-year position as an instructional coach, trying to support teachers whose mental health was not perceived as stable, due to the unprecedented demands of teaching during a pandemic. Teachers had to

learn to teach virtually, and some lacked the technology skills to be successful. Teachers became exhausted mentally, physically, and spiritually. Dealing with the stress and strain from their jobs and personal lives made a huge impact on how they were able to deal with students daily.

The teacher turnover rate increased, and reducing turnover was a challenge for educational leaders (Camera, 2022). As of January 2022, 44% of public schools reported having several teacher openings and 61% of them were because of the COVID-19 pandemic (Camera, 2022). Retirement rates were higher, and teachers were leaving their educational careers. Teachers resigning accounted for 51% of the vacancies, and retirements accounted for 21% (Camera, 2022). Teacher turnover was twice as high in the United States as in other places such as Canada, Finland, Ontario, and Singapore (Sutcher et al., 2019). According to Toropova et al. (2020), this will continue to be an international concern and not just a domestic one.

As, COVID-19 began to spread in 2020 and schools shut down, based on an executive order from the governor, districts had to set up and quickly establish remote learning programs which included learning packets and virtual platforms (Malkus, 2020). When remote instruction was launched, it was just one of the factors that affected students. According to Malkus (2020), students in poverty suffered more due to the lack of instruction and more paper learning packets versus technology-based instruction. Some of the negative impacts included not having a wireless connection, someone to help them log on to participate in virtual instruction, and not having a workstation set up to complete work.

In addition to student learning suffering, the pandemic had the potential to affect

teacher mental health along with their personal well-being. Teacher well-being correlates with teacher effectiveness, student outcomes, and school improvement. Other psychological constructs associated with teacher well-being include gratification, flexibility, flourishing, anxiety, and nervous breakdowns (Sipeki et al., 2022). A strong well-being allows a person to achieve the impossible, create, and construct work to compile relationships with people to contribute to the community (Dewe & Cooper, 2012).

### **Purpose**

This study's goal was to assess how elementary instructors handled the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic mentally, physically, and spiritually in three elementary schools in North Carolina. Additionally, it sought to qualitatively document the coping mechanisms used to support teacher well-being. Through surveys and interviews, this study analyzed how the pandemic affected teachers and what coping strategies can be provided for similar future situations.

### **Research Questions**

With this study, I investigated how the COVID-19 pandemic affected teachers in different aspects. The research inquiries were

1. How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect teachers mentally, physically, and spiritually in their ability to teach?
2. How effective were the support programs offered by the school district for teachers?
3. What kind of coping strategies do teachers recommend to effectively continue teaching during a pandemic?

## **Definition of Terms**

### ***Asynchronous Learning***

A generic phrase used to describe educational, instructional, and learning processes that do not take place simultaneously or in the same location. The phrase is most frequently used to describe a variety of digital and online learning activities in which students learn from teaching that is not given in person or in real time, such as taped video classes or self-directed game-based learning assignments (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-a).

### ***AIDS***

Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome; a persistent, potentially fatal condition (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2021b).

### ***Burnout***

A condition characterized by physical and emotional tiredness, detachment, a sense of unfulfilled potential, and feelings of inefficacy (Carter, 2013).

### ***Coping***

Comforting and coping mechanisms for stressful situations drawn from cognitive, emotional, and behavioral perspectives (Admiraal & Wubbles, 2000).

### ***COVID-19***

A respiratory sickness and an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus (World Health Organization, 2022a).

### ***Employee Assistance Program***

A state-sponsored benefit program that provides the assistance and tools you need to deal with problems and issues that are either personal or work-related (North Carolina

Office of State Human Resources, 2022).

### ***HIV***

Human Immunodeficiency Virus; targets the immune system of the body (CDC, 2022).

### ***Mental Health***

Your thoughts, feelings, and actions are influenced by your social, psychological, and emotional health. Helps us make wise judgments, engage with others, and handle stress (CDC, 2021a).

### ***Pandemic***

A sickness that affects the entire world's population and is typically brought on by newly emerging, quickly spreading infectious agents (bacteria or viruses; Riley, 2021).

### ***SARS***

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome; a virus related respiratory disease (World Health Organization, 2022b).

### ***Spirituality***

Having a relationship with God or the hereafter is what it means to be spiritual. Prayer every day is a sign of spirituality (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-b).

### ***Stress***

A condition of tension or mental or emotional strain brought on by challenging or unfavorable conditions (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-c).

### ***Synchronous Learning***

Implies that even though you will be learning online, you will virtually attend a

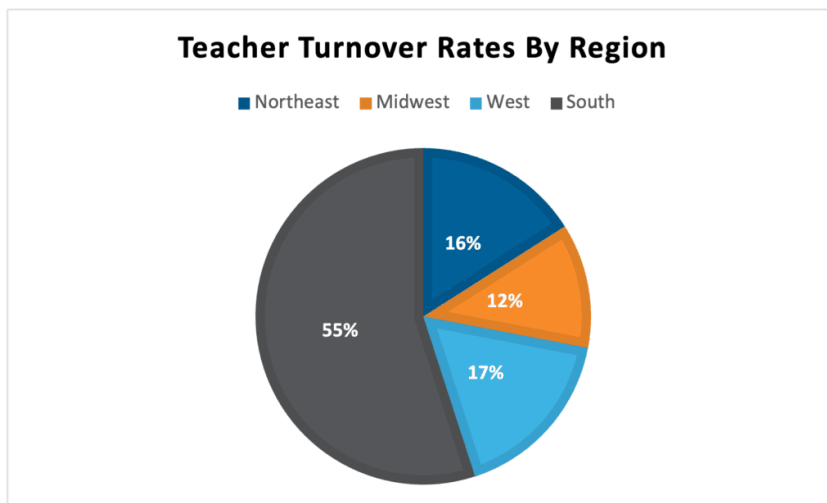
class meeting every week at the same time as your teacher and fellow students (Merriam-Webster, n.d.-d).

### **Significance of the Study**

The turnover rates for teachers increased after the pandemic, which put a greater demand on providing coping strategies mentally, physically, and spiritually to support teachers. A few schools with in-person, hybrid, and online learning formats reopened in the fall of 2020. Teachers were challenged to build relationships with coworkers, students, and families while being asked to adjust education using synchronous and asynchronous instruction (Camp et al., 2021). Figure 1 displays the teacher turnover rates by region in the United States.

### **Figure 1**

*Teacher Turnover Rates by Regions in the United States*



The southern region had the most turnover at 55%, and the other regions ranged from 12% to 17%, according to Research and Development (RAND) reports (Diliberti et al., 2021).

A 2021 poll by RAND found that over one quarter of teachers said they planned

to quit their professions at the end of the 2021-2022 academic year (Camp et al., 2021). As the economy recovered and they had more employment possibilities, more instructors departed as the pandemic persisted and the delta variant caused more difficulties for the 2021–2022 academic year (Camp et al., 2021).

For many instructors, returning to class after the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown did not mean returning to normal. The academic and emotional recovery of students from pandemic interruptions required further assistance, and instructors were overworked and overburdened because of staffing shortages (Sparks, 2022). These demands on instructors, coupled with the traditional stressors of being an educator in a public school system, negatively impacted teacher well-being. Kush et al. (2022) found that teachers, whether they taught in-person or online, had much greater rates of anxiety during the pandemic—even higher than healthcare employees. It was based on data from a 7-month survey, during 2020 and 2021, of millions of American workers. Teacher mental health well-being was adversely impacted by the difficulty of remote education. In comparison to their counterparts in the classroom, remote teachers were 60% more likely to report feeling socially isolated, and they also had higher depressive symptoms (Sparks, 2022).

### **Overview of Methodology**

This research study used a mixed methods approach to gather data from a variety of teachers in order to obtain insight into the coping mechanisms applied throughout the pandemic. Elementary school teachers from several schools in Sunshine District (pseudonym) were participants in this research study. Qualitative data were collected through interviews with open-ended questions and a focus group to gain insight into how teachers felt while teaching during the pandemic. A qualitative study allows you to



explore concepts and experiences in detail. Quantitative data were collected through 10 Likert scale response questions. A quantitative study can be an experiment, observations recorded as numbers, or a survey with close-ended questions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

### **Setting**

This research involved the participation of teachers working in different elementary schools within Sunshine District. Two schools served students in prekindergarten through fifth grade. The other school served students in kindergarten through fifth grade.

### **Role of the Researcher**

Currently, I work as an elementary school teacher in the public school system in North Carolina. I have been a teacher, instructional coach, and most recently a reading interventionist for the past year. With an aspiration to support other educators in a leadership position, I wanted to finish my research on a subject that I think has an effect on teachers. I had to present resources for teachers in the event of a pandemic and explain how coping mechanisms can help keep teachers in the field.

### **Overview of Theoretical Framework**

This study's theoretical framework is based on resilience theory. How teachers deal with the nature of adversity is important and within the scope of this collection of work. Resilience is characterized as facing frustration, adversity, or misfortune and bouncing back. Resilience can help teachers survive, recover, and thrive for success even in hard times (Moore, 2019). During the pandemic, teachers displayed resilience in a positive manner. Resilience can be determined if the educational system continues to

operate as effectively as before the pandemic. Changes were made, but the system kept functioning, developing, and responding. People, technology that supports the process, and the environment in which the process takes place are the three dimensions of resilience in education. These elements will aid in comprehending how educators persevered despite the pandemic and how learning still occurred (Raghunathan et al. 2022).

The focus of this dissertation was a study of how teacher well-being was affected; thus, the social-emotional learning theory is a suitable research framework to take into account. Forty to fifty percent of educators had intended to quit their jobs during the first 5 years of their careers prior to the pandemic. They usually lose their passion because they feel undervalued, overworked, and underpaid (Currie, 2021). The five social and emotional competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, interpersonal skills, and responsible decision-making should be emphasized by teachers.

### **Summary**

This study analyzed and compiled strategies to help teachers cope during a pandemic while teaching in elementary schools. A growing corpus of information on how teachers fared during a pandemic is available, and there is a need for ongoing efforts to support teachers and adapt best practices for the classroom. In this mixed methods study, data from teachers were gathered to support the need for coping strategies mentally, physically, and spiritually while teaching in a school district in North Carolina. The study demonstrated how educators continued teaching in the face of challenges and support during the pandemic.

Following a focus group of research that corresponds with the study's objectives

and research questions within the framework of resilience theory, with a focus on social emotional learning theory in Chapter 2, Chapter 3 outlines the study's methodology and components. With the information given, the research's mixed methods design is discussed.

The information gathered throughout my investigation is presented in Chapter 4, along with an analysis of the findings. The research, its findings, and its conclusions are compiled in Chapter 5. Future research suggestions and recommendations are given.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### Introduction

This chapter reviews research on the mental, social, emotional, and spiritual impact COVID-19, influenza, and school shootings have had on teachers during a pandemic. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers were stressed because of low pay and lack of support from the state, and they became more stressed because of the COVID-19 pandemic (Parrish, 2022). Some schools operated with a face-to-face option since August 2020, while some schools remained strictly virtual. There were surprisingly few studies completed during the pandemic that examined the impact of stress, anxiety, and depression among teachers, but those that were conducted revealed the pandemic created undesirable psychological symptoms. This emphasized how crucial it was to have schools and universities reopen as soon as possible (Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021).

The mental health needs of teachers are important and can impact students if teachers do not have support. Some teachers were stressed prior to the pandemic and had never experienced the challenges they faced with COVID-19. Most schools have a district psychologist and therapist for students who have mental needs, but many do not have a full-time position. In most districts, employee assistance programs are available. Researchers are interested in finding answers and developing accurate predictions of what learning loss brought on by the pandemic consists of, using earlier test results from millions of children and studies on summer learning patterns (Kuhfeld et al., 2022).

Prior to returning to school, there should have been mental health support for teachers. Teacher jobs were stressful before the pandemic and became even more challenging with longer work hours, engaging students remotely, and repeated pivots

from hybrid to remote to in-person instruction (Gewertz, 2021). In addition, many were fearful of their loved ones getting COVID-19. With the challenges and dynamics teachers experienced, mental health needs were paramount (Gewertz, 2021).

This chapter presents research that addresses the study's research questions, including

1. How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect teachers mentally, physically, and spiritually in their ability to teach?
2. How effective were the support programs offered by the school district for teachers?
3. What kind of coping strategies do teachers recommend to effectively continue teaching during a pandemic?

A structured format is used to deliver this literature review. The theoretical basis for this research, resilience theory, is introduced in the first section of the literature review. This literature review is presented in a structured format. After the theoretical framework is reviewed, research regarding how mental health was introduced in education, how mental health affects teachers, and programs provided for teachers to help with mental and physical stress are presented. The next section of the literature reviews detailed research regarding the effect COVID-19 had on education, coping strategies, and spiritual connections that can be utilized by teachers. Following this research are discussions on different pandemics, throughout the years, that affected teachers. This list includes the influenza pandemic, school shootings, and the HIV/AIDS pandemic. The research is summarized by the main points at the end of Chapter 2.

## **Theoretical Frameworks**

### ***Resilience Theory***

Resilience theory asserts it is not the nature of adversity that is important, but how teachers deal with it. When teachers face frustration, adversity, or misfortune, resilience helps them bounce back (Moore, 2019). During the pandemic, some teachers were able to survive teaching virtually even with the challenges they continued to face all year.

Schools are a place for academic learning as well as social and emotional learning, social support, and social interaction. Due to the closing of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic, the learning and well-being support teachers were accustomed to receiving throughout the school year was impacted. There will continue to be major challenges for teachers, school leaders, superintendents, and board members related to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, it was important that teachers recognized what stress looked like and how to build resilience. Some ways teachers could build resilience were

- communicating with coworkers and administrators about job stress
- discussing how the pandemic was affecting work
- working together to identify solutions for factors that cause stress
- knowing how to access mental health resources in the school
- accepting things they do not have control over (CDC, 2021e).

If the responses to resilience fail, it would have a life-long impact on students, teachers, and communities in both social and economic terms. Teacher resilience is important in all areas of education and can generate positive outcomes if they stand against the natural stressors and setbacks in teaching (Wang, 2021). Resiliency produces

a sense of pride, autonomy, empathy, job satisfaction, competency, responsiveness, and emotionally intelligent teachers (Xie & Derakhshan, 2021); therefore, providing resilience in the educational system should be prioritized and more education related to resilience should be implemented in schools.

Understanding what resilience means has an impact on teacher identities.

Resilience is the ability to adjust to obstacles that successfully inhibit survival processes (Ramakrishna & Singh, 2022). It is also a process that is connected to adaptive responses to encourage adaptation and functioning after an imbalance (Masten, 2018). Relational resilience is important for relationships with colleagues in education while focusing on the main role with teacher resilience and motivation levels (Ramakrishna & Singh, 2022). It is created through a web of solid, dependable relationships between teachers, students, and teacher leaders. These connections are crucial for support and empowerment and form the basis of the resilience process (Ramakrishna & Singh, 2022).

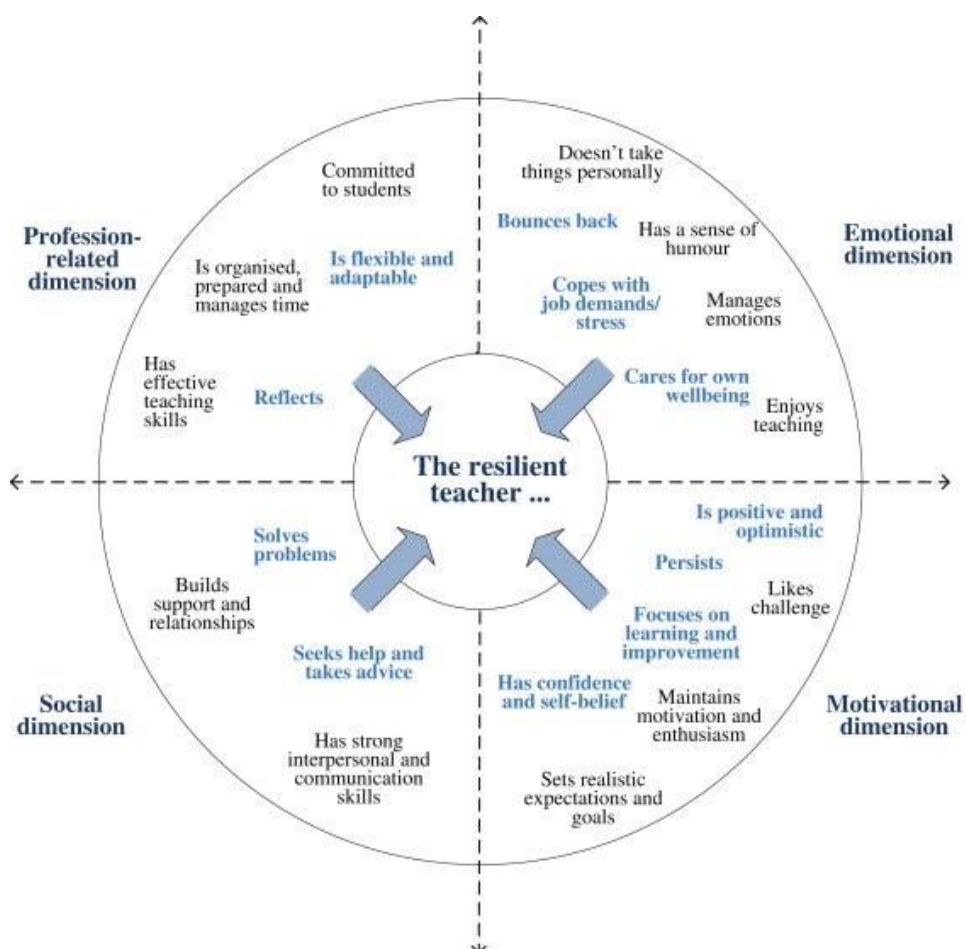
Resilience is important in teacher professional performance. Teacher self-efficacy, work satisfaction, effectiveness, and motivation are all correlated with teacher resilience (Amin et al., 2022). Instead of placing blame for what is uncomfortable, resilient educators concentrate on handling difficulties and challenging circumstances (Drew & Sosnowski, 2019). This suggestion implies that a resilient teacher will probably be able to maintain their high level of teaching performance, despite the challenges and circumstances at work. Resilience is one of the most crucial elements that keeps educators in the field.

Resilience in teachers refers to their capacity to endure and flourish in the face of unforeseen circumstances, sustain the purpose of education, and manage the unexpected

circumstances of being a teacher (Kowitarttawatee & Limphaibool, 2022). Teacher resilience leads to personal and professional accomplishments; positive commitment to students; and valuable, driven decision-making. Figure 2 displays the four-dimensional framework on teacher resilience (Lehman et al., 2021). The arrows pointing from each of the four dimensions toward the center of the framework demonstrate how the characteristics of a resilient teacher are interrelated.

**Figure 2**

*Four-Dimensional Framework on Teacher Resilience*



*Note.* The four different dimensions (social, motivational, profession-related, and emotion) lead to what a resilient teacher means (Lehman et al., 2021).



Teacher resilience has four components: career-related, emotional, motivational, and social. The aspects of the career-related dimension consist of classroom management, instructional skills, being flexible, and facilitating effective learning. Not taking things personally, having a sense of humor, and regulating emotions are the aspects of the emotional resilience dimension. Motivationally resilient teachers will have confidence, perseverance, and positivity, and obtain realistic expectations. Collaborating, asking for support, accepting advice from others, and having professional and support networks are all consistencies of a social resilience teacher.

Resilience theory during the COVID-19 pandemic helped teachers remain positive and motivated (Nandy et al., 2021). Strategies must be developed to help remain stable during a crisis. Navigating through a crisis can be tough, and teachers need to identify their capacity to adapt to maintain a normal setting without disrupting their normal activities (Nandy et al., 2021). Figure 3 displays the resilience model for an individual, as well as what a school could utilize after a pandemic (Nandy et al., 2021). The model was expanded and includes exhaustion and competition to assist schools in thriving during the recovery period.

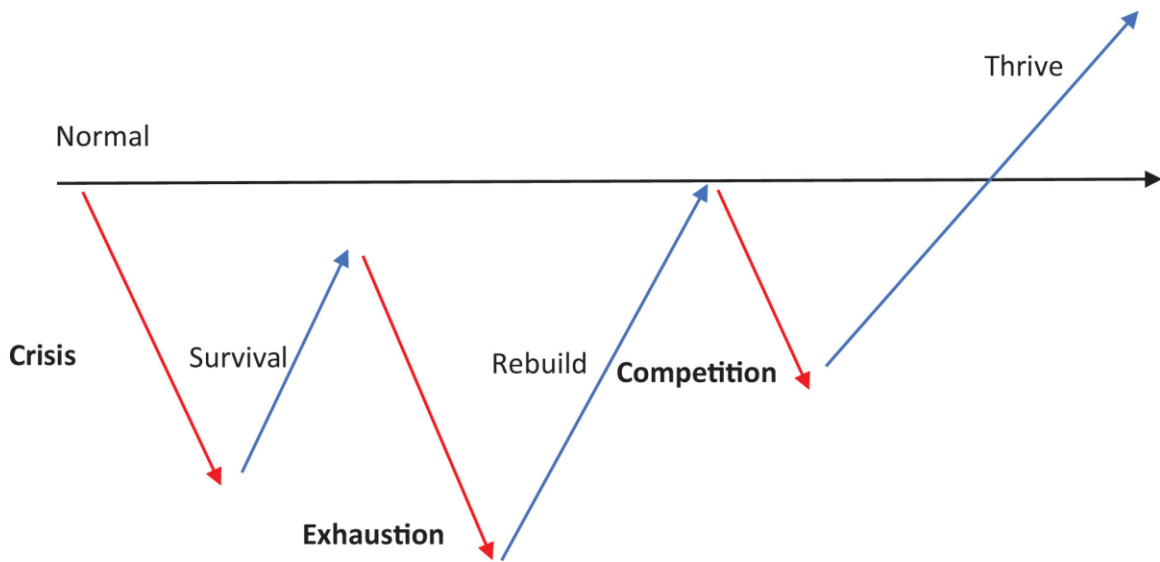
**Figure 3***Resilience Model With Three Dips*

Figure 3 illustrates when life is normal and a crisis manifests, a person automatically adopts survival mode. After identifying survival strategies and managing the crisis, exhaustion decreases while rebuilding life increases. The competitive elements in life decrease and thriving increases, to return to a normal life after a crisis.

***Social-Emotional Learning Theory***

According to social-emotional learning theory, teachers can control and comprehend their emotions as they react to their environment. The COVID-19 pandemic forced educators to implement empathy while preserving positive connections with their students and coworkers. Learning and teaching social-emotional skills require setting constructive goals and making wise decisions. From their teachers, students are expected to learn how to overcome obstacles, regulate their emotions when they do not get their way, solve issues, and treat people with respect. However, social-emotional learning must first be taught to teachers, who must also learn how to manage similar situations for themselves. Educator capacity to do so was challenged by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The psychological effects of stress-related difficulties for instructors were altered by COVID-19 (De Klerk et al., 2021). Teachers experienced tension, worry, sadness, and dread for their own safety and the safety of others during the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers had to learn how to use social-emotional skills to cope with all these emotional events and continue teaching (De Klerk et al., 2021). Teachers were worried about working from home full-time and having to learn how to implement instruction virtually (De Klerk et al., 2021). Some of the psychological challenges teachers faced included a decrease in stable mental health, increased stress levels from working long hours, and no top-level concern for how they had to teach and learn new strategies quickly (De Klerk et al., 2021). Teachers were in desperate need of emotional and psychological support. Social-emotional learning can strengthen the emotional functioning of teachers because they can engage with others and know how to present themselves in a positive manner during real-life challenges (De Klerk et al., 2021).

Self-management, self-awareness, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills are the five core competencies of social-emotional learning that were developed into a framework by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL; Ferren, 2021). Self-management allows an individual to take control and ownership of personal thoughts, emotions, and actions. Self-awareness helps individuals recognize emotions, while also acknowledging strengths and weaknesses to gain confidence in their abilities. Social awareness implies the ability to project yourself into another person's environment and display empathy in an ethical manner. Responsible decisions are made by the reactions to a situation based on learned behaviors. Relationship skills involve an individual's ability to build and maintain

healthy relationships with people from different backgrounds (Ferren, 2021).

Teachers teach social-emotional learning lessons, and they have experienced positive outcomes from their students (Currie, 2021). The classes impart knowledge and abilities that will enable students to better control their behavior and emotions, develop resilience, and foster interpersonal relationships. The results benefit student academic growth and teachers who are learning the skills while teaching them (Currie, 2021).

There are different reasons why social-emotional learning is important for teachers:

- Managing stress and burnout while practicing self-awareness (if the triggers are known) allows teachers to use coping strategies to keep from becoming overwhelmed.
- Social-emotional learning improves self-care and allows teachers to put their needs first and have a healthy work-life balance.
- Social-emotional learning improves decision-making capacities and self-management skills, thereby reducing stressful biased decisions.
- Social emotional learning enhances teacher-student relationships, allowing for the awareness of their emotions to build and sustain positive relationships.
- Social-emotional learning creates supportive environments; building social awareness along with strong relationship skills will increase participation in activities.
- Social-emotional learning makes teachers more effective by cultivating skills within themselves to be able to model it in the classroom.
- Social-emotional learning makes teachers want to teach; when a positive change in their students is witnessed, teachers feel successful and hopeful,

renewing their love of teaching.

Social-emotional learning can improve teacher well-being without interventions and help them continue to be successful in the classroom, for them as well as their students (Currie, 2021).

Teachers faced unique challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic including adapting to remote learning while maintaining a balance with the impact it had on their personal lives. Although students needed social and emotional support during and after the pandemic, it was important that the social and emotional needs of teachers were addressed, because teachers provided initial support for students (Ferren, 2021).

Organizations including the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence and CASEL provided resources to help teachers process the stress of virtual learning and adapt to the “new normal.” Schools and districts received federal relief funds from the American Rescue Plan to focus on how to provide social and emotional support for teachers (Ferren, 2021). Providing educators with social-emotional learning support helped lower stress levels at work, increased the modeling of positive emotions for students, and improved teacher attendance (Ferren, 2021).

Teachers will continue to need social-emotional support from their administration team as they face challenges in school. The administration team can provide teachers with opportunities to connect, heal, and build their capacity to support students (Ferren, 2021). Teachers can be provided with continued mental health resources and culturally responsive trauma through community organizations. In addition, the administration can provide teachers with different opportunities to support them throughout the school year. One of those opportunities is to collect data on their needs, including wellness,

professional learning outcomes, and support for students (Ferren, 2021).

Administrators can also receive feedback via walkthrough tools to reflect on how teachers can continue to improve in school (Ferren, 2021). Self-care plans can be provided for teachers along with a school-wide plan detailing expectations for promoting self-care. For example, avoiding career-related emails or calls in the evenings or on the weekends could be a self-care expectation. Administrators should continue to collaborate with colleagues and provide professional learning to improve practices that promote social-emotional learning for teachers. In schools, administrators can also create professional learning communities based on social-emotional learning, equity, and trauma-informed practices (Ferren, 2021).

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs during the COVID-19 pandemic had a visceral reaction for some teachers (Wish, 2020), as it related to the pyramid or building blocks of fundamental human physical and emotional desires. Teachers over the age of 50 with an autoimmune disorder perceived a threat to life elevating their safety needs, which came before their higher-level needs (Wish, 2020). According to Maslow's original theory, achieving self-actualization and self-esteem required meeting physiological or safety needs, such as those for food, clothing, and a place to live. However, the framework has been adapted so all needs support each other and well-being is focused on (Porter, 2020). There are five needs included in Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs pyramid, as presented in Figure 4.

**Figure 4***Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*

The importance of needs begins at the bottom of the diagram and goes to the top. Physiological needs represent the first section of the pyramid, and teacher needs during the COVID-19 pandemic focused on maintaining a career in education to support their physiological needs. Some teachers began searching for a flexible job so they could spend more time with their loved ones during the pandemic. Safety is the second need. Safety, along with job security to support their families, was important. Love and belonging are the third need on the pyramid. Educators had relationships at home, but social interaction with colleagues and students was equally important (Wish, 2020). Esteem is the fourth need. Receiving respect and attention and being in an authoritative position were teacher expectations in their field. Self-actualization is the fifth need. During the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers worked with their colleagues and students while exploring learning, communicating, and connecting (Wish, 2020). Maslow's

Hierarchy of Needs is a framework that can be utilized not only for teachers but for students and people in general. Teacher well-being is important and their physiological needs during the COVID-19 pandemic were not always met. This had an effect on their work performance (Porter, 2020). Theoretically, once teachers are able to operate at the top of the pyramid, they have the potential to be extremely effective and provide differentiated instruction, whether it is virtual or face-to-face (Porter, 2020).

Maslow's framework can be utilized to support teacher well-being and reduce burnout. As previously stated, teachers dealt with stress because of the COVID-19 pandemic due to health issues, social isolation, and adjustments to their roles and responsibilities at home and in the virtual classroom (Porter, 2020). When social interaction and community building are coupled with virtual learning, it can foster greater feelings of self-worth and belonging, and teachers may give more weight to student aspirations for self-actualization than to their physical and personal requirements (Porter, 2020). Furthermore, while safety needs were heightened during the pandemic, creating consistent schedules and agendas so teachers and students can create routines satisfies both self-actualization and safety desires (Porter, 2020). During a challenging time in schools, consistency can provide feelings of safety.

A program called Capturing Kids Hearts encourages social-emotional learning in the classroom and promotes the health of both teachers and pupils (Holt, 2022). Building and maintaining positive relationships, achieving goals, and developing productive habits are all made easier by social-emotional learning. Utilizing these skills leads to success in school, work, and home relationships (Holt, 2022). There are six main areas in social-emotional learning that can support teacher growth and engagement.



The first area to support teacher growth is personal growth and learning how to create self-confidence along with continuous improvement as a professional. Reducing social anxiety is the second area, and it focuses on how to reduce the “fear of the unknown” to help colleagues and students reduce their own social anxiety. The third area is building relational capacity, and it develops components within different relationships to recognize the stresses and strains that come with personal interactions during tough situations. Applying classroom strategies is the fourth area to support teachers in developing professional skills that will work with their students, which includes learning and modeling skills. The fifth area is creating self-managing classrooms and having a skill set to promote self-discipline. Empowering student voice is the sixth area, and it teaches students to think, act, and speak for themselves. This will promote self-confidence because they will be empowered in the classroom. These strategies, which are at the heart of social-emotional learning and support positive mental health, are a high priority for adults and children (Holt, 2022).

### **Mental Health in Education**

During the Progressive Era, which started in the 1890s, school-based mental health services for teachers and students emerged as a result of regional, state, and federal reform (Flaherty & Osher, 2022). Five elements were reflected during this time: immigration, urbanization, public health, advances in the fields of psychology, social work and education, and laws limiting child labor. However, the needs of the students and the community have modified the laws and acts over time (Flaherty & Osher, 2022). With the transition to virtual instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers experienced a mental health crisis pushing them out of the profession due to the attacks

on social-emotional learning and critical race theory (Collins, 2022).

Untreated mental illness can result in high rates of school abandonment, drug abuse, arrest, jail, and early death among youth and adults. For young people aged 10 to 34, suicide is the second-leading cause of death. Providing mental health services in schools can help children get assistance at an early age. Typically, teachers experience more stress when student mental health needs are not addressed and they do not have the resources or skills to manage these types of needs. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) is an organization created in 1979 to help people affected by mental health challenges. In order to increase access to appropriate mental health services, NAMI supports public policies and laws for schools (NAMI, 2022).

Session Law 2020-7, enacted by the North Carolina General Assembly in June 2020, asserts that the state board of education must create a policy on school-based mental health that includes a mental health strategy and teacher training initiatives. According to the law, the policy must require each K-12 school to develop and maintain a Local School Mental Health Improvement Plan, mandated to be reviewed at least every 5 years, requiring 6 hours of mental health training for new employees, and 2 hours of training in subsequent years (Blanco, 2021). According to the North Carolina State Board of Education in 2021, schools will be supported by developing model training that can be accessed in multiple formats, and the superintendent of public instruction conducts reviews every 5 years.

### **Mental Health and Teachers**

For pupils to succeed, teachers must have the capacity and support to exercise positive mental health. Teacher mental health is vital. According to data from 2018, one

in five adults in America will have mental health issues. According to this study, approximately 43 million Americans would report experiencing symptoms of anxiety, sadness, insomnia, substance misuse, and/or suicidal thoughts (Starling Minds, 2019). Due to COVID-19, there are new instructional obstacles and barriers that have impacted teacher mental health (CDC, 2021e). The environmental climate is one of the factors for the increase of mental health challenges among educators. Many teachers are employed in settings where there is a lack of cooperation among coworkers, a lack of strong and consistent leadership, and a lack of respect for school employees (Starling Minds, 2019). When teachers work in positive environments with strong leadership and supportive colleagues, educators will report higher job satisfaction and teachers will stay in the profession longer.

As discussed previously, there are various types of mental health challenges for teachers including stress, burnout, anxiety, and depression. When these challenges increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, teacher use of substances to cope with stress also increased (CDC, 2021e). According to Mendez (2021), concerns about teacher mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic impacted student performance, attrition rates, and school and classroom environments. Teachers, as a rule, impact a diverse group of students. Many students struggle with specific social, emotional, behavioral, and language difficulties and perform below grade-level expectations (Mendez, 2021). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers experienced more stress and challenges in the learning environment with their students. Some teachers taught students who were 100% virtual and had higher rates of anxiety and depression. Conversely, the hybrid and face-to-face students had difficulties with prevention strategies and following mandated COVID-19

protocols. As a result, a substantial increase in teacher mental health challenges emerged. The CDC (2021e) asserted that teacher mental health must be addressed by districts to retain teachers and provide flexible work opportunities in the future.

It is important to promote teacher mental health success with well-being and support the stress that comes with the job. In order to give teachers the support they need, it is necessary to implement a comprehensive approach focused on resilience, social and emotional health, safety, and creating a positive work environment (Porter, 2020). There are different ways to support teacher mental health and well-being. Teachers can be supported by receiving a support system and evenly distributed workloads. Another way teachers can be supported is by setting reasonable expectations and understanding time constraints. Focusing on motivation by boosting morale and having reasonable goals to work towards are other ways to support teacher mental health. Self-care is promoted to encourage teachers to take care of themselves (Porter, 2020). This support can take some of the stress off teachers and identify the needs to support their mental health while in education.

### **Mental Health Coping Skills With Mental and Physical Stress Programs**

In North Carolina, there is an Employee Assistance Program that helps people when life and work become stressful. It is a state-sponsored benefit program that provides the assistance and materials needed to handle problems and challenges in one's personal or professional life. This service is both free and private. When a person calls the Employee Assistance Program, they are offered a needs evaluation by a qualified, experienced counselor. If it is established that the issue may be resolved through problem-solving sessions, there are professionals who will help in that resolution. If more

help is required, the Employee Assistance Program will connect people with the best care providers, at the lowest possible cost (North Carolina Office of State Human Resources, 2022).

A program called Cultivating Awareness and Resilience in Education aims to teach educators and administrators how to manage stress by encouraging the inner resources of awareness, compassion, reflection, and inspiration that kids need to succeed socially, emotionally, and academically. This curriculum teaches emotional skills to encourage comprehension, recognition, and how to control emotions. There are mindfulness exercises that include brief times of silent thought as well as activities that show how to apply mindfulness to difficult situations teachers may face. Educators learn to be calmer and more aware of the importance of enhancing their relationships with their students, classroom management, and implementation of the curriculum through these activities (Garrison Institute, 2022).

The Happy Teacher Revolution is an initiative to promote teacher emotional wellness. The movement is made up of a network of educators offering support to other educators who are having trouble juggling a demanding profession with their own sense of self and happiness (Happy Teacher Revolution, 2021). They want teachers to feel empowered and take ownership of their happiness. Without feeling pressured to forgo their wholeness or well-being, teachers are given the resources they need to flourish for greatness. In order for teachers to develop emotionally healthy kids, Happy Teacher Revolution seeks to develop their mental health.

After the COVID-19 pandemic emerged, the Hope4Healers Helpline was made available to teachers, school staff, and their families by the North Carolina Department of

Health and Human Services (NCDHHS, 2020). When calling the helpline, a trained person will listen and provide support. For first responders, healthcare, and childcare professionals, as well as their families who have endured stress due to COVID-19 changes, they provide mental health and resiliency counseling. A certified mental health specialist provides free follow-up through phone or video chat. Since its introduction in 2020, in collaboration with the North Carolina Psychological Foundation, the helpline has assisted over 160 people (NCDHHS, 2020).

### **COVID-19 Effect on Education**

The global impact of COVID-19, which first appeared in Wuhan, China, before spreading quickly throughout the entire world, was significant. Like past pandemics, COVID-19 caused a large number of deaths quickly after it first appeared (World Health Organization, 2022a). Due to the recommended COVID-19 social isolation protocols and other constraints, teachers, students, and parents experienced unfavorable psychological circumstances including anxiety and fear in the classroom (Özer, 2020). Some families did not have enough support for their children to learn at home, due to the lack of adult education and socioeconomic levels.

Instructors have always been crucial to a student's educational progress. During the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, some teachers lacked knowledge about how to manage virtual instruction or the different virtual platforms provided to students. It was challenging to compile different ideas and strategies for online education (Rapanta et al., 2020). Therefore, the negative effects of COVID-19 seemed more difficult to progress through with virtual instruction. Special education teachers, specifically, had difficulties providing support for their students due to the closing of schools and students lacking

access to internet connectivity. Teachers were aware of the expectations and laws but had a hard time complying (Murez, 2022). Interestingly, during the COVID-19 pandemic, some teachers would deliver materials to student homes to display appreciation for parents making efforts (Murez, 2022). Some special education teachers accommodated their students virtually and taught their parents how to teach as well.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a negative impact on academic performance, as previously acknowledged. Students and our society continued to be negatively affected for a long time by school closings and inadequate learning opportunities (Kwayke & Kibort, 2021). Data from 5.4 million pupils in Grades 3-8 were used to track math and reading scores for the first 2 years of the pandemic (Kuhfeld et al., 2022). Results showed that reading test scores were 0.09 to 0.18 standard deviations (SDs) lower and math test scores were 0.20 to 0.27 SDs lower than those of peers in the same grade in the fall of 2019 (Kuhfeld et al., 2022). Because of COVID-19, there was unfinished learning in schools. The chance for students to finish the lessons they would have finished in a typical school year was not provided. Students lost interest in learning and stopped using the abilities they had learned before schools closed (Dorn et al., 2021). Without adequate preparation, students were promoted to the next grade rather than being retained, and achievement discrepancies widened (Dorn et al., 2021). The gaps increased due to the missing building blocks needed for succeeding in the previous grade (Dorn et al., 2021). Repetitive students have a lower likelihood of graduating from high school and going to college (Dorn et al., 2021). Although academic information will be lost, students also will not have the abilities, attitudes, or ways of thinking necessary to excel in school or the workplace. Support is needed to help students close gaps in learning and become

successful in the future (Dorn et al., 2021).

### **Coping Strategies in a Pandemic**

People's everyday lives have been impacted by a number of stressors as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, including the loss of loved ones, dread of infection and death, confinement and movement restrictions, economic instability, and increased household and caregiving responsibilities (González-Sanguino et al., 2020). The American Psychological Association (2018) offered several recommendations for stress management to assist, lessen, and prevent the negative consequences of stress. Maintaining a strong support system, exercising, and getting enough sleep each night are some of the strategies (American Psychological Association, 2018). Some of the coping strategies teachers utilized during the COVID-19 pandemic included religious coping, emotional support coping, active coping, and behavior disengagement coping (Quansah et al., 2022). These coping mechanisms assisted with working through the COVID-19 pandemic and reduced the negative anxiety associated with it (Quansah et al., 2022).

Specific coping strategies could have helped teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Coping can look different depending on what teachers are faced with. There are strategies that can also help decrease stress levels which include cognitive, physical, and environmental forms (Mast, 2022). Some examples of cognitive forms consist of mindfulness, cognitive therapy, and meditation. Physical examples are yoga, art, deep breathing, and exercise. The environmental method consists of spa visits, music, pets, or outdoor activities.

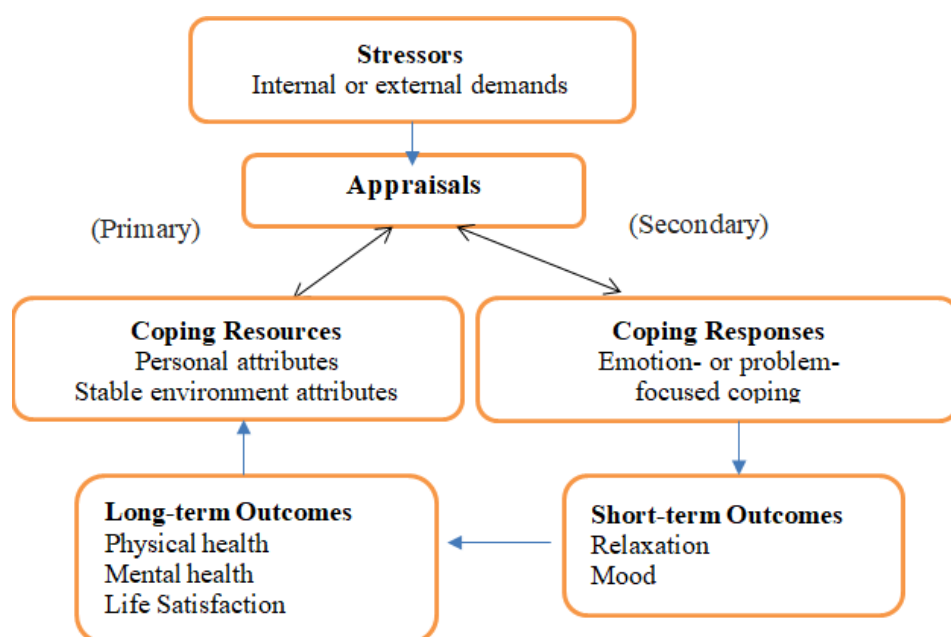
The two styles of coping are problem-focused and emotion-focused coping mechanisms that Lazarus and Folkman (1984) distinguished. Emotion-focused coping



governs emotional reactions to the problem, whereas problem-focused coping manages the distress-causing problem. This is a model to assist with stress and how to cope with different events in life (Sanderson, 2022). Figure 5 displays the transaction model and how the amount of stress people experience is based on two factors called primary appraisal and secondary appraisal.

**Figure 5**

*Transaction Model of Stress and Coping*



Primary appraisal is the assessment of the stressors, and secondary appraisal is the assessment of resources being coped with (Sanderson, 2022). With the primary appraisal, some teachers might have appraised the COVID-19 pandemic as stressful and some might have appraised the pandemic less negatively trying to find a positive in the situation. Secondary appraisal examines the ability to cope with the event based on resources (Sanderson, 2022). Teachers needed access to resources to cope with COVID-19 while continuing to work. In some cases, emotion-focused coping can be as effective

at reducing stress as actually fixing the problem creating the stress (Sanderson, 2022).

Yoga, dancing to music, and other exercises that may be done at home are some examples of physical activities in which teachers can engage. These activities have been demonstrated to improve anxiety, mood, and social and emotional health, as well as a number of mental disorder symptoms (Ai et al., 2021). Yoga is a form of physical and mental concentration that has been shown to improve mental health by enhancing autonomic stress coping mechanisms (Wang & Szabo, 2020). Walking through the park, playing with kids, or riding bikes in the neighborhood can help reduce stress for teachers (Yarmolkevich, 2020).

Self-care is one of the best strategies to help cope with stress during a pandemic. Self-care activities include walking, yoga, praying, working in the garden, and listening to music. Teachers must create a healthy balance between their work and home lives. According to Verbanas (2020), school administrators should support their teachers and allow them to feel they are being heard, respected, and taken into consideration when it comes to mental health. Some ways administrators can support their staff are by providing open forums to discuss teachers concerns, providing consistent communication, including stakeholders, explaining why certain decisions have been made, creating nurturing environments to support the positive work demonstrated, promoting team building, and informing staff about the physical and mental health support offered from the county.

During traumatic events such as pandemics and mass shootings, it is natural to feel anxiety, stress, worry, and grief (CDC, 2021c). In addition to the previous methods discussed, some research-based methods to cope with stress include eating healthy;

exercising; resting; talking to others, for example, a counselor, pastor, or relative; taking breaks from watching, listening, or reading news stories including social media; and making time to unwind by engaging in activities that are enjoyable (CDC, 2021e).

A person's physical health can be enhanced by exercise, which also releases endorphins that improve mood and lower stress (Froedtert & Medical College of Wisconsin, 2022). Duane Milder, a workforce health coach stated, "Exercise boosts levels of serotonin, dopamine, and norepinephrine, giving you a general good feeling about being in control in an otherwise uncontrollable situation" (Froedtert & Medical College of Wisconsin, 2022, p. 1). During COVID-19, physical activity promoted happiness and improved mental health (Ai et al., 2021). However, due to COVID-19 gym closures, working out stopped, along with motivation, for many people. There are fitness apps and websites that can help create a home workout routine and perform exercises for strength training without using gym equipment (Froedtert & Medical College of Wisconsin, 2022).

Physical activity can prevent mental disorders such as anxiety or depression (Aguirre et al., 2020). Frequent physical exercise reduces sadness, anxiety, and mental health (Ai et al., 2021). It would be a benefit to facilitate the practice of physical activity at home to prevent health problems for teachers during a pandemic (Aguirre et al., 2020). There are three potential mechanisms from the psychological perspective for exercising. Exercising frequently to enhance exposure to anxiety-related sensations and decrease anxiety to maintain improved health conditions is the first method. The second method involves exercising to boost confidence and a sense of self-efficacy to assist and maintain control when circumstances become overwhelming. The third method occurs when

physical activity serves as a diversion from stressors to promote enjoyment of physical activity and lessen anxiety (Ai et al., 2021). It is more beneficial for teachers to become active versus inactive to avoid having higher levels of loneliness, sadness, and anxiety (Ai et al., 2021).

### **Spirituality**

The relationship with the limitless and mighty heavenly superior is what is meant by spirituality. A teacher can radiate the good energy that advances their students' education when they are connected to this source while instructing (Nasrollahi et al., 2020). Programs to prevent stress and burnout have incorporated prayer and meditation. A helpful coping mechanism for stress caused by the workplace is prayer. According to Chirico et al. (2020), an individual's beliefs, religious traditions, and prayer can be defined in many ways. Personal prayer involves "the raising up of one's mind to God" (Chirico et al., 2020, p. 2), and personal meditation is usually considered a mental exercise that involves reflection or mindfulness toward a higher being (Chirico et al., 2020).

If a person can create a sense of quiet, remain still, and have peace, their spirituality can decrease stress. Experiences of spirituality have positive effects on lowering levels of psychological and depressive symptoms, increasing quality of life, and decreasing illness and mortality (Cook, 2017). The understanding of spirituality may give the tendency to behave toward students in an ethical and caring way along with viewing issues of equity and social justice in a positive manner (Cook, 2017).

The principle of separation of church and state forbids the federal, state, and local governments from erecting religious symbols or engaging in religious activities on or

within any property under their control, such as courthouses, public schools, and public libraries (Longley, 2022). According to Heinrich (2019), *Sante Fe vs. Doe* (2000), the Establishment Clause has been violated by requiring daily prayer in schools. Although the Free Exercise Clause protects student-led prayer at sporting events, coaches cannot take part. The Free Exercise Clause from *Westside Board of Education v. Mergans* (1990) gives students the right to organize prayer around the flagpole if there is no disruption within the school (Heinrich, 2019).

The First Amendment guaranteed that everyone has the right to exercise their religion freely, including the freedom to follow their beliefs without interference from the government (National Coalition Against Censorship, 2021). Teachers are not allowed to be antagonistic toward religion in general, to advocate one type of religion as being superior to all others, to promote religion as being superior to a secular way of life, or to engage in activities that advance religion (National Coalition Against Censorship, 2021). Teachers are encouraged to keep their spiritual identity private. There are different religious spectrums including religious right or secular left, theist or atheist, and personal faith, which are an inseparable part of personal identity (Armanious, 2019). Some teachers have a hard time leaving their faith outside the classroom (Armanious, 2019).

## **Pandemics**

### ***Influenza***

In 1918, the H1N1 virus with avian-origin genes triggered the influenza pandemic (Spanish Flu), which was the worst pandemic in recent memory (CDC, 2021d). There was an estimation that 500 million people became infected with this virus. The number of deaths totaled at least 50 million worldwide with approximately 675,000 occurring in the

United States. There were no vaccines to protect against influenza infection; no antibiotics to treat bacterial infections; and limited non-pharmaceutical interventions which included isolation, quarantine, and limitations of public gatherings (CDC, 2021d).

During the influenza pandemic, 40 cities closed schools for 6 weeks to help reduce the peak in rates and the number of deaths. Closing the schools reduced the burden on healthcare services and infrastructure (Barile, 2022). Students had no access to their teachers during the influenza pandemic and became responsible for their own learning by reading what books they had, journaling, and writing detailed letters. There were no technology or social media influences on families and teachers (Barile, 2022).

Children exposed to the flu pandemic were less likely to complete their education and receive a high school diploma, earned less money, and were more likely to depend on government assistance (Aldeman, 2021). During the flu pandemic, most cities closed their schools except New York, Chicago, and New Haven because the students were safer and better off at school (Waldrop, 2020). Three lessons educators and policymakers could have compiled from how schools responded to the flu pandemic were: (a) invest in school nurses, (b) partner with authorities, and (c) combine education with other priorities (Battenfeld, 2020). School nurses were transformative and cared for students rather than sending them home with no treatment. Cooperation planning with public health, political leaders, and education officials was a success for schools during the flu pandemic. Although education was important, the U.S. Bureau of Education proclaimed life and health were more important (Battenfeld, 2020).

### **SARS**

SARS was initially noted in Asia in 2003. Small droplets of saliva can be used to

disseminate the airborne SARS virus (World Health Organization, 2022b). The disease spread throughout Europe, Asia, South America, and North America. The first serious and spreadable new disease of the 21<sup>st</sup> century was SARS, which spread via worldwide air travel. Infected people transferred the virus by touching surfaces that had been exposed to it. SARS had an incubation period of 2 to 7 days but could linger up to 10 days (World Health Organization, 2022b). Teachers and students were diagnosed with this disease and had to miss instruction due to being incubated. In total, 8,098 persons contracted SARS during the outbreak, and 774 of them passed away afterward. There was no cure or vaccine for SARS. Schools in China closed for 2 weeks, leaving two million students home following the increase in SARS cases. There was an online educational service provided for students (Esposito & Principi, 2020). Schools in the United States did not close in 2003; however, travel to different countries was decreased to keep the disease manageable and cases lower.

### ***Ebola***

Ebola is a deadly viral disease with outbreaks mainly in Africa. Ebola predominately affects people and animals such as monkeys, gorillas, and chimpanzees. The Ebola River, which is located in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, is where the virus was first found in 1976. Since its discovery, the virus has infected humans, causing outbreaks in many African nations (CDC, 2021f). Direct contact with animal blood, bodily fluids, or tissues allows Ebola to spread. It then spreads to others after coming into direct contact with an ill person's bodily fluids (CDC, 2021f). Ervebo is a vaccine that received U.S. Food and Drug Administration approval in December 2019 (CDC, 2021f) to treat Ebola.

School closures during the Ebola epidemic, which occurred from 2014 to 2016, were linked to an increase in child labor, violence, and socioeconomic issues (Esposito & Principi, 2020). In Guinea, Liberia, and Sierra Leone, schools were shut down for 5 months each (Jenkins, 2020). At least five million children were impacted, which had an effect on their academic performance, social interactions, and access to resources on which families relied. School lunches and health programs that allowed people to have access to clean water and sanitary facilities were impacted (Jenkins, 2020). When schools reopened, some children never returned; the children who did return fell behind in instruction and development.

### ***HIV/AIDS***

The HIV pandemic had three mechanisms that affected the educational attainment of children: sickness, orphanhood, and HIV infection of parents (Zinyemba et al., 2019). Due to sickness, a child may miss school, but academics were challenging due to a lack of instruction. Orphan children obtained less schooling compared to non-orphans. There were effects of HIV on gender gaps in educational outcomes because women and girls are more likely to lose jobs and miss school to take care of the sick people in their families (Zinyemba et al., 2019). Parents being infected with HIV present challenges to their children by deteriorating from the disease and dying before the child becomes an adult and finishes school. Children dealing with depression, poverty, and posttraumatic stress syndrome due to seeing their parents die struggled with their education (Zinyemba et al., 2019).

During the HIV pandemic, teachers were infected and still expected to teach students. Teachers were substitutes for their colleagues and were required to teach



unfamiliar subject areas when their colleagues became sick or deceased (Moyo & Perumal, 2019). This caused teachers to feel stressed and discouraged. A lack of experienced teachers, or teachers familiar with the subject area, impacts the implemented instruction provided to students, which can lead to deterioration in content areas (Moyo & Perumal, 2019). It was a challenge for teachers who knew they were infected with an incurable disease; consequently, they experienced emotional stress, hindering their productivity (Moyo & Perumal, 2019).

The COVID-19 pandemic was the largest and most intrusive health emergency for communities around the world. There were social relationships subjected to rules and regulations along with social contact becoming a threat. Families experienced the loss of friends and family members for the first time, at an increased rate (Namer et al., 2022). On the other hand, the COVID-19 pandemic was not new for families whose lives were impacted by the HIV pandemic, which had been in existence for 40 years, affecting 38 million people around the world (UNAIDS, 2020).

### **Other Stressors**

*Teacher Assistants.* Teacher assistants had a major impact on supporting teachers, and the COVID-19 pandemic affected their wages along with their mental health. The contribution of teacher assistants to student learning appears to have been undervalued in the past (Clifton et al., 2021). State policymakers in North Carolina reduced funding for teacher assistants in the belief that they were not a cost-effective investment (Clifton et al., 2021). In the nation, 12% of elementary roles in classrooms are completed by teacher assistants. Some of those roles are small group instruction, behavior management, evaluating student work, and assisting with activities. Teachers can focus on

implementing instruction when they have teacher assistants providing support (Clifton et al., 2021).

Most teacher assistants are required to drive a bus, and during the pandemic, there were different challenges they had to face (Cooper & Hickey, 2022). Table 1 displays the different K-12 public school employees who are ages 50 and older along with workers in the education field overall from the Economic Policy Institute analysis of 2014–2019 pooled Current Population Survey microdata (Cooper & Hickey, 2022). During the COVID-19 pandemic, older workers were at a higher risk for COVID-19.

**Table 1**

*Education Support Staff Aged 50 and Older*

	Age 50 or older
All workers (economy wide)	31.6%
Bus drivers	66.2%
School custodians	55.4%
Food service workers	50.4%
Teaching assistants	40.5%
All education	37.9%
K–12 teachers	31.4%

The number of K-12 teachers who were 50 or older was similar to the total of overall workers. Also, the number of bus drivers who were 50 or older was 66.2% which was double the number of overall workers. Custodians and food service workers aged 50 or older were at least 50% of that subgroup (Cooper & Hickey, 2022). The older the person, the higher the risk for COVID-19 exposure. These workers had more concerns about being around unvaccinated people or students (Cooper & Hickey, 2022).

Bus drivers were struggling, and the pay was not enough to retain good drivers or attract new hires (Long, 2021). With low pay, a lack of benefits, and limited support, a

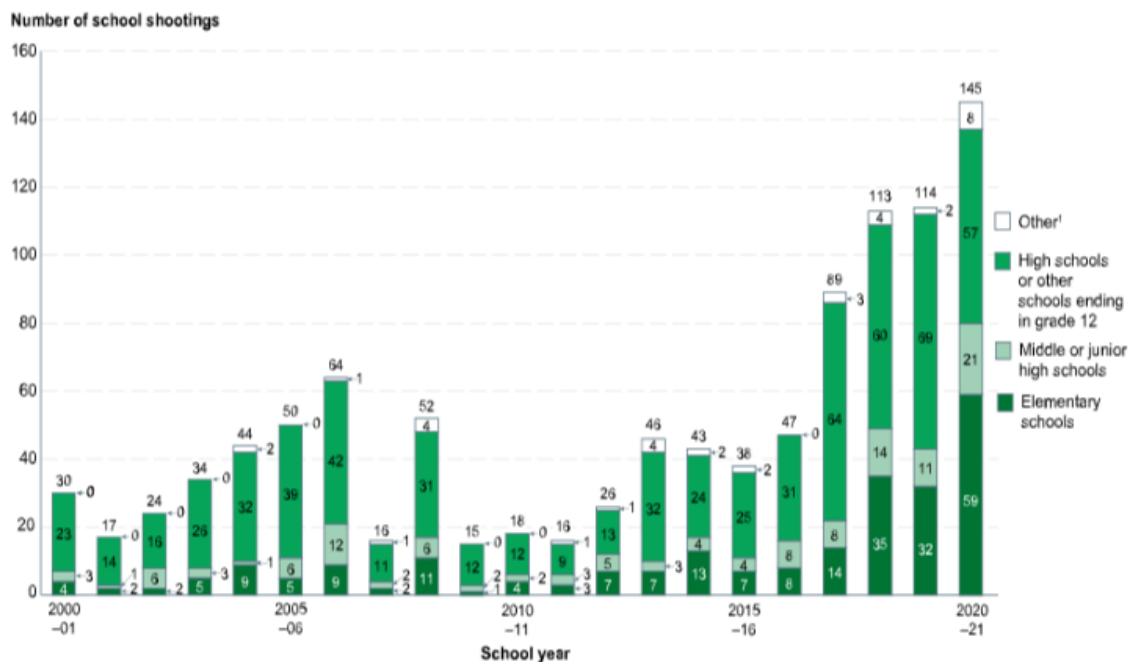
bus driver shortage emerged. The COVID-19 pandemic caused drivers to have longer drive times, later pick-ups and drop-offs, and more students on buses due to the routes being consolidated (Long, 2021). Teachers who drove buses were concerned about masking and asked for plastic partitions to protect them from students boarding the bus and from students who refused to keep their masks on (Long, 2021). Bus drivers were not given enough hours to receive benefits (Long, 2021).

***School Shootings.*** While school shootings are not classified as a health emergency, they have presented a safety emergency. School shootings are events in which a gun is shown or fired on school grounds or a bullet strikes the school property for any reason, regardless of the number of victims, time of day, or motive, according to the School Shooting Database.(Jones & Livingston, 2022) During the COVID-19 pandemic, school shootings were also defined as shootings that happen on school property during virtual instruction. A teacher's mental health may be negatively impacted by dealing with school shootings, among other things. Fears that their families and children will not be safe at school have caused some teachers to abandon the classroom. According to Sandy Hook Promise and the Center for Homeland Defense and Security, there have been more than 900 school shootings (Jones & Livingston, 2022). The Uvalde attack was the latest act of gun violence that affected teachers and students. In 2021, there were 42 acts of campus gun violence at K-12 schools in the U.S. (Jones & Livingston, 2022). School shootings have effects on school populations and surrounding communities. School-Associated Violent Death Surveillance System is an indicator to present data on school-associated violent deaths. The indicator examines casualties and school shootings from the K-12 School Shooting Database (National Center for

Education Statistics, 2022). Figure 6 displays the number of public and private elementary and secondary schools with shootings by the level of school from 2000-2021.

**Figure 6**

*Number of Public and Private Elementary and Secondary Schools With Shootings*



Within those 21 years, shootings in elementary schools rose from four elementary schools to 59 elementary schools. Figure 6 displays all incidents in which a gun was exposed or a school was shot at. If a school had multiple shootings in a year, they were counted once in that year's total. When schools were closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the numbers were lower and the comparison between 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 must be reviewed carefully from earlier years. The most school shootings with casualties occurred in 2020-2021. In fact, during the 2020-2021 school year, there were a total of 93 school casualties, which included 43 school shootings with deaths and 50 school shootings with injuries only. According to the National Center for Education

Statistics (2022), there were an additional 53 reported school shootings that are not shown in Figure 6.

School safety and how students should prepare for the possibility of a mass shooting at their school have been debated due to the increase in shootings in schools. Some lockdown drills consist of teaching students how to jump out of classroom emergency exit windows and how to fight back by throwing objects at an attacker (Blad, 2022). In order to make lockdown drills more realistic, some districts have incorporated components such as the sound of real gunshots, officers firing blank rounds through school hallways, and the use of other items designed to simulate the scenario (Blad, 2022). Staff and students have experienced trauma as a result of lockdown active shooter drills.

After a shooting takes place, teachers are expected to return to their school to continue to teach and are forced to cope with personal healing along with supporting students in ways to heal. When this expectation occurs, some educators transfer schools or decide to leave the profession entirely (Asbury, 2022). There is an advocacy group called Teachers Unify to End Gun Violence that was created by a teacher and gun-violence prevention activist to help teachers cope with these situations. Another group is called the Principal Recovery Network, formed in 2019 by principals who survived, to help provide school administrators with support on how to navigate a shooting's aftermath (Asbury, 2022).

### **Research Findings**

According to Eastman (2022), elementary public school teachers experienced coping mechanisms with stress during the COVID-19 pandemic in North Texas. It was

done using the Lazarus and Folkman (1984) Transaction Model of Stress and Coping Theories. Teachers discussed how they handled stress during the COVID-19 pandemic. The psychological, physical, and emotional coping techniques used during the COVID-19 epidemic were also stated by the teachers. Using greatest variety and intentional sampling, 14 public school instructors who had experienced teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic were chosen. According to the study's findings, teachers had to deal with challenges related to students, technology, and education during the COVID-19 pandemic. They maintained their resiliency throughout the pandemic and used psychological, physical, and emotional coping mechanisms to help them deal with their stress (Eastman, 2022).

Livio (2021) conducted a study focused on the major causes of job-related stress among elementary teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic and the strategies utilized to eliminate the stress. There was a survey distributed to 29 teachers in New Jersey to measure job-related stress. The survey created by Livio was supposed to bring awareness to teacher observations and teacher perspectives as teachers continued in their roles during the period in which the pandemic impacted them. This study was meant to provide information to administrators and other school personnel as to how to support teachers with classroom structure and teacher implementation for instruction during a pandemic. According to the data collected by an attitudinal Likert scale survey, teachers felt overwhelmed due to all the immediate changes and added responsibilities brought on by teaching during a pandemic. Findings displayed administration was less than helpful in eliminating those many stressful issues for the teacher participants (Livio, 2021). Although this study was limited, it proved helpful to school administrators regarding how

they can lessen work-related stress for teachers during a pandemic.

According to a phenomenological approach study, elementary science teachers faced challenges when teaching science during the COVID-19 pandemic, additionally, how to continue supporting their science teaching (Bookbinder, 2022). The emphasis of this strategy was on elementary science teachers, educators, and formal and informal leaders to better understand their struggles during the epidemic and how to support them when teaching virtually and in person. The information was gathered through surveys, interviews, focus groups, and discussions on the difficulties experienced by first-year science instructors, new teachers, and leaders. In this study, the transactional model of stress and coping was used. Teachers utilized different coping mechanisms to handle the stress of teaching science, including problem-solving and collaboration with others. In order to support teachers, district-level administrators created initiatives, such as how to collaborate with other science instructors in the district and how to create an appropriate science curriculum for online instruction. (Bookbinder, 2022).

Kim et al. (2021) completed a longitudinal study of teacher mental health and well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. This study analyzed the challenges teachers faced teaching and caring for students during the COVID-19 pandemic and how it affected their mental health. This study examined 24 primary and secondary teachers using the longitudinal qualitative trajectory analysis (Kim et al., 2021). The Job Demands Resources Model was used in this strategy, which combined inductive and deductive coding. With the use of this model, participants had to determine whether a job need was expensive on a physical or mental level and whether there was a chance that resources would have an impact on demands and promote success and progress (Kim et al., 2021).

According to Kim et al.'s findings, teacher mental health and well-being declined throughout the pandemic, particularly for those who taught in elementary schools. There were six requirements from teacher perspectives that contributed to the state of their well-being: uncertainty, amount of work having to be done, negative opinions about the field, worries about everyone but themselves, health concerns, and different roles and expectations in school (Kim et al., 2021). The three job resources teachers felt could help positively contribute to their well-being included social support, work autonomy, and coping strategies. Teachers needed social support along with collaborative communication before and after the COVID-19 pandemic (Kim et al., 2021).

### **Summary**

The research reviewed in this chapter described how teachers can and have coped mentally, physically, and spiritually while experiencing a pandemic or other challenges to teaching. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in numerous obstacles to teachers, and stress levels increased (Diliberti et al., 2021). After experiencing an outbreak of COVID-19 challenges in schools, districts will be more prepared moving forward to acclimate to similar situations (Vegas & Winthrop, 2020). Being resilient in a pandemic can be tough for a teacher but will help them face difficult challenges. A resilient teacher can make decisions without becoming overwhelmed. They understand what is important in challenging situations and that minimizing stress and burnout can improve their well-being. Being a resilient teacher is a skill to help one recover from difficulties quickly. Teachers can develop the ability to keep going even when hard times arise if provided the resources to do so. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, a resilient teacher accepted the change as part of life and learned to adapt and adjust to the changes. When the COVID-



19 pandemic arose, many teachers needed assistance and did not feel supported in gathering last-minute teaching strategies with the virtual platform. The COVID-19 pandemic was stressful for teacher mental and physical health. Teacher lifestyles changed, and they experienced many challenging situations. Social-emotional skills have historically been what teachers learned and utilized to help their students at school; however, with the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers needed the same social-emotional skills for their well-being (Quansah et al., 2022). Social-emotional learning offers teachers coping skills of social awareness, personal awareness, and positive approaches for self and others. Also, it aids educators in cultivating admirable social skills and employing techniques to lessen pandemic-related mental discomfort (Quansah et al., 2022).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, teacher mental health deteriorated, and having to balance their personal lives and jobs was challenging. Some anxieties led teachers to become burned out and leave their jobs (Gewertz, 2021). There were different mental health programs provided for teachers as the pandemic continued; however, some teachers were not aware of the support being offered. Providing mental health programs for teachers can prepare them for challenging situations and help support their mental health. Teacher wellness is linked to the effectiveness of teaching. Teachers who are in a good mood might have a favorable influence on student learning.

The effect COVID-19 had on education increased demands from teacher instruction. Teacher workload increased due to a lack of participation from students. Although students had challenges with virtual learning, teachers could not teach an empty virtual classroom. Achievement gaps increased, and economically disadvantaged students suffered the most. EOG testing was not conducted in 2020 as a result of the COVID-19

pandemic and school closures. During the COVID-19 pandemic, students lost more than just academic knowledge; they also lost family members and socialization opportunities and suffered learning losses due to numerous factors, including teachers who resigned from their jobs.

Coping strategies helped teachers maintain their emotional well-being around the time of the COVID-19 pandemic (Hidalgo-Andrade et al., 2021). Some of the coping strategies teachers utilized included healthy living (exercise, healthy eating, having routines), leisure activities (hobbies, listening to music, watching television or movies), spiritual activities (praying, devotional, reading, meditating), having social assistance, and promoting positive mental health (Hidalgo-Andrade et al., 2021). Self-care is important for teachers because it can prevent burnout and create positive morale for school learning. Teachers can establish a routine of self-care, and it can reduce or eliminate anxiety and stress. Also, self-care can improve energy and happiness, minimizing frustration and anger (Glowiak, 2020).

Previous pandemics, including influenza and HIV, impacted teachers and education in general, but virtual instruction and learning were not options during those pandemics. Teachers still had to provide learning for students and figure out how to cope with their own personal issues as they occurred (Vegas & Winthrop, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic brought increased stress for teachers, and many were not aware of the resources available for them to help develop coping mechanisms. Consequently, without adequate support and measures in place, instructors found it difficult to maintain their well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic (Starling Minds, 2019). Teacher beliefs about their spirituality are not allowed in the classroom during this time, yet teachers became

closer to Christ due to the loss of family members and even students (National Coalition Against Censorship, 2021).

The procedures utilized to accomplish this study are described in Chapter 3. It also discusses how the data gathered were processed to respond to the study's research questions.

## **Chapter 3: Methodology**

### **Introduction**

The techniques utilized to gather and examine the data relevant to the goal of this study are described in this chapter. The aim of this study was to analyze and provide teachers with coping strategies while teaching during a pandemic. While there is growing research regarding how teachers could cope mentally, physically, and spiritually, most research is focused on student coping strategies. The focus of this study was to offer recommendations and resources for teachers by answering the following research questions:

1. How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect teachers mentally, physically, and spiritually in their ability to teach?
2. How effective were the support programs offered by the school district for teachers?
3. What kind of coping strategies do teachers recommend to effectively continue teaching during a pandemic?

As mandated by the school board, the Sunshine District provided staff wellness through a coordinated school health program. The board promoted initiatives that enhanced the physical, mental, emotional, and vocational well-being of staff members by encouraging healthy eating, smoking cessation, physical activity, managing stress, and breastfeeding. The Employee Assistance Program sends out monthly newsletters and online seminars teachers can attend if needed.

### **Research Design**

For this study, a mixed methods research strategy was chosen. In-depth evidence

and the development of instances for comparative analysis are both outcomes of a mixed methods research strategy, which integrates both quantitative and qualitative data collection. Examples include surveys and interviews, performance assessments and observations, questionnaires and follow-up, and questionnaires for focus groups. Because they combine the strengths of qualitative and quantitative research while reducing their respective weaknesses, mixed method procedures are consistently used in research studies (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), the topic of this study was considered pragmatic, which means practicality, multiple viewpoints, biased and unbiased, subjective and objective.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) conveyed qualitative research is framed in verbal descriptions and quantitative research utilizes numerical descriptions. You can thoroughly investigate ideas and experiences through a qualitative study. On the other hand, a quantitative study allows you to test hypotheses and measure variables. An experiment, numerically recorded observations, or a survey with closed-ended questions can all be used in a quantitative study. Open-ended interview questions, written descriptions of observations, and literature reviews that investigate ideas and theories are a few instances of qualitative research.

### **Participants**

To help with addressing the study's research topics, participants were chosen from a variety of district-wide schools. Participants came from three schools in the Sunshine District. Each school had different demographics. The first school served students in prekindergarten through fifth grade. The student enrollment was 400 and included prekindergarten students. The demographics were Hispanic 54%, Black 37%,

Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander less than 1%, White 6%, and Two or more races 2%. According to the North Carolina School Report Card (2021), there were no more than 21 students in each grade-level class. Seventy-six percent of the teachers at this school were experienced, and 24% of the teachers were beginning teachers. Three educators were recognized by the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards as excellent educators. The total number of instructional teachers was 50. Fifty-three percent of students in this school were economically disadvantaged.

The North Carolina School Report Card (2021) indicated the second school served students in kindergarten through fifth grade. Eighty-seven percent of students in this school were economically disadvantaged. The student enrollment was 279 and the average class size was 18 students. The demographics were 96.3% minority enrollment. This included 3.7% White, 91.1% Black or African American, 2.6% Hispanic/Latino, and 2.6% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander. Fifty percent of the teachers were experienced, and 40% of the teachers were beginning teachers. Two teachers were National Board Certified as accomplished teachers. There were 24 instructional teachers employed at this school. In this school, 87% of the students were considered to be economically challenged.

The third school served 615 students in prekindergarten through fifth grade with 58 instructional teachers. According to the North Carolina School Report Card (2021), the demographics were 60.9% minority enrollment which consisted of 39.1% White, 27.8% Hispanic/Latino, 21.8% Black or African American, 7.2% Two or more races, and 4.1% Asian or Asian/Pacific Islander. Six teachers were National Board Certified as accomplished teachers. Eighty-three percent were experienced teachers, and 17% were

beginning teachers. Fifty-seven percent of students in this school were economically disadvantaged.

### **Procedures**

Prior to collecting data for this research study, I created interview questions, focus group questions, and survey items using the Likert scale. Five people who were not involved in the study validated the survey. The instrument validation involved two principals, one lead mentor for new teachers, and two instructional coaches. These people were in charge of evaluating the data tool's reliability utilizing the Lawshe method. In order for the validation process to be completed, I emailed the survey to all five people through a Google Form. The content validity ratio of the Lawshe method was used to determine the content validity of each question. This method assures the critical value of data collection when utilizing a survey. The panel was asked to rate each item as "essential," "useful but not essential," or "not necessary" to determine the validity of the items being included in the survey. Table 2 displays the survey item, the rating choices for each question, and which research question the survey item aligns with.

**Table 2***Lawshe Method Validation and Research Question Alignment*

Questions	Question rating	Research Question
1. Since the COVID-19 pandemic started in 2020, it has impacted me in the classroom. (SA, A, D, SD)	<input type="radio"/> Essential <input type="radio"/> Useful but not essential <input type="radio"/> Not necessary	1. How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect teachers mentally, physically, and spiritually in their ability to teach?
2. It has been difficult for me to implement the COVID-19 related safety measures and protocols in my building. (SA, A, D, SD)	<input type="radio"/> Essential <input type="radio"/> Useful but not essential <input type="radio"/> Not necessary	3. What kind of coping strategies do teachers recommend to effectively continue teaching during a pandemic?
3. The pandemic has affected me spiritually. (SA, A, D, SD)	<input type="radio"/> Essential <input type="radio"/> Useful but not essential <input type="radio"/> Not necessary	1. How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect teachers mentally, physically, and spiritually in their ability to teach?
4. The pandemic has affected me physically. (SA, A, D, SD)	<input type="radio"/> Essential <input type="radio"/> Useful but not essential <input type="radio"/> Not necessary	1. How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect teachers mentally, physically, and spiritually in their ability to teach?
5. The pandemic has affected me emotionally. (SA, A, D, SD)	<input type="radio"/> Essential <input type="radio"/> Useful but not essential <input type="radio"/> Not necessary	1. How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect teachers mentally, physically, and spiritually in their ability to teach?
6. Parents have been helpful while supporting their children's remote learning. (SA, A, D, SD)	<input type="radio"/> Essential <input type="radio"/> Useful but not essential <input type="radio"/> Not necessary	3. What kind of coping strategies do teachers recommend to effectively continue teaching during a pandemic?
7. Teachers' mental health is just as important as students. (SA, A, D, SD)	<input type="radio"/> Essential <input type="radio"/> Useful but not essential <input type="radio"/> Not necessary	3. What kind of coping strategies do teachers recommend to effectively continue teaching during a pandemic?
8. Technology implementation played an important role when the COVID-19 pandemic began. (SA, A, D, SD)	<input type="radio"/> Essential <input type="radio"/> Useful but not essential <input type="radio"/> Not necessary	2. How effective were the support programs offered by the school district for teachers?

(continued)



Questions	Question rating	Research Question
9. Moving my classes to remote learning was the hardest part of the transition during the pandemic. (SA, A, D, SD)	<input type="radio"/> Essential <input type="radio"/> Useful but not essential <input type="radio"/> Not necessary	3. What kind of coping strategies do teachers recommend to effectively continue teaching during a pandemic?
10. I am aware of the resources provided for teachers to help with mental health challenges. (SA, A, D, SD)	<input type="radio"/> Essential <input type="radio"/> Useful but not essential <input type="radio"/> Not necessary	2. How effective were the support programs offered by the school district for teachers?

Table 2 reflects the correlation between the research questions and the survey items distributed for validation.

I received permission from the district to complete the research and received consent from the Gardner-Webb Institutional Review Board to distribute the survey to participants, conduct the interviews, conduct the focus group, and collect data. Each participant received an email from me inviting them to take part in the study (see Appendix). Participants (teachers) received an email inviting them to complete the survey. If they agreed to complete the survey, it was sent to them, and they were given 2 weeks to complete it. If they indicated in the initial survey, through an external link, that they were willing to participate in the individual interviews or the focus groups, they were contacted to schedule those sessions. After the 2-week survey submission period, the results were exported to an Excel spreadsheet. For those willing to participate in the interview, I used a random number generator (random.org) to select the row belonging to the willing participants for the interviews and then repeated this procedure for the focus group. The initial survey had an external link at the end asking teachers if they wanted to be a part of the interview and/or a focus group. Informed consent forms for interviews and focus groups were completed by contacting teachers via email or phone. The interview and focus group participants experienced a semi-structured interview protocol.

The interview took place either face-to-face or virtually, based on each participant's preference, and lasted approximately 20 minutes. The discussion group met in a public library and lasted approximately 20 minutes.

### **Instruments**

For the quantitative data collection, I utilized Likert-scale survey items aligned with the three research questions from Table 2. The Qualtrics platform was utilized to complete the surveys. This is a web-based software that allows survey development and collection of results and provides quantitative analysis through reports that are downloadable.

The data can be easily analyzed and visualized using surveys, and the majority of them are quantitative by design. Interpreting the results of a survey can be completed quickly as reports, charts, and tables to facilitate the presentation are easily available in Qualtrics (Gaille, 2020). The online surveys I created allowed everyone to remain anonymous. The survey participants had 2 weeks to complete it. After a week, participants received a reminder if they had not completed the survey to obtain as many participants as possible.

The surveys were completed and submitted electronically. Participants got a confirmation that their responses had been sent. I saw their responses right away through Qualtrics. Qualtrics provided different options to view responses which included individually, collectively, bar graphs, or tables.

The second instrument included five open-ended semi-structured interview questions ; each of the three research questions has three items related to it. Each interview began by providing participants with results from the completed survey. They

were asked to do a 2-minute quick write on their takeaways regarding the results. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. Participants were able to respond in their own terms as a result. From the transcriptions, themes were identified utilizing a coding procedure because participants provided more details regarding the survey item responses. When drawing conclusions on my research questions, this qualitative approach validated the research findings. In Table 3, the interview question and research question alignment is presented.

**Table 3**

*Semi-Structured Interview Questions*

Interview question	Research question
1. How stressful did you find teaching remotely during the COVID-19 pandemic?	2. How effective were the support programs offered by the school district for teachers?
2. Given what we know currently about the COVID-19 pandemic, where would you prefer that your district/network focus?	2. How effective were the support programs offered by the school district for teachers?
3. How can your school support you further?	2. How effective were the support programs offered by the school district for teachers?
4. What are you most proud of in your classroom for the past two years?	3. What kind of coping strategies do teachers recommend to effectively continue teaching during a pandemic?
5. What are some ways you coped during the COVID-19 pandemic while teaching?	3. What kind of coping strategies do teachers recommend to effectively continue teaching during a pandemic?

Using the questions in Table 3, I interviewed six teachers. In addition to the individual interviews, I conducted a teacher focus group with the teachers willing to participate. Table 4 displays the focus group questions utilized.

**Table 4***Focus Group Questions*

Question	Research question
1. How would you describe your experience with the Covid Pandemic while teaching?	1. How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect teachers mentally, physically, and spiritually in their ability to teach?
2. What are some things that you wish could have been different during the pandemic?	1. How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect teachers mentally, physically, and spiritually in their ability to teach?
3. Do you think it was harder or easier to teach during the pandemic? Why?	3. What kind of coping strategies do teachers recommend to effectively continue teaching during a pandemic?
4. Was the pandemic used as a reason not to interact with parents?	2. How effective were the support programs offered by the school district for teachers?
5. Are there any positives that came from the pandemic?	2. How effective were the support programs offered by the school district for teachers?
6. What did you gain from teaching during a pandemic that you might still use now?	3. What kind of coping strategies do teachers recommend to effectively continue teaching during a pandemic?

Six educators who worked during the COVID-19 pandemic took part in the focus group. The phase of collecting qualitative data helped to make the survey results easier to grasp. In order to address the research questions, I combined the quantitative and qualitative findings in the last stage of the study.

**Data Collection**

As previously described, quantitative data were collected from the responses of the participants in the online survey. Qualitative data included open-ended interview questions and focus group questions. The Lawshe method survey panel yielded the required results of .99 minimum CVR for validation. The CVR for each of the survey

items submitted was 1.00 (100% essential). The panel of experts chosen to validate my instruments all had a vested interest in the results of this study. I statistically analyzed survey responses and determined themes and coping strategies from the individual interviews and focus group interviews. For the interview protocol and the focus group protocol, participants were provided with the results of the data from the survey. I asked them to do a 2-minute quick write on their takeaways regarding the results and then followed up with a semi-structured interview protocol.

### **Data Analysis**

Once I collected all survey responses, I reviewed the data. According to a scale of 1 to 4, the answers were given numbers corresponding to agree, strongly agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. The mean for each question was calculated after the replies were examined as ordinal data. To identify the patterns in the responses meant to address each of the three study questions, I employed frequency charting. I reviewed the open-ended transcriptions to determine common themes in the interview and focus group responses. To identify reoccurring categories among participant replies for each item, participant responses were manually coded. I streamlined combining codes in order to arrange the responses in connection to the research. In order to derive meaning pertinent to the research goal and prepare for gathering research conclusions, the quantitative and qualitative data were merged.

### **Summary**

The goal of this study was to discover the ways teachers cope mentally, physically, and spiritually while teaching during a pandemic. To find the best coping mechanisms for teachers, research was done in line with the objectives of this study. In

this mixed methods study, participants could reply to items on a Likert scale, interview questions, and focus group questions.

Districts all around the state benefited from the research findings. District administration, mental health organizations, and teachers all learned a great deal by responding to the three research questions about the best coping mechanisms for elementary school teachers to use while instructing during a pandemic. For the benefit of educators, learners, institutions of higher learning, and communities at large, the research was significant in bolstering these coping mechanisms.

The three research topics of this study are connected in Chapter 4 and provide an in-depth look at the investigation's findings. How to link the results to the additional studies covered in the Chapter 2 literature review is summarized in Chapter 5.

## Chapter 4: Results

### Introduction

Teacher expectations in the classroom were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. The stress levels became high due to the spread of COVID-19 and the closing of schools. Teachers had to adapt to virtual instruction with little to no training. This made their jobs as educators more challenging. This research study sought to provide insight into how teachers coped during the COVID-19 pandemic while teaching and how those skills can be applied to similar challenges in the future.

The mixed methods research study was conducted to analyze and provide teachers with coping strategies while teaching during a pandemic. Using teacher surveys, interviews, and a focus group, this study analyzed perceptions and recommendations from each of these three groups of participants. The study's findings are fully explored in this chapter to look into the following research questions:

1. How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect teachers mentally, physically, and spiritually in their ability to teach?
2. How effective were the support programs offered by the school district for teachers?
3. What kind of coping strategies do teachers recommend to effectively continue teaching during a pandemic?

This study focused on how teachers coped mentally, physically, and spiritually while teaching during the pandemic. The findings of this mixed methods study are described in this chapter. The three research questions that served as the study's guiding principles are the framework within which the qualitative and quantitative data analysis is

presented.

### **Participants and Response Rate**

Those who participated in this research study included teachers in three different schools with different demographics. The first school served students in prekindergarten through fifth grade. The student enrollment was 400, including prekindergarten students. The second school served students from kindergarten through fifth grade. The student enrollment was 279. The third school served 615 students in prekindergarten through fifth grade. All three schools were open and had to make changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Participants in this study included teachers who taught for more than 3 years or more in one of the three schools described. The teachers were certified with a bachelor's or master's degree in education. Some teachers had just begun teaching when the COVID-19 pandemic began. Additionally, the participants in this research included teacher assistants within the schools due to the shortage of teachers. Teacher assistants had to cover classrooms for teachers when teachers would get COVID-19. Long-term substitutes were teacher assistants in those schools.

The participants who were teachers during the COVID-19 outbreak completed the survey. Due to confidentiality, their names were not collected. The expected amount of participation was 45 surveys completed, six participants for the interviews, and a focus group. Forty-eight individuals ultimately took part in the study. All questions received a 100% response rate and were taken into account in the data analysis.

### **Data Collection**

The superintendent was contacted to start the research process and informed of



the study's goals and framework. The superintendent was contacted and gave permission to perform the study with teacher involvement. Also, the principals of the three participating schools gave permission to conduct the study with teachers. Data collection started when I received authorization for my study and the Gardner-Webb Institutional Review Board committee's approval. In order to gather the data, surveys, interviews, and focus groups were used.

The Qualtrics platform was utilized for the survey response items. An evaluation team had already examined the response items in the self-created survey to validate it. The Lawshe approach was used to calculate the content validity index for the survey validation process and assess the content validity ratio of each item. The survey was shown to be a reliable research tool.

The survey was structured to include 10 Likert scale response items. There was a link for participants to click on at the end of the survey if they wished to take part in an interview or focus group. The responses of the survey, interview, and focus group participants provided qualitative and quantitative information pertaining to the three core research objectives of this study. Table 5 shows how the response items were in line with the study questions.

**Table 5**

*Data Analysis and Research Question Alignment*

	Research Question 1	Research Question 2	Research Question 3
Qualitative open-ended questions (focus group)	Questions 1, 2	Questions 4, 5	Questions 3, 6
Qualitative open-ended questions (interview)	Question 1	Questions 2, 3	Questions 4, 5
Quantitative closed-ended Likert scale responses	Questions 1, 3, 4, 5	Questions 8, 10	Questions 2, 6, 7, 9

A link for distribution was received after the survey was developed in Qualtrics, and it was sent to the participants with instructions to complete it within 2 weeks. The participants received a reminder email 1 week after the initial email. The survey's submission period ended on January 27, 2023, at 5:00 p.m. After the replies were gathered, Qualtrics was used to look through and evaluate the survey data. The responses to each item's qualitative data were manually coded and evaluated to identify recurrent groups. The mean for each response item was calculated using an ordinal data analysis on the quantitative data. In order to find any significance connected to the research's goal, the trends in the responses meant to address each of the research questions were evaluated and combined.

### **Overview of Research Responses**

Participants were asked to rate the significance of 10 response items on a 4-point Likert scale that corresponded with the research questions. Likert scale options for responses included strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. The lowest rating is listed as the minimum and the highest as the maximum for each item. The total number of values divided by the sum of all values yields the data set's mean. For each of the 10 items, the mean, or average response, was also determined. The distance between each result and the data set's mean was shown by the SD, which was discovered. The values were far from the mean if the SD was high. Wide variations in scores are indicated by a large SD. The scores fell more closely in line with the mean the lower the SD. A lower SD suggested greater agreement on the response items among the research participants (Urdu, 2017). Each data point's average deviation from the mean is represented by the variance. Data with high variation are more dispersed in regard to the

mean, while data with low variance are dominated by the mean.

The 11 open-ended questions that were posed to the research participants were answered by the participants in the study. Five questions were for the interviews and six questions were for the focus group. The responses were examined in light of the study's inquiries. For information relevant to the first research question, "How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect teachers mentally, physically, and spiritually in their ability to teach," the first set of questions were analyzed. The following collection of inquiries were examined for consistency with the second research question, "How effective were the support programs offered by the school district for teachers?" The relationship between the final set of open-ended question replies and the final research question, "What kind of coping strategies do teachers recommend to effectively continue teaching during a pandemic," was examined. Prior to calculating the frequency of the themes among the responses, the themes inside each response to each question were recognized and coded.

### **Quantitative Data Analysis**

The completion of 10 Likert scale replies by the participants allowed for the collection of quantitative data. Each research topic was represented by four Likert scale response possibilities. A summary of these data was given before the responses were examined considering these three study objectives.

#### ***Overview of Likert Scale Data***

Strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree were the ratings given to each of the 10 response options. The mean, SD, and variance of the responses were calculated after an analysis of the data.

The survey results in Table 6 indicate the response items from participants which

included the minimum scores, maximum scores, mean scores, SD, and variance.

**Table 6**

*Survey Question Results*

Survey items	Mi	Ma	M	SD	V
1. Since the COVID-19 pandemic started in 2020, it has impacted me in the classroom.	1	3	1.65	0.59	0.35
2. It has been difficult for me to implement the COVID-19 related safety measures and protocols in my building.	1	3	2.4	0.73	0.53
3. The pandemic has affected me spiritually.	1	4	2.15	0.94	0.87
4. The pandemic has affected me physically.	1	4	2.27	0.76	0.57
5. The pandemic has affected me emotionally.	1	4	1.85	0.74	0.54
6. Parents have been helpful while supporting their children's remote learning.	1	4	2.75	0.72	0.52
7. Teachers' mental health is just as important as students.	1	3	1.15	0.41	0.17
8. Technology implementation played an important role when the COVID-19 pandemic began.	1	3	1.4	0.53	0.28
9. Moving my classes to remote learning was the hardest part of the transition during the pandemic.	1	4	1.85	0.84	0.71
10. I am aware of the resources provided for teachers to help with mental health challenges.	1	4	2.13	0.73	0.53

Participant replies in Table 6 demonstrate that the response item with the highest average score was, "Parents have been helpful while supporting their children's remote learning," with a mean of 2.75. "It has been difficult for me to implement the COVID-19 related safety measures and protocols in my building," with a mean of 2.4, was the second in the highest average score. The third highest average score was, "The pandemic has affected me physically," with a mean of 2.27.

There were five items with a mean of 2 or higher and five items that received a 1.85 or lower. The lowest average score for an item was, “Teachers’ mental health is just as important as students,” with a mean of 1.15. With a mean of 1.4, “Technology implementation played an important role when the COVID-19 pandemic began” was the second-lowest average score. The remaining items receiving an average score lower than 2.27 were, “The pandemic has affected me spiritually,” with a mean of 2.15; and “I am aware of the resources provided for teachers to help with mental health challenges,” with a mean of 2.13. Two items received a mean score of 1.85: “The pandemic has affected me emotionally,” and “Moving my classes to remote learning was the hardest part of transition during the pandemic.” With a mean score of 1.65, “Since the COVID-19 pandemic started in 2020, it has impacted me in the classroom” was the item standing alone. All 10 response items had a minimum score of 1, while four items had a maximum score of 3. There were six items with a 100% score of 4 or “strongly disagree.”

The item ranked with the highest percentage of “strongly agree” was, “Teachers’ mental health is just as important as students,” with 87.50% of the responses being “strongly agree.” Ninety-eight percent of respondents who responded to this item said that they “strongly agree” or “agree.” “Technology implementation played an important role when the COVID-19 pandemic began” was the second highest with 62.5% of participant responses indicating “strongly agree” with these elements. Although teacher mental health was the highest, technology had the same total score for “strongly agree” and “agree” responses.

There were three items that received the lowest percentage of participants indicating the statements as “strongly agree” to being affected during the COVID-19

pandemic. The first item was, “Parents have been helpful while supporting their children’s remote learning,” with a percentage of 2.1. The next lowest item was, “The pandemic has affected me physically,” with a percentage of 12.5 responding with strongly agree. With a percentage of 14.6, the third lowest strongly agree item was, “It has been difficult for me to implement the COVID-19 related safety measures and protocols in my building.”

Of the statements to evaluate the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on teachers, three items had the highest percentage of participants ranking the items as “disagree.” “It has been difficult for me to implement the COVID-19 associated safety measures and protocols in my building,” said 54.2% of respondents. The next item with 47.9% disagreeing was, “Parents have been helpful while supporting their children’s remote learning.” Although “The pandemic has affected me spiritually” received the biggest percentage of respondents disagreeing (39.6%), the overall percentage of “strongly agree” and “agree” responses was 56.3%. There were two items totaling the same percentage which was 27.1%. These items were, “I am aware of the resources provided for teachers to help with mental health challenges,” and “The pandemic has affected me physically.”

There were three items with the lowest percentage of participants ranking “disagree.” The two items with 2.1% were, “Teachers’ mental health is just as important as students,” and “Technology implementation played an important role when the COVID-19 pandemic began.” The next lowest item was, “Since the COVID-19 pandemic started in 2020, it has impacted me in the classroom,” with 6.2%. The last item was, “The pandemic has affected me emotionally,” with 8.3%. Every item had at least one

participant who selected disagree as a ranking.

There were four items for which participants did not select “strongly disagree,” which calculated a zero percentage. These items included “Technology implementation played an important role when COVID-19 pandemic began,” “Teachers’ mental health is just as important as students,” “It has been difficult for me to implement the COVID-19 related safety measures and protocols in my building,” and “Since the COVID-19 pandemic started in 2020, it has impacted me in the classroom.” The highest percentage for “strongly disagree” was 14.5%. Parents have not been supportive of their children’s distance learning, according to research. The lowest percentage was, “I am aware of the resources provided for teachers to help with mental health challenges,” with 2.%.

The item that indicated the lowest SD was, “Teachers’ mental health is just as important as students,” with an SD of .41. The mean was 1.15 which was the lowest, so this item stood out as a heavily agreed upon item of the importance of teacher mental health. The second lowest SD was, “Technology implementation played an important role when the COVID-19 pandemic began,” with an SD of .53. With the second lowest mean being 1.4, this item also stood out because most participants agreed on technology playing an important role when the COVID-19 pandemic began. The third lowest SD item was, “Since the COVID-19 pandemic started in 2020, it has impacted me in the classroom,” with an SD of .59. The mean was the third lowest at 1.65, and participants were in agreement that the COVID-pandemic impacted them in the classroom. The lower SD scores have low means as well. This consensus is evidence that participants agreed with the items.

The items with the least variation from the mean were the items that included the

impact on teachers in the classroom since COVID-19 began, how teacher mental health is as important as student mental health, technology implementation and the role it played in schools, and the resources provided for teachers to help with mental health challenges. The greatest variation from the means, with a high variance score, was .87, for the effect the pandemic had on teachers spiritually. With a mean of 2.75, responses ranged from strongly disagreeing to strongly agreeing. With a variance score of .52, “Parents have been helpful while supporting their children's remote learning” revealed the greatest deviations from the mean of 2.75 with rankings from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.”

### **Qualitative Data Analysis**

#### ***Research Question 1: How Did the COVID-19 Pandemic Affect Teachers Mentally, Physically, and Spiritually in Their Ability to Teach?***

Responses from the open-ended questions that aligned with the first research question asked participants how they found teaching virtually during the COVID-19 pandemic and how they described their experience. Participants were able to share what they wished could be different during the pandemic. Table 6 identifies the recurring themes among the short answer responses.



**Table 7**

*Question 1 Interview Responses (How Stressful Do You Find Teaching Remotely During the COVID-19 Pandemic? N=6)*

Themes	Number of responses	Percentage of responses
Training	6	100%
Expectations	5	83%
Student participation	6	100%
Mental health	6	100%

As evidenced in the themes from Table 7, participants indicated that the trainings related to virtual instruction were essential for teachers. Responses included topics such as lack of training, time, engagement, and preparedness. Participants also indicated teachers were not given enough time to learn how to teach virtually and were held to high expectations to teach students. Research participants acknowledged how students were not engaged while participating in virtual instruction.

Another theme among the responses was mental health decreasing when participants had to begin virtual instruction. It was noted that participants became overwhelmed and forced to learn something new with not enough time. Additionally, several responses indicated trainings were necessary for teachers and grace should have been given while they learned. A few of the open-ended responses to this question indicated there should have been accountability for students like there was for teachers. Several participants also solely referenced how teachers were given so many rules and expectations, while students were able to be promoted regardless of their participation.

The next open-ended response item that supported the first research question asked participants to describe their experience teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Four themes were identified from the responses provided by the participants, as evidenced in Table 8.

**Table 8**

*Question 1 Focus Group Responses (How Would You Describe Your Experience With the COVID-19 Pandemic While Teaching? n=6)*

Themes	Number of responses	Percentage of responses
Professional development	4	67%
Teacher support	5	83%
Mental health	6	100%
Personal challenges	6	100%

Responses to this question emphasized how teachers felt in schools during the pandemic. Sixty-seven percent of the responses also emphasized the importance of having continued professional development in schools to help new teachers with adapting to new teaching. Similar in occurrence, there were 83% of responses focused on teacher support. Responses focused on the lack of support for teachers and that the focus was more on students. Participants indicated that if teachers have mental needs, it will impact their ability to be there for their students. Specifically, participants highlighted the challenges they faced walking into the building each day and the sacrifices they made to come to work. A few responses also indicated they began seeing a therapist and were diagnosed with anxiety disorder.

The last interview/focus group question related to the first research question regarding information about things participants wished were different during the pandemic. In Table 9, the response analysis contributes to an understanding of the areas within the school, indicating if teachers had to deal with the most challenges and what

benefits those areas could have contributed to making life less stressful.

**Table 9**

*Question 2 Focus Group Responses (What Are Some Things That You Wish Could Have Been Different During the Pandemic? N=6)*

Themes	Number of responses	Percentage of responses
Mental health	6	100%
Behavioral support	6	100%
Support staff	6	100%
COVID-19 protocol	6	100%

Responses from the participants indicated being overwhelmed during the pandemic and wishing there was more compassion for educators. The challenges for behavior expectations for students were noted in one participant's response as something they wished was different during the pandemic. Participants elaborated on challenging student behaviors increasing during the pandemic making it hard to teach virtually or in person. Additionally, understanding classroom management along with behavior management must be done before instruction can be implemented. Participants agreed that having extra staff during the pandemic could have taken some stress off the teachers. A lot of the teacher assistants were assigned to be regular education teachers when coverage was needed. Another theme noted by participants was the COVID-19 protocol. Participants emphasized how the rules about masks, along with other mandates, were inconsistent and teachers were the last to be notified of the quick changes and expected to inform parents, who became irritated.

***Research Question 2: How Effective Were the Support Programs Offered by the School District for Teachers?***

The second research topic of this study was matched by four open-ended questions. This research question sought to determine the effectiveness of the support programs offered by the school district for teachers. Three themes were identified among the participant responses when asked where the district should focus now being more familiar with the COVID-19 pandemic, as illustrated in Table 10.

**Table 10**

*Question 2 Interview Responses (Given What We Know Currently About COVID-19 Pandemic, Where Would You Prefer That Your District/Network Focus? N=6)*

Themes	Number of responses	Percentage of responses
Social-emotional learning	4	67%
Achievement gaps	6	100%
Continued teacher support	6	100%

Sixty-seven percent of participants agreed with providing social-emotional learning for teachers and students to help them learn how to handle their emotions in stressful situations. Most students have lost 2 years of true instruction and need extra support. In addition, noted in responses to this question was the importance of closing the achievement gaps while teaching grade-level instruction. In 100% of the responses, it was noted as essential for all classrooms that ongoing support be provided for kids in order to promote growth and close achievement gaps.

In consideration of the expectations received from the district, in the next question connected to this research issue, participants in the study were asked for their opinions on the support they would get from their school. The results are shown in Table 11. Four

themes arose from their comments.

**Table 11**

*Question 3 Interview Responses (How Can Your School Support You Further? N=6)*

Themes	Number of responses	Percentage of responses
Interventions	3	50%
Compassion	6	100%
Flexibility	6	100%
Professional development	3	50%

In 50% of the participant's responses, two of the themes mentioned in the responses to this question were observed. Participants noted intervention support as a benefit for students during the stressful times of adapting to meeting grade-level expectations. Providing professional development to implement interventions would be beneficial, also noted by 50% of the participants. Additionally, participants revealed that having compassion for the teachers and students should be the same when support is given from the school. Several participants also noted flexibility in scheduling and implementation of teaching materials should have been provided by the school. There was not enough time in a day to complete everything the school was asking for and that made it more frustrating for teachers and overwhelming for students. Participants' most frequent responses to this question stated how support should have been given to teachers because when teachers feel appreciated, they are more willing to go above and beyond for their students.

As evident in the previous responses, challenges existed with regard to support being given from the district level to the school level. Once teachers received support from those levels, they felt more capable of teaching and important. The question of

whether the pandemic was a reason to avoid interacting with parents was put to the participants. In Table 12, four themes emerged from their responses.

**Table 12**

*Question 4 Focus Group Responses (Was the Pandemic Used as a Reason Not to Interact With Parents? N=6)*

Themes	Number of responses	Percentage of responses
Communication	6	100%
Building relationships	6	100%
Safety protocols	6	100%
Maintaining high expectations	6	100%

There were 100% of responses to each theme for this question from participants. Participants agreed communication with parents was important during the pandemic, but it was challenging to have parents respond to important information regarding their child. Also revealed in the responses were the challenges of building relationships during the pandemic. Some of those challenges included parents dealing with family members dying from COVID-19; loss of their job leaving them with no funds to keep their cellphones on; and being overwhelmed, in general, with less time to be involved with school necessities. Explained in the responses was how parents struggled with the safety protocols of their child wearing a mask or being sent home for certain symptoms. Participants emphasized how parents did not respond to them when they had to call about their child needing to be picked up due to one of the protocols mandated by the district. Additionally, it was identified that having high expectations for students was not agreed with by parents due to different circumstances. Participants discussed how they feared setting expectations high and having parents become upset. These challenges became worse even after

students were back in school and parents were allowed to have parent conferences. Several responses simply indicated communication with parents was important, but it was not worth being disrespected because they held their children accountable. In Table 13, the themes are displayed from the question pertaining to the positives that came from the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Table 13**

*Question 5 Focus Group Responses (Are There Any Positives That Came From the Pandemic? N=6)*

Themes	Number of responses	Percentage of responses
Teamwork	5	83%
Technology expansion	6	100%
Instructional resources	4	67%
Smaller classroom sizes	3	50%
Parent involvement	5	83%

An overwhelming 100% of responses revealed the technology expansion has been a major positive that came from the pandemic. The technology platforms are still utilized, and participants feel they will be more prepared if they have to experience another pandemic. Also revealed in the responses was the thankfulness of teachers becoming team players after having so many challenges while teaching during the pandemic. Explained in the responses were the instructional resources that were given to continue to differentiate instruction. Some examples were Canvas, Seesaw, and Reading Horizons. Additionally, it was noted the increase in parent involvement since the pandemic is due to parents wanting to help their children close the gaps they have in learning. Participants discussed how parents want to help their children more now that things are back to normal versus when teachers needed more support during the pandemic. Only 50% of the

responses discussed the smaller class sizes and how they wished it would continue for all teachers and not some. They mentioned they understood funding is an issue like always and they are aware of the extra funding being gone.

***Research Question 3: What Kind of Coping Strategies Do Teachers Need to Effectively Continue Teaching During a Pandemic?***

This research study's third research question centered on the strategies teachers could utilize to effectively teach during the pandemic. To determine what could be beneficial for teachers, in order to learn more about the most effective teaching methods, a series of questions were posed to the participants.

The first question asked the participants to share what they were proud of in the classroom for the past 2 years. Table 14 indicates that after their responses were collected, three themes emerged.

**Table 14**

*Question 4 Interview Responses (What Are You Most Proud of in Your Classroom for the Past 2 Years? N=6)*

Themes	Number of responses	Percentage of responses
Relationships with students	6	100%
Student engagement	6	100%
Blended learning	6	100%

The two most frequent responses indicated the relationships and engagement they had with their students. Responses also emphasized how life is so short and there is no need to complain about things they cannot change but instead cherish each moment making a difference in a child's life. Participants also proudly talked about how blended learning has been beneficial to their students and they will continue to differentiate



instruction based on the requirements of their students.

Participants were also asked to share how they coped during the COVID-19 pandemic while teaching. Descriptions of what they did regarding coping are shared in Table 15.

**Table 15**

*Question 5 Interview Responses (What Are Some Ways You Coped During the COVID-19 Pandemic While Teaching? n=6)*

Themes	Number of responses	Percentage of responses
Self-care	6	100%
Therapy	3	50%
Hobbies	4	67%
Family time	6	100%

Respondents shared in 50% of the responses that therapy was the first thing they tried when looking for ways to cope during the pandemic. Additionally, the word “therapy” was frowned upon but quoted as being of utmost importance to have someone to express feelings to. Participants also responded to self-care being more important than ever and that it was easy to forget about self and fall into a stage of depression. Participants emphasized self-care can mean a day off work to just relax due to the stress of teaching. Responses also revealed that they found hobbies to keep their mind out of a dark place. Some examples were reading, journaling, walking, and dancing. Finally, a few respondents suggested the requirement for family time and how their personal families were neglected during the pandemic. Family is first and foremost. We have to realize we only get one set of parents, so cherish them while they are here. One respondent shared how they lost their parents during the pandemic and lost time they

could have shared with them.

Looking into how teachers coped with the pandemic while teaching, participants were asked to share if it was easy or hard teaching during the pandemic and to explain why. From the responses, four themes were present and are displayed in Table 16.

**Table 16**

*Question 3 Focus Group Responses (Do You Think It Was Harder or Easier to Teach During the Pandemic? Why? N=6)*

Themes	Number of responses	Percentage of responses
Build trust	4	67%
Build relationships	6	100%
Closing achievement gaps	6	100%
Communicate with parents	5	83%

Respondents revealed in 67% of all responses the importance of trusting not only your principal but your grade-level team in providing what is best for students. Additionally, building relationships with the parents and community was a challenge due to the restrictions during the pandemic and the interactions that could not be made until the mandates were lifted. Participants agreed that closing achievement gaps was hard during and now after the pandemic.

Themes from the next question are displayed in Table 17.

**Table 17**

*Question 6 Focus Group Responses (What Did You Gain From Teaching During a Pandemic That You Might Still Use Now? N=6)*

Themes	Number of responses	Percentage of responses
Community support	6	100%
Technology platforms	6	100%
Collaborative teaching	4	67%
Staffing challenges exist	6	100%

In 67% of the responses, participants emphasized how collaborating with their colleagues helped them learn what can be done while teaching during a pandemic. Teachers shared ideas with each other, and the ideas gave options on how learning would be taught. Relationships were formed as a result of this help that may benefit the school community. Respondents shared how they enjoyed the technology platforms provided by the district and planned to continue to utilize those resources with their students. Their responses also revealed the following information: Staffing was still a challenge after the pandemic and there were still classes that had long-term substitutes, due to teachers quitting or not renewing their contracts.

### **Summary**

The research results of this mixed methods study were thoroughly described in Chapter 4. Teachers who worked in primary schools were surveyed, and information was acquired from the participants that was associated with the research topics for this study through the gathering of qualitative and quantitative data from the Likert scale response items, interviews, and focus groups. Through data analysis, I determined that teachers were stressed while teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. The emergent themes from

the questions asked determined how mental health was impacted in all aspects of teachers' lives. This mixed methods study also revealed coping strategies that can be utilized by teachers and the importance of being prepared to teach during a pandemic.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

### Introduction

The objective of this mixed methods study was to collect and analyze how elementary teachers coped mentally, physically, and spiritually while instructing during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this study, instructors from three separate elementary school districts in North Carolina were surveyed. Participants in the study were elementary school teachers at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. The study revealed coping strategies teachers utilized to reduce stress. A group of best practices for anticipating a pandemic was also identified as a result of this research. Also, survey responses from study participants gave data to aid teachers in pandemics in the future. Three research questions served as the framework for this study and served to direct the response questions posed to research participants:

1. How did the COVID-19 pandemic affect teachers mentally, physically, and spiritually in their ability to teach?
2. How effective were the support programs offered by the school district for teachers?
3. What kind of coping strategies do teachers recommend to effectively continue teaching during a pandemic?

Data were collected during this research through a survey, interviews, and focus group. The survey included ten 4-point Likert scale response items. The focus group and interview questions were open-ended, and participants provided succinct answers. The three primary research questions of this study were addressed by the participant responses, which also included quantitative and qualitative information.

## Summary of Findings

The research questions are a summary of the findings of this investigation.

### *Research Question 1: How Did the COVID-19 Pandemic Affect Teachers Mentally, Physically, and Spiritually in Their Ability to Teach?*

Teachers expressed how stressed they were while teaching remotely during the pandemic. There were no prior trainings, and teachers were expected to begin teaching online and were held to high expectations with no support. Teachers felt they were navigating a new world of teaching and were forced to learn overnight. Ninety-three percent of teachers agreed since the COVID-19 pandemic started in 2020, it impacted them in the classroom. Teachers became more resilient by communicating about stressors, accessing mental health resources in the school, and compiling solutions for factors that cause stress (CDC, 2021c). Fifty-six percent of teachers agreed that the pandemic affected them spiritually and 43% disagreed. Teachers emphasized how their faith became stronger due to the increase in deaths from COVID-19. Some teachers' faith decreased because their personal situations became worse after prayer. More than fifty percent of teachers agreed on the pandemic affecting them physically. Teachers gained weight due to the closing of the gyms and the gym being a therapy place for them. Some teachers gained weight due to the increase of stress in their jobs during the pandemic. Due to finances, some teachers stopped paying to go to the gym and it took a toll on their mental and physical well-being. Table 18 displays the teachers who agreed that the COVID-19 pandemic affected them mentally, physically, and spiritually.

**Table 18***COVID-19 Effect*

Question	Strongly agree/agree	Strongly disagree/disagree
The pandemic has affected me spiritually.	56.25%	43.75%
The pandemic has affected me physically.	66.67%	33.33%
The pandemic has affected me emotionally.	87.5%	12.5%

Table 18 displays responses to the survey utilizing the Likert scale. Looking at how the pandemic affected participants spiritually had a difference of 13% between agreeing and disagreeing. The pandemic affected participants physically and only one-third disagreed. The question with the highest percentage of agreed was the pandemic affecting participants emotionally, which was 87.5%.

***Research Question 2: How Effective Were the Support Programs Offered by the School District for Teachers?***

According to some of the teachers, they were aware of the resources provided for teachers to help with mental health challenges. During the interviews, it was emphasized how the support was inconsistent with expectations from the students versus the teachers. More technology was provided for teachers to support them in their instruction of students. Teachers implemented instruction from various platforms, including Seesaw and Canvas. Zoom was utilized for teachers to meet virtually with students. During interviews, teachers agreed they had students who would never log on and if they did, they were not engaged. Table 18 displays the difference in how teachers responded to the

technical support along with the mental health resources provided to teachers.

**Table 19**

*Resources Provided to Teachers During COVID-19*

Question	Strongly agree/agree	Strongly disagree/disagree
Technology implementation played an important role when the COVID-19 pandemic began.	97.92%	2.08%
I am aware of the resources provided for teachers to help with mental health challenges.	70.83%	29.16%

Table 18 displays participant responses to questions from the teacher survey.

Almost all the participants agreed that technology played an important role when the COVID-19 pandemic began. Seventy percent of teachers were aware of the resources for mental health challenges.

***Research Question 3: What Kind of Coping Strategies Do Teachers Recommend to Effectively Continue Teaching During a Pandemic?***

Teachers during the pandemic had a lot of challenges and had to implement different strategies to cope with stress. According to interviews, exercise was a great stress reliever for teachers. Walking their dogs and listening to podcasts were used as ways to escape from all the COVID-19 stress. Some teachers set routines as a way to cope during the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers agreed that having a set routine could be quite beneficial when tackling any issue. Setting a consistent bedtime and wake-up time was part of this. Organizing meals, work hours, and breaks could also aid in developing a pattern that is sustainable. During the focus group, it was discussed how it is crucial to take care of the mind, body, and soul during unpredictable times. Teachers agreed they



needed to take care of their mental health by making friends and doing productive things (journaling, painting, dancing). Some teachers expressed and celebrated their faith to feed their spirit. In those challenging times, teachers kept in mind to treat themselves and others with compassion.

Teachers were proud of the growth they saw from the beginning to the end of the COVID-19 protocols. Table 19 displays the correlation between the survey and interview questions and why coping strategies were important for teachers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

**Table 20**

*Coping Strategies*

Question	Strongly agree/agree	Strongly disagree/disagree
Moving my classes to remote learning was the hardest part of the transition during the pandemic.	79.16%	20.84%
Teachers' mental health is just as important as students.	97.92%	2.08%
Parents have been helpful while supporting their children's remote learning.	37.5%	62.5%

The transition from regular instruction to remote learning was difficult for 79.16% of teachers. During the focus group, teachers agreed it was harder to teach during the pandemic because of the lack of support from parents and time constraints. Teachers discussed in detail how kids were promoted and never participated in remote learning. This made it harder and had a major impact on their stress levels to close the achievement gap. In the focus group, teachers emphasized how parents really stopped caring when

they knew their child would be promoted no matter what. The ability to effectively manage one's time depends entirely on an individual; therefore, it may be the most difficult challenge for students to conquer. Students must take their studies seriously, use time management techniques, establish regular habits, and continue in their work despite distractions, according to the study's participants.

For the first research question, the results of this mixed methods study support the following conclusion: The COVID-19 pandemic affected teachers mentally, physically, and spiritually in their ability to teach. Consequently, the school districts needed to provide resources to help teachers remain in the education field. For the second research question, the results of this mixed methods study supported the following conclusion: There were not a lot of programs provided by the district, but what they did offer was effective and beneficial. For the third research question, the results of this mixed methods study supported the following conclusion: Teachers utilized different coping strategies to continue teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some strategies are still being used after the pandemic.

### **Connections to Existing Research on Teaching During the COVID-19 Pandemic**

The results associated with the research questions parallel the findings of previous studies analyzing the impact of COVID-19 on schools and teachers. The finest available public policy tool for skill improvement is education. While enhancing their social skills and social awareness, students can still have fun at school. The improvement of the child's ability is the main objective of attending or enrolling in school. A very short period of time spent in school enhances aptitude and abilities, yet skipping or refusing to go to school will have a negative effect on skill development (Tarkar, 2020). The

COVID-19 pandemic's effect on school closures had an impact on how learning and education are organized. It first affected the strategies for instruction and evaluation. Some private institutions started using online teaching techniques and allowing students to take lessons online, yet low-income private and public schools were closed totally and were not given access to e-learning (Tarkar, 2020). Children's capacity to learn was hampered by this behavior. Parents had to deal with a range of issues as a result of the change in instructional methods.

Further, this study implored methods used by Subedi et al. (2020) by utilizing a descriptive cross-sectional survey referring to the impact of virtual learning. With few or no other options available, switching from traditional face-to-face instruction to online learning was an entirely different experience for both learners and teachers. The educational system and teachers accepted education in emergency through a variety of internet channels, compelling them to adopt a system for which they were not prepared. As schools and universities were shut down due to the pandemic, e-learning services were crucial in assisting students with their studies (Subedi et al., 2020).

### **Resilience Theory**

Through this research study, coping mechanisms for teachers teaching during the pandemic were shared in relation to mental, physical, and spiritual challenges. This research also explored the different programs provided for teachers along with the effectiveness they provided. The theoretical framework of resilience theory, which was used to explore the data, is consistent with the study's research questions. According to resilience theory, how we respond to adversity rather than its actual characteristics is what matters most. During the pandemic, teachers could build resilience by accepting

things they had no control over, knowing how to access mental health resources in school, and communicating about the stress impact. This theoretical framework was especially pertinent to the research's investigation of teachers to build resilience, which is the ability to adjust to obstacles that successfully inhibit survival processes (Ramakrishna & Singh, 2022).

Many presumptions that pertain to the conduct of this research study are incorporated into the theoretical framework of resilience theory. These assumptions assert that teachers go into survival mode, lack knowledge, and have time restraints. When someone is in survival mode on autopilot, they are only making enough progress to get by. No extra effort is being made. They become estranged from their surroundings and lack objectives. Teachers were given resources to implement instruction, but due to a lack of training, they were not utilized. Professional development was provided for technology instruction, and other trainings were provided for virtual platforms from which teachers were expected to teach.

### **Social-Emotional Theory**

The findings of my study indicated an alignment with social-emotional theory and the impact it can have on not only students but teachers. According to responses, teachers and students both needed to focus on social-emotional learning to help learn how to handle their emotions in stressful situations. A poll conducted in May 2022 revealed that the COVID-19 epidemic had “stunted behavioral and socioemotional development” (DeLeon, 2022, p. 2) in more than 80% of public schools, as well as revealed a 56% spike in “classroom disturbances from student misconduct”(DeLeon, 2022, p. 2) and a 49% increase in “rowdiness outside of the classroom” (De Leon, 2022, p. 2).

Teachers agreed to receive therapy to help with their mental health. It was also recognized that students were in therapy provided by the district and some students were on waiting lists outside of the district. The rate of kids seeking mental health treatment increased after the COVID-19 pandemic began, according to data from 70% of public schools. In addition, 34% of public school kids who sought mental healthcare more frequently than other students were “economically disadvantaged students” (De Leon, 2022, p. 3).

Although there are differences between social-emotional learning and mental health, social-emotional health can help foster good mental health and ought to be used as part of a system of resources and supports for mental well-being that also includes promotion, prevention, early intervention, and treatment. States, local districts, and federal programs now actively encourage this kind of coordination. Some of the emotions teachers described were being frustrated, overwhelmed, stressed, tired, and happy. The lack of work and life balance affected their ability to teach. Although these emotions were discussed, teachers did agree they had been feeling this prior to the pandemic.

### **Implications**

The purpose of this study was to evaluate how elementary teachers in a medium-sized school district handled the COVID-19 pandemic mentally, physically, and spiritually while teaching. Several implications emerged from this study.

School districts must understand their role in responding to teacher concerns on a school and personal level. This study confirmed the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on teacher mental health, their physical well-being, and their spirituality. Due to the impact of the pandemic, teachers needed coping strategies to continue teaching. Teachers,

teacher assistants, substitutes, administrators, custodial staff, and other school employees can benefit from the coping strategies shared in the study. This may require providing professional development throughout the school year and not just sending out surveys to check on teachers. Additionally, research cited in the Chapter 2 literature review revealed the programs offered to educators (Garrison Institute, 2022; NCDHHS, 2020; North Carolina Office of State Human Resources, 2022). If there is explicit support from the district, the retention and recruitment of teachers may improve even through the challenges they may face. Support from the district can include a district-level plan to respond to emergencies that will occur like the pandemic or a specific commitment to expectations when implementing instruction with a different platform within the school district vision, mission, or learning goals. Superintendents and human resource directors should also consider putting resilience and social-emotional training programs in place for teachers currently working in their schools. The training could begin with a school audit connected to school performance outcomes and retention of teachers followed by specific research-based training related to learning styles and the effectiveness of the programs for educators.

While this study showed that teachers were aware of the support programs provided by the district, there were a limited number of responses indicating what the actual programs were. Some of the teachers from one of the schools in the study reported receiving the Employee Assistance Program emails but sometimes did not even read them. The Employee Assistance Program is a program centered around mental health challenges, seminars, problem-solving, and counseling. Other teachers reported being involved in different programs not provided by the district. While no program has been

shown to have more benefits, it may have addressed the needs of the teachers. It is also worth noting that the selection of teachers for the study was based on a survey score. The scores were divided, with 34 teachers being aware of the resources provided by the district and the other 14 teachers not being aware of the resources provided. Although more than half of the total number of teachers agreed, this may signify the need for all teachers to be informed of the resources provided by the district when they are first employed and throughout their employment.

Finally, teachers found themselves trying to learn more coping strategies to effectively continue to teach. This could have implications for teachers due to everyone having a different way they cope with stress. Teachers who might not be able to handle stressful situations can help during a pandemic by creating experiences and providing strategies to make them feel less worried. To keep teacher stress levels down and retain them, it is imperative to utilize different methods including cognitive, physical, and environmental forms. These methods consist of meditation, exercise, and outdoor activities (Mast, 2022).

### ***Summary of Implications***

The research findings of this study provided insight that can be beneficial to school districts with resources for teachers to cope mentally, physically, and spiritually while teaching in a pandemic or other challenging environments. A summary of the suggestions includes the following:

- Create a system of accountability: States and school districts should pledge to describe their efforts to improve academic performance and set up a reporting schedule for their progress toward 5- and 10-year goals.

- Teachers should be informed of the expectations and responsibilities when changes in the implementation of instruction occur.
- District leadership, school administration, school staff, and parents should be aware of the expectations and responsibilities of the teacher.
- To be ready to provide kids with a great education regardless of the upcoming crises, schools should continue to research and invest in promising approaches.
- Teachers should
  - take care of themselves
  - create and maintain positive relationships with students
  - participate in seminars to help with mental health challenges
  - be vocal about issues they disagree with when it comes to teaching
- Trainings for teachers should include
  - safety procedures and protocols
  - working during a pandemic
  - mental health
  - de-escalation strategies
  - social-emotional learning
  - virtual instruction platforms
  - building teacher resilience
- It is important for teachers to understand the detailed goals of the programs.  
Goals of these programs include
  - attain problem-solving strategies when becoming overwhelmed in



challenging situations in the school

- create and maintain positive relationships
- provide education and information pertaining to emotional skills to encourage comprehension, recognition, and how to control emotions
- empower other colleagues, hold each other accountable, and promote wellness
- Some of the coping strategies recommended for teachers:
  - exercise classes
  - art therapy
  - outdoor activities
  - gym membership
- A check-in for teacher mental health should be done by an administrator to assure the stress levels remain at a minimum.

### **Delimitations and Limitations of the Study**

Choices I made as the researcher and factors outside of my control both had an impact on the study's findings. The sample size is one restriction of the study to take into account. The study only included 48 persons as its sample size. The fact that participant replies solely represent the three schools I chose to participate in the study is another limiting factor of this research. The participant profiles were another boundary that was established for the study. I decided to limit my investigation to elementary school instructors. Other individuals who served in different capacities but are knowledgeable of the COVID-19 pandemic in the schools were not invited to participate.

The decision to use an online platform for the survey distribution may have

affected the study's findings because of potential disparities in participant comfort levels with technology. I was also less able to exert any control over the participants' survey-taking behaviors because of the utilization of the online platform. I was unable to monitor other people's presence and impact throughout the survey's completion, as well as any potential environmental distractions.

The results of this research could have an impact on future instructors in school districts if a new pandemic breaks out, despite the study's restrictions and limitations. This research may have an impact on decisions about teacher duties and expectations, as well as their education and development as professionals. The impact the COVID-19 pandemic had mentally, physically, and spiritually between school districts with elementary, middle, and high school teachers can also be influenced by the results of this study. The results of this study could potentially be compared to subsequent research on the subject.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Future research on pandemic-coping mechanisms for primary school teachers may be able to take advantage of the opportunities presented by this study. Further research on the subject of education during the COVID-19 pandemic would enable comparisons to the data gathered in this study and the ability to further examine the concepts presented in this study, taking into account the study's findings.

#### ***Larger Participation***

Replicating this work with a bigger sample size would present a chance for future research. As only three schools were used in the study, using other school districts would allow for a comparison of the research's findings and conclusions. Also, the study only

included educators who had been in the classroom throughout the pandemic. Further research that included more parties impacted by the epidemic in elementary schools would assist in identifying whether the study's findings were only representative of the participants or whether they would still hold true with a wider range of participants. In the future, researchers might examine primary school counselors, administrators, and teaching aides.

### ***Focus on Training and Professional Development Impact***

Investigating the effects of specific professional development opportunities for teachers would be another area for future research. Studies might look at the impact of mental health trainings, social-emotional learning, resilience training, or coping strategies on how teachers adapt during a pandemic. Participants in this study made references to the trainings. The majority of teachers felt the trainings could be time-consuming and the expectations were not met due to the responsibilities they had. The influence of trainings in comparison to teachers who do not receive trainings may be the subject of future research in relation to this study.

### ***Virtual Instruction Platform***

Asynchronous versus synchronous online learning is an opportunity for future research. Asynchronous learning is when students communicate with each other and access resources at their own pace over a longer period. When teachers and students come together at the same time and location (physical or virtual), they are said to be learning synchronously and interacting in "real-time." This study emphasized the awareness of technology implementation playing an important role when the COVID-19 pandemic began. Further research could consider the usage of either learning platform

continued to be implemented after the pandemic. Some teachers stated during the interview they saw a difference in their students when it was a choice to participate in asynchronous or synchronous learning. Most students chose asynchronous and never completed their assignments. Some pros of asynchronous learning were students learning at their own pace and having more time to reflect and engage in the material. However, there were cons, which included self-discipline and loss of informal learning. Community building and faster information exchange are pros for synchronous learning. Scheduling and technical difficulties are synchronous learning cons.

### ***Closing Achievement Gaps After the COVID-19 Pandemic***

This research study's participant responses revealed a pattern of unfavorable perceptions of how the district-mandated expectations to close achievement gaps were shared. Nonetheless, this study highlighted that there is a chance for teachers to close the learning gaps with continued support from the school, district, and parents. There is potential for more investigation into how teachers can provide differentiated instruction and have an intervention block to help close those achievement gaps in reading and math.

Similar to this, participant comments in this survey revealed that the district did not provide enough support and that the pacing and curriculum were frequently changed. Future studies could look into the aspects that contributed to student growth and the way teachers applied standards. There could be supporting staff hired to provide interventions and research could compile data from schools to see if it has an impact on students learning.

Some of the different ways teachers try to close the achievement gaps are by providing evidence-based instruction, teaching from a rigorous curriculum, providing

scaffolding during instruction, progress monitoring, and motivating and engaging. As teachers continue to work through different challenges in our school districts, more research pertaining to the pandemic would benefit beginning teachers and stakeholders within the school community.

### ***Equitable Resources***

Discussing the equitable resources provided for students during a crisis or pandemic could be a topic for future research. Education must be equal for pupils to begin with effective educational outcomes. Equity makes sure that these options are modified to include kids who might need more assistance and care. When schools close their doors, teachers must strive to assist students online, over the phone, and through care packages delivered to their doors. This makes equity more difficult. One reason is that the overall quantity of instructional time will probably decrease, making it difficult to appropriately distribute finite resources like time.

Teachers indicated that during the pandemic, several pupils had great gear and WiFi at home, and their parents could guide them in using the resources. Other students were logging on with a phone, trying to use the device distributed to them, or not participating at all. Also, there were households with a clean and quiet place to work and some who did not have those assets. Some parents were familiar with the topics the school was attempting to teach, while others were not. Some people had the time, resources, and dedication to actively participate in their own children's education during the pandemic. Other parents were either struggling or refusing to assist (Levine, 2020).

According to teacher responses from the study, students lost a lot of reading and math instruction. The exceptional students were not provided their services due to their

lack of knowledge of technology. Information on how the pandemic affected particular student demographics, such as English language learners and students with impairments, was scarce. Black, Hispanic, and low-income students were disproportionately affected by the pandemic, which had a considerably greater negative impact on some student groups than others. Students in high-poverty schools missed the equivalent of 22 weeks of teaching in schools whose classes were totally remote during the 2020–2021 school year, compared to 13 weeks in high-income schools. Children who were African American or Hispanic, as well as those from other racial and ethnic minority groups, were much more likely than Caucasian children to lose a caregiver to COVID-19 (Prothero, 2022).

### **Conclusion**

This mixed methods research study's goal was to establish how elementary teachers coped mentally, physically, and spiritually while teaching during a pandemic through an analysis of responses from participants with experience related to this research. This study addressed and answered three research questions. Ten 4-point Likert scale answer items, five open-ended interview questions, and six open-ended focus group questions were used to achieve this. Understanding of coping mechanisms, resources, and assistance obtained throughout the epidemic was gained from an examination of the research participant responses. Responses also provided key insight regarding how teachers felt during the past 2 years in schools.

I have been given the chance to thoroughly evaluate the effects a pandemic could have on primary school teachers while being held to high standards to teach students through data analysis of the research study's findings. The purpose of this study was to

enhance the worthwhile efforts of teachers and provide coping strategies for the mental, physical, and spiritual needs while teaching during a pandemic. With more teachers becoming accustomed to coping mechanisms, it would be advantageous for districts to retain teachers during an emergency pandemic.

In ordinary times, teaching is a never-ending struggle to decide what to say and what not to say, when to push and when to back off, when to continue a lesson and when to move on. But how, in our present world, does one make such judgments? How does one read the body language, facial expressions, and social cues of children wearing masks and sitting six feet apart, or peering through laptop computers? There's no guidebook for teaching during a pandemic. This will be a year of dizzying uncertainties, and teachers will need all the resources and supports we can give them. (Heller, 2020, para. 6)

This research sought to contribute to helping teachers not only in a pandemic but in different challenges they face throughout their teaching careers.

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**Appendix**

**Email Invitation to Teachers**

Dear Colleague,

I am a Doctoral student at Gardner-Webb University in the Education Leadership Program. I am asking you to take part in my research entitled, "A mixed-methods study of how elementary teachers cope mentally, physically, and spiritually to address teaching in a pandemic."

The purpose of this research is to evaluate how elementary teachers handled the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic mentally, physically, and spiritually. Additionally, it will seek to qualitatively document the coping mechanisms used to support teachers' wellbeing.

As a participant in the study, you are being asked to take an online survey. It is anticipated that the study will require about 15-20 minutes of your time. Participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw from the research study at any time without penalty. You also have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) for any reason without penalty. The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your data will be anonymous which means that your name will not be collected or linked to the data. There are no anticipated risks in this study. You will receive no payment for participating in the study. You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty by exiting the survey. At the end of the survey, you will be asked if you are interested in participating in an interview or focus group. Data from this study will not be used or distributed for future research studies.

**If you have questions about the study, contact:**

Researcher's name: Chavon Bryant

Researcher telephone number: XXXXX

Researcher email address: cbryant3@gardner-webb.edu

Faculty Advisor name: Dr. Shelley West

Faculty Advisor telephone number: XXXX

Faculty Advisor email address: swest4@gardner-webb.edu

Dr. Sydney K. Brown

IRB Institutional Administrator

Telephone: 704-406-3019 Email: skbrown@gardner-webb.edu

Clicking the link below to continue to the survey indicates your consent to participate in the study:

Survey Link