

A NARRATIVE STUDY ON SUPPORTING STUDENTS' PSYCHOLOGICAL/EMOTIONAL,
PHYSICAL, AND EDUCATIONAL NEEDS BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER THE
PANDEMIC

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A NARRATIVE STUDY ON SUPPORTING STUDENTS' PSYCHOLOGICAL/EMOTIONAL,
PHYSICAL, AND EDUCATIONAL NEEDS BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER THE
PANDEMIC

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A NARRATIVE STUDY ON SUPPORTING STUDENTS' PSYCHOLOGICAL/EMOTIONAL,
PHYSICAL, AND EDUCATIONAL NEEDS BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER THE
PANDEMIC

A Dissertation Presented to The Faculty of the Graduate Education Department
Southwest Baptist University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

By

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July 2024

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We need to acknowledge the people in your life who have helped you along the way or inspired you to complete this dissertation. First and foremost, I would like to thank God for allowing me to complete this project. Without God giving me the ability to complete this dissertation, it would never have happened.

Secondly, I would like to thank the most important person in my life, Kendra. She has seen me go through some of the roughest times in my life and has stuck with me through it all. She has encouraged me to complete this project. She has been my biggest cheerleader even when I did not want to work on the paper anymore. She has inspired me to keep going. I can never thank her enough for all the times she has encouraged me to keep going.

I want to thank Dr. Fong for all his thoughts and prayers for me as I went through significant life events while completing the dissertation. He gave me the needed feedback to complete the project, which was a dream. I would also like to thank Dr. Bryant for giving me technical advice, which helped me complete the dissertation.

I am thankful to all of the staff in the graduate education office for helping me achieve my life's goal. No one can ever complete goals of this magnitude in life unless they have help along the way. Thank you to everyone who helped me along my journey.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

On December 31, 2019, China alerted the World Health Organization (WHO) of several clusters of pneumonia-like symptoms. At the start of the virus, it was unclear how it spread throughout the population. Eventually, the WHO determined that this virus was spread from person to person via air droplets. The WHO investigated the situation and declared a Public Health Emergency of International Concern, affecting everyone's life. On March 20, 2020, the coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19) was considered a worldwide pandemic (Carvalho et al., 2021).

The first case of COVID-19 in the United States was diagnosed on January 20, 2020, in the state of Washington (Harcourt et al., 2020). The United States was put on alert about how quickly and easily the virus could spread throughout the United States. The first officially reported case in Missouri was on March 7, 2020, in St. Louis. Missouri's Governor, Mike Parson, reported the first case and said he was sure the State Department of Health and Senior Services would protect the health and safety of people in Missouri (Parson, 2020). On March 19, 2020, Governor Parson announced that all schools would be shut down until further notice due to the spread of COVID-19. On April 9, 2020, Governor Parson shut down public schools in Missouri for the remainder of the academic year (Parson, 2020).

When schools in Missouri shut down, student education appeared stagnant because of the shutdown. The school districts needed students to stay in school to acquire essential skills for the next grade level. Missouri's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education released a statement that students were not to be penalized because of the school closure in the spring of 2020 (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [DESE],

2020). The closure of schools across the state led districts to teach students virtually. Most elementary teachers decided not to teach new content because the process of teaching students virtually was unfamiliar. In addition, most had very little training in completing this task. Rural districts across the state struggled to find reliable internet connections to continue with classes through the virtual platform. The 2019-2020 school year ended without a second semester of regular education as in previous years (Schneider, 2021).

Before the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent school closures, the interaction between the student's social environment and their development was considered a predictor of their future academic success (Eccles et al., 2013). Students experiencing disruptions in their basic needs often struggled both academically and socially (Maslow, 1943). Additionally, family dynamics at home play a significant role in a student's school performance (Martiny et al., 2022). The nature of home and school environments during early childhood influences many academic and social outcomes.

Since the pandemic interrupted regular school attendance, it is helpful to understand how students learn academic skills during and after the pandemic. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has shown no significant change from 1992 until 2017 in reading ability before the pandemic (McFarland et al., 2019). If students are behind because of the lack of required academic skills, schools must find the best way to teach the students how to gain those skills. The information gained from this study will allow schools to know how other districts prepared and handled the students' emotional, physical, and educational needs.

In Chapter One, the researcher will propose the theoretical framework to guide the following research. It will explain the need for further study into how teachers responded to the emotional, physical, and educational needs of students created by the shutdown of

schools in Missouri because of the COVID-19 pandemic. This research will delve into the problem, the purpose of the study, and the research questions to be explored. The researcher will discuss the definitions of critical terms, limitations, delimitations, assumptions, and design controls and then close with a summary.

Theoretical Framework

In this research, the investigator has chosen Maslow's theory of human motivation (Maslow, 1943) as the guiding conceptual framework for this paper. Maslow's theory offers a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between motivation and various parts of human life. By understanding this theory, one can understand the underlying influences of human behavior and decision-making. This theory serves as the theoretical foundation for examining how students acquired basic educational skills and responded to challenges amid the complexities brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Maslow's theory of motivation provides a fundamental framework for understanding the hierarchy of human needs, with physiological needs forming its foundational level. As outlined by Maslow (1943), these needs involve serious elements crucial for survival, including air, food, drink, shelter, clothing, warmth, sex, and sleep. It is recognized that these primary needs take precedence over others in the hierarchy (Roebuck et al., 2022). This suggests that until these physiological needs are fulfilled, other motivational levels remain of secondary importance. Walther (2021) pointed out that meeting these basic needs is very important as they are essential for sustaining life and functioning at normal levels. Walther (2021) also stated that before major changes can occur externally, individuals must meet the basic primary needs important in navigating life effectively. Maslow's theory shows the importance of the physiological needs being met to shape human motivation and behavior, which serve as the cornerstones for personal development and well-being.

Understanding how these physiological needs affect the motivation of students at every level of education is important.

Advancing up the hierarchy of needs, the second tier involves safety needs, which are important for individuals to navigate and function within their environment (Maslow, 1943). These safety needs protect from potential threats, thereby fostering stability, law, order, and freedom from fear. Once these safety needs are satisfactorily met, individuals can ascend to the third tier in Maslow's pyramid. When the government shut schools down across the United States, adolescents and young children began to feel a lack of safety because the normal routines of life had been significantly changed. This left students, who were switching to virtual education, anxious because they were unsure how the pandemic was going to affect their lives.

The third level, love and belonging, becomes attainable upon the fulfillment of physiological and safety needs. At this juncture, individuals actively seek relationships that satisfy their innate need for belongingness, a pivotal aspect of internal growth that propels them towards the subsequent level of motivation, as delineated by Maslow (1943). This tier holds significant importance as it lays the groundwork for individuals to develop a positive self-image, thereby facilitating their progression to higher levels of the pyramid. With students and adolescents having their social time at school taken away, they had to move to social platforms to be able to connect with other peers. This led to depression in students and in some cases suicides because students were unable to connect with others their age.

Esteem needs constitute the fourth level, involving self-worth and the desire for recognition or respect from others. The need for self-appreciation and acknowledgment from one's social circle becomes pivotal at this stage (Maslow, 1943). It is vital for an individual to feel good about themselves and have their social circle accept them to move to

the final phase of the pyramid. When social circles have been taken away and students cannot mingle with their peers, this stage becomes difficult to obtain.

Finally, the pinnacle of the pyramid is self-actualization, wherein individuals strive to comprehend and enhance their potential, searching for continuous self-improvement. This phase will allow individuals to become a better representation of themselves (Maslow, 1943). Individuals are always seeking to improve to better fit within the world in which they live. This theory of human motivation and basic needs helps one to understand the importance of how the hierarchy of needs affected students before, during, and after the pandemic. It will allow the researcher to understand how teachers influenced students to learn during this unprecedented historical time.

Problem Statement

Kantis et al. (2021) stated schools closed across Missouri and the globe in February and March 2020 (A. Li, et al., 2020). These closures caused the most significant disruption in the education and lives of students in the past 100 years (Karakose & Demirkol, 2021). During the cessation of in-person school sessions, students in the primary grades lost the opportunity to receive beginning instruction commensurate to the students in previous years, notably affecting academic achievement. The loss of in-person instruction time left school districts in a dilemma, and they now faced the obstacle of physically ensuring students could not attend school (Zierer, 2021). Complications began to arise when students returned to school in the fall of 2020 because of inequitable access to technology, student engagement, and school-parent relationships in the United States (Slavin & Storey, 2020). The school environment changed for public schools once they returned to school in the fall of 2020 because of school closures.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, schools were forced to take education to a virtual format, which disadvantaged some families (Serrano-Díaz et al., 2022). Inequalities in the ability to receive education in the virtual realm were widespread among those who were either unable to pay for internet service or those students who live in rural areas of the world where internet service is sporadically available (Zainuddin et al., 2020). Because the schools transitioned to a virtual platform during the closure of schools, parental involvement was critical to the student's success (Ribeiro et al., 2021). Students from families with higher socio-economic status statistically spent more time on digital learning than those from lower socio-economic status (Andrew et al., 2020).

Following the closure of schools, students had limited opportunities for in-person socialization. To address this need, many adolescents increasingly rely on mobile phones for communication (G. Li et al., 2022). This time of isolation and increase in cell phone usage also led to a deterioration of mental health among students (Jo et al., 2023). In addition, the lack of face-to-face classes resulted in anxiety disorders, panic attacks, and fear among several teachers and students (Duran, 2021). Historically, education has been shown to strengthen college preparation, standardized test scores, and positive behavioral outcomes among students (Gray-Lobe et al., 2021). The problem is that the literature has not fully addressed how teachers supported students' psychological/emotional, physical, and educational needs before, during, and after the pandemic.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study is to understand how teachers were supporting students' psychological/emotional, physical, and educational needs before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the closure of schools in the spring of 2020 and the modified school year of 2020-2021, students are adjusting to a new face of

learning in different educational modes (Marshall & Bradley-Dorsey, 2020). The researcher will analyze questionnaires sent to several public school districts across Missouri. Public school districts targeted in this study will be those that participated in one of three different methods of instruction during the 2020-2021 school year: in-person learning, a hybrid learning model, or an entirely virtual setting.

Research Questions

1. What did you do to support your students' emotional, physical, and educational needs before the pandemic?
2. What did you do to support your students' emotional, physical, and educational needs during the pandemic?
3. What did you do to support your students' emotional, physical, and educational needs after the pandemic?

Significance of the Study

Karakose and Demirkol (2021) discussed the need for more research comparing the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and education. School closure significantly impacted learning loss, especially with low-achieving students (Schult et al., 2022). The researcher will work to describe the factors influencing basic academic skills acquisition and how the emotional and physical needs of the students were met before, during, and after the worldwide pandemic. Academic skills are the foundation for other building blocks as students progress through school. Basic academic skills can be helpful as they progress through secondary school and life. This study will work to understand the effects of the worldwide pandemic on the acquisition of basic educational skills and how the emotional and physical needs of the students were met before, during, and after the worldwide pandemic in Missouri public school systems.

The researcher will address how teachers supported students in meeting emotional, physical, and educational needs before, during, and after. This qualitative narrative research will give personal stories of how teachers taught students and how students learned basic academic skills during the pandemic (Elkatawneh, 2016). Educators who lived through the pandemic and taught students have diverse personal stories to share. These stories can be sequenced into events that will be collected and analyzed to understand further how the student's emotional and physical needs affected the acquisition of educational skills during and after the pandemic. (Elkatawneh, 2016). Karakose and Demirkol (2021) explored the lack of research topics related to education during the COVID-19 pandemic and this study will add to the small body of research on how the pandemic affected the psychological/emotional, physical, and the acquisition of educational skills.

Definition of Key Terms

Coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19). A severe acute respiratory virus caused by the novel coronavirus SARS-CoV2 which has affected the world (Ciotti et al., 2020; Dardas et al., 2020).

Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE). This is the administrative arm of the State Board of Education in Missouri (DESE, 2020).

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). This organization provides essential data about student achievement and learning experiences in various subject areas (McFarland et al., 2019).

Program for International Student Assessment (PISA). PISA is an international assessment designed to measure 15-year-old students' reading, mathematics, and science literacy every three years (PISA, 2021).

World Health Organization (WHO). This organization was created in 1948 by the United Nations to form an organization that would oversee the health and betterment of the world (McCarthy, 2002).

Limitations

The following were the limitations of this study:

1. The information gained from the interviews will be from one person's perspective and possibly biased.
2. All contacts with the districts will wait to respond to the interview.
3. Possibility of participants asked will not complete the interview.
4. Perception of the researcher and possibility of bias.

Delimitations

The following were the delimitations of this study:

1. The researcher delimited the questionnaire to only public-school systems in Missouri.
2. This study was delimited to public schools that attended during the pandemic.
3. The study was delimited to only teacher perspectives on how physical and emotional needs affected educational skills acquisition by students.
4. The study was limited to the questions purposed by the researcher.

Assumptions

The researcher made the following assumptions, which are assumed to be generalizable to a similar population:

1. It was assumed that the participants responded honestly and truthfully to the questions.

2. It was assumed that the teachers responded honestly to all the questions about their school district, students, and families.
3. It was assumed that the researcher would collect and analyze the data without any bias toward the school districts or the methods in which the school was attended.

Design Controls

This qualitative narrative study will aim to understand how teachers in Missouri public schools supported students with emotional, physical, and educational needs before, during, and after the pandemic. Through this type of study, the researcher seeks to find patterns and themes in the natural setting of the people and places (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This qualitative narrative study was chosen so the researcher could describe and understand the experiences and emotions of those who tried to teach and learn through the pandemic. Although the researcher attempted to control for the limitations, delimitations, and assumptions, the research presented can be affected by those mentioned above because of dealing with human feelings and emotions during the pandemic.

In this qualitative narrative study, the researcher asked open-ended questions to allow the respondents to express their feelings and emotions about learning during the pandemic (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Answers given to the researcher looked for common themes among the various school educators who responded. The teachers who responded to the questionnaire and the districts they were employed at remained confidential.

Limitations within the study will be controlled by using purposeful sampling of districts that met the conditions outlined in the study. Understanding the experiences of staff and students who went through the learning process during the pandemic helped the researcher answer any questions that might limit the participants' unwillingness to complete the questionnaire. The researcher will also be aware of several experiences and biases across

school districts. Understanding these limitations might be a barrier to the study but will be important in the overall picture to be captured from this study.

Regarding delimitations to the study, the researcher only asked public schools to participate. The questions asked were about the experience of teaching through the pandemic and how the students acquired academic skills while dealing with emotional and physical needs. The qualitative narrative study was chosen to understand teachers' feelings and emotions and use those responses to understand how students learned completely. A set guide of questions was proposed, but human responses led to more in-depth questions missing from the questionnaire. All participants in this study were not identifiable through the transcripts.

The objective of the qualitative narrative research study is to be unbiased. The research is based upon understanding the situation the teachers and students went through during the pandemic; it is assumed the researcher would be unbiased toward the responses given by staff. After the questions were given and answered, the researcher transcribed all responses. Those responses were given back to the respondent to review and check for accuracy. These responses then formed the data the researcher analyzed for information on the thoughts and feelings of the teachers during the pandemic.

The researcher tried to control all limitations and delimitations by setting the study's parameters. Data analysis from all interviews was coded impartially to categorize all data into themes and patterns. Once the information was put into themes and patterns, the researcher made every effort to present the information as honestly as possible.

Summary

Chapter One introduces a concerning trend of stagnating test scores in both the United States and Missouri, particularly in English Language Assessment (ELA) scores

(DESE, 2020; McFarland et al., 2019; Schleicher, 2019). The data reveals persistent stagnation in ELA growth, raising intriguing questions about the potential worsening of these trends by the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on reading and academic skills acquisition. Understanding how the pandemic's long-term effects on emotional and physical needs affected the acquisition of academic skills becomes pivotal for educators and administrators to adapt curricula and address potential learning loss.

The enactment of the American Rescue Plan Act in 2021 allocated funding specifically targeting learning loss, empowering school districts in Missouri to address educational setbacks resulting from the pandemic (Araya, 2021; Thelen-Creps et al., 2022). This legislative initiative emphasizes the importance of mitigating learning disruptions caused by the pandemic and underscores the significance of informed research to guide effective interventions.

Chapter Two will embark on a comprehensive review of current literature, exploring the intersection between emotional, physical, and educational needs and how the pandemic impacted the attainment of educational skills. Organized thematically, this review will delineate factors influencing academic skills, encompassing students' emotional, physical, and educational needs before, during, and after the pandemic, challenges teachers faced during and after the pandemic, and the impact of the shutdown on families and students.

Following this, Chapter Three will clarify the study's participant selection criteria, questionnaire design, and the methodology employed for questionnaire analysis. Chapter Four will present the questionnaire results, examining the pandemic's repercussions on educational skills attainment before, during, and after the pandemic. This analysis will shed light on the pandemic's impact on student's ability to obtain the needed educational skills.

Finally, Chapter Five will synthesize the research findings, concluding the pandemic's effects on educational acquisition in public schools. It will culminate in recommendations for future research initiatives to address learning gaps and enhance support for students who have been affected by the closure of schools.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

This qualitative narrative study aims to understand how educators supported students' psychological/emotional, physical, and educational needs before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic. When the first confirmed COVID-19 case was reported in Wuhan, China (Cheng et al., 2020) and subsequently in the United States on January 20, 2020, this greatly impacted education worldwide (Stokes et al., 2020). The virus spread rapidly across the United States and worldwide, affecting densely populated regions (Hunter et al., 2021). Schools were areas of dense population that experienced significant increases in COVID-19 cases, which impacted how schools would operate through the pandemic (Goldstein, 2020). Most schools shut their doors in the spring of 2020, which disrupted academic skills acquisition during that time frame (Horton, 2021). This closure of schools interrupted the education of nearly 80% to 95% of students worldwide (Engzell et al., 2021; Van Lancker & Parolin, 2020). The ramifications of these closures underscored the impact of the pandemic on students' academic progress, particularly those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, and learning globally was impacted (Engzell et al., 2021; Van de Werfhorst, 2021). Such changes to the educational system and family structure have never been seen before in recent history (Bouter et al., 2023).

With the closure of schools worldwide, students and teachers felt a negative educational impact. The loss of obtaining academic skills was affected by the closure of schools (Mukhari & Sanders, 2023). Estimations predict that students have lost academically an equivalent to at least 20% of the school year because of the prolonged closure of schools (Engzell et al., 2021). The acquisition of academic skills by students from

various backgrounds was affected by school closures, with children in low-income families experiencing a loss of reading skills (Haeck & Lefebvre, 2020). The closure of schools and the transition to virtual learning affected the development of many learners, as students required more training on the virtual platforms and needed clearer expectations for using those platforms (Bao et al., 2020; Donnelly & Patrinos, 2022; Richter et al., 2022). Focusing on training students to meet virtual platform expectations enables them to learn academic skills at home, which is essential for their progress in later grades (Bozkurt et al., 2020).

In the spring of 2020, schools shut down before the summer months due to COVID-19 and went to remote education, and this widened the gap of what students would normally lose during a normal school year when schools are closed for the summer months (Richter et al., 2022). With remote education in place during the spring of 2020, evidence suggested students spent less time studying (Engzell et al., 2021). On top of students not spending as much time on academics, research suggests students lost as much as a year in academic skills acquisition during the pandemic (Mukhari & Sanders, 2023). The most recent Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) results over the past couple of years indicated stagnation or minimal growth in Missouri's student performance in English Language Arts (ELA), as the DESE (DESE, 2020) reported. Additionally, progress has been negatively impacted, especially in reading (Hammerstein et al., 2021).

The researcher will incorporate the theoretical framework of Maslow's theory on the human motivation of needs (Maslow, 1943), allowing the researcher to determine how this theory is related to student learning during school closures as well as explore the emotional and psychological impacts experienced by students and teachers alike when studying the impact on students before, during, and after the school closures. This approach promotes a deeper exploration of the various challenges encountered while acknowledging the nuances

of learning those basic education skills and having the individual meet their needs, according to Maslow's theory (Maslow, 1943). This hierarchy of needs must be met for the acquisition of skills to take place within the school system. Those needs must be met in Maslow's (1943) hierarchy list of needs. This approach promotes a deeper exploration of the various challenges encountered while acknowledging the nuances of learning those basic education skills and having the individual meet their needs, according to Maslow's theory (Maslow, 1943).

The research question, which concerns Missouri students' acquisition of essential skills, forms the framework that summarizes the emotional, physical, and academic challenges and the diverse strategies utilized for instruction in public schools amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The theoretical framework discussed in this paper provides a better understanding of the encounters of students and educators, creating an overview of the difficulties of the educational terrain during this unforeseen period in history. Since the pandemic had significant disruptions to the educational process, we must realize, as researchers, how this impacted the acquisition of academic skills (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

The organization of Chapter Two focuses on the research question concerning the experiences of Missouri's teachers supporting students with psychological/emotional, physical, and educational needs before, during, and after the pandemic. It provides the focus to investigate the experiences of public-school educators and students. The gap in research, coupled with the emotional and psychological trauma resulting from school closures, emphasizes the need for an in-depth exploration (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020; Timmons et al., 2021). Chapter Two will focus on how COVID-19 affected education and the impact of schools shutting down. The effects of the shutdown on teachers and their morale will be

discussed in this chapter. The loss of education and the psychological/emotional, and physical impact of the pandemic will be discussed (Jo et al., 2023). It will also discuss how the school shutdown affected the social and emotional well-being of students, families, and teachers.

Theoretical Framework

In this study, the researcher chose Maslow's theory of human motivation (Maslow, 1943) as the guiding conceptual framework. Maslow's theory comprehensively explains the interplay between motivation and various parts of human life. By understanding this theory, one can understand the underlying influences of human behavior and decision-making. The theory of human motivation serves as the theoretical foundation for examining how students acquired basic educational skills and dealt with the emotional, physical, and educational challenges amid the complexities brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Maslow's Theory of Human Motivation

Maslow's theory of human motivation provides a fundamental framework for understanding the hierarchy of needs, with physiological needs forming its foundational level. As outlined by Maslow (1943), these needs involve serious elements crucial for survival, including air, food, drink, shelter, clothing, warmth, sex, and sleep. It is recognized that these primary needs take precedence over others in the hierarchy (Roebuck et al., 2022). The precedence of primary needs suggests that until these physiological needs are fulfilled, other motivational levels remain of secondary importance. Walther (2021) pointed out the urgency of meeting these basic needs is very important as they are essential for sustaining life and functioning at normal levels. Also, before major changes occur, individuals must meet the basic primary needs important in navigating life effectively. Maslow's theory shows the importance of meeting physiological needs to shape human motivation and

behavior, which is the cornerstone for personal development and well-being (Maslow, 1943).

The second tier involves safety needs, which are important for individuals to navigate and function within their environment (Maslow, 1943). Safety needs include protection from potential threats, fostering stability, law, order, and freedom from fear. Once these safety needs are satisfactorily met, individuals can ascend to the third tier in Maslow's pyramid.

The third level, love and belonging, becomes attainable upon fulfilling physiological and safety needs (Maslow, 1943). At this juncture, individuals actively seek relationships that satisfy their innate need for belongingness, a pivotal aspect of internal growth that propels them toward the subsequent level of motivation. The third tier holds significant importance as it lays the groundwork for individuals to develop a positive self-image, facilitating their progression to higher levels of the pyramid.

Esteem needs constitute the fourth level, involving self-worth and the desire for recognition or respect from others. The need for self-appreciation and acknowledgment from one's social circle becomes pivotal at this stage (Maslow, 1943). It is vital for an individual to feel good about themselves and have their social circle accept them to move to the final phase of the pyramid. Finally, the pinnacle of the pyramid is self-actualization, wherein individuals strive to comprehend and enhance their potential, searching for continuous self-improvement. The fourth level of the theory of motivation will allow individuals to better represent themselves. Individuals are always seeking to improve and better fit within the world in which they live. This theory of human motivation and basic needs helps to understand the importance of how these affected students before, during, and

after the pandemic. The theory will allow the researcher to understand how the teachers influenced students to learn during this unprecedented time in history.

Students Pre-Pandemic

Before the COVID-19 pandemic and the shutdown of schools, the interaction between the student's social environment and their educational development was a predicting factor in the future academic outcome of the student when they were as a young adult (Eccles et al., 2013). In some cases, students would have a disruption in their basic needs being met, which would cause a student to have academic and social problems (Maslow, 1943). Additionally, students might encounter difficulties within school settings, which could adversely affect their capacity to maintain positive social and emotional well-being. Moreover, there is also a correlation between the mental health issues of parents in the home and negative outcomes for students, further emphasizing the link between family dynamics and student welfare (Chaudry & Wimer, 2016; Martiny et al., 2022). Many of these outcomes manifest during early adolescence, influenced by the tumultuous nature of their environments. Consequently, within the United States, adolescents exhibit the highest arrest rates among all age groups, paralleled by a concerning uptick in substance abuse, particularly involving drugs and alcohol.

Teachers commonly perceived a duty to attend to their students' needs, such as these and other issues, a responsibility that often carried a considerable burden (Dryfoos, 1994; Roeser & Midgley, 1997). This recognition of the vital role educators play in supporting students' health and psychological well-being shows how important it is to student success. Teachers serve not only as instructors, but also as frontline advocates for students' health and psychological welfare. With the advent of students' health and psychological welfare,

school-based mental health services within districts were established (Chafouleas et al., 2016; Lynn et al., 2003).

The concept of a school-based approach to servicing students, from academics to mental and physical health, has become the focal point of schools offering whole-school support in health and education (Lewallen et al., 2015). In association with the whole-school approach to serving students, schools have been pushed to be trauma-informed to serve students and staff better (Chafouleas et al., 2016; Walker et al., 1996). Establishing school-based mental health services became a cornerstone for instigating positive change within educational institutions (Chafouleas et al., 2016; Lynn et al., 2003). These services serve as a vital resource, offering students professional support and interventions tailored to their needs. By integrating mental health services into the school setting, educators and mental health professionals collaborate to create a nurturing environment that would support students' overall growth and development academically and psychologically. Even though teachers receive little training in students' mental health issues, school is still one of the main areas that provides a wide range of treatment services (Dryfoos, 1994; Evans, 1999).

Within the confines of the classroom, teachers profoundly influence students' motivation levels and adherence to social norms (Harter, 1996). Teachers shape the learning environment through their instructional practices, classroom management techniques, and interpersonal interactions, cultivating a sense of belonging and engagement among their students. Furthermore, by fostering positive relationships and providing constructive feedback, teachers play a pivotal role in nurturing students' self-esteem and intrinsic motivation, empowering them to strive for academic excellence and personal growth (Akhtar et al., 2019). Maslow (1943) referred to this as the third tier of the hierarchy of

needs. Students can progress toward meaningful relationships when basic physiological needs such as food are met.

Some schools have adopted the weekend food backpack program for students in family homes with food insecurities to alleviate some childhood hunger (Shanks & Harden, 2016). Weekend food backpack programs have been proven to increase math and reading scores (Kurtz et al., 2020). These programs have helped to reduce the problem of hunger in schools. Maslow (1943) stated that food was one of the basic needs which must be met. Once hunger has been resolved, students will be better able to focus on learning.

In essence, the role of teachers extends far beyond the transmission of knowledge; they serve as catalysts for holistic development and champions of student well-being. By acknowledging and addressing the mental health needs of students, educators contribute significantly to creating a supportive and inclusive educational ecosystem where every learner can flourish (Evans, 1999; Kurtz et al., 2020; Lewallen et al., 2015). Teachers also play a vital role in ensuring the students' basic needs are met so they can thrive in school (Maslow, 1943).

Students During the Pandemic

During the school closure instigated by government-imposed restrictions, the daily lives and overall well-being of families bore the brunt of significant impacts. Children grappled with the consequences of social isolation and experienced disruptions in their educational progress (Gilbert et al., 2021; Tull et al., 2020). The enforced isolation during this period presented formidable challenges for students, such as increased loneliness and detachment from their peers and usual routines. When routines in students' lives have been disrupted, students lose the anchor they had with attending school daily before the pandemic

(Brooks et al., 2020; Meherali et al., 2021). Routines in the lives of students help with a positive increase in mental health.

The closure of schools coincided with a critical developmental stage for many students. This phase of life is characterized by multiple biological, psychological, and social changes, rendering students particularly vulnerable to the dynamic effects of prolonged isolation and disruption (Charatcharoenwittaya & Niltwat, 2022). This time in a student's life represents a pivotal period wherein individuals are exposed to a heightened risk of mental health issues and potentially harmful behaviors that could exert long-lasting repercussions on their overall health and well-being (Charatcharoenwittaya & Niltwat, 2022; Lades et al., 2020). During this time, the closure of schools affected the students' ability to maintain social interactions because of their isolation.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic intensified psychological issues among students, with notable increases in anxiety and depression observed among adolescents (Jo et al., 2023). This rise in depression has unfortunately coincided with an alarming uptick in suicide rates among students and adolescents (Manzar et al., 2021; Miron et al., 2019). The most common causes of these suicides have been linked to underlying factors such as depression, loneliness, and psychological distress. The increased stress and uncertainty caused by the pandemic have worsened mental health outcomes among students. The disruption of the daily school routine, which serves as a coping mechanism for students, has contributed to this decline (Jo et al., 2023; Lee, 2020;). Prolonged periods of social isolation, disruptions to daily routines, and concerns about academic performance and prospects have all played a role in exacerbating feelings of anxiety and depression among students. The impact of the pandemic on family and social dynamics may have further intensified feelings of loneliness and psychological distress, worsening pre-existing mental

health conditions and increasing the risk of suicidal ideation and behavior (S. E. Jones et al., 2022; Manzar et al., 2021).

The combination of social isolation, educational disruptions, and other psychological challenges underscores the various impacts of the school closure on students' lives (Bouter et al., 2023). This disruption in the lives of children affects their ability to maintain social groups (S. E. Jones et al., 2022). By prioritizing interventions that promote social connectedness, provide mental health support, and lessen educational setbacks, stakeholders can mitigate the adverse effects of the school closure and foster resilience among students during this challenging time (Manzar et al., 2021).

The enforced shutdown measures resulted in a notable surge in sedentary behavior, with studies indicating a substantial reduction in physical activity levels. Approximately 60% of students exhibited decreased physical activity during the pandemic (Ashwin et al., 2022; Charatcharoenwitthaya & Niltwat, 2022). Similarly, a 61% decline in physical activity accompanied by an uptick in sedentary behavior among students was also reported (Gilbert et al., 2021). This sharp decline in physical activity shows the huge impact of the shutdown on daily routines and raises concerns regarding its implications for students' mental well-being. A sedentary lifestyle is linked to motivation, and according to Maslow's hierarchy, if basic physiological needs are not met, people will lose motivation (Maslow, 1943).

The reduction in physical activity levels during this period has been shown to adversely affect students' mental health (Gilbert et al., 2021). Physical activity is intricately linked to various aspects of mental well-being, including mood regulation, stress management, and overall psychological resilience (Fox, 1999). The decrease in physical activity among students during the shutdown is likely to increase feelings of stress, anxiety,

and depression, as well as obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease later in life, which further compromises their health (Gilbert et al., 2021; Pai & Vella, 2022).

During the pandemic, the increase in sedentary behavior among adolescents was aggravated by the overuse of the internet and social media platforms (E. A. Jones et al., 2021). Particularly, smartphones emerged as a primary source of concern, with adolescents showing addictive behaviors sustained by an extra amount of screen time during the pandemic-induced lockdowns (Duan et al., 2021). Fernandes et al. (2021) revealed a concerning correlation between increased internet use and negative psychological outcomes among adolescents. The increased levels of online engagement were associated with feelings of loneliness, diminished self-esteem, and heightened psychological distress. This created a cycle of inactivity and psychological distress and led to adolescents struggling with sleep problems, anxiety, depression, and suicidality (G. Li et al., 2022).

The ramifications of this behavior are likely to persist long after the pandemic has ended. The sedentary lifestyle and psychological issues experienced by adolescents during the pandemic are anticipated to have lasting effects on their overall health and well-being (Gilbert et al., 2021). Ensuring students' basic needs are being met is highly important for them to maintain motivation in school and life (Maslow, 1943). This has led to a lack of motivation to complete online schoolwork and less time spent online learning during the lockdown (Wyse et al., 2020).

With students struggling remotely, schools had the central focus of providing education to students and monitoring the students' physical and mental health and well-being (Calvert et al., 2021). Several school districts loaded up buses with food and delivered it to students, especially in rural regions, to meet their basic food needs (Schwabish et al., 2020). Teachers would ride along on the buses to hand out the food and be able to see

students to determine if the family required psychological/emotional support. This support from the school district helped families and students through the shutdown phase of the pandemic and eventually return to some normalcy in life.

Students After the Pandemic

Once students returned to school after the mandatory lockdown, they faced transitioning back into the classroom after much learning loss (Engzell et al., 2021). The mental health and well-being of the child had been affected by the pandemic, and teachers had to connect with these students to transition them back into the classroom (Parveen et al., 2022). Durcan et al. (2020) stated the impacts of the lockdown will be significant and long-lasting and require intense interventions from service providers and schools. Educators will need to be mindful of the prevalence of anxiety, depression, loneliness, and behavioral issues associated with the lockdown. Schools had used mental health providers before the pandemic. Still, after the pandemic, school districts will need to continue training staff on various mental health issues and being trauma-informed (Naff et al., 2022).

Students, families, and educational staff experienced heightened stress and uncertainty, which emphasized the lack of predictability, highlighting the school district's need to strengthen and energize the district's trauma-informed care (Collin-Vézina et al., 2020). Children have been exposed to many traumatic events, such as the loss of a family member or close friend, loss of important life events, economic challenges, isolation, and/or increased exposure to abuse or violence in the home during the lockdown (Mirman et al., 2022). In some cases, students were left without basic physiological needs being met, which affected their ability to feel safe in their environment; this, in turn, affected their ability to maintain social groups with peers during this time (Maslow, 1943). The school districts need a nurturing and caring environment to help address these needs, along with increased

communication about the trauma experienced (Collin-Vézina et al., 2020). Communication between children, caregivers, and educators is imperative when working within the trauma-informed system in the school (Collin-Vézina et al., 2020; Naff et al., 2022).

The connection between physical activity and the mental well-being of both students and parents is intertwined. Research has shown there is a positive correlation between physical activity and mental health along with physical health (Moore et al., 2020). When students have a positive correlation between physical activity and mental health, they will build their self-esteem, which is at the fourth level of Maslow's hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943). Physical activity contributes positively to mental health and is crucial in combating childhood obesity and other health risks associated with sedentary lifestyles. Through their research, Gilbert et al. (2021) determined the impact of the pandemic-induced lockdowns on access to recreational areas for children. Parents reported a sense of loss as children missed out on outdoor play, socialization, and physical activity opportunities. With school being back in session in the fall of 2020, schools should incorporate more physical activity within the school day, even for short periods (Gilbert et al., 2021).

Challenges Teachers Faced During and After COVID-19 Shutdown

As school districts worldwide panicked and quickly shifted to virtual education amid the pandemic, the consequences were deeply felt by both educators and students, bringing on many challenges that affected teachers during and after the school closures. Navigating the virtual realm led to heightened collaboration among educators, creating a supportive community. Sharing strategies and resources became crucial in mastering effective remote teaching methods. Teachers were immediately required to teach using a virtual platform with very little training. Another challenge educators faced was only being able to look at a screen while teaching and not being in a classroom with students. The shutdown affected

how teachers taught students remotely, especially delivering foundational skills. The lack of virtual resources, how the pandemic affected teachers personally, teacher burnout, and social and emotional issues with teachers are the topics to be discussed in this section.

The sudden transition to remote learning revealed unknown challenges in infrastructure and support from the district, leading to discouragement and a sense of unpreparedness (Agyapong et al., 2022). Teachers were also facing an immense change in the teaching environment, yet just as before the shutdown they were still required to provide effective instruction through engaging lessons (Pressley, 2021). Teaching staff needed more resources and training in the virtual programs; this challenged educators' confidence to engage students and employ impactful instructional strategies, contributing to self-doubt and the feeling of failure among all school staff (Donald et al., 2023). The lack of preparedness from the government and at the district level to support teachers during the pandemic and remote learning led to some teachers experiencing burnout and leaving the profession (Agyapong et al., 2022).

The challenges posed by the shift to virtual education during the COVID-19 pandemic underscored the critical need for complete solutions to address the barriers encountered by educators and students (Hammerstein et al., 2021). One significant barrier was the lack of access to resources, particularly internet connectivity, which adversely affected individuals in rural areas (Van Lancker & Parolin, 2020). This digital divide hindered both teachers' ability to deliver instruction effectively and students' access to learning materials and communication platforms during remote learning. Educators and students alike faced the task of adapting to virtual instruction without adequate support and resources (Flack et al., 2020). The absence of essential tools and training further

compounded the challenges of navigating the demands of online teaching and learning, exacerbating disparities in educational outcomes.

In response to the pressing challenges of not every student having equal access to digital infrastructure, it became vital to implement measures to address the inequities made worse by the pandemic and build support structures to ensure educational environments that would include everyone. Bridging the digital divide and providing equitable access to resources for all students, regardless of their economic backgrounds or geographical locations, was important (Eroglu & Senol, 2021; Van de Werfhorst, 2021). By prioritizing initiatives that promote digital inclusion and provide targeted support to more disadvantaged communities, educational institutions can create a level playing field and nurture learning environments that cater to the diverse needs of all students and districts (Eroglu & Senol, 2021).

Changes came along with the closure of schools that became problematic and disrupted the lives of teachers during the closure of schools (Pressley, 2021). Teachers' professional lives and professional responsibilities changed very quickly once the schools decided to close for a time, which led to the teachers becoming frustrated and upset (İlter & Izgar, 2022). Teachers needed more tools, training, and materials for successful virtual teaching (Bozkurt & Sharma, 2020). The lack of materials and training to go virtual increased educators' responsibilities to keep students on track with the curriculum amid uncertain circumstances, increasing their workload and stress levels to a point they had never experienced before (N. D. Jones et al., 2022). This absence of materials and the preparation for online teaching, created because of the pandemic and school closures, led to significant stress and pressure within a small timeframe (Bozkurt et al., 2020). Those instructional changes put in place for the closure of the schools and the virtual learning

platform due to COVID-19 were only temporary, which meant there were additional changes when schools closed and reopened in the fall (Zhao, 2020).

Teachers struggled with how the pandemic affected them personally and how they navigated the educational system among the abrupt changes (Kraft et al., 2020). Teachers also struggled with feeling safe during this time, and Maslow (1943) discussed the need for safety to be fulfilled to move up the hierarchy of needs. These struggles led to negative emotions due to the inadequacies in the system's response and support mechanisms (N. D. Jones et al., 2022). The teaching staff found themselves in the dual struggle of coping with pandemic-related issues in their personal lives while trying to uphold their professional commitments. The line between work hours and personal life blurred, and they soon felt overworked and emotionally drained (D'Mello, 2021). The absence of clear boundaries in the virtual teaching method contributed to an ongoing work culture, leaving teachers feeling overwhelmed and tired due to the relentless demands of addressing professional and personal responsibilities without knowing how long these changes would continue (Ynon et al., 2023).

The shift from in-person to virtual instruction during the pandemic induced significant stress and anxiety among teachers, resulting in elevated levels of burnout (Agyapong et al., 2022). Educators' dedication and extra efforts were not recognized by the public or administration, which led to a growing sentiment among teachers that the public undervalued their extensive work hours—this lack of acknowledgment of their commitment added to the teachers' frustration and disillusionment with the profession. The sudden transition demanded rapid adaptation to new teaching methodologies and technologies, intensifying the workload and emotional strain on educators (N. D. Jones et al., 2022; Kraft et al., 2020). The challenges of navigating unfamiliar virtual platforms, maintaining student

engagement, and addressing individual learning needs in a remote setting added complexity to their roles. Consequently, the mounting pressure and the persistent effort to meet the diverse needs of students within the virtual environment contributed to heightened stress levels and burnout among teachers (Ynon et al., 2023).

In the wake of the pandemic, numerous teachers encountered a significant dilemma concerning their career paths. The ongoing challenges, stress, and disillusionment experienced during this difficult time prompted deep introspection among educators, causing some to reconsider whether they should even move forward as educators (Ynon et al., 2023). When it occurred, successfully engaging with students during the pandemic was a significant source of fulfillment and motivation; however, the lack of constant direct student engagement had adverse effects, diminishing teachers' fulfillment and potentially impacting their overall job satisfaction (N. D. Jones et al., 2022). This lack of regular direct student engagement emphasizes the belonging teachers gain from these connections and stresses the need to keep such interactions, whether in physical or virtual settings.

The COVID-19 pandemic imposed an immense emotional toll on teachers, contributing to burnout within the profession (Ynon et al., 2023). Once the government put the order in for social distancing, teachers' social and emotional well-being was affected (N. D. Jones et al., 2022). The complex interplay between individuals and the challenging circumstances presented by the pandemic significantly impacted the emotional well-being of educators, necessitating support and strategies to alleviate the emotional burden (Eroglu & Senol, 2021). Teachers were emotionally exhausted because of the sudden shift in how education was delivered to students. This exhaustion, a key element of burnout, manifested in disrupted sleep patterns and depleted energy levels, severely impacting teachers' ability to cope with the demands of their profession. These physical and emotional strains became

apparent as the reasons teachers were leaving the profession after the pandemic and the closure of schools (Eroglu & Senol, 2021; Mota & Rad, 2023).

Impact of School Shutdown on Families and Students

Amid the global crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, in-school public education faced unprecedented challenges, causing a massive shift in formal educational systems worldwide. Although a necessary step to contain the virus's spread, the closure of educational institutions significantly deepened the crisis within the academic field, impacting students' learning trajectories on a global scale (Van de Werfhorst, 2021). Although closing the schools was the most logical measure for protecting children and staff, it established various hurdles, creating substantial disruptions and changing the conventional dynamics of teaching and learning. Challenges arose with obtaining academic skills and showed vulnerability to the lack of face-to-face instruction for students (Engzell et al., 2021). This section will cover the transition to remote learning, the disruptions and their effects on students, the behavior of students, and mental health issues for students.

Transition to Remote Learning

When schools transitioned to remote learning, students spent less time and energy engaging with schoolwork through virtual lessons compared to their previous in-class participation (Letzel et al., 2020). This notable decrease in instructional time and the abrupt shift to remote learning methods impacted students obtaining early reading skills. Families at in the lower income levels struggled without the proper tool, such as internet connectivity, and were at a disadvantage; these same families struggled during the pandemic to gain the needed education (Van de Werfhorst, 2021). The differences in access to resources and support systems increased the challenges within the lower-class population of students, widening the education gap even more than before the pandemic (Haeck &

Lefebvre, 2020). The gap experienced by these students for academic skills acquisition was based upon the student's lack of knowledge in those technology-based skills needed to complete the lessons.

The research conducted in the aftermath of school closures over the following two years revealed a significant imbalance in student learning differences (Rose et al., 2021). This widening gap emphasized the deepening of educational inequalities, mainly affecting students from marginalized backgrounds. Historically, disparities in socioeconomic status have affected the outcomes of students' educational growth. These disparities have grown over the last few years because of the growing income difference across families (Jang & Reardon, 2019). Prolonged disruptions to traditional learning environments compounded these students' challenges; due to disparities, the pandemic made it more difficult for them to bridge the learning gap than their peers (Van Lancker & Parolin, 2020).

The disruptions caused by the pandemic have accentuated the importance of specific interventions and support systems to tackle the widening educational discrepancies it has created. Minimizing the academic setbacks these student groups face, particularly those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, is very important. These efforts are essential to guaranteeing fair access to quality education and preventing further deepening educational inequities in post-pandemic education (Araya, 2021). Prioritizing targeted interventions and support for these students is crucial for building a more equitable closing of the education gap (Wyse et al., 2020).

Educational Learning Loss

Engzell et al. (2021) reported a trend where students suffered a significant learning loss equivalent to approximately one-fifth of a school year due to the prolonged closure of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some predictions have elevated that number to a

loss of up to one year of education (Araya, 2021). The impact of school closures varied with different economic groups, as students from less educated households experienced a staggering 60% greater decline in educational progress (Engzell et al., 2021). Discrepancies in virtual learning emerged, with certain regions needing more digital infrastructure, thus leading to minimal or no academic advancement for some students. Particularly concerning was the observation that younger students faced heightened challenges in foundational skill-building compared to their high school classmates (König & Frey, 2022).

There are implications for the pandemic-induced disruptions on students' academic progress, particularly in core subjects like reading and mathematics (Maldonado & De Witte 2022). Ludewig et al. (2022) highlighted the impact on reading achievement, focusing on the substantial learning setbacks students faced. These findings align with Kuhfeld et al.'s (2020) research, which forewarned alarming declines in students' academic performance upon re-entry to school in the fall of 2020. Specifically, they estimated a staggering 32%-37% decrease in reading proficiency. Even more concerning were the projected declines in mathematics, which were estimated to be markedly higher, ranging from 50% to 62%. The projected declines in proficiency levels upon returning to school reflect the significant challenges and learning loss experienced by students during remote or altered learning environments (Kuhfeld et al., 2020). Such setbacks in foundational academic skills emphasize the critical need for targeted interventions and support mechanisms to overcome the adverse impacts of disrupted learning on students' educational needs. As a result, the gap is only increasing over time because there is no additional time to make up for what students have lost.

The repercussions of the pandemic went beyond what anyone could have imagined. The significant changes experienced by families—including job losses, economic

downturns, and the persistent threat of COVID-19—significantly impacted lifestyles and educational environments. These cumulative impacts resulted in widespread psychological distress, profoundly affecting the mental well-being of individuals within families and academic growth (Naff et al., 2022). Specifically, Bouter et al. (2023) highlighted the acute psychological pain experienced by adolescents due to prolonged lockdowns and social isolation.

School Closures and Mental Health

School closures and the isolation of students and families have generated many mental health issues that were not known before the closure of the pandemic. The extended closures and aftermath of the pandemic have led to a multitude of mental health challenges and negative lifestyle patterns, leaving a lasting impact on overall well-being (Charatcharoenwitthaya & Niltwat, 2022; Durante & Lau, 2022). The mandated social distancing measures significantly correlated with a rise in mental health issues, particularly among individuals experiencing heightened psychological distress due to social isolation (Magson et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2020). The implications of prolonged isolation and the disruptions caused by the pandemic have had a concerning effect on mental health across various segments of the population (Naff et al., 2022). This is seen in Maslow's hierarchy of needs theory, in which parents and students are concerned with meeting those basic needs (Maslow, 1943). When basic needs are not met, students struggle with focusing on academics. These developments intensified young children's significant challenges, emphasizing the importance of addressing their mental and behavioral well-being in the wake of pandemic-related disruptions. Noticeable behavioral changes marked the impact of the pandemic on children under twelve (Jo et al., 2023). These changes included heightened oppositional defiant behavior, increased irritability, amplified dependence on adults, and

repetitive body movements, indicating considerable psychological strain within this age group. Additionally, the shift towards elevated screen time for young students during the pandemic disrupted their sleep patterns, leading to a loss of healthy connectivity and contributing to various socialization disorders.

During the pandemic, adolescent suicide rates had an upward trend, particularly in nations like the United States and Japan. Charpignon et al.'s (2022) research shed light on this distressing trend, highlighting a significant increase in the number of young lives lost to suicide. This revelation was further substantiated by a comprehensive study, revealing a troubling pattern of rising suicide rates among adolescents. The importance of this situation and the mental health crisis gripping this vulnerable age group necessitates urgent attention and support systems to safeguard their well-being. Beyond statistics, these findings reflect the immense psychological strain and challenges faced by adolescents during the pandemic, prompting a critical need for immediate approaches to address mental health issues and provide adequate support and resources for their mental well-being. (Manzar et al., 2021). The effect on mental health, particularly concerning suicide attempts, displayed significant gender differences (Nearchou et al., 2020). Research delving into gender differences in suicide attempts during this period found a 195% increase in such attempts among females, showing the heightened vulnerability of young women to mental health challenges during these trying times (Hunter et al., 2021).

The pandemic's impact on the socialization crucial to students was impactful, severing vital connections to school environments and broader societal networks and creating a void that may endure long into the future (Meherali et al., 2021). There was a 31% increase in emergency room visits among adolescents dealing with mental health issues during the shutdown compared to pre-pandemic periods (Yard et al., 2021). This

surge marked the severity of mental health issues and the need for an increase in mental health support systems (Mayne et al., 2021). Statistics reveal the extent of this crisis: approximately 44.2% of adolescents dealt with persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness, while nearly 19% contemplated suicide and 9% attempted suicide (S. E. Jones et al., 2022). Recognizing the role of connectedness, recent studies emphasize its critical influence on improved mental health outcomes among adolescents. These findings indicate the significance of support networks and solid social bonds in nurturing the mental well-being of young individuals, highlighting the need to emphasize how meaningful social connections are to children's mental health in the face of social isolation (Bouter et al., 2023).

During the lockdowns, the lack of socialization led to a significant shift towards virtual entertainment, leading individuals to turn to digital entertainment for leisure and social interaction. Notably, adolescents and teenagers, who were already avid users of mobile phones and electronics, significantly increased their screen time during the pandemic, driven partly by restricted social engagement opportunities. However, this surge in screen time has been linked to concerning implications for mental health, notably an association between prolonged mobile phone usage and depressive symptoms. Furthermore, the relationship between increased mobile phone usage and suicide rates during the pandemic has raised significant concerns. Studies have made clear that there is a direct correlation between heightened mobile phone usage and elevated suicide rates, exposing the potential impact of excessive screen time on mental health, especially among vulnerable age groups (A. Li et al., 2020; Chauhan et al., 2021; G. Li et al., 2022).

Learning Loss During Virtual Instruction

The transition to virtual instruction in schools posed considerable challenges, particularly for students residing in rural areas. Research conducted by Bao et al. (2020) revealed predictions regarding the impact of school closures on reading abilities. Their models suggested that such closures could lead to a staggering reduction of up to 66% in students' reading ability rate. This forecast highlights the consequences that disruptions in traditional schooling can have on educational outcomes, particularly regarding literacy and foundational skills crucial for academic success. Compared to the usual in-person education, the virtual divide brought to light the differences in accessing digital information for the classroom, which signaled the gap in education among students from different geographic locations, especially in rural areas (G. Li et al., 2022). Limited access to necessary resources and reliable internet connectivity emerged as major impediments, hindering these students' ability to keep pace with essential schoolwork crucial for acquiring foundational academic skills.

The shift to virtual education significantly altered the time students dedicated to learning, often resulting in a notable decrease compared to traditional in-class instruction. At the same time, many educators opted to significantly lessen the workload assigned to students during this period. Research by Wyse et al. (2020) determined this substantial contrast in learning time between virtual and in-person instruction, and their findings suggest that, on average, students spent considerably less time engaged in learning activities during virtual education compared to the structured learning time typically experienced in a classroom setting. Students in the early stages of reading seemed more vulnerable to significant losses due to limited access to instruction (Richter et al., 2022).

The pandemic's influence on virtual engagement has brought the interplay between technology use and mental health to the forefront, made more significant by the differences in access to virtual education. Students who spent less time on digital devices had fewer externalizing behaviors (Rosen et al., 2021). Differences among young children on devices compared to adolescents did exist, with adolescents having more external and internal behaviors that negatively impacted the students (Rosen et al., 2021). These complexities are the underlying challenges that adolescents and students faced during this period in time.

Therefore, efforts directed at narrowing the divide and fortifying mental health resilience are essential in pushing through enduring repercussions of the pandemic on adolescents and students. Particularly when viewed through the lenses of Maslow's hierarchy of needs, these differences underscore early elementary students' difficulties acquiring the foundational educational skills essential for their cognitive growth and academic advancement. Where the theories come together reveals delicate barriers hindering students' access to virtual instruction, affecting their development in mastering the fundamental aspects of reading. Addressing these differences calls for educational theories and strategies to empower students and minimize the widening gaps in learning opportunities.

Educating Students During the Pandemic

Reading is foundational to all students' ability to survive in the contemporary world and succeed in school. Literacy skills are crucial, and as a result, poor reading can lead to increasing high school dropout rates, anxiety, depression, and substance abuse, which can significantly impact the individual and society (Richter et al., 2022). The closure of schools during the pandemic made acquiring those needed skills even more difficult. During the spring of 2020, when schools shut down nationwide, students' learning loss was significant

(Araya, 2021). While some secondary students remained unaffected by the shutdown, learning for primary school children did appear to slow down during the closure of schools (Tomasik et al., 2021). Young children in the early stages of reading seemed to be significantly vulnerable to the lack of access to reading instruction (Richter et al., 2022). Close to 40 million preschool students have missed their critical first year of schooling (Guterres, 2020).

During the pandemic, educators faced significant challenges regarding the educational inequalities among students resulting from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and various parental education levels. Students with less educated parents experienced setbacks due to school closures, resulting in lower academic achievements. Schools, besides being centers of learning, also play a crucial role in providing meals to students of low socioeconomic status, and providing meals to students has been linked to improved academic performance (Van de Werfhorst, 2021). In the United States, the prevalence of food insecurity was already notable, affecting 14% of households in 2018, and this issue was exacerbated by the pandemic (Van Lancker & Parolin, 2020). Addressing basic needs, such as ensuring access to food, is fundamental for human motivation to move to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs. Unmet needs can hinder students from progressing beyond these basic requirements, affecting their attitudes toward learning. Also, some teachers noted a decline in students' interest and motivation in completing academic tasks during this period. Moreover, the quality of student writing suffered during the pandemic, partly attributed to teachers' perceived lack of emphasis on writing instruction (İlter & Izgar, 2022). Thus, the shutdown led to an overall negative impact on education in general.

When looking at academic achievement across schools, there has been a .9 school year loss since the pandemic on the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA,

2021). Remote learning was implemented when schools closed their doors, but the effect of virtual learning was equivalent to no teaching as in the summer months. Early indications of remote learning during the pandemic in early 2020 showed it to be ineffective and that learning was not moving forward for those students (Hammerstein et al., 2021). However, the top learners in school did make some progress during the pandemic compared to those students who were not top learners in school (Kuhfeld et al., 2020). Overall, most students on standardized tests suffered significant losses on those assessments, equating to a vast learning loss, especially for those in the early elementary years (Maldonado & De Witte, 2022).

The lack of student interaction and limited social opportunities significantly affected the social development of elementary-grade students. The absence of outdoor activities and the inability to engage in group play with friends disrupted the typical socialization crucial for young learners (İlter & Izgar, 2022). This disruption in social interactions and experiential learning slowed down the development of children, affecting not just academic progress but also emotional and social growth (König & Frey, 2022).

İlter and Izgar (2022) highlighted that obstacles interrupting children from acquiring these skills could significantly hinder students' long-term educational journeys. To prevent these potential setbacks, prioritizing motivation, social interaction, and creating a supportive learning environment becomes crucial. These elements play essential roles in minimizing the adverse effects of disruptions on students' development and academic achievements and meeting the basic needs set forth by Maslow (1943), which helps students stay focused and motivated. By focusing on these aspects, educators and policymakers can provide the necessary support to ensure that students continue to progress effectively in their

foundational learning, safeguarding their educational trajectories against the impact of interruptions or challenges.

Summary

This qualitative narrative study aims to understand how teachers supported elementary students' psychological/emotional, physical, and educational needs before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The prolonged closure of schools induced by the global pandemic, starting in the spring of 2020, disrupted the educational continuum. This disruption manifested as a noticeable learning gap prevalent among students worldwide (Kaden, 2020) and shows the disparities in academic skill acquisition across public schools. Scholars and educators have been attempting to address the factors contributing to this gap in education since the pandemic.

The emergence of the learning gap stems from several elements that have impacted the attainment of basic academic skills. The sudden shift to remote learning brought about by the pandemic has been a key factor in the learning gap. Not all families were prepared for their students to learn virtually. Some families could not attain the needed services for internet, whether it was because of living in a remote area or because they could not afford internet services (Haeck & Lefebvre, 2020). The challenges of adapting teaching methodologies to virtual instruction, increased by the unequal access to resources and technology among students, have notably contributed to this educational disparity. As Kuhfeld et al. (2020) highlighted, the transition from traditional classroom environments posed hurdles for educators. It disrupted established teaching methods and widened the gap in access to quality education for all students, emphasizing the critical need to address these discrepancies.

The research conducted in this paper will reveal how teachers supported students emotionally, physically, and educationally before, during, and after the pandemic. Maslow's hierarchy of needs shows how if the basic human needs are not met, it would be difficult for students to be ready to learn new material (Maslow, 1943). Thus, given what we know about the subject, we can conclude that the problem is acquiring basic academic skills during the pandemic. Students faced a particular gap in mathematics and reading when compared to the same subjects before the closure of schools because of the COVID-19 pandemic (Bao et al., 2020). Unfortunately, there is a gap in the literature as to how students acquired the essential grade-level skills during school closures and whether students were able to progress academically with remote instruction.

Chapter Two stresses the need to learn basic academic skills so students can function in our society. The section also discusses the importance of Maslow's theory in students' lives. There is a need to know exactly how teachers taught the students and how the students received the information being taught during the school closure. Chapter Three will outline the methods used in this study to comprehend the impact of COVID-19 on the emotional, physical, and educational needs of the students before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown. Chapter Three will include a discussion on the purpose of the study, research questions, participants, selection and sampling, research setting, research design, instrumentation, and data analysis.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

With schools shutting down in the spring of 2020, education across the country appeared to have stalled (Mustafa, 2020). The acquisition of needed academic skills at the younger grade levels was in jeopardy as students were required to stay home and learn virtually through the Internet, which needed to be improved in rural areas. Once schools closed in Missouri and later in the fall semester, education remained stagnant despite the intended virtual learning during the closure period, as most staff across Missouri needed to be trained in effective remote instruction. These school closures have caused interruptions in student education, known to have short-term and long-term effects on learning (Haeck & Lefebvre, 2020). Haeck & Lefebvre (2020) also noted in their research that differences in school districts' socioeconomic statuses intensify inequalities among students. Students in lower socioeconomic parts of the state might experience a wider education gap. This qualitative narrative study aims to understand how teachers supported students' psychological/emotional, physical, and educational needs before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

The theory of human motivation explains how human needs are met at each stage. Students suffered from unmet basic needs during the isolation of the pandemic. Due to the pandemic, there was an increase in student suicides (Manzar et al., 2021). The need for social connection was evident throughout the pandemic, highlighting students' need to be in a physical setting for academics. Some researchers looked at the effect of shutting schools down and not having in-person learning on the social aspect of students. Research has also been conducted on the impact of shutting schools down, the gap in learning loss, and student

test scores. Those individuals in this study have a voice in their experiences and can be interpreted differently by different researchers (Jha, 2018). This qualitative narrative study will examine how teachers supported students' emotional, physical, and educational needs before, during, and after the pandemic and fill a gap in research as there is very little information or research on how the closure of schools affected students.

Chapter Three will outline the methodology employed in this study to comprehend the impact of COVID-19 on the development of academic skills in the public school system. This chapter will include a discussion on the purpose of the study, research questions, participants, selection and sampling, research setting, research design, instrumentation, and data analysis.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study is to understand how teachers were supporting elementary students' psychological/emotional, physical, and educational needs before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the closure of schools in the spring of 2020 and the modified school year of 2020-2021, students are adjusting to a new face of learning in different educational modes. Qualitative research is socially constructed by individuals when interacting with the world around them, which gives us the foundation of this analysis method (Merriam, 2002). This qualitative narrative study aims to understand how teachers supported students' emotional, physical, and educational needs before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic in Missouri public schools. Several studies have been conducted since the end of the COVID-19 pandemic to study the gap in education students have suffered since the pandemic. Some research has suggested the effects of the pandemic on students' mental well-being due to the isolation from the social aspects of being in the school system. This research will examine how the teachers responded to students'

emotional, physical, and educational needs before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The researcher will analyze questionnaires that will be sent to several public-school districts across the state of Missouri. The targeted public-school districts will be those that participated in one of the three different methods of instruction during the 2020-2021 school year: in-person learning, a hybrid learning model, or an entirely virtual setting.

Teaching students in the early grades builds a strong foundation for learning outside school, even during school closures (Mawoyo & Vally, 2020). Zierer (2021) completed a study that determined the effects of school closures in the spring of 2020, which significantly impacted primary school grades. Early Childhood Education was also considerably affected by the shutdown of public schools. The shutdown's effects negatively impacted students in Pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten programs. The impacts of teaching students virtually were shown in teachers being prepared to teach students effectively and implementing strategies for students in those classes (Mphahlele & Jikpamu, 2021).

Research Questions

1. What did you do to support your students' emotional, physical, and educational needs before the pandemic?
2. What did you do to support your students' emotional, physical, and educational needs during the pandemic?
3. What did you do to support your students' emotional, physical, and educational needs after the pandemic?

Participants

Participants for this qualitative narrative study were selected based on the following criteria for teachers and administrators working in Missouri public schools. There were 2 male and 4 female teachers interviewed. Also, there were 2 male administrators interviewed

for the research. The average years of teaching among the group is 13 years. The researcher identified public school systems within the state of Missouri which was recognized as a small, medium, or large school district.

Once the district was chosen for the study, the building administrator of each district was contacted. The researcher discussed the research and asked for approval to discuss the research questions with the teachers and administrators selected. After the districts were identified, a questionnaire was sent to two districts in each of the three methods of returning to school in the fall of 2020. In the fall of 2020, Missouri public schools re-entered schools after being shut down since the spring of 2020. There were three options the school districts in the state of Missouri could employ. First, public schools could continue with complete virtual instruction. Second, public schools in Missouri could have seated instruction in the local school buildings. Thirdly, the public schools in Missouri could elect for a blend of the first two options. The students would attend seated instruction in the buildings a few days a week, and the remainder of their education was completed online. Two teachers were chosen to provide information for each option. Two administrators were also selected to give their points of view on the research questions. This gave a purposeful inquiry and an in-depth understanding of how the pandemic affected academic acquisition in the public school system (Mukhari & Sanders, 2023). Looking at each option through the teacher's and administrator's lens gave a better understanding of the experiences of each attendance choice. Socioeconomic status, teachers' years of service, and the size of the public school were not delineating factors in the purpose of this study.

Research Setting

Those teachers and administrators who participated in this research were sent an email to verify whether their participation was valid for their school district. Once they were

willing and accepted the invitation to an interview, the researcher determined a time and date for the participant and researcher to meet via an online video program called Zoom. The participant did use the Zoom program at school or home. Before the interview, the researcher sent the participant information about the research, including the study's purpose and general research questions, to help guide the conversation.

Each participant was interviewed once, and if any clarifying questions were needed, the participant was contacted via either email or telephone, whichever was most beneficial for the research. Each interviewee included a teacher or administrator from a public school. Every participant agreed before the interview to have the interview recorded for data retrieval for the researcher. The researcher transcribed all the interviews to look for common themes from the experiences of teachers who taught students during the pandemic and how they supported the students' academic, psychological, and physical needs before, during, and after the pandemic. All interviews were conducted with teachers in Missouri public schools, which could limit the overall efficiency of the research.

Demographics

The researcher evenly distributed the gender purposively so it would not be limited to just one gender. Participants were selected from elementary, middle, and high school, so the views on how the students' needs were supported psychologically/emotionally, physically, and educational before, during, and after the pandemic were across the district and not limited to just a specific grade level. Six of the eight participants had a Master's degree. Also, six of the eight participants were teacher and two were administrators.

Research Design

To understand how the anomaly of COVID-19 affected students' emotional, physical, and educational needs within public schools in Missouri, the researcher selected the qualitative narrative study approach. A qualitative narrative study focuses on understanding what people lived through with such an event as COVID-19 and how it affected them (Astroth & Chung, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Peoples, 2020).

Interviewees gave an in-depth and personal view of the lived experiences that happened to them and how they affected the classrooms and buildings in which they were teaching students. Analyzing these lived experiences of teachers who participated in the research allows for a deeper and richer understanding of the event (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This study also explains how teachers and administrators responded to the daily changes presented to schools during the pandemic.

The researcher utilized purposeful sampling to capture teachers and administrators directly associated with the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Eight interviews were conducted in Missouri school districts, one-on-one with each teacher and administrator directly involved with students. An online video conferencing tool called Zoom was utilized to interview and record the information. All information collected from the research was anonymous, and confidentiality was kept to protect the public school districts involved.

After the interviews, the researcher sent each participant a copy of the transcript to review for completeness and accuracy. The researcher did multiple reviews of the interview recordings and read through the transcripts and participant reviews. This process was completed after all of the data collection to triangulate the data for validation. To help determine the study's validity, the researcher reviewed the notes from interviews, archival data, and data from assessments given before and after schools shut down, which would

serve as the data triangulation for facts. The notes from the interviews included any behaviors noted during the discussions or comments that were not part of the research questions asked of all participants. Interviews were recorded and transcribed so themes and commonalities could be determined.

The interconnection of three key data points is a link in comprehending the comprehensive impact of the shutdown on students. However, it is imperative to recognize that data triangulation is not only a practice but a structured approach with specific criteria to fortify the study's reliability and validity in qualitative research. Guba (1981) outlined these criteria as transferability, credibility, dependability, and conformability. The adoption of data triangulation, as emphasized by Kaman and Othman (2016) and Patton (2014), is instrumental in bolstering the overall quality of the study. By incorporating diverse data sources or methods, researchers can enhance the reliability and validity of their findings, providing a more robust foundation for drawing conclusions and making informed interpretations. This meticulous approach to triangulation enriches the depth of understanding and contributes to the broader applicability and credibility of the research outcomes.

Researcher's Role

The primary role of a researcher is to seek out information and perform studies on various topics. The researcher is also the primary tool for collecting the data needed for the study (LeCompte, 1999), and results from the studies must be based on evidence-based data. Researchers must be honest and objective with their research. The researcher has worked in public education for 17 years, primarily in elementary education. No participant had a direct relationship with the researcher, resulting in a conflict of interest that could provoke any

bias in the research. All information about the participants was listed in the participant section and, therefore, can be viewed in that section.

Researcher bias is more of a problem in qualitative than quantitative research (Meredith, 2006). Qualitative researchers must constantly ask themselves if their opinions cloud the research results (Ulz, 2022). A qualitative researcher cannot correlate data from different sources as it can only sometimes predict the outcome since the research is based on a phenomenon. The researcher considered all related factors during the approach to the narrative qualitative research, which could be impacted by implicit bias. Since the researcher has worked within public school systems for the last 17 years, the implicit bias will be kept at a minimum by looking only at the data retrieved from the interviews and the lessons learned from those teachers teaching in public schools.

Implicit bias is unconsciously done without the researcher knowing it has been done. A pre-judgment of one's belief can be pushed into any research form to get others to obtain the same opinion as the individual performing the research to persuade the audience. To limit implicit bias in this research, the researcher looked at only the information given during the interviews and any data the teachers shared on students' emotional, physical, and educational needs before, during, and after the pandemic.

Procedures

Purposive sampling was employed in this study based on an established criterion set by the researcher (Mills & Gay, 2019). First, the researcher was to obtain approval to conduct the research through the Southwest Baptist University Research Review Board (RRB), as noted in Appendix A. The researcher designated schools for this qualitative study that participated in one of the three plans to return to school in the fall of the 2020-2021 school year. The researcher contacted the administrators of school districts chosen based on

the district's location to obtain permission, as noted in Appendix B. All districts chosen were rural school districts of varying size and demographics. The researcher noted how the lack of connectivity to the Internet in rural areas during the pandemic affected the students' psychological/emotional, physical, and educational needs. Teachers and administrators were selected for this study based on how they returned to school in the fall of 2020. After the approval to participate, which can be found in Appendix C, the participants for the study were contacted by email to verify a date and time for the researcher to ask in-depth questions related to the topic under study. The participants were promised confidentiality; all interview information would not be identifiable to any person or school district, which can be found in Appendix D. An email was sent to the participants with the questions that would be asked during the interview. All information from the study participants was kept confidential and destroyed after the research was completed. No names of administrators, teachers, or students were used in this study. The researcher selected two schools from each option and teachers and administrators from those schools regarding the emotional, physical, and academic needs of students before, during, and after the pandemic.

Consideration was given to confidentiality to protect all students and teachers involved in this study. Any identifiable information from any participant was excluded, and each participant's numerical identity was used. After the initial contact and the date set for the interview, the researcher used Zoom for online video conferencing with the participants. The researcher asked the participants to approve the interview recording before the start. If the interview recording was denied, the researcher destroyed detailed notes after completing the study. Detailed notes were also kept on the attitudes and biases of the teachers interviewed. The data from this research was stored in a cloud-based service, password-protected by only the researcher. All data was destroyed after the study.

Three primary data sources for a qualitative research study are interviews, observations during the interviews, and documents (Patton, 2014). The interviews conducted for this research were done with an online video program called Zoom, which recorded the interview upon permission. The observations during the interview were conducted by watching the responses of each individual and recording the information in the research. Each participant interviewed represented a public school district in Missouri and was teaching students in the various formats of returning to school in the fall of 2020. The researcher had predetermined questions, which are in Appendix E, sometimes leading to other queries relating to the teacher's experiences. The questions were designed to provide feedback from each teacher's and administrator's experiences with students' emotional, physical, and educational needs. Each teacher described their experiences when working with students in one of the three formats of returning to school during the interview, which could last a while. There was no set time for the interview to be completed. When the interview was concluded, the researcher discussed with the participant how the data would be analyzed and processed for the current research. The researcher also thanked every participant for their participation in the study. Also, the researcher gave each participant their results from the research conducted before the study was concluded. This allowed the participant to review the information from the interview and contact the researcher if further clarification is needed. This process validated the knowledge gained from the interviews and allowed for follow-up interviews. Creswell and Poth (2018) stated that interviewees were given the interview transcript, which validates the study.

Instrumentation

In a qualitative narrative study, the researcher asks leading questions to gain data and information about the study. Interviewees were sent an email containing the study's

purpose, details of how each teacher was selected, and an overview of the topics to be discussed in the interview. The researcher started with the lead question central to the study: What were the experiences of Missouri's teachers supporting students with psychological/emotional, physical, and educational needs before, during, and after the pandemic? The interviewer asked the leading questions but was taken off course depending on their answers, which could have led to other questions that were not on the list (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher specifically allowed for open-ended questions so the participant could lead the direction of the interview with some guidance from the researcher. The interviews relied upon the teachers' and administrators' lived experiences during the pandemic, and those experiences were analyzed for patterns across all discussions (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). After the interview, the researcher analyzed the data and shared any follow-up questions with the participant to ensure accuracy. The email and the questions that led the discussion during the interview can be found in Appendices A and B. Once the information was collected from the interview, the data was analyzed for common themes.

Data Analysis

Data was collected by interviewing active teachers and administrators in Missouri public schools. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. With the information recorded, the data could be analyzed more deeply and coded for ease of reference (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Information was bracketed to reduce the researcher's presuppositions while listening and understanding the recording of the interviews (Hycner, 1985). Bracketing of the data reduced the influence of any preconceived ideas from the researcher (Hycner, 1985). The researcher had no personal ties with any of the participants from school districts involved in this research.

Data collected from the teachers' and administrators' interviews were identified, analyzed, organized, described, and categorized in themes across all of the interviews (Nowell et al., 2017). One of the first steps in exploring the transcripts was to list all relevant statements. If statements were joint among the interviews or off-topic of the research, those were noted and left off the study. Coding the data from the interviews was done manually. The researcher reread the transcripts to distinguish any reoccurring words, patterns, or ideas (Butina, 2015). This allowed the researcher to sort through the data to look for any themes and patterns that emerged. Once the researcher identified the patterns, a code will be assigned to each pattern with a numerical number. This allowed the researcher to easily identify themes in the interviews. Those themes and titles were then used to analyze and align the data. The themes and concepts common among the interviews were compared to the structure of the research questions. Those themes were repeated among teachers and were compared and analyzed to determine if the research questions had been answered. The information gained through this research method was segregated among the themes, and the research questions were answered and summarized for the phenomenon for this qualitative study (Groenewald, 2004).

The validity and reliability of this qualitative research paper were completed through interviews and student and grade-level data on student growth during the acquisition of academic skills during the pandemic (Creswell & Poth, 2018). All interview transcripts were bracketed by grade level, attendance for returning to school, and acquisition of academic skills in public schools. Chapter Four contains the interview information and is organized so the reader can see how the research questions were addressed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After the common themes were obtained, to check for further reliability and validity, the researcher allowed those who were interviewed to verify the data.

Summary

The exploration of educational challenges amid the pandemic is important to helping students through their hierarchy of needs which are to be met so the student can learn. The disruption caused by COVID-19 presented many obstacles in upholding students' academic advancement across diverse school districts, as noted by Van Lancker and Parolin (2020). The disparities in socioeconomic status among these districts significantly influenced the acquisition of crucial skills necessary for academic progression, as highlighted by Van de Werfhorst (2021). Furthermore, the varying levels of technological infrastructure available in different districts amplified the complexities associated with transitioning to virtual education, as emphasized by König and Frey (2022). These disparities in resources and socioeconomic factors have significantly shaped the educational landscape, accentuating the challenges faced by schools and students during the pandemic.

Chapter Three of this research embarked on the design of a qualitative narrative study, providing a comprehensive framework to delve into the experiences of teachers who taught students during the pandemic and how they supported their academic, psychological, and physical needs before, during, and after the pandemic. This chapter analyzes educators' firsthand experiences teaching students before, during, and after the pandemic. The study aimed to uncover recurring themes among teachers, clarifying their challenges, adaptations, and strategies in navigating this educational landscape and how they helped students during this time in history.

By delving into the lived experiences of these educators, the research strived to provide a comprehensive framework to delve into the experiences of teachers and administrators who taught students during the pandemic. The interviews determined how students were supported in their academic, psychological, and physical needs before, during,

and after the pandemic. This also allowed valuable insights into the multifaceted aspects of teaching students during a period of disruption. Identifying common themes among teachers offered a nuanced understanding of the hurdles they faced and how they helped students and their families during the pandemic. This chapter laid the groundwork for a deeper comprehension of the dynamics surrounding how the pandemic affected the student's emotional, physical, and educational needs in the context of the pandemic, providing valuable insights for informing educational practices and interventions moving forward.

Rigorous efforts were employed to uphold research integrity by mitigating bias through meticulous data analysis and maintaining an open-minded stance. As the research progresses to Chapter Four, the focus shifts toward presenting the interview data, subjected to thorough and systematic analysis. This rigorous examination aims to unveil prevalent themes and patterns from educators' experiences before, during, and after the pandemic. The comprehensive study in this section lays a robust foundation for Chapter Five, where a detailed interpretation of the findings occurs.

Chapter Five aims to delve into the implications derived from the discovered themes, offering a profound exploration of their significance. Additionally, it seeks to provide valuable recommendations for future research endeavors focused on addressing the educational challenges unearthed amid the COVID-19 pandemic. This structured and meticulous approach ensures that the research not only highlights critical insights but also offers potential pathways for enhancing educational practices, especially in times of crisis. Ultimately, the goal is to contribute meaningful insights to inform and improve educational strategies and interventions in similar challenging circumstances.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative narrative study is to understand how teachers were supporting students' psychological/emotional, physical, and educational needs before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic. In the spring of 2020, schools were shut down across the globe. This shutdown affected how students obtained education (Mustafa, 2020). Acquiring academic skills at all grade levels was jeopardized as students were required to stay at home and gain the necessary education virtually. Not all areas of Missouri had internet access, which would hinder learning for some students. This learning became almost nonexistent because not all students had access to the internet. The differences in socioeconomic status of the families intensified the inequalities among the students, affecting whether they were to obtain internet access (Haeck & Lefebvre, 2020). This inequality widened the gap among students in school districts where the internet was difficult to obtain. Research has shown that this interruption in the usual school routine has long- and short-term effects on education.

The physiological needs of Maslow's theory of human motivation form the basis of his theory of motivation. Maslow (1943) outlined that these needs involve serious elements crucial for survival, including air, food, drink, shelter, clothing, warmth, sex, and sleep. These needs take precedence in the hierarchy of needs over others (Roebuck et al., 2022). The primary physiological needs must be met before moving to the other motivation levels (Walther, 2021). Maslow's theory shows the importance of meeting physiological needs and shaping human motivation and behavior (Maslow, 1943).

In the second tier, safety needs become important so individuals can function in the environment (Maslow, 1943). These needs include protection from potential threats, fostering stability, law, order, and freedom from fear. These needs must be met before the individual can move on to the third level of motivation.

Level three includes love and belonging, which become attainable upon satisfying physiological and safety needs (Maslow, 1943). Individuals will actively seek relationships that satisfy their innate need for belongingness. This fulfillment is essential for an individual's internal growth, which will help move them to the next level of motivation.

The fourth level embraces the need for esteem. This involves self-worth and the desire for recognition and respect from other individuals. The need for self-appreciation and acknowledgment from one's social circle becomes pivotal at this stage (Maslow, 1943). Individuals must feel good about themselves and have their social circle accept them. This must be obtained to allow them to move to the final stage of motivation.

Finally, the top of the pyramid is self-actualization. This is where individuals attempt to comprehend and enhance their potential. Individuals are always seeking to improve and better fit within the world in which they live. The theory of human motivation and basic physiological needs allows educators to understand the importance of how these affected students before, during, and after the pandemic.

Maslow's Theory of Human Motivation (1943) has five tiers, each built upon the previous tier. The first tier involves the basic needs of humans, which is essential for individuals. If those basic needs are not met, students cannot learn effectively. Social connection among students is vital, but when schools shut down, students did not have that connection. Social connection is the basis of the third tier of Maslow's theory of motivation. The students connect socially by being allowed to meet at school, but when schools shut

down, students lose that connection. This loss of connection led to an increase in student suicides (Manzar et al., 2021). When the pandemic caused schools to shut down, the need for social connection was apparent because students had lost connection with each other. Some researchers have looked at the impact of shutting schools down, the gap in learning loss, and how substantial it has become, and researchers have looked at test scores. Participants in this study have a voice and can be interpreted differently by different researchers (Jha, 2018). This qualitative narrative study will examine how teachers supported students' emotional, physical, and educational needs before, during, and after the pandemic and fill a gap in research as there is very little information or research on how teachers and schools supported students before, during, and after the pandemic.

The questions which are central to this research are the following;

1. What did you do to support your students' emotional, physical, and educational needs before the pandemic?
2. What did you do to support your students' emotional, physical, and educational needs during the pandemic?
3. What did you do to support your students' emotional, physical, and educational needs after the pandemic?

These questions were used to guide the direction of the interview, although it was not limited to them. Other questions were asked based on the participants' responses. After the interviews had been recorded and transcribed into a document, the researcher looked for common themes and words used by the participants. Each participant had a summary of their interview. This allowed the reader to understand each participant and their interviews' similarities.

Chapter Four will focus on how the data obtained through the interviews are presented. This chapter will discuss the participants in detail without any identifying information about the participants or school districts. The systematic and rigorous approach to analyzing data was to obtain common themes and patterns of educators' experiences. This information will lay the groundwork for Chapter Five, allowing the researcher to explain the interpretation of the data and possible future research.

Participants

The qualitative narrative study was conducted with six teachers and two administrators who taught in Missouri public schools. The participants were selected based on the criteria of school size. A school district with up to 500 total students was categorized as a small school. Schools with 500-2,000 students were considered medium-sized. Schools with over 2,000 students in the district were determined to be large. Table 1 gives information on gender, years taught, and the district's size. Six of the eight participants had at least a Master's degree in education. Participants for this study were told their identity would remain confidential and only the researcher would know the identity. The researcher made sure the participants were told not to identify any school district in the interview, and in the event that the participant did mention the school district, the researcher erased it from the transcript. The researcher meticulously reviewed each transcript, looking for any identifiable information about the participant or school district, and erased it from the transcript.

The researcher delimited the participants to only those in the Missouri public school system. No participant who taught in a private school was interviewed. Each participant was labeled according to whether they were a teacher or administrator and was labeled in the order they were interviewed. Participants were labeled as T1 for teacher one and A1 for

administrator one, as documented in Table 1. The interviews for this study were conducted in the summer of 2024 on the Zoom program. The participant was notified that the interview would be recorded for transcription later. The researcher evenly distributed the gender purposively so it would not be limited to just one gender. Participants were selected from elementary, middle, and high school, so the views on how the students' needs were supported psychologically/emotionally, physically, and educational before, during, and after the pandemic were across the district and not limited to just a specific grade level.

Table 1

Participant Data

Participants	Gender	Years Taught	Size of District
T1	Male	14	Small
T2	Male	16	Medium
A1	Male	13	Small
T3	Female	10	Medium
T4	Female	9	Small
T5	Female	9	Large
A2	Male	9	Medium
T6	Female	24	Large

Triangulation

Reliability and validity in any research paper are essential so the researcher can determine whether the data are accurate. One of the ways to help with reliability and validity is through a method called triangulation of data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This was accomplished through the transcription of the interviews, archival data, and assessment scores in general to help achieve the reliability and validity of data. The researcher would ask about overall assessment scores at the beginning and end of the school year. This would allow the researcher to determine how the students' overall grades looked before, during, and after the pandemic. All participants' comments were transcribed and sent back to them

so they could make any necessary changes. The researcher, also in the public education system during the COVID-19 pandemic, reviewed the interview data.

Clarifying Bias

Implicit bias is the attitudes or stereotypes one has that are subconscious and affect our perceptions and beliefs. This unconscious bias sometimes involves the study's research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher in this study has worked in education for 16 years. For the last eight years, the researcher has worked in administration. The implicit bias may have affected how the researcher interpreted the results based on his educational experiences and teaching before, during, and after the pandemic. The researcher tried to keep an open mind when interviewing the participants and writing up the research results. Even though one attempted to limit bias as much as possible, there is always the possibility of some bias entering the study.

Data Analysis Procedures

The researcher's goal was not to prove or disprove the experiences of teachers and administrators but to understand their experiences. The focus was to understand how teachers and administrators supported students before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic in psychological/emotional, physical, and educational areas. All of the information from the teachers and administrators in this research will hopefully help to improve education for all students if school districts ever have to go back through another pandemic. The researcher asked questions related to the study, but sometimes, the researcher would ask questions to clarify the participants' answers during the interview.

Other questions related to the topic were asked to expand upon the participant's words. Each participant was asked the research questions proposed in Chapter One. The two administrators were asked the same research questions as the teachers. Their responses

varied from the teachers' because of their different perspectives on the pandemic.

Participants were asked if they were willing to participate in the interview process. All participants were willing to participate in the interview and research project. Since each participant differed in what they had to say, the lengths of the interviews and transcripts varied (Table 2).

Table 2

Descriptive Table

Participant	Interview Length in Minutes	Transcript Length in Pages
T1	38:37	11
T2	41:29	13
A1	30:24	8
T3	30:04	8
T4	30:45	9
T5	31:02	9
A2	31:11	10
T6	35:21	8

All of the interviews were recorded on a program called Zoom. The participants that were involved in this research gave their approval of the interview to be recorded. Once the interview was recorded, the researcher put the video in a program called Otter.ai. The program then gave a transcription of each interview, which was sent to the participants for approval. The researcher read through each transcript many times and collected all identifiable information for the participant. This would allow the participant to remain anonymous, which was guaranteed by the researcher. Through the process of reading over the transcripts many times, themes related to the research questions asked began to emerge. Data triangulation increased the study's validity and reliability (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The participants discussed assessment scores during the interviews. The assessment scores were points of data from a few different sources. First, the educators viewed

MAP/EOC data, but there needed to be more clarity in using the state assessments as a data point. The MAP/EOC data based on districts of similar size was compiled in this research paper so that the districts would remain anonymous. Similar districts were found, and an average of the data was used to support the research. The MAP/EOC assessments were not given in the spring of 2020 (DESE, 2020). The format of those assessments changed, so comparing previous years to current years needed to be more accurate. Second, assessments were given to students from the grade level curriculum. Districts use various curricula, so comparing assessment data across districts is difficult. Finally, districts were allowed to form their assessments based on Missouri Learning Standards, found on Missouri’s Department of Elementary and Secondary Education website (DESE, 2024). Some of the larger districts had curriculum directors who would oversee the creation of those assessments. In the smaller districts, grade-level teams were formed and would align assessments with the Missouri Learning Standards.

The transcripts generated from the Otter.ai software needed to be 100% accurate. The transcripts were read several times to look for words that did not impact the research questions being asked. Words such as people, grade, fall, and spring were removed because every participant used them when discussing their lived experiences. Otter.ai also provided each transcript with a list of keywords, which was put into a spreadsheet but left off the repetitive words (Table 3).

Table 3

Most Used Terms Coded Within the Interviews

T1	T2	A1	T3	T4	T5	A2	T6
kids	kids	students	kids	grade level	students	kids	kids
district school	students school	school kids	school students	Kids students	classroom grade level	school support	students support

counselor	physical	physical	grade level	support	school	classroom	classroom
grade level students		grade level counseling	support physical	school	counselor kids district	students district counseling	

Table 4

Most Used Combined Terms

Coded Terms	Total Times Used	Number of Participants
Class/Classroom	82	8
Counsel/Counseling	20	5
District	17	4
Grade Level	40	5
Kids	152	8
Physical	11	5
School	73	8
Students	116	8
Support	39	4

Table 5

Terms by Number of Participants

Used by 8 participants	Used by 5 participants	Used by 4 participants
Class/Classroom	Counsel/Counseling	District
Kids	Grade Level	Support
Students	Physical	
School		

After creating a list of the most used terms, the researcher looked to understand their meaning. The researcher created another spreadsheet from the terms listed in Table 3 to determine how many times and how many participants said those words in the interview. That information is listed in Table 4. The researcher noticed three of the most frequently used words in the interviews: kids (152 times), students (116 times), and class/classroom (82 times) from Table 5.

Teacher Narratives

Teacher 1 (T1)

Teacher 1 has worked in public education for 14 years. All of those years have been spent in public education. This teacher has taught in a few districts but was in the same district before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' emotional needs before the pandemic?

Teacher 1 remembers school being regular like all the other years he taught. He said, "Before the COVID-19 pandemic appeared, students seemed as normal as they had been in the other years they were taught. The district had one school counselor in each building to assist the students, but nothing abnormal." Two of the main issues students had at the time before the pandemic that the teacher and counselors dealt with were anxiety and depression. T1 stated, "Just your typical anxiety and depression among teenagers at that time. Nothing huge that our one counselor could not handle."

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' physical needs before the pandemic?

T1 explained that the district had some donations, and teachers would identify students who needed physical assistance and put them in contact with the correct people to help. T1 stated, "We had people that would donate to the school, and we would identify kids that needed that and then provide that to the ones that we had identified." Not many students were identified as needing physical support before the pandemic. T1 said, "There was not any broad food for all the kids or anything like that." The free and reduced lunch program through the school district was "pretty high" because the district was a poor community.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' educational needs before the pandemic?

Looking at the educational needs of the students being met before the pandemic, “The students in class were reading and writing at grade level, and most of my kids did not need support outside of the classroom.” Teacher 1 did “provide a little extra tutoring” to help the students if they got behind in his class. T1 stated, “They were reading and writing on grade level.” This participant discussed how students were expected to follow strict deadlines to complete assignments. “They could meet deadlines, and they did not need me outside of the classroom at all,” said T1.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' emotional needs during the pandemic?

During the COVID-19 pandemic, educators faced challenges supporting students' emotional and psychological needs. During the spring of 2020, the district sent buses to bus stops to “make sure they were not at home alone with sick parents, or they were at home sick and not getting their needs met,” Teacher 1 explained. When students returned to school in the fall, “students were having more emotional and social outbursts than before the pandemic.” The counselor for the district was overwhelmed, and the staff tried to help eliminate jobs for her so she could focus on the students. “My district only had one counselor, so we tried to alleviate some things from her, like some of the scheduling stuff; we tried to make that.” The counselor said several students were being seen for anxiety-related behaviors. When the students came back to school in the fall of 2020, emotionally and psychologically, the students were suffering from anxiety, and they struggled to handle their emotions. This led to the district hiring another counselor. “So, for the first time, our district hired a second counselor because the need was so great,” said Teacher 1.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students’ physical needs during the pandemic?

The teacher discussed the need for food and hygiene products delivered by buses to families. “Busses would take bus routes out and drop off food supplies, personal hygiene products, and things they would need.” Staff rode along on the bus routes to see students and ensure they were doing well or checked whether they needed anything else. The district also offered free food pick up in the FEMA building if parents could not be at the bus stop when deliveries were made by bus. The district expected teachers to contact the students in any way they could reach them, “Teachers had a set number of kids that we had to make phone calls to, or Zoom calls to, or something. We had to make contact every other day to check in on how they were doing,” Teacher 1 said. Families began to rely on local charities for food and basic needs. Several families still needed food and hygiene items. “There were local churches that stepped up to help with some of these items, but that lasted maybe a year after we returned.” The district implemented a backpack program but gave the students extra food through some bag they could carry home.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students’ educational needs during the pandemic?

Teacher 1 discussed the gaps in education caused by the pandemic. Teachers were required to be available during the school day through emails in case any students needed anything. When school resumed in the fall of 2020, it was regular classes except with all the restrictions. “So, everything that we did curriculum-wise, academically-wise, had to be essentially two different forms of curriculum. Had to be an in-person and a digital curriculum so they could get that while they were in quarantine or if they were there,” said Teacher 1. Teacher 1 stated, “It was much more difficult to teach during COVID.”

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' emotional needs after the pandemic?

After the pandemic and school returned to normal, “the biggest difference between before and after COVID restrictions were lifted was that kids didn’t know how to handle their emotions,” explained Teacher 1. “You had kids that would have emotional and social outbursts you did not have before COVID-19.” The behaviors coming after the pandemic were over-related to anxiety and depression because “students did not know how to handle those emotions. They had no one to talk to except other students,” said Teacher 1.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' physical needs after the pandemic?

“The district had a local charity organization that provided food and personal hygiene items to families that need them, and that ended about a year after the restrictions were lifted,” explained Teacher 1. The school district had a backpack program that would send food home to the families every day until after the first year past the restrictions. “The kids all got to take stuff home, but that was all of the physical needs that we met.”

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' educational needs after the pandemic?

Deadlines had been required and maintained before the pandemic. After the pandemic, deadlines were not met, nor did the staff require deadlines for assignments. “After COVID, I mean, there is no such thing as a hard deadline,” said Teacher 1. The teachers were beginning to see more and more gaps among the students. The gaps were significant compared to where the students should be academically at that grade level. The students were behind academically when compared to before the pandemic. “I think that curriculum is still what we had pre-COVID, where we are progressing them on for a year,”

said T1. The students are not at grade level, so the curriculum will not help them fill the missing gaps.

Teacher 2 (T2)

Teacher 2 has taught in public education for 16 years. Before the pandemic, the participants received professional development about students and their mental health. This helped the teacher better handle students before, during, and after the pandemic. He has taught in two different school districts but was in the same district before, during, and after the pandemic.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' emotional needs before the pandemic?

Students seemed to be getting more fragile compared to the prior years he had taught. The mental health training he had received before the pandemic helped him better understand the students' needs. This professional development happened a couple of years before the pandemic. "They are more anxious, worried, depressed, or little things that should not matter," explained T2. This allowed the teacher to teach his students to consider their mental health.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' physical needs before the pandemic?

Before the pandemic, Teacher 2 bought bottled water and snacks that students could eat in class. T2 said, "If you wanted a bottle of water, you can go and take a bottle of water, and if you wanted to donate \$1, I would take money out of the dollar jar and buy more water cases. Moreover, any shortfall, which there always was, I would buy more water. I would also supply ramen and like coffee and tea." He stated, "Students could not learn if their minds were on something to eat or drink." So, the teacher decided to provide

snacks that could be eaten and drunk during class. The participant would also buy loaves of bread and a jar of peanut butter to allow the students to make a sandwich. The participant discussed how the students seemed to be able to focus better on the lesson. He told a story of a student a few weeks ago thanking him for having the Ramen noodles in class. The students said that the parents did not always have groceries for them to eat, so that meant a lot to them. If any students needed clothing items, the teachers would send the students to the office, and the office staff would handle the situation for the teachers. Less than 10% of the students must be sent to the office for those items.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' educational needs before the pandemic?

Before COVID-19, the district was a one-to-one school, allowing the students to access the lessons online. The teacher offered tutoring, and some students took advantage of this opportunity. "I was available for tutoring, but like most students, did not want tutoring, so I did very little tutoring outside of our study hall, and so it was pretty much like, very focused on academics," stated Teacher 2. "Most of the students were on grade level regarding reading and math." There was very little concern with the students academically because they seemed to be on grade level.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' emotional needs during the pandemic?

When the pandemic shut the schools down, there was some anxiety among the students, but Teacher 2 saw more anxiety from the other staff members. The staff only saw students twice a week when school started in the fall of 2020. The staff gave the students much positive encouragement to help them overcome this difficult time. T2 explained, "We will ensure you get as much positive encouragement as possible. You know, you can do

this. It was very kind of like positive encouragement. You are going to be fine.” The students enjoyed the routine of school. “Students like the routine of public school. I mean, it is maybe less chaotic than their private life,” said T2. “The loss of a routine was probably the biggest emotional thing for students.” The routine for students and staff was missed during the pandemic when schools did not operate normally.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students’ physical needs during the pandemic?

The district had bus routes they followed to make sure families had food and hygiene items. “I was riding a bus while helping with the deliveries. So that was during the actual when we had no physical contact, and so we would set it down on the ground, and they would come up and pick it up, and then we would collect any homework and totes,” explained T2. The school would send home paper copies of work to be delivered to students. Rarely did any of the work return to school. This participant discussed how, before the pandemic, they supplied various items to the students in class to snack on. But during the pandemic, “Everything was hands-off, so there were no snacks available then.” The teacher discussed how they would wrap up class two minutes before the bell rang to clean their area for the next class.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students’ educational needs during the pandemic?

During the pandemic, the participant discussed the fourth quarter of 2020 being “hold harmless for grades.” The teachers in the district were still supposed to give assignments during the school closure. The student's grades were decided based on their grades when the school closed in the spring of that year. The teacher said, “95% of my

students did not do the work.” Teacher 2 had zero assignments turned in during the school shutdown.

When classes resumed in the fall of 2020, all assignments the students completed and returned to class were hands-off. They were not allowed to do assignments where students would be near each other or touch the same things. T2 stated, “I completed about 50% of the curriculum. That is the least amount of academic content I have taught in my career.” Teacher 2 talked about how the students were behind because of the change in school schedules when the year began. Students were somewhat behind in grade-level material. “It was a difficult time to teach, but not so bad as long as you maintained a positive classroom.”

Research Question: What did you do to support your students’ emotional needs after the pandemic?

After the pandemic, when classes resumed normal function, the participant talked about when staff would go into the lunchroom, which would be quiet. None of the students were talking with each other. He said the only time anyone was talking was to show another student something on their phone. He discussed how the social aspect of students had gone down because they were always on their phones. “I have also seen a huge increase in just the anxiety,” said T2. Anxiety among students has risen after the pandemic. They also get highly agitated quickly when compared to before the pandemic. The participant talked about how students appear more tired when coming to class. When the students were asked about being so exhausted, they responded that they did not get to bed early enough and were on their phones. “I have made it to where being aware of my students’ mental health is a primary concern, mainly because of Maslow’s hierarchy of needs,” he explained.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' physical needs after the pandemic?

The teacher discussed earlier how he supplied Ramen noodles for students during class, but now, "I switched from ramen noodles to, like, energy bars, like Cliff bars, or something, granola bars, those kinds of things," explained T2. After the pandemic, T2 talked about parents not buying their student's school supplies, saying, "So, I started buying notebooks and pencils for the students who needed those items in my class. If a student required any items regarding clothing, there was a room at the building that could provide those items for students."

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' educational needs after the pandemic?

T2 said that educationally, the students experienced some learning loss. When looking at the gaps and determining how far behind the students are at this level, the participant stated that most students seem to be three to four years behind in academics. "The majority are not reading at the high school level, or writing or math; I would say their math skills are at the elementary level, and their reading and writing is at the middle school level," explained T2. The participant said he could quickly get students to write a four to five-paragraph essay for class before the pandemic, but now the students cannot write one paragraph.

Teacher 3 (T3)

Teacher 3 has taught in the public school system for 10 years. Before the pandemic, she taught for several other districts and attended the same school before, during, and after the pandemic.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' emotional needs before the pandemic?

Before the pandemic, she discussed how the district could teach normal social and emotional behaviors in the classroom. Teacher 3 said, "I could just do general, like social-emotional skills." She could see and check on her students daily to determine what support was needed. The students were able to express their emotions to the teachers clearly.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' physical needs before the pandemic?

The school district already had a backpack program for students needing the service. She said only a tiny percentage of the students used that program before the pandemic. T3 stated, "I had fewer kids who needed maybe food or clothing." Only three or four students in the class would need more attention than just the backpack program so that they would send them to the school nurse.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' educational needs before the pandemic?

The teacher stated that most students were at or above grade level before leaving the classroom in the spring of the 2020 school year. "I feel like I had a large portion of my class on grade level, and I was able to take most of them to grade level, or, like, above grade level, for the next upcoming year," explained T3. Most students worked in small groups, and very few were below grade level. The teacher offered minimal after-school interventions because most of the students were where they needed to be educationally.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' emotional needs during the pandemic?

When the shutdown happened, it seemed like students had trouble connecting with adults and their peers. "I found opportunities to reconnect with adults and their friends. I found that many kids came from different situations, whereas they might not have had any adult interaction," She explained. The teacher discussed how they supported parents during this time compared to before the pandemic. Parents needed to be educated on how to parent again.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' physical needs during the pandemic?

"They had a lot more physical needs," said T3. The district was offering bus routes to send food home to families. The teachers could ride on the bus so they could see the students. The demand for physical needs was more than before the pandemic. During the pandemic, the students returned to school in clothes or shoes that did not fit. The participant talked about how, before the pandemic, only three to four students would need assistance with these needs, but that need rose to about half of the class during the pandemic. The teachers could tell the students were used to more screen time on some devices than before the pandemic. The district provided the students with a backpack full of weekend food. "I had many more kids I signed up for our backpack school program," said T3.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' educational needs during the pandemic?

The students started in the spring of 2020 and could only meet for class virtually. The participants tried to reach students virtually during the pandemic, but some lived in rural areas without internet access. "It was a little bit harder because many parents did not

have access to the internet,” said T3. Teacher 3 said, “They did not have their learning skills, those base skills, mastered yet; they did not know them.” If the students did not have internet access, they would have to send home paper copies of the assignments. The students were behind when they returned to school in the fall of 2020.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students’ emotional needs after the pandemic?

“It is a huge burden lifted off of us to have the students in front of us daily.” Students struggled with identifying their social and emotional needs to the teacher. They lacked interactions with other students and struggled after the pandemic with those interactions. They struggled with how to interact with adults as well. Their unwanted behaviors increased after the pandemic. “I tried to focus a lot more on calming down activities,” explained T3. The teachers had to return and teach students several early social skills to allow them to participate in the classroom or on the playground. The students did not know how to express their emotions. So, when a student got mad at someone, they would hit another student instead of telling them how they felt.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students’ physical needs after the pandemic?

Most students still needed assistance with food and clothing throughout the school. I still felt like I had a large majority of kids who needed access to physical needs. Teacher 3 observed, “During COVID, their parents lost their jobs, or they could not work.” After parents could get back to work, the number of students who needed food and clothing seemed to dwindle.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' educational needs after the pandemic?

The teacher discussed reducing screen time because the students seemed to get plenty of that during the pandemic. "I feel like it was important to focus on manipulatives and hands-on learning," she said. The students were significantly behind in their reading skills when school was back to normal. They did not seem to know their letters or numbers. "They were very behind with their reading skills, like identifying letters and sounds," she explained. Over 60% of the grade level was behind in reading. Educationally, the students experience learning loss due to the school being shut down.

Teacher 4 (T4)

Teacher 4 has taught in the public school system for nine years, all for one school district. Before, during, and after the pandemic, she taught a class with special needs.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' emotional needs before the pandemic?

Teaching social skills before the pandemic was much easier because students already came to school knowing those skills. Students also understood facial expressions much more quickly. "I would say those skills, the basic facial skills that you would think come naturally, would still be there for the student," stated Teacher 4. Fewer students at this time needed any help with social or emotional issues. Students seemed to understand those areas; if not, they would send them to the counselor for help.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' physical needs before the pandemic?

The district already had a backpack program, and a few students in class utilized that service with the school. The backpacks would go home on the weekends to help families

with food. T4 explained, “I still supplied snacks to my kids daily, just like I do now. However, we were able to do a rotation with parents.” Parents would take turns to send in snacks for the classroom. Early in their careers, the teachers discovered that students would be better equipped to learn if they were not hungry.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students’ educational needs before the pandemic?

Students seemed to be about at grade level before the pandemic. “I worked with them on reading, writing, and math. I would say they were probably closer to grade level before COVID,” explained T4. They seemed to be better prepared for success when they came to her class before the pandemic than after.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students’ emotional needs during the pandemic?

When students returned to school during the pandemic, students and teachers had to wear masks and be six feet apart. “So, there was no, like, hugging, or, you know, maybe even if you were doing group things, you could not be right next to somebody else,” said Teacher 4. The masks made it difficult for students to understand how to interact in small groups. The masks prevented students from seeing the teacher’s face, which hindered the teaching of facial expressions and being in small groups. Some students used their masks as security blankets and would not remove them when possible. Students appeared more anxious and nervous when returning to school during the pandemic. Teacher 4 said, “There was a stress factor that weighed on them, and you could tell it weighed on them and you.”

Research Question: What did you do to support your students’ physical needs during the pandemic?

It was harder to support your students’ physical needs during this time. Teacher 4 said, “I still had snacks in the classroom but would hand them out to each student instead of letting the students come up and get their snacks.” This would be an attempt to try not to spread the virus. The district provided a backpack program and sent food to families needing extra help.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students’ educational needs during the pandemic?

The teacher discussed how difficult it was to keep students engaged in the lesson, so they took more brain breaks than before. She said, “I tried my best.” The teacher tried to do as much on the screen as possible because the students seemed more attentive to that method than any other. “We did many brain breaks to get our body to move so when we came back to sit down, I could have their full focus,” she explained. Teachers struggled to connect with parents through Zoom, emails, or phone calls. Some parents had no internet connection at home or would never return the phone call.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students’ emotional needs after the pandemic?

“After the pandemic and school was back to normal, I never thought I would have to teach students what an angry, sad, or happy face was,” said Teacher 4. There was an increase in anxiety after the pandemic, which made it more challenging to teach students and bring them back up to grade level. Because of the masks that covered the face entirely, it was difficult for students to build those needed relationships. “The relationship building was not there anymore,” stressed Teacher 4. The students seemed nervous because they did

not know what to expect. The students were worried that they or their parents would get sick.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' physical needs after the pandemic?

After the pandemic, the district continued the backpack program. "It seemed like more students signed up for the backpack program," said Teacher 4. The teacher said she has always taught basic needs to her students. She had always tried to provide food for the students in the classroom. "So, I always made sure that they had food in the room all the time, okay, so that basic need was met," she explained.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' educational needs after the pandemic?

Teacher 4 said, "Students were well below grade level in mathematics and reading." The learning gaps were much more significant than the teachers realized at first. The teacher assessed the students at the beginning of the year and could see from the test scores how far behind the students were compared to before the pandemic. "You would have them a grade level, two grade levels below where they were supposed to be, because during COVID, they were not getting anything, so they were losing all those skills if your parents did not have internet access, to where they could zoom with you or do the work if you sent it online, it was not getting done," said Teacher 4. The teacher discussed the need for more hands-on activities because the student's attention span seemed shorter than before the pandemic. Students seemed to be more adjusted to electronic devices than social interactions with others. They also needed to be taught emotional regulation and facial expression recognition.

Teacher 5 (T5)

Teacher 5 has taught in the public school system for nine years in the same school district. The teacher taught elementary before, during, and after the pandemic.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' emotional needs before the pandemic?

Before the pandemic, Teacher 5 stated, "Students would always be greeted at the door with hugs, smiles, high fives, fist bumps, or whatever their preferred method was. Also, little ones need lots of love and attention throughout the day." Students need lots of love and encouragement throughout the day. If students were upset, they would receive the attention required to help them participate in the class. The students had a large playground to run around and play on. This allowed the students to interact with other students socially.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' physical needs before the pandemic?

The district already had a backpack program in place before the pandemic. Teacher 5 said, "We send food home through the weekend to help them get by when they are not at school for that free and reduced lunch." The building had a counselor who could help the students in the areas they needed.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' educational needs before the pandemic?

Educationally, students were assessed every week in all areas. The district had interventions for the students who needed extra help in reading and math. "I remember that year it seemed like half my class was going out for one intervention or special education services," explained T5. About half of the class went out for some intervention or Special Education class. "Grade level for reading, I would say about 80% of my class, 80 to 85,

were on grade level before the pandemic,” clarified Teacher 5. When it comes to mathematics, “Mathematics would have been, I would say, 90%,” explained T5. Most students were on grade level in this district before the pandemic.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students’ emotional needs during the pandemic?

During the pandemic, “students came back to school scared,” and the parents were “scared, and they need much reassurance,” explained Teacher 5. Teachers and students had to wear masks, which made it difficult to communicate with the students. “It did cover our faces, and it was hard to communicate when we were happy with a student,” lamented T5. The masks made it more challenging to communicate social-emotional awareness. “I still hugged my kids even though they told us not to. Those kids need our love,” said Teacher 5. “They told us that we should not hug or high-five,” stated Teacher 5. The playground was cut up, and students were not allowed to mingle with each other. Social skills among students during this time took a hit. It was difficult for the students to communicate with others outside of their classroom. Students were still allowed outside, just in the groups called pods.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students’ physical needs during the pandemic?

“We took several breaks during the classroom, especially knowing students with those ADHD needs,” explained Teacher 5. “I always had brain breaks probably every 30 minutes in my classroom where we stopped and moved around,” said T5. This would allow the behaviors to be minimal because the students needed that extra movement when returning to school during the pandemic. The counselors in the district were available to help the students who needed help with whatever they needed.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' educational needs during the pandemic?

Educationally, the students came back to school behind. The students missed the fourth quarter and did not regain the lost information. "Educational needs that were difficult before the pandemic were worse during the pandemic," explained T5. The administration still expected the teachers to get the students back on grade level by the end of the school year. The teachers in this district tutored students before and after school. "I just took it day by day. Whatever the class needed is what I taught that day," stated Teacher 5.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' emotional needs after the pandemic?

Once the students returned to school and all of the restrictions had been lifted, the students appeared to have more social and emotional needs than before the pandemic. "We were working more on social-emotional learning within the classroom, lots of training in school about how to provide for those needs, some professional development was brought in for that, and we are just seeing a steady increase in those behaviors ever since," stated Teacher 5.

The behaviors of students had increased when they came back from the pandemic. Students displayed disrespectful behavior and refusal to do work. The students would tell the teachers, "No, I do not want to," or "No, it is boring." The need for more individualized attention to students and their needs was time-consuming, and the teacher struggled to balance the educational needs of the students with all of the other needs of the students. Behaviors have gotten to a point where some students will spit on a teacher, and even one

student spit on a police officer. The district hired counselors outside the district, which could help with the overflow of needs.

Some of the behaviors in the district have been worse than before the pandemic. “We are seeing a regression. As far as behaviors go,” stated Teacher 5. Students who are potty trained have been reverting to urinating in their pants when they do not want to do something that is asked of them. There has been a regression of behaviors from students.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students’ physical needs after the pandemic?

The district saw an increase in the need for the backpack program. More students signed up for the program after the pandemic than before. Local charities helped with what the students and families needed after the pandemic. “We just tried to get everyone back on their feet again right after the pandemic,” explained T5.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students’ educational needs after the pandemic?

“After the pandemic, the district started implementing more assessments to identify the students behind,” explained Teacher 5. The students came back from the pandemic below grade level, but the staff did not know how bad the gaps in learning were until later in the school year. The district has even hired an additional interventionist to help.

Students seem to have more speech-related issues. The staff discussed the idea that wearing masks possibly hindered correct speech production. The masks covered the mouth, which would not allow a student to see how the mouth formed the letter sounds.

“I have taken a course on the science of reading, the LETRS training, and the importance of how kids need to see your mouth,” explained Teacher 5.

Teacher 6 (T6)

Teacher 6 has taught for 24 years in the public school system in Missouri. She has taught all those years for the same district at the elementary level. She taught before, during, and after the pandemic for a public school in Missouri.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' emotional needs before the pandemic?

The teacher discussed her involvement in the students' lives before the pandemic. She would go to the students' sporting events and talk to parents all the time. "I was in their lives. I connected with them on a personal level," explained Teacher 6. She said she always tried to let the parents and families know they could communicate with her anytime. "I always had open communication with parents," stated T6. She talked about giving the students the emotional support they needed. There was not much of a need for counselors before the pandemic. The counselors would work with classes like normal.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' physical needs before the pandemic?

The district had a backpack program, and parents who needed the service would sign up. "Parents sign permission slips to get a bag of food on Fridays to have food over the weekends," said T6. The teacher said that maybe three students out of her class would need that service. "If I saw a child that needed clothing or new shoes, we have resources through our counselor, and I would take them up there to the nurse and help them with that," explained T6. The teacher was involved in a church that would provide shoes and haircuts to students who were in need.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' educational needs before the pandemic?

Parents seemed to be more supportive of their children before the pandemic. “We had more parental support when it came to education,” stated T6. With the parents being involved in the education of their students, the students did not have many gaps in their education before the pandemic. “There were not as many holes to fill before COVID,” explained Teacher 6. She recalled how she still had students who struggled but was able to help them get to grade level.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' emotional needs during the pandemic?

During the spring 2020 pandemic, the district was all virtual. Teacher 6 discussed how they tried to connect with the students daily. The teacher would make daily videos to send the kids, and they could see how the students still enjoyed being connected. “I did as much as I could to let them know that they were still loved, they were still part of my family, and that we were still a class even though we could not all be together,” clarified T6. She talked about how she would try her best to meet the needs of the students.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' physical needs during the pandemic?

The district provided food through bus stops for families during the school shutdown. “We still gave out food bags to kids that needed it,” said T6. When the students returned in the fall of 2020, the district provided complimentary breakfast for everyone in the building. This helped the students get the needed nutrition before they started their day.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' educational needs during the pandemic?

When the students returned in the fall of 2020, everyone had to wear masks. "We had to wear masks and keep our distance," explained Teacher 6. At the elementary level, the focus of teaching changed from academics to being more about being healthy. "Teaching became more about keeping their masks on and helping them understand why it was important and keeping them healthy more than anything else," clarified T6.

Teaching the students virtually was challenging. Sometimes, the parents need to be educated on what needs to be done to help their students. "I was there to help if, like, the parents did not understand what we were doing or got confused, and they would contact me, and I would help them that way," stated T6. Parents do not support students' homework when they bring it home. Only about 50% of the students completed the assignment sent home.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' emotional needs after the pandemic?

Teacher 6 stated, "It has been a quest of mine to return to normal." After the pandemic, parents were less supportive of education than they were before the pandemic. Parents seem to have lost parenting skills, which were trying to be taught by teachers to the parents who needed the training. They were less likely to take responsibility for their student's disruptive actions at school when called.

"We have had an increase in behaviors," explained T6. Teacher 6 discussed how the increased behaviors have been not socially acceptable, which has increased office referrals. When it comes to behaviors, the district sometimes cannot do much about them without the support of the parents. "I do feel like hands are tied many times, but in the education system, hands are tied," explained Teacher 6. The teachers seem to have their hands tied

regarding behaviors in the classroom now. “I cannot do anything except have the child removed from the classroom, which is hard because I desire to help,” clarified T6. Anxiety among students and parents seemed to be higher after the pandemic than before. There was an increase in disruptive behaviors after the pandemic, which increased office referrals.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students’ physical needs after the pandemic?

The district still does the backpack program to help with the need for food among the families. “We still do food bags and clothes; it seems that is increasing,” said T6. She explained her concern about helping parents too much with their physical needs. “We are enabling the parents, and we want to meet the kid’s needs, but it is like we are going to have to meet the kid’s needs for the rest of their lives because we are enabling the parents to do nothing for their kids because everybody else will do for their kids,” explained Teacher 6.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students’ educational needs after the pandemic?

Teaching after the pandemic is more difficult because the students now coming into school have been on digital devices more than before the pandemic. The teacher found that students have more difficulty paying attention after the pandemic than before. “I feel like I have to stand on my head while teaching to get them to pay attention to me.”

Students are behind because of the learning loss. Students were behind in both reading and mathematics. “I feel like my students are a lot lower, and I have to break down my instruction a lot more than I have in the past,” explained Teacher 6. The teacher explained how students need homework, and the parents help them because students are behind academically. “I send homework every night, and half of it gets done,” stated T6.

She ended the interview by saying, “But I think there is a lot that has gone into where we are, educationally, academically, socially, emotionally, and COVID, I think, did have a big, a big part in it, but it is not to blame for everything.”

Administrator Narratives

Administrator 1 (A1)

Administrator 1 has been in public education for 13 years, all in the same district. Nine years were spent as a teacher, and four were spent in administration. He was an administrator before, during, and after the pandemic. The same questions the teachers were asked were asked of the administrators.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students’ emotional needs before the pandemic?

Focusing on social and emotional issues was not a large part of the school. “It was a small portion that we would try to help them through some of those social, emotional things, but it was not, it was not necessarily a large part of our focus,” explained Administrator 1. There were the typical students who would need to see the counselor over various issues, and if the issue was big enough and the counselor thought Administrator 1 needed to know, the counselor would give them the needed details. Sometimes, before the students go to the counselor, Administrator 1 tries to talk to the students and see if there is a solution. The typical issues with students were depression and anxiety, but most of that got worked out by talking to others who could help them.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students’ physical needs before the pandemic?

The school district this administrator works in is high-poverty, so the need for food and clothing was a big deal. They had a closet with snacks, personal hygiene items, and

clothing. “Not having cleanliness, hygiene, food, those are all struggles that were back then as well,” stated A1. Somewhere between 25 and 50% of the students needed some physical item.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students’ educational needs before the pandemic?

Most of the students were working at or slightly below grade level. The biggest struggle was getting students to turn in their work. “There were just the basic struggles; it is mainly the willingness to turn in things, not necessarily the lack of knowing,” explained A1. The students were about at grade level in the district. “I would say close to grade level for mathematically and for, like, English language arts, I would say, for the most part, they were working at, or maybe just below grade level, but functional enough to get through the material,” clarified Administrator 1.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students’ emotional needs during the pandemic?

Communication between teachers and students was lost during the shutdown of the pandemic. “I would say during the COVID time that that did not get much because there was not a lot of communication back and forth,” said A1. Social and emotional issues with students were dropped during the shutdown because there was little communication between teachers and students. When students came back in the fall semester of 2020, it was a different schedule, and they only went to school twice a week for the first semester. When school came back in the fall of 2020, students seemed to have lost a lot in the area of social and emotional.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students’ physical needs during the pandemic?

The district decided to load up buses and send the food out to the students and be delivered by staff members. The staff members on the bus routes could at least see the students and determine from there what else they might need. “It appeared the hygiene of the students was dropped off as important because they just did not get out much during the shutdown. Again, in a low-poverty area, things like food and those two meals they were getting at school are huge for them,” stated Administrator 1. During the closure of schools, food was still being sent to the school districts like it was before the closure of schools. Before the closure of schools, students were getting two meals a day. When the schools closed in the spring of 2020 due to COVID-19, districts sent home food to students through the school buses to make sure students were still getting food.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students’ educational needs during the pandemic?

During the pandemic and the shutdown of schools, students did not turn in any work in the fourth quarter of 2020. “We were trying, but there were just too many things going on,” explained Administrator 1. Educationally, the students got further behind even when returning to school in the fall of 2020. The district returned with seated classes two days a week for half of the students in the district. “So, they would be gone five days and got set back at that point because it was like having to reset every five days,” explained A1. Education during the restrictions was less about educating the students and more about the safety of the students. Losing the fourth quarter in the spring of 2020 and only having the students return to school two days a week in the fall of 2020 caused them to be further

behind. “Later in the year, we could see how behind the students were academically,” clarified Administrator 1.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students’ emotional needs after the pandemic?

When the pandemic was over, and the students returned to school without restrictions, there was an increase in disruptive behaviors and office referrals. There was close to a 20% increase in office referrals. “There were many more behavior issues,” explained A1 after the pandemic. Students' social skills had regressed because they had not had to use them. “There was an adjustment when the students returned to school because they had been in their comfort bubble,” explained A1.

The counseling department was bustling trying to help students with anxiety and depression to get them back into the classrooms. The district hired an outside counselor to help with all of the student's needs, and there was a waitlist for students between 10-20 students. “Her days increased that were at the school because there was just so much need, and our counselors can touch on those situations, but for more of a deeper therapy counseling, we had to get a specialist for that,” stated A1.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students’ physical needs after the pandemic?

Food and hygiene needs were significant issues after the pandemic. “Food and hygiene are my big physical things,” explained A1. The increase in the need for food prompted the backpack program to be increased across the building. “Kids just hung out in the pajamas all day and kind of forgot how to get themselves ready for school,” said A1. The students had forgotten how to get themselves ready for school every day. The school did offer showers for those students who had hygiene issues.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' educational needs after the pandemic?

Once the students returned to a regular schedule, the staff assessed them and could tell the learning gaps were worse than initially thought. "Once we regained strength, we started seeing the lack in reading and math skills," clarified Administrator 1. The district has educational coaches trying to help the teachers catch the students back to grade level, but it is more complex than one thought. The district had hired some paraprofessionals to help pull students into small groups for more intensive instruction, which seemed to help. The gap in learning persists across the district.

Administrator 2 (A2)

Administrator 2 has been in public education for nine years. Before the pandemic, A2 taught at the middle school level for four years as a middle school principal. The same questions the teachers were asked were asked of the administrators. He was an administrator before, during, and after the pandemic.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' emotional needs before the pandemic?

Before the pandemic, everything was as usual at school. Administrator 2 stated, "I am big on relationships. I think that is the foundation for everything for me." The administrator would talk to the students about various things in their lives or plans for the weekend. "We had much open dialog with kids, I would say, they felt pretty emotionally safe," stated A2. The administrator stressed how important it was for those relationships to be built with the students. The district had one counselor who handled the students' needs before the pandemic. There was one instance when the district brought in an outside counselor, but it was due to a suicide committed by a student.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students’ physical needs before the pandemic?

When a student needed extra clothing, food, or hygiene items, an empty classroom was dedicated. Students could go and get what they needed. Administrator 2 stated, “If you can think of it, you can name it. It was in that room.” Approximately less than 10% of the students would use that service provided by the school. There was perishable and non-perishable food in the room. Students who need a coat during winter can get those items taken care of by going to the room.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students’ educational needs before the pandemic?

The building had times for students to be tutored if they needed extra help in a subject area. “Pre-COVID, it was easier to manage the classes because there were no restrictions or barriers,” stated A2. It was easier to have students be in small groups for interventions because there were no restrictions. Most students seemed to be at grade level in reading and mathematics. The district was in school five days a week, and some teachers offered tutoring twice weekly.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students’ emotional needs during the pandemic?

Administrator 2 encouraged the staff to connect with the students during that fourth quarter to check in on the students. When the students returned in the fall of 2020, “they were like feral cats,” stated A2. Students had been out of school for so long that it seemed like they had forgotten what it was like to be in school. The staff and students had to wear masks when returning to school in the fall. “It was hard to communicate with students and staff when you could not see the person’s face. Behaviors increased during this time. It was

challenging to deal with the students' behaviors because of worrying about the other things we had to remember, such as contact tracing, ensuring everyone had their masks on, and maintaining the correct distance apart from each other." It seemed like the frustration levels of staff were increased, and they were very defensive.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' physical needs during the pandemic?

The district was a "super low-income district," stated A2. The district wanted to ensure the students still had food, so they created drop bags containing enough food for the family for a few days. The district would load buses and send them out on the bus routes to deliver the food. It did not matter the financial status of the family. "It did not matter if you were free and reduced, or, you know, your parents were millionaires if you wanted a drop bag," explained Administrator 2. The district would drop the bags of food off at mailboxes or porches, and "That was one way we helped try to keep them fed," said A2. If you do not have food, it is hard to expect the students to learn.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students' educational needs during the pandemic?

During the pandemic in the spring of 2020, when assignments were given to students and they returned them, this was counted for attendance during the fourth quarter. The district was a one-to-one for each student, so it was encouraged that teachers would provide students with work digitally, and if they could not get it digitally, then a paper copy would be provided for them. There were some areas for improvement in academics. The staff initially did not think it was that bad of a learning loss. The administrator discussed how some students seemed behind academically after they returned from the mandatory shutdown, "The difference was not nearly as noticeable academically."

Research Question: What did you do to support your students’ emotional needs after the pandemic?

When the students came back in the fall of 2021, the district adopted the slogan of “Return to Normalcy.” “We wanted to make it as normal as possible for our kids,” explained A2. The district brought in some counselors from other agencies to help deal with the issues the school counselors could not handle. Students were being seen to get help with handling their emotions. “There are just a lot of social and emotional deficits and how to process those emotions,” explained Administrator 2. Anxiety levels were high in students, which caused trouble for them to focus on their school work.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students’ physical needs after the pandemic?

The district had a backpack program and meal plans to offer food to students who needed extra nutrition to function at school. The food issues were essential to the building, but the students' more significant need was emotional. A2 stated that he did not have much to do with the student's' physical needs but was more on the emotional needs of the students.

Research Question: What did you do to support your students’ educational needs after the pandemic?

The academics of the students were lower than first thought. “As time went on, it got worse. We realized the gaps were larger,” explained Administrator 2. The district determined that students had significant learning gaps as teachers went through assessments with students and began sharing that information with staff. The building began to break students into groups based on assessments, which told the staff the students' missing standards so they could work on them. The learning gaps were a challenge to overcome. “I am still not sure we have got them there yet,” explained Administrator 2.

Themes

This qualitative narrative research aimed to understand how schools supported students' emotional, physical, and educational needs before, during, and after the pandemic. The study was conducted using research questions that were asked of all participants. The main research question: How did you support students' emotional, physical, and educational needs before, during, and after the pandemic? One theme that emerged from the interviews was the increase in behaviors, anxiety, and depression among students. Another theme discussed among the participants was the increased need for food, clothing, and hygiene. The last theme that emerged was learning loss among students.

Once all interviews were completed, the video was uploaded through the program Otter.ai to provide the researcher with a transcript. The researcher discussed the transcripts with the participants to check for accuracy. Other information gathered from this research study was archival data. The archival data was used to assess the curriculum based on grade-level standards. Those assessment scores were on districts giving grade-level assessments based on the Missouri Learning Standards for the grade levels interviewed for this research. Other archival data used were attendance data and free and reduced lunch numbers in districts of similar size to protect the districts that were interviewed. This information was gathered from the DESE website. The last piece of data collected was the assessment score from MAP/EOC data from other districts of similar size to protect the anonymity of the districts interviewed (DESE, 2024). This allowed the researcher to triangulate the data across the districts represented in this study. While all this information was searched, some themes emerged from the interviews. The themes that emerged from this research of transcripts, assessment data, and archival data were the following: the

increase in behaviors, anxiety, and depression; the increased need for food, clothing, and hygiene; and the issue of learning loss.

Increase in Negative Behaviors, Anxiety, and Depression

One of the themes that emerged during the interviews was the increase in behaviors, anxiety, and depression. The participants interviewed represented various grade levels and saw increased undesirable behaviors. When interviewed, both administrators discussed how office referrals for adverse behaviors had increased compared to before the pandemic. Five of the six teachers saw an increase in undesirable behaviors as well. Participants discussed the increase in unwanted behaviors, anxiety, and depression. This was obvious once the students returned to the classroom in the fall of 2020. Student referrals began to increase, and counselors saw an increase in student referrals. This increase led many districts to hire counselors outside of the school to help with the overflow of student needs.

The district-hired counselors were overwhelmed by the students' needs. There was an increase in cases that the district-level counselors saw. Seven of the eight districts interviewed in this study hired counselors from outside the district to help maintain the influx of students who needed help in emotional areas.

The unwanted behaviors in the younger grades were due to the lack of social skills and the ability to form relationships among their peers and adults. The older grades saw an increase in emotional behaviors like anxiety and depression. The participants talked about anxiety among students across all grade levels being high because the students did not know what was going to be expected next. Depression increased at the higher grades because students could not work through the process alone. Most students during this time only communicated with one another via a digital device. Therefore, they struggled with those social interactions when they returned to school.

Teachers discussed that maintaining the students' attention was difficult during and after the pandemic. This difficulty was due to students constantly leaving the class with undesirable behaviors, and that interruption also interrupted the learning of the other students. Students would leave class to receive help with their anxiety and depression issues, which increased after the pandemic. The constant leaving of class and interruptions led to lower assessment scores as students tried to return to the school routine.

Data was collected throughout the interview to determine the validity and reliability of this theme. The transcripts were analyzed for common themes, and the increase in undesirable behaviors, anxiety, and depression was commonly talked about during all of the interviews. To support this theme, the researcher asked about any data they may be able to share on the increase in unwanted behaviors, anxiety, and depression. After the pandemic, the districts saw increased cases being sent to school counselors. School counselors in the respective district interviewed saw almost a 50% increase in cases across the district. When the school administrators saw this data, they began to research counselors outside the school district to help alleviate some pressure off the school counselors. Behavior data involving suspensions in all public schools across Missouri increased from the 2020/2021 school year by 1.7%. School expulsions from across the state increased from six in the 2020/2021 school year to 33 in the 2022/2023 school year. Data from districts of like size and demographics was analyzed, and the suspensions increased by .88% from 2020/2021 to 2022/2023 (DESE, 2024).

Increased Need for Food, Clothing, and Hygiene

Another theme from the interviews was the increased need for food, clothing, and hygiene for students. Every district in this study offered food to families during the shutdown of the pandemic. Cafeteria personnel from each district prepared food bags, which

were then loaded onto the school buses. Cafeteria staff would document the number of food bags prepared and how many returned to the school when delivery was not made. The teachers would be given a specific bus to ride and go out on the deliveries. Some families would wait at the bus stops for food delivery. Some districts would drop off the food on the porches of families. Six of the eight participants would ride along bus routes to see the students and communicate with families. If the family needed other services but could not contact others for help, then the district would make sure they put them in contact with the right people.

When the students returned in the fall of 2020, it was apparent that the need for clothing had begun to emerge. Both of the administrators interviewed stated the office tracked the increased need for these items because they would need to send them to the counselor or contact an outside agency to provide those needs; students were wearing shoes that were too small for them or clothing that did not fit. All of the districts either had a place on campus or a local charity that would provide the needed clothing articles to the families. Participants T1, T2, and A2 stated how students at the high school level needed clothing and would be able to gain access to the needed items.

Along with the need for clothing and food was the need for personal hygiene items. During the interviews, participants discussed how the need increased for students who had food and hygiene issues. As discussed in the interviews, some students were not ready to go anywhere during the shutdown because everything was closed due to government restrictions. The students returned to class in the fall of 2020, and some needed hygiene issues taken care of. Five districts offered showers to those students who might not have had access to showers during the pandemic. The younger students were sent to the school nurse to have some hygiene issues taken care of during the pandemic.

Because of the need for these items, some students began to intimidate those who needed them. This would increase behavior referrals to the office and lead to time out of class, which affected the student's education. The students would miss out on critical concepts discussed in class because of their behavior.

Data collected to support this theme was based on transcripts, assessment data, and archival data. This allowed the researcher to evaluate an average of the number of students needing these items before, during, and after the pandemic. The first data to evaluate was the transcripts. These transcripts revealed that all participants discussed the increased need for food, clothing, and hygiene at school.

Participants T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, A1, and A2 discussed how students needed food, clothing, and hygiene items to function at school regardless of the student's age. The participants supported this increased need for food, clothing, and hygiene by sharing archival data on the increase in their districts. There was an average across all districts of a 45% increase in the needed items.

The districts interviewed in this study discussed the assessments they created based on the Missouri Learning Standards (DESE, 2024). Those assessments were given to the students at the beginning of the year in 2021/2022 and at the end of the school year to determine growth. The educators discussed how the students were not at grade level in general. Six of the participants interviewed discussed the need to increase the knowledge base for students so they could be back at grade level.

The researcher gleaned data on MAP/EOC results for school districts with similar demographics to those interviewed for this study. From the districts used in this study, in the first year after the pandemic, 2020/2021, the average number of students below basic on the state assessments was 27.5%. By the school year 2022/2023, the average for students who

scored below basic had decreased to 21%. This information aligns with the grade-level assessments based on the Missouri Learning Standards given to the students.

Data from Missouri on the eligibility of free and reduced lunch programs showed an increase of 1.5% in the number of students using this service from the 2020/2021 school year to 2022/2023. Data from similar districts was used for this information to protect the districts interviewed. The eligibility for students to use the free and reduced lunch program in similar schools increased by 1.9% (DESE, 2024).

Learning Loss

The final theme that resonated with all districts involved in this research was learning loss with all students. Every district represented in this research study discussed the amount of learning loss among students. When the participants discussed the issue of learning loss, each participant noted concern. When given a limited amount of time, the participants were still determining how they would have enough time to get the students back to grade level.

In the spring of 2020, when schools shut down across Missouri, teachers and administrators talked about how little to no work was being completed during that time. The grades for the second semester were locked in at what the students had when schools shut down. The staff could not mandate any work be completed during that time. Some parents were involved in their children's education and would help them. Six participants talked about how they could tell some students were on a digital device when most of the school was shut down. When the students returned in the fall of 2020, they struggled to pay attention to the teacher but wanted to be on the devices at school.

Staff knew in the fall of 2020 that students needed to regain the loss of education but discovered the magnitude the following year. The participants discussed how staff began to

do more targeted assessments in reading and math. Participants of the districts involved in this study discussed the assessments the districts created based on the Missouri Learning Standards (DESE, 2024). Those assessments were given to the students at the beginning of the year in 2021/2022 and at the end of the school year to determine growth. The educators discussed how the students were not at grade level in general. MAP/EOC data across Missouri was reviewed. The average number of students below basic on the state assessments was 27.5% in the 2020/2021 school year. By the school year 2022/2023, the average for students who scored below basic at state assessments had decreased to 21%.

The participants of younger grades talked about how wearing masks put the students behind. Students could not see the other's faces and be able to see the emotion behind their actions. The teachers felt they needed to teach emotions and social skills repeatedly. The other aspect of keeping the faces covered with masks hinders the ability of younger grades to acquire the needed reading skills. Face coverings did not allow the student to see how letters were made with the mouth to produce the correct sound. This, in turn, hindered the student's ability to produce the correct speech sounds.

Participants discussed how districts still asked teachers to cover the current grade-level curriculum and try to catch up with the students who were behind. Most participants offered tutoring services for students to gain the missed academics needed. One of the participants discussed how it seems like students need to catch up because the curriculum is written for the current grade level, and if students are away from that grade level, it is easier to bring them up to current standards.

Transcripts, archival data, and grade-level assessments supported this theme. The first piece of data which the researcher analyzed was the transcripts. All eight participants talked about how the shutdown of schools during the pandemic led to increased learning

loss in reading and math. One of the participants discussed that he felt like the students were at grade level in both reading and math at the high school level. When the students returned to school after the closures, they began to see an increase in students being behind their grade level expectations.

Other data gathered from and used to determine the lower test scores was attendance rates across the state of Missouri and the districts of similar demographics. Missouri law requires students to attend school for 1,044 hours per school year. So, the attendance standard in Missouri is 90%, and student enrollment should be at 90% or above of attendance. In the 2021/2022 school year, attendance rates across the state were 76.2%, below the state's expected standard. Data from districts of similar demographics to those interviewed in the research showed an attendance rate for the same period of 82.62% (DESE, 2024). When reviewing this data, students across the state averaged approximately 796 of the required 1,044 hours. Schools of similar demographics averaged approximately 863 of the required 1,044 education hours.

Summary

This qualitative narrative study sought to understand the lived experiences of staff members who taught children before, during, and after the pandemic. This chapter provided insight into those lived experiences among staff by looking at the data collected from each interview. Those interviews were conducted online with a program called Zoom, which addressed the research question of how educators supported students before, during, and after the pandemic in the students' psychological/emotional, physical, and educational needs.

Interviews among the participants revealed some common themes. One of the main themes that all participants saw was the increase in student anxiety and undesirable

behaviors after the pandemic. The other central theme was the loss of learning after the pandemic. Every participant discussed the loss of learning during and after the pandemic. Losses were more noticeable as the year after the pandemic progressed. The concern among the participants was how to get the students caught up to grade level without hindering their current education and having students fall farther behind. All participants discussed how difficult it was to teach students during and after the pandemic.

Chapter Five will conclude this study, offering the researcher's thoughts and what was discovered during the participant interviews. These participants were from Missouri public school systems that shut down in the spring of 2020 and resumed various student contact for the 2020/2021 school year. The researcher will discuss the implications of this research and the findings. The chapter will conclude with recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This qualitative narrative study aims to understand how educators supported students' psychological/emotional, physical, and educational needs before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Education was significantly impacted globally in the spring of 2020 once COVID-19 cases began to be reported (Stokes et al., 2020). The spread of this new virus happened rapidly and affected densely populated areas, and schools happened to be one of those areas that saw increases in COVID-19 cases. This increase in cases impacted how schools operated through the pandemic (Goldstein, 2020). Schools closed worldwide, disrupting student acquisition of academic skills (Engzell et al., 2021; Van Lancker & Parolin, 2020). The impact of the loss of learning on students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds was significant and did affect all students at some level (Engzell et al., 2021; Van de Werfhorst, 2021). These changes in how education was delivered to students during the pandemic have not been seen in recent history.

Virtual education took much work for most students to acquire the needed information and academic content for school. When schools transitioned from classroom to virtual education, the districts found that students needed to be trained and prepared for this next phase in education (Bao et al., 2020; Donnelly & Patrinos, 2022; Richter et al., 2022). The acquisition of educational skills by students from all backgrounds was affected by schools closing and the expectation for all students to receive instruction virtually. Students of low-income status suffered the most significant loss in education, especially in reading,

due to the inability to effectively teach reading through the virtual method (Haeck & Lefebvre, 2020).

After reviewing the literature, the researcher determined that no research was done on teachers' perceptions before, during, or after the pandemic. The study completed in this paper will fill this gap in the literature. The central questions of this research were answered: How did teachers support the students' psychological/emotional, physical, and educational needs before, during, and after the pandemic?

The theoretical framework for this research incorporated Maslow's theory on human motivation (Maslow, 1943). Motivation determines how involved students are in their learning. School closings and virtual learning affect students' motivation levels. The research also explored the emotional and psychological aspects of students' learning. This approach allows the researcher to understand students' many challenges in attempting to learn at school while staying motivated.

Chapter Five concludes the qualitative narrative study. The researcher will summarize the research findings, discuss the limitations and delimitations of the study, and summarize the methods used. The summary of findings will detail how the data is related to the theoretical framework of the paper. Recommendations for future research and the implications of this research will complete this study.

Limitations and Delimitations

One limitation of this study was that it only asked participants from public schools in Missouri. This would have limited the scope of the research by not looking at private schools and how they supported students. Another area for improvement was the assumption that the participants would complete the interview without their biases or opinions within the interview. The study was only limited to six teachers and two

administrators. This also limited the scope of the study, not including other administrators and support staff. Participants were asked to remember information and situations from their school district from four years ago, which may have limited the ability of the participant to remember everything about the shutdown.

The delimitations of this study included only questions that the researcher had asked. All participants were asked the research questions. Some other questions may have been asked during the interview, which may have yet to be asked of all participants. Research for this study was delimited to only public schools that attended school before, during, and after the pandemic. Another delimitation was only asking educators how they meet the students' psychological/emotional, physical, and educational needs before, during, and after the pandemic.

Summary of Methods

This qualitative narrative study chose eight participants. Six teachers and two administrators were chosen from public schools in Missouri. The participants were selected based on the criteria of school size. Small schools have up to 500 total students in the district, medium-size schools have between 500 and 2,000 students, and large schools have over 2,000 students. Participants for this study were told their identity would remain confidential and only the researcher would know the identity. Each participant was told not to identify any school district in the interview, and if the participant mentioned the school district, the researcher erased it from the transcript. The researcher meticulously reviewed each transcript, looking for any identifiable information about the participant or school district, and erased it from the transcript. Once the researcher went through each transcript, the transcript was sent back to each participant and verified that all interview information was correct.

When all information was verified, corrected, and erased from any identifiable information erased, the researcher began to look for common words among all participants. A spreadsheet was created to track the common words used during the interviews. Also, the researcher looked for common themes among participants. Themes were selected from across all interviews. The participants may not have used the exact words, but the theme was consistent with those of other participants in the study. The data used in the interviews were grouped in spreadsheets and then transposed into tables so the reader could understand them.

Summary of Findings

Each participant in this study was asked what they did to support their students' emotional, physical, and educational needs before the pandemic. Participants discussed that students saw a counselor when needed, and the need to see a counselor before the pandemic was not prevalent. Students had access to food at school and would sometimes bring their lunches or lunch from the school. The schools would offer a breakfast program to help students meet their food needs. Most students before the pandemic were on grade level or slightly behind. Students would complete assignments and would be attentive in classes.

The second question was about what the participants did to support their students' emotional, physical, and educational needs during the pandemic. All participants discussed how educating students during the pandemic was more difficult than ever. Students were not always on the internet, whether they could not obtain service or parents did not see it as a requirement. Students were behind because of school being closed in the spring of 2020. Participants did not know how far students had regressed and what each student needed to perform at the next grade level when they returned in the fall of 2020. Students were not as social as they were before because students would rely on social media to communicate

with each other. The physical needs of students grew during the pandemic. Families lost jobs, and the need for food and hygiene was essential. All participants discussed how their districts would load school buses with food and deliver it to families on bus routes. This would allow the education staff to see their students and determine what the families needed visibly.

The third question was about what the teacher did to support their students' emotional, physical, and educational needs after the pandemic. According to the school counselors at each of the districts, the anxiety of students had increased from before the pandemic. The teachers discussed the data, which was anecdotal from the school counselors. This data was collected from anecdotal notations by the district counselors. Students needed more attention from counselors and teachers because their anxiety levels were so great. The participants talked about how, after the pandemic and schools were back to regular attendance, the need for school counselors increased, and districts were hiring extra counselors to help deal with the issues. With the rise of anxiety, the participants discussed the surge in undesirable behaviors. The administrators in this study addressed the increase in office referrals after the pandemic. Families required more help in the area of food for the children. Districts across all participants had backpack programs where food was sent home with the students before the weekend. Educationally, participants stated they knew students were behind, but the extent was not revealed until the year after all of the restrictions from the pandemic had been lifted. The teachers could not honestly assess students to determine the level of learning loss.

The themes emerged through the interviews, archival data, and assessment data. The interviews were transcribed and read many times for themes and keywords. Assessment data was taken from two different sources. First, each district interviewed in this study created an

assessment based on the Missouri Learning Standards (DESE, 2024). Those assessments were made with grade-level teams, or if the district had a curriculum director, they were involved. The second assessment data was from MAP/EOC scores from districts of similar demographics as the districts interviewed and was obtained from DESE's website. The archival data was noted during the interviews. That data showed the level of concern all participants had for their students.

Participants discussed the increase in undesirable behaviors, anxiety, and depression. This was apparent once the students returned to the classroom in the fall of 2020. Teachers and administrators began to see an increase in student referrals, and counselors saw an increase in students. Data on suspensions and expulsions from DESE supported increased undesirable behaviors (DESE, 2024). This increase led many districts to hire counselors outside of the school to help with the overflow of student needs.

Data was collected throughout the interview to determine the validity and reliability of this theme. The transcripts were analyzed for common themes, and the increase in undesirable behaviors, anxiety, and depression was commonly talked about during the interviews. To support this theme, the researcher asked about any data they may be able to share on the increase in unwanted behaviors, anxiety, and depression. After the pandemic, the districts saw increased cases being sent to school counselors. School counselors in the respective district interviewed saw about a 50% increase in cases across the district. When the school administrators saw this data, they began to research counselors outside the school district to help alleviate some pressure off the school counselors. The last part of the data the researcher analyzed was assessment scores across the district. The assessment scores were lower, and when the researcher asked the participants about the scores, they stated that the

students were out of class more after the pandemic, which gave them less seat time in the classroom—the less seat time in the school resulted in lower assessment scores.

Another apparent theme during the data research was the increase in students' food, clothing, and hygiene needs. Participants discussed how students came to school hungry and needed more clothing or personal hygiene. These issues made students miss more classes, affecting their education. Students who did not have their basic needs met needed more motivation to learn the material. Data on the eligibility of free and reduced lunch programs with schools supported this theme (DESE, 2024).

The data collected by the researcher to support this theme were transcripts, assessment data, and archival data on the percentage of students needing these items before, during, and after the pandemic. First, the transcripts revealed that all participants discussed the increased need for food, clothing, and hygiene at school. The participants told how students needed food, clothing, and hygiene items to function in school regardless of age. The participants supported this increased need for those items by sharing data on the percentage of increase. The participants said the school office would prepare the food bags to go home to needy families. There had been a 45% increase in students needing these items to be sent compared to before the pandemic. The final piece of data the participants looked at was assessment data. The assessment data was not one joint assessment among all schools; it was an assessment created from Missouri Grade Level standards by staff to measure if students were at grade level. While looking at the data, participants could see that the students were not at grade level when looking at those assessments and attributed some of the decreases in being at grade level because students were out of class more because of the need for food, clothing, and hygiene. A1 discussed how students were allowed to use the showers at school if they needed their hygiene needs taken care of at school.

The final theme was the amount of learning loss among students. The participants discussed that almost all of their students had some learning loss. The participants who taught at the high school level saw less learning loss than the early grades. By the time students reached the high school level, they could read and do basic math for the most part. Therefore, the learning loss could have been more significant in the elementary grades.

Data was collected to support this theme. First, the researcher looked at transcripts and determined that every participant discussed how the pandemic affected learning loss. T1 stated that the district he taught in was okay with students being at grade level before the pandemic. However, when they returned to school after all the restrictions had been lifted, they saw a significant increase in grade-level students. The assessment data, created by staff in districts to determine if students were at grade based upon the Missouri Learning Standards, was looked at in each of the districts the participants taught. The archival data the participants looked at was the district's curriculum assessments, and they could see, based on those scores, that students needed to be at grade level. There needed to be a consistent curriculum for all participants to determine the consistency among districts. The researcher reviewed DESE's MAP/EOC data to support this theme. Also, data on students' attendance during this time was acquired to support the theme (DESE, 2024).

Discussion of Findings

Participants involved in this qualitative narrative research study sought to answer three questions. First, how did you support students' psychological/emotional, physical, and educational needs before the pandemic? Second, how did you support students' psychological/emotional, physical, and educational needs during the pandemic? Third, how did you support students' psychological/emotional, physical, and educational needs after the pandemic? Other questions were asked, which were associated with the answers given by

the participants that would further explain how students were supported. Answers to these questions helped the researcher understand how students were supported before, during, and after the pandemic. Maslow's theory on human motivation helped set the basis for the research, as the participants' interviews noted that basic needs must be met for students to learn effectively.

One of the first themes discovered from the interviews was the increase in undesirable behaviors, anxiety, and depression. Before the pandemic and schools shut down, school districts had at least one counselor for the building, and there was no need for more. Teacher #2 discussed how anxiety among students has seemed to increase over the last 24 years of education, so he was not surprised by the increase in anxiety levels. All of the participants discussed how students were typical year after year when it came to students having anxiety and depression. Normal undesirable behaviors were pretty typical for schools before the pandemic. How the students interacted with their social environment and education predicted future academic outcomes (Eccles et al., 2013). The need for belonging among students was critical because it followed the theory put forth by Maslow (1943).

Participants' concerns for the students increased during the school shutdown phase, and then students were brought back in the fall of 2020. Participants in this research could not see their students daily to ensure their physical well-being was cared for in the home. Participants T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, A1, and A2 discussed that during the closure of schools, they would try to reach the students through Google Classroom, Zoom, email, or phone calls. Students spent less time completing classroom assignments provided by the teacher when schools went virtual than before the schools' closure (Letzel et al., 2020). When talking to the educators, some students were more concerned with how COVID-19 would affect them. The participants could tell the students had either been watching the

news or were listening to their parents discuss the effects of COVID-19. Participants discussed that the level of anxiety increased during the beginning of the shutdown.

Participants T1, T2, and A2 discussed that at the higher grade levels, they could start to see some of the students becoming depressed because their everyday routines had been disrupted. Educators were concerned with self-harm by some of the students because they were at home all the time and their home were not a protective or safe place. During and after the pandemic, there were notable increases in anxiety and depression observed among adolescents (Jo et al., 2023). One of the participants discussed that at the higher grades, students were not that much behind in grade level, but the level of anxiety among students had increased significantly. The increase in anxiety was a contributing factor to students not gaining the needed education. Students' anxiety levels had risen from before the pandemic. Anxiety among students was discussed in the review of literature. However, I do not believe the review of literature discussed the anxiety issue to the extent needed. With the mandates for social distancing during the pandemic, students could not communicate normally with peers. This led to students experiencing higher psychological issues due to social isolation (Magson et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2020). The pandemic deepened the psychological issues among students, with a notable difference in anxiety and depression (Jo et al., 2023). A2 talked about a student who committed suicide during the pandemic. This information from A2 tied back to the review of literature on how there was a rise in suicide rates among students (Manzar et al., 2021; Miron et al., 2019).

Students in the upper grades could not socialize with their peers because of the shutdown. The shutdown did affect how students socialized during the pandemic. In the early grades, educators saw that social skills among students deteriorated. Students across all grade levels have lost the ability to socialize with their peers. Participants T3, T4, T5,

and T6 discussed how they had to teach basic social skills to students. Students' social skills had diminished during the pandemic, and teachers could see the effects when students began returning to school after the pandemic. One of the participants discussed how, before the pandemic, students would sit together in the lunchroom and socialize with each other. After the pandemic, T2 noticed how students were on their devices and were not talking during lunchtime. They said this was a significant change from before the pandemic. Students could only understand how to speak with one another if it was on a device. The participants discussed how the students seemed to have lost their connection with each other because of the school closure.

Administrators and teachers are concerned about handling the unwanted behaviors they see. A2 discussed how their district was implementing Positive Intervention Behavior Supports (PBIS). This has seemed to help stop some of the undesirable behaviors, but the educator stated it was still too early to tell the full benefit of this program.

Another theme that emerged through the interviews was the increased need for food, clothing, and hygiene. Maslow (1943) discussed that basic needs must be met at the first level to move on to the next level in the theory. Those basic needs were met when students needed food or clothing. Before the pandemic, the physical needs of student participants saw a small percentage of students in need of basic needs such as food, clothing, and hygiene. The majority of students met these needs at home. One of the participants discussed how food and water would be provided in the classroom for all students. Early in their career, these educators learned that students would not learn at school if they were hungry and thirsty. This was in line with Maslow's theory of human motivation (Maslow, 1943). Another participant discussed the need for some hygiene needs in the grade levels

they taught. The district would provide a shower for students who needed their personal hygiene needs met.

In order to meet the nutritional needs of the students, it was crucial to attend to their physical needs during and after the pandemic. Schools have always provided lunch and breakfast to students, knowing that meeting one of the basic needs would give students a better chance at learning during the day. When the schools closed, there was an immediate concern that students would need more nutrition. All participants discussed how every district loaded up school buses and delivered food to drop-off points for families. The educators would be on the buses as the food was delivered to see the students and determine what else was needed. Some participants discussed how local charities in the schools' communities would donate various food and hygiene items to help families in need. Once the students returned in the fall of 2020, the districts had food programs to feed the students breakfast and lunch again, even with physical restrictions for staff and students. Participants T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, A1, and A2 discussed how the districts started a student backpack program. Every week on Friday, the students were given a backpack full of food that was sent home to them. This would help the families with the needed food resources for their students. Shanks and Harden (2016) discussed how schools adopted the weekend food backpack program. This program has proven to increase math and reading scores among students (Kurtz et al., 2020). Since Maslow (1943) stated that food was a basic human need, schools needed to make sure students were fed so they could learn.

Hygiene was needed, and participants T1, T2, A1, and A2 discussed how schools would allow students to use showers to help with hygiene issues. Clothing was another issue for some families. The participants discussed how local charities would help pick up the students' clothing and supplies. A few participants discussed how they would purchase

items independently to ensure the students were cared for after the pandemic. Participants T1, T2, T3, T4, A1, and A2 discussed how the communities stepped up to help with their needs. Educator T6, who was interviewed, said they were concerned about how parents relied on the handouts and did not try to obtain items independently. Educator T6 was also concerned that this could continue into the foreseeable future.

The final theme from the interviews was learning loss among the students. Some researchers reported a trend where students suffered a significant learning loss equivalent to approximately one-fifth of a school year due to the prolonged closure of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic (Engzell et al., 2021). Some predictions have elevated that number to a loss of up to one year of education (Araya, 2021).

“Before the pandemic, the educational needs of the students were fairly typical for all grade levels,” stated T1. Participant T1 discussed how deadlines were given to students and how the students were held to those deadlines. Students had a level of responsibility in completing assignments. Most students were at grade level when starting school years before the pandemic. The interviews showed how it was typical for a few students to be behind in grade-level expectations. However, those students received special education services or would be referred for special education.

The educational needs of students during the pandemic were challenging. The closure of schools during the pandemic made it difficult for students to acquire the needed literacy skills. Poor literacy skills can significantly impact students (Richter et al., 2022). Young children in public schools seemed to be the most at risk for the loss of literacy skills being acquired (Tomasik et al., 2021). Most participants discussed how teaching during the pandemic was one of the toughest in their careers. Most people needed to understand how education would be obtained during this time. When the bus routes delivered food to

families, they also delivered assignments. Paper assignments were given to students who did not have access to the internet. On returning trips to the bus stops, completed assignments were picked up and returned to school. Those assignments underwent a decontamination process before they were delivered to the educators to be graded. Some participants discussed that once the assignments were returned to them, this counted as attendance for those students.

The education of the students after the pandemic looked very different than before the pandemic. Educators focused on trying to get students caught up on the deficient areas. Approximately one-fifth of a school year was lost due to the closure of schools (Engzell et al., 2021). All participants discussed how difficult it was to teach the students after all the restrictions were lifted. The participants discussed how the focus had shifted to understanding how significant the educational gaps were and how they affected the students. Some participants were concerned about passing students on to the next grade level, knowing crucial building blocks needed to be added, but hoping the next grade level would catch them up to the current grade level. There were alarming declines in students' academic performance when the students re-entered school in the fall of 2020 (Kuhfeld et al., 2020). Participant T6 discussed the fear of never being able to catch the students back up from what they had lost. Some students regressed farther than other students. All participants discussed how almost all students were behind, especially in reading and math. Undesirable behaviors of students across all grade levels had increased, which hindered their ability to gain lost information. It took two years after the pandemic to understand how significant the learning loss would be among students. The participants discussed how neither the administration nor educators knew how to handle the level of learning loss. Especially in the younger grades where most students were learning the fundamentals of

education and those were lost. The boards of education and administrators still expected the current grade level curriculum to be taught but did not understand how the students would fill the needed gaps.

There were a few surprises during this research. Participants T3, T5, and T6 discussed how it seemed like, after the pandemic, parents had forgotten how to parent their children. Participant T6 discussed the need for parenting classes. They said that after the students returned from the school closure, the parents did not seem to know how to parent children and needed more classes in parenting skills to be offered. T6 said, “Our district offered parenting classes for those who needed the classes after the pandemic, but the parents who showed up to the classes were not the ones who needed the classes.” T5 stated that with the increase in unwanted behaviors, staff had to call home to parents more to discuss the child’s behavior. The parents appeared disinterested and did not view the undesirable behaviors as their responsibility. T5 said the unwanted behaviors were sent to the building-level administration, increasing office referrals. A1 and A2 both discussed the increase in office referrals after the pandemic.

Another area of surprise was the hygiene of the students. In the review of existing literature, something had yet to be said about the lack of hygiene during and after the pandemic. Participants T1, T2, A1, and A2 discussed the lack of hygiene and how students needed to remember how to prepare themselves for school. T2 talked about how the parents let their students get ready for school by themselves and students would come to school in dirty clothes or had not showered. T2 discussed how the school nurse would try to ensure that students who needed a shower could take one. He said the district would obtain permission from the parents before any showers were given at school. T3, T4, and T6 did discuss how their district would sometimes put clean clothes on students when they came to

school in dirty clothes, and then while the students were at school, the staff would make sure the dirty clothes were washed.

One of the more essential items not suspected during the research was the educators' level of care and concern for students. Educators cared about their students before the pandemic, but it was evident that during and after the pandemic, educators cared much more about the students whom they serve. During the interviews with educators, the researcher could hear their voices and see on video their expressions when discussing the level of care during and after the pandemic. During the pandemic, most staff were more concerned about ensuring the students' basic needs were met than educating the students in the current grade level curriculum. After the pandemic, the researcher could hear, through the participants' voices when interviewed, how the level of care and concern for the students increased during and after the pandemic. This level of care and concern went beyond just educating students. However, educators were now concerned with educating the child because they knew students were behind.

Another surprise was the increased need for substitutes during the pandemic. The districts needed substitutes for staff who acquired COVID-19. One participant discussed how, at one point, there were not enough substitutes to cover everyone, so the district would take away the staff's planning time and use that teacher as a substitute. This would increase the time outside school hours for teachers to plan their lessons.

Implications

This qualitative narrative study aims to understand how educators supported students' psychological/emotional, physical, and educational needs before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic. Maslow's Theory of Human Motivation was the theory that pulled this research together (Maslow, 1943). Maslow discussed that the first level was the

basic needs of an individual. Those needs must be met before one moves on to the next level. Each level in the theory of human motivation is built upon the preceding level. When comparing this theory to the pandemic and how it affected students in education, the researcher found that basic needs such as food, clothing, and shelter must be met before students are motivated to learn. Without those basic needs being met, students would not be able to learn the material needed to progress to the next grade level. This study expanded upon the existing literature, which lacked how teachers supported students before, during, and after the pandemic. There was a lack of studies on whether students in rural areas were supported by teachers before, during, and after the pandemic.

This research was conducted through participant interviews, which tied back to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. The information gained through this research study added to and expanded the research of previous studies. No research was found in the review of existing literature that tried to understand the perception of educators and what they lived before, during, and after the pandemic. This information gained through the educators' perception adds to the research on this phenomenon. This information allows the researcher to make future recommendations for research in this area so school districts can understand how to handle another situation if schools ever need to close because of a worldwide pandemic.

One of the first items school districts should consider is how to support students' learning loss. All of the participants in this study saw learning loss in students. Educators found that shutting schools down for even a tiny period dramatically affected students and their education. Students suffered a significant learning loss equivalent to approximately one-fifth of a school year due to the prolonged closure of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic (Engzell et al., 2021). Araya (2021) stated that some researchers have predicted

that some students are losing up to almost a year of education because of the pandemic. Teachers must now consider how to help students regain the information lost during the closure. Teachers are trying to teach the grade-level material and help students regain the material lost due to the pandemic. The gaps in education are more significant than first suspected with students. Teachers will now need to find a way to maintain grade-level curricula while simultaneously bringing students behind up to grade level. Teachers will need time to work with other grade levels above and below them to plan how to regain the knowledge lost. The interviews showed more learning loss from the younger grades than in high school. The districts must assess how to gain the missed education the students lost during the pandemic and maintain current grade level material.

Another suggestion for school districts is an increased awareness of behavior expectations. Administrators and teachers have seen an increase in undesirable behaviors among students in all grade levels—from disrespect to fighting at school. The extended closures of schools and repercussions of the pandemic have led to a multitude of mental health challenges and negative lifestyle patterns, which has led to an impact on the overall well-being of students (Charatcharoenwitthaya & Niltwat, 2022; Durante & Lau, 2022). Counselors have seen an increase in anxiety, depression, and the lack of social skills among students. These deficits have led to struggles for principals and teachers trying to navigate their day with the increase in office referrals. District-level administration must bring professional development to their district involving emotional intelligence and trauma-informed topics to all staff. This would allow all staff to handle the increased behavioral issues and understand the issues with anxiety and depression since the pandemic.

Lastly, school districts must be the resource center for food, clothing, and hygiene items. Kurtz et al. (2020) stated that weekend food backpack programs have been proven to

increase math and reading scores. Some school districts have adopted a weekend food backpack program for students in family homes with food insecurities to alleviate some childhood hunger (Shanks & Harden, 2016). The primary physiological needs of students must be met in the first level of Maslow's Theory of Human Motivation (Maslow, 1943). The district might need to work with local churches and charitable organizations to help make sure these basic needs are met so students can learn in the classroom.

The information from this study could be helpful to all educators. They are the ones who have experienced the front lines of the pandemic and have seen changes among the student population. The students must gain the information that was lost during the school closures. This will allow the students to return to grade level and not suffer learning loss. They understand how education was before, during, and after the pandemic, and it is essential to know where education is going in the future. Grade-level curriculum in districts will still be taught year after year regardless of whether students are still suffering from learning loss. With a clear road map of how to approach curriculum and undesirable behaviors for these students who suffered the loss during the pandemic, students in this generation will likely stay caught up in education and social skills. The districts will need to be more involved in professional development in learning loss and psychological issues so staff will know how to help students.

Lastly, another implication was the school districts' impact on serving the students' basic needs. Districts did serve students and their families meals and would make sure they were taken care of during the pandemic. The primary purpose of a school district is to educate the students, but during this time of the pandemic, districts could not meet the educational needs of the students. This was detrimental to the students and their educational progress.

Recommendations for Future Research

The researcher sought to understand how educators supported students' psychological/emotional, physical, and educational needs before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic. The researcher selected six teachers and two administrators from across Missouri to represent the data in this research. Future researchers could include more participants to understand how educators support students—expanding this research to more educators not only in Missouri but across the United States to understand if there is consistency in more participants instead of just a few.

Another area of future research is understanding the depth of the gaps in learning loss. All participants in this research discussed how students from all grade levels suffered from learning loss. If educators understood the depth of the learning loss and had a plan to help students recover from the shutdown, then the students would be able to gain back from the gaps in learning. The government increased money for school districts to help with the gaps in the education of students, but there needed to be a clear plan to solve the issue. Future research into the learning gaps and how to fill those gaps would greatly benefit students and educators.

In the area of psychological/emotional, future research could seek to understand how and why anxiety has increased among students during and after the pandemic and the effects it has on education. Through this current study, participants talked about how every district needed more counselors, whether they were hired as district employees or contracted from outside services. With the increased need for counseling services, researchers need to understand how this phenomenon has affected our students. Some of the participants did discuss students having more depressant moods after the pandemic than before. The

questions would be to understand why there was an increase in anxiety and depression from the pandemic and how to solve those issues in the future.

These possible future research areas would align with Maslow's theory of human motivation (Maslow, 1943). Understanding how students' and families' basic needs are met will help us understand the motivation behind future research in the abovementioned areas. The areas of future research listed in this study will help us be better prepared for any future phenomena the world of education just endured.

Conclusion

One of the main points of this research was the learning gaps students are now facing and will face as they progress through school and life. Students who have gone to school through the pandemic now face the world of education with learning gaps. These gaps will become more apparent as students increase grade levels year after year and then enter the workforce at some point. The shutdown of schools and the limitations on returning to school in the fall of 2020 will have a resounding impact on the lives of many students worldwide for years to come. Maslow stated in his research on human motivation that basic needs must be met before moving forward (Maslow, 1943). When food becomes more important in students' lives than education, little to no learning will be attained. Students were concerned about how they were going to eat during the pandemic. Some families lost their jobs and had to worry about housing, a basic need that must be met. It has been discovered through this research that when basic needs are not met, it appears that the anxiety of people increases overall.

This qualitative study found the theme of increased undesirable behaviors. Administrators discussed the increase in office referrals of students to district staff members. Some parents did not want to be involved in the unwanted behavior committed at

school, declining to help the district resolve the issue. Some participants discovered during this time that parents needed help understanding how to parent.

This research clearly defines how the pandemic has affected our students across all grade levels and how teachers supported the students during that time. Districts should look at ways to close the learning gaps in education soon, or we will risk raising a generation of students going through life with gaps in their education. Districts will also become the central point of community services, whether for food, clothing, or counseling. Educating students has now become more than just educating students. This research helped to fill a void in the body of research that sought to understand the experiences educators and students had during the pandemic. We hope that schools will never have to be shut down because of a pandemic, but the hope is to be better prepared through this research.

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Appendix A

Dear Colleague,

My name is Brent Sharp, and I am the Middle School Principal for the Stockton School District in Stockton, Missouri. I am a doctoral student at Southwest Baptist University. I am conducting a research study to gather information about supporting students' psychological/emotional, physical, and educational needs before, during, and after the COVID-19 pandemic. I want to invite you to participate in this qualitative narrative study through an interview via phone, in-person, or the Internet. You have been purposefully selected as a potential participant in this study because you meet the specific criteria established by the researcher. Possible benefits include an opportunity for you to reflect on your level of how students are supported in school districts during times of extreme duress and how school districts might better support students going through extreme situations.

I realize that you are very busy. The survey should only take 45-60 minutes of your time and can conveniently be taken by phone, in person, or through the Internet. The questions were constructed and carefully and thoughtfully separated into three sections. What did you do to support your students' emotional, physical, and educational needs before, during, and after the pandemic? Your privacy is important; the information will remain anonymous, and only the researcher will track who participates. Your response to this letter will indicate your consent to participate and permission to use the information you provided in my study.

Before you make a final decision about participation, please read the following statements about how your responses will be used and how your rights as a participant will be protected:

- Participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may stop participating at any point without penalty.
- You need not answer all of the questions.
- Your answers will be kept confidential. Results will be presented to others in summary form only, without names or other identifying information.
- Your participation will take approximately one hour. During this time, you will answer questions about how you supported students emotional, physical, and academic needs before, during, and after the pandemic.

The RRB Committee at Southwest Baptist University (417-326-1659) has reviewed and approved this project. The committee believes the research procedures adequately safeguard the subject's privacy, welfare, civil liberties, and rights.

You may contact me at 417-733-2462 if you have questions or concerns about your participation. If you want a copy of this study's results, please contact me at brentsharp0831@gmail.com. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Brent Sharp
Stockton Middle School