

## COVID-19 Impact Memo

### Promising Practices In Education

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused major disruption to all levels of education that could impact student outcomes for months and possibly years ahead. The SCORE series of COVID-19 Impact Memos analyzes challenges, examines emerging innovations and research-supported practices, and highlights student-centered approaches for educators to consider.

## COVID-19 Impact Brief: Teacher Support

Summer 2020

### Introduction

Across Tennessee, schools are reopening and welcoming back students in new and innovative ways. In response to COVID-19, districts have had to consider a number of issues, including the digital divide and nonacademic supports. Districts and schools have myriad competing priorities and challenges as they work to reopen schools, but given the research that shows teachers are the most important in-school contributor to student learning and long-term success, it is essential that educators are set up for success during this turbulent school year.<sup>1</sup>

### COVID-19 Impact On Teacher Support

When schools closed in the spring, educators and students were forced into remote instruction for the duration of the year. While there has been significant attention paid to how this transition affected student learning and well-being, there has been less focus on teacher impact.<sup>2</sup> The pandemic presents significant concerns for teacher mental and physical health and also has serious implications for overall teacher effectiveness.

### Physical Safety

Schools and classrooms are typically areas of high engagement and contact between individuals. These factors that allow for positive communication and relationship building are incompatible with safety protocols for COVID-19. District and school leaders must follow health guidance from the state and ensure that schools are safe for both teachers and students, particularly for those at the greatest risk of harm from infection. This includes, but is not limited to, social distancing, regular cleaning, and provisions of personal protective equipment (PPE).

- ◆ **Personal Protective Equipment:** Tennessee has taken the first step to ensure the safety of our educators by providing free PPE for every school across the state. Moving forward, districts should make sure that supplies are consistently replenished as needed and that all PPE provided meets standards to effectively prevent the spread of COVID-19.
- ◆ **Local Educator Survey:** In several districts, teachers were surveyed about their health needs and whether or not they were comfortable or able to return to school in person. For Valor Collegiate Academies in Nashville, this data informed staffing decisions regarding which educators can transition from virtual to in-person instruction in the fall.
- ◆ **Safety Protocol For Operations:** Trousdale County Schools placed teachers' physical safety at the forefront of their decision-making process for reopening using a hybrid model. District leaders focused on following federal and state safety protocols such as daily

symptom screenings and limited building capacity. This comprehensive planning ensures that schools can maintain some high-quality in-person instruction where teachers can have the greatest impact on student learning while also keeping the community safe.

## Mental Well-Being

National surveys of teacher well-being amid COVID-19 found that the majority of educators felt anxious about their personal safety as well as their ability to do their jobs effectively.<sup>3</sup> Experts believe the overwhelming challenges related to teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic may have direct implications for exacerbating teacher burnout and turnover — ultimately leading to staffing shortages.<sup>4</sup>

- ◆ **Strong School Leadership:** School leaders are key to ensuring that teachers are supported and cared for in their teaching environment. Research suggests that principals have the greatest influence on teacher retention, with even greater benefits for teachers of color.<sup>5</sup> During the health crisis, leaders have the opportunity to provide consistent communication and transparency around planning decisions and how those decisions impact educators, boosting teacher morale in the process.
- ◆ **Opportunities For Feedback:** Districts have responded to the mental health needs of teachers in a variety of creative ways. Hamilton County has supported teacher well-being with multiple avenues of support — from regular mindfulness practices to weekly opportunities for teachers to give feedback on reopening plans and communicate their concerns and needs. In a SCORE interview panel, Hamilton County teachers expressed that their voice was being heard.
- ◆ **Dedicated Teacher Support:** Another example can be found in Statesmen Prep Academy in Washington D.C., which has allocated part of their CARES Act funding to hire additional mental health counselors who exclusively serve their teachers in response to heightened feelings of anxiety and sadness amid COVID-19.

## Capacity And Effectiveness

The COVID-19 pandemic has fundamentally redefined the responsibilities of teachers across the nation. In the spring, educators were asked to abruptly pivot to virtual instruction while ensuring student learning continued. This is despite many teachers not having formal training in virtual instruction. During a typical year, teachers perform essential and difficult work to provide high-quality instruction to students and ensure they have the tools to be successful in and out of the classroom. As a result of COVID-19, the capacity of teachers to do their jobs effectively is significantly strained. District and school leaders must do everything they can to prepare educators to lead their classes successfully this year — regardless of how instruction is offered.

- ◆ **Aligned Professional Development:** Sumner County has supported teachers' professional development by providing extensive training and virtual modeling of their existing curriculum. This type of aligned training is critical to support teachers in transitioning to remote instruction. Many other districts across Tennessee have offered similar supports by spending time over the summer training teachers on virtual learning systems.
- ◆ **Additional Planning Time:** [Trousdale County Schools](#), among other districts, has incorporated additional time for teacher planning into their hybrid schedule this year. Once a week, students engage in remote, independent learning and teachers have the day to focus on recording video lessons, planning in-person instruction, providing personalized student support, or whatever is needed. By providing time and space for teachers to



effectively prepare, districts can ensure that high-quality instruction is being provided to all students.

## Conclusion

An important way to ensure success for our teachers and students this year is preparation and support. Rather than responding to challenges as they occur and sacrificing teachers' well-being and consistent quality of instruction, districts and schools must be equipped with comprehensive reopening plans that enable Tennessee educators to respond to the challenges of this school year and continue effectively serving students. As much as possible, it is important that teacher voice is elevated in conversations this year and beyond. While COVID-19 has exacerbated the stress that teachers are under, it is critical that teachers receive adequate professional support and resources – regardless of the circumstances.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Chetty, Raj, John N. Friedman, and Jonah E. Rockoff. "Measuring the Impacts of Teachers II: Teacher Value-Added and Student Outcomes in Adulthood." *American Economic Review* (2014).

<sup>2</sup> Soland, Jim, et al. "The impact of COVID-19 on student achievement and what it may mean for educators." Brookings Institute (May 2020).

<sup>3</sup> Cipriano, Christina and Marc Brackett. "Teachers Are Anxious and Overwhelmed. They Need SEL Now More Than Ever." EdSurge (April 2020).

<sup>4</sup> Will, Madeline. "Teachers Say They're More Likely to Leave the Classroom Because of Coronavirus." Education Week (June 2020).

<sup>5</sup> Ravenell, Amber, Jason A. Grissom, and Brendan Bartanen. "Exploring Turnover and Retention Patterns Among Tennessee's Teachers of Color." Tennessee Educators Research Alliance (November 2018).

