

The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Teacher Well-Being in British Columbia

HUMAN EARLY LEARNING PARTNERSHIP, UBC

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to school closures in 165 countries around the world, affecting approximately 63 million teachers and hundreds of millions of children worldwide (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2020). The unexpected and drastic change to the organization of schools and learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic has come with many challenges, uncertainty, and stress that have affected the well-being of teachers and other support staff working with children in schools and the community. The pandemic-related school disruptions and the need to adapt to new regulations and guidelines are unprecedented. Policy makers and stakeholders are eager to understand the challenges teachers are facing and to find ways to effectively respond to their needs.

The goal of this study was to gain a greater understanding of teachers' self-identified challenges and supports over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic and how these are associated with teacher well-being. To achieve this goal, teachers across the province of BC were asked to respond to a survey in February 2021 – 11 months into the COVID-19 pandemic. This report outlines key findings from the survey related to teachers' experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, namely their (1) current mental health and well-being in comparison to before the COVID-19 pandemic, (2) opportunities to connect with their students, parents/caregivers, colleagues, and feel part of the school community during the COVID-19 pandemic, (3) perceived support from different sources, (4) meeting the needs of their students, and (5) work experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

KEY FINDINGS

- (1) BC teachers reported deteriorated mental health 11 months into the COVID-19 pandemic.
- (2) A large majority of teachers reported having fewer opportunities for connecting with students, parents/caregivers, colleagues, and the school community.
- (3) Feeling supported across multiple sources (i.e., within schools, districts, communities, and from the union and the Ministry of Education) was a protective factor for teachers' well-being.
- (4) Most teachers reported unmet needs for students this school year.
- (5) Most teachers reported a workload increase since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic.

INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about unexpected and drastic changes in the organization of schools and learning (UNESCO, 2020). These changes have led to many challenges, uncertainties, and stress for teachers and created a burden that jeopardizes the well-being of teachers. The current school disruptions and the continuous need to adapt to new regulations and guidelines are unprecedented and policy makers and stakeholders are eager to understand the challenges teachers are facing and to find ways to effectively respond to their needs.

Teacher stress is an on-going concern and not new to the current pandemic. Prior to the pandemic, teachers in Canada reported heightened levels of mental distress (Linseman, 2016; Marko, 2015). Work overload has been identified as a primary source of teacher stress (Austin et al., 2005; Marko, 2015). Teachers face numerous potential stressors in their day-to-day work environment that may compromise well-being, such as time constraints, classroom management challenges, and supporting the needs of diverse learners (Polok et al., 2020), and this may be exacerbated by additional burdens due to the pandemic. Prior research suggests that many teachers leave the profession due to (a) exhaustion and/or (b) a lack of confidence in their teaching ability (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2016). These findings take on new meaning in the COVID-19 pandemic, potentially creating a “perfect storm” of high levels of exhaustion and lack of confidence in one’s teaching ability in this unprecedented context. Teacher stress and well-being have also been a major concern as teachers have had to rapidly adapt, innovate, and mobilize to implement teaching approaches and learning strategies for their students over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic and the related school disruptions (UNESCO, 2020). Research on teacher well-being during the pandemic confirms heightened levels of stress and emotional exhaustion among teachers in Canada (British Columbia Teachers’ Federation [BCTF], 2021; Sokal et al., 2020a) and in other countries (Klapproth et al., 2020; MacIntyre et al., 2020; Oducado et al., 2020; Ozamiz-Etxebarria et al., 2021; Zhou & Yao, 2020).

While it is critical to understand the current stressors teachers are experiencing, it is also important to examine supports that may bolster teacher well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic. Pre-pandemic evidence points to social support from school-based principals as a key source of support that helps in times of stress (Ferguson et al., 2017). Data from the first six months of the pandemic further supports the view that school- and district-based leadership may be central to preserving teacher well-being and preventing burnout (Collie, 2021; Kraft et al., 2020; Sokal et al., 2020a; Sokal et al., 2020b). Indeed, social support more generally has been found to play a key role in the reduction of acute stress for teachers (Zhou & Yao, 2020) and in the early period of the pandemic, teachers in England identified relationships as particularly important (Kim & Asbury, 2020).

STUDY PURPOSE

The goal of this study was to gain a greater understanding of teachers' self-identified challenges and supports over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic and how they are associated with teacher well-being. The goal of the report is to outline key findings related to teachers' (1) current mental health and well-being in comparison to before the COVID-19 pandemic, (2) opportunities to connect with their students, parents/caregivers, colleagues, and feel part of the school community during the COVID-19 pandemic, (3) perceived support from different sources, (4) meeting the needs of their students, and (5) work experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

STUDY DESIGN

The cross-sectional, survey-based study was carried out by researchers from UBC's Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) in partnership with the BC Ministry of Education, and the BC Teachers' Federation (BCTF). The survey was conducted online during the time period of February 3-14, 2021, just prior to the third wave of the pandemic when nearly 3000 cases per week were reported in BC (BC Centre for Disease Control [BCCDC], 2021a). Email survey invitations were distributed by the BCTF to a random sample of 7,000 BCTF actively employed members¹ who work in public schools across the province. Prior to the survey launch, information on the survey and project was sent out to all members through the BCTF newsletter. Invited participants received two email reminders about the survey and could participate in a draw for one of 15 gift certificates. Teachers were informed that participation was voluntary and that they could complete the survey any time within the 2-week time window in February. Teachers were also provided with a phone number to connect with a research team member if they had questions about the survey or the survey completion process. Ethics approval for this project was obtained from the Behavioural Research Ethics Board at UBC (H20-03274).

PARTICIPANTS

The sample included 1,206 teacher survey respondents from across BC (a response rate of 17%). Just over half of the respondents (54%) were elementary school teachers, with secondary school teachers comprising the second largest proportion (26%). Respondents were mainly from large districts (66%). Most of the respondents were classroom teachers (63%); 37% of teachers were employed in other positions such as special education teachers and counsellors. On average, respondents reported just over 15 years of teaching experience. The majority of respondents reported holding a full-time teaching position (80%). The majority of respondents were female (78%) and between the ages of 35 and 54 (55%). A full overview of the demographics for the teacher survey respondents is provided in Table 1.

¹ BCTF members include classroom teachers, teachers teaching on call (TTOC), adult/continuing education teachers, distributed-learning (DL) teachers, district coordinators or district helping teachers, local officers or local executive officers, special education teachers, learning assistance teachers, teacher librarians, counsellors, English language learning teachers, and Aboriginal/Indigenous Culture teachers.

Table 1. Characteristics of the teacher survey respondents (N = 1,206)

	Percentage (%)
School Type	
Elementary	54
Middle	8
Secondary	26
Multiple	6
Other	5
Prefer not to say	<1
District Size	
Small (<200 grade 4s)	4
Medium (200-499 grade 4s)	13
Medium-large (500-999 grade 4s)	15
Large (≥ 1000 grade 4s)	66
Missing	2
Teaching Position	
Classroom teacher	63
Special education teacher	7
Teacher teaching on call (TTOC)	6
Learning assistance teacher	4
Teacher librarian	3
Counsellor	2
Other	14
Prefer not to say	<1
Teaching Experience	
Mean years (SD)	15 (9.7)
Range (years)	0-49
Missing (%)	3
Age	
< 24	2
25-34	19
35-44	28
45-54	27
55-64	17
65+	2
Prefer not to say	2
Missing	3
Gender Identity	
Female	78
Male	16
Non-binary	1
Prefer not to say	2
Missing	3

1. DECLINES IN MENTAL HEALTH

CHANGES IN MENTAL HEALTH COMPARED TO BEFORE THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

“This has been the hardest year of my teaching career.”

Elementary school teacher (over 15 years of experience)

Teachers were asked to indicate the state of their mental health now, in comparison to before the COVID-19 pandemic. As can be seen in Table 2, the majority of the teachers (80.5%) reported that their mental health was slightly or significantly worse now. This can be seen as a stark contrast to responses to the same question from a nationally representative sample of Canadians surveyed in January 2021 in which only 40.5% of the overall sample reported that their mental health was slightly or significantly worse now (Jenkins et al., 2021).

Table 2. Response breakdown for question related to mental health status now compared to before pandemic

	Current study, BC Teacher Sample (Feb 2021)		Nationally Representative Sample of Canadians (Jan 2021) ^a		
	Frequency	Valid Percent	% Overall	% Women	% Pre-existing mental health conditions
Slightly or significantly worse now	953	80.5	40.5	45.2	53.7
About the same	201	17.0	50.8	45.6	32.3
Slightly or significantly better now	30	2.5	8.6	8.9	13.7
Valid total	1184	100.0	(n = 3034)	(n = 1533)	(n = 543)
Prefer not to say/missing	22	--	0.1	0.2	0.4

Note. Proportions of participants endorsing response options ‘slightly worse now’ and ‘significantly worse now’ were collapsed, as were ‘slightly better now’ and ‘significantly better now’.

^aSee Jenkins et al., 2021

MENTAL DISTRESS

“Myself and my colleagues all feel the weight of the pandemic and are exhausted.”

Elementary school teacher (over 25 years of experience)

Teachers were asked about their feelings of mental distress over the past 30 days. According to this standard measure, the K6 screening scale for psychological distress (Kessler et al., 2011), the majority of teachers met the range for ‘moderate mental distress’ (56.5%) and ‘serious mental distress’ (22.9%). As can be seen in Table 3, a substantially higher proportion of teachers in the current study could be characterized as having moderate or serious mental distress, in comparison to previous studies with teachers (Linseman, 2016) and the general population (Prochaska et al., 2012) that have used the same measure.

Table 3. Response breakdown for question related to mental health distress in the past 30 days

	Current study (Feb 2021)		Norm Group of 50,880 US Adults (Prochaska et al., 2012)	Convenience Sample of 523 Canadian Teachers in 2014-15 (Linseman, 2016)
	Frequency	Valid Percent	% US adults	% teachers
Serious mental distress	272	22.9	8.6	12.8
Moderate mental distress	671	56.5	27.9	49.7
Normal mental distress	244	20.6	63.5	37.5
Valid total	1187	100.0	100.0	100.0
Prefer not to say / missing	19	--	--	--

TURNOVER INTENTIONS

“I have never felt more discouraged, unappreciated and deflated while at the same time burned out. The way we’ve been treated during this pandemic has really changed my outlook on the profession. I am currently looking for a change of career and so is my husband (he’s a teacher as well).”

Elementary school teacher (over 10 years of experience)

Teachers were asked to indicate whether the COVID-19 pandemic impacted their likelihood of seeking to leave the profession in the next few years. The majority of teachers (57.8%) reported that they were now no more or less likely to leave the profession. Notably, 40.3% indicated that they were now more likely to seek to leave the profession. See Table 4 for more detail.

Table 4. Response breakdown for question related to leaving profession in the next few years

Has the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic made it more or less likely that you will seek to leave the profession altogether in the next few years?		
	Frequency	Valid Percent
I’m now <u>more</u> likely to seek to leave the profession	453	40.3
I’m now <u>no more or less</u> likely to seek to leave the profession	650	57.8
I’m now <u>less</u> likely to seek to leave the profession	21	1.9
Valid total	1124	100.0
Prefer not to say/missing	82	--

2.FEWER OPPORTUNITIES TO CONNECT

CONNECTING WITH STUDENTS, PARENTS/CAREGIVERS, COLLEAGUES, AND THE SCHOOL COMMUNITY

“...I miss hugging and receiving hugs of support from my colleagues. I miss the teaching staff being able to eat lunch together at our long table, I feel more isolated this year.”

Elementary school teacher (over 5 years of experience)

At the time of data collection, BC schools were operating under the guidelines of the Provincial Health Officer (BCCDC, 2021b) that mandated several infection prevention and exposure control measures to stop or limit transmission of COVID-19 within schools. These included avoiding activities with close face-to-face contact, assigning staff to a specific student cohort, limiting school gatherings including school assemblies and extracurricular activities, cancelling inter-school events, and mandating mask wearing indoors for all K-12 staff and middle/secondary school students (by personal or family/caregiver’s choice for elementary school students), including in all-staff areas such as break and meeting rooms. School districts could also offer flexible in-person and remote learning options for students and families (BC Ministry of Education, 2021).

Teachers were asked about their current opportunities to connect with their students, parents/caregivers, colleagues, and the school community. The majority of teachers (69.4%) reported that they had fewer opportunities to form and maintain emotional connections with their students than before the COVID-19 pandemic (see Table 5). Even more teachers (77.7%) reported fewer opportunities to form and maintain connections with parents/caregivers (see Table 6). The vast majority of teachers (92.7%) reported fewer opportunities to form and maintain connections with colleagues (see Table 7). Finally, 92.0% of teachers reported fewer opportunities to feel a part of the school community (see Table 8).

Table 5. Response breakdown related to opportunities to emotionally connect with students

Compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic, the opportunities I have to form and maintain emotional connections with my students are:

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Less than before or a lot less than before	823	69.4
About the same as before	277	23.4
More than before or a lot more than before	86	7.2
Valid total	1186	100.0
Prefer not to say / missing	20	--

Table 6. Response breakdown related to opportunities to connect with parents/caregivers

Compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic, the opportunities I have to form and maintain connections with <u>parents/caregivers</u> are:		
	Frequency	Valid Percent
Less than before or a lot less than before	917	77.7
About the same as before	197	16.7
More than before or a lot more than before	66	5.6
Valid total	1180	100.0
Prefer not to say / missing	26	--

Table 7. Response breakdown related to opportunities to connect with colleagues

Compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic, the opportunities I have to form and maintain connections with <u>colleagues from work</u> are:		
	Frequency	Valid Percent
Less than before or a lot less than before	1107	92.7
About the same as before	73	6.1
More than before or a lot more than before	14	1.2
Valid total	1194	100.0
Prefer not to say / missing	12	--

Table 8. Response breakdown related to opportunities to feel part of the school community

Compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic, the opportunities I have to feel part of a <u>school community</u> are:		
	Frequency	Valid Percent
Less than before or a lot less than before	1097	92.0
About the same as before	83	7.0
More than before or a lot more than before	12	1.0
Valid total	1192	100.0
Prefer not to say / missing	14	--

3. FEELING SUPPORTED MAY PROTECT TEACHERS' WELL-BEING

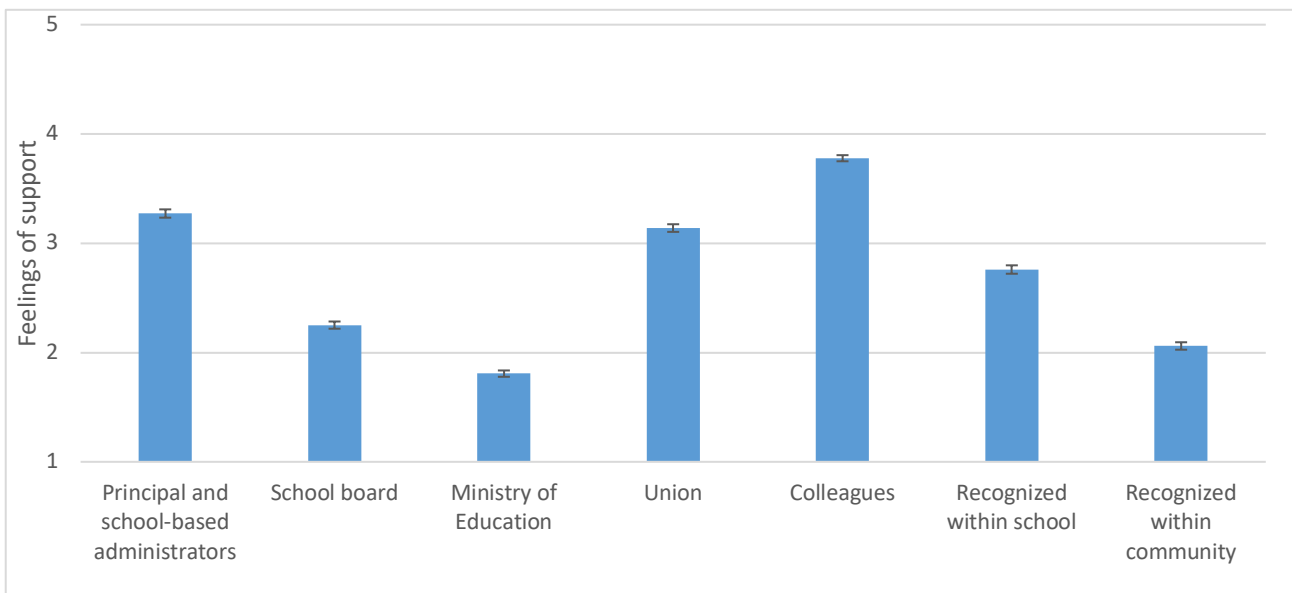
SEVEN TYPES OF SUPPORT

“My district kept telling me that I come first and my mental health is important. This has enabled me to give myself permission to leave work a bit earlier and go for a run before I come home to taking care of my family and has helped my mental health.”

Elementary school teacher (over 5 years of experience)

Teachers rated how supported they felt across seven different types of support: (1) principals and school-based administrators, (2) school board, (3) Ministry of Education, (4) union, (5) colleagues, as well as (6) recognition within their schools and (7) recognition within their communities (outside of school). As can be seen in Figure 1, teachers tended to report feeling more support (above the scale midpoint) from their colleagues, principal and school-based administrators, and union. Teachers tended to report less support (below the midpoint) from the school board, Ministry of Education, recognition within their schools, and recognition within their communities.

Figure 1. Teachers' feelings of support^a reported for seven different types of support (mean scores)



Note. All means are statistically significantly different from each other, except for the comparison between union vs. principal and school-based administrators. Error bars are the margin of error for a sample of this size, 19 times out of 20.

^a The survey question was: “In supporting your mental health and wellbeing during the pandemic this school year, to what extent are the following true for you?”... I feel supported by my/the ____.” Teachers indicated their feelings of support using the following scale response options: 1 (*Not at all true*), 2 (*Slightly true*), 3 (*Moderately true*), 4 (*Very true*), and 5 (*Completely true*).

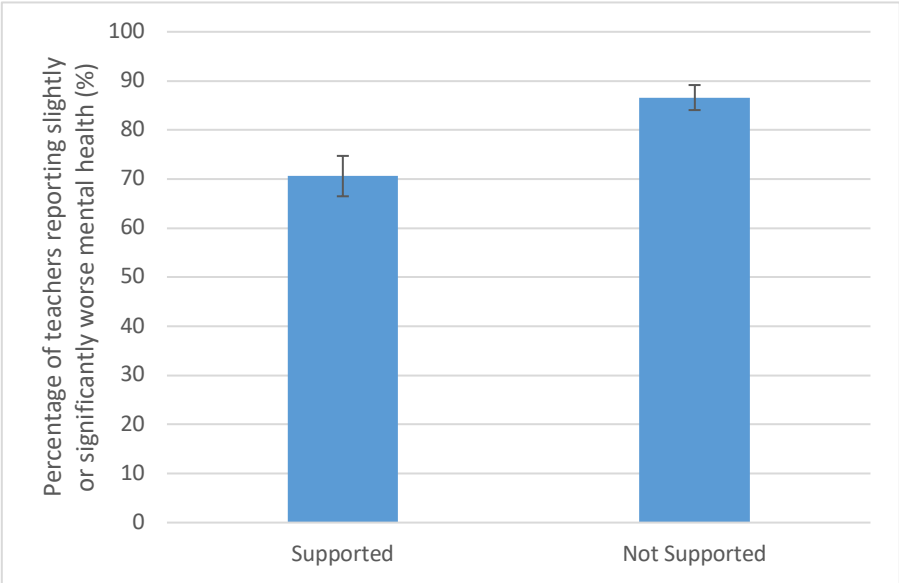
SOCIAL SUPPORT AND CHANGES IN MENTAL HEALTH

“The stress that other colleagues carry is likely the most stressful thing for me. People are short tempered, emotional, cranky, flat. The least connected year of my career. Tremendous impact on staff relationships.”

Elementary school teacher (over 25 years of experience)

In Section 1 of the report, we looked at changes in mental health compared to before the pandemic. Here we show this measure again, comparing teachers who reported having supports and those who did not. Figure 2 shows the percentage of teachers who reported slightly or significantly worse mental health now in comparison to before the COVID-19 pandemic by their reported feelings of support. Teachers who reported not being supported (i.e., had average scores below the midpoint across the seven measured types of support) were more likely to report slightly or significantly worse mental health. Teachers who on average reported feeling supported across the seven types were less likely to report slightly or significantly worse mental health now, in comparison to before the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 2. Teachers reporting slightly or significantly worse mental health by feelings of support (scores ≥ 3)



Note. ‘Supported’ was categorized as average scores of 3 or more across the seven types of support. ‘Not supported’ was categorized as average scores below 3. Teachers indicated their perceptions of support using the following scale response options: 1 (Not at all true), 2 (Slightly true), 3 (Moderately true), 4 (Very true), and 5 (Completely true). Percentage differences are statistically significant (Chi-square(1) = 45.06, p < .001). Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

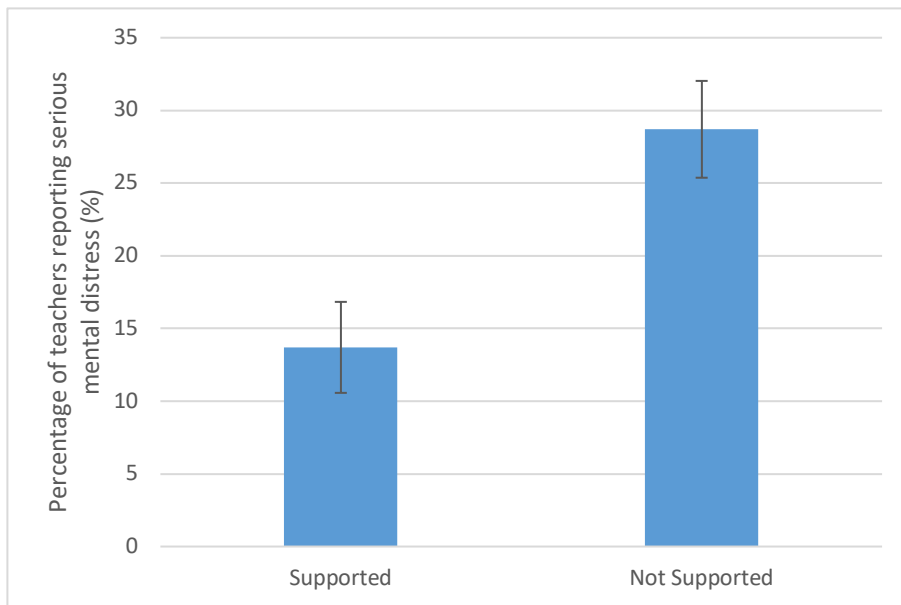
SOCIAL SUPPORT AND SERIOUS MENTAL DISTRESS

“Mental health support offerings from the district are appreciated but I have no capacity/time for follow through. Even just receiving regular mental health emails is overwhelming.”

Secondary school teacher (fewer than 5 years of experience)

Similarly, in Section 1 of the report, we presented the percentage of teachers categorized as having moderate and serious mental distress. Here we show this measure again, comparing teachers who reported having supports and those who did not. Figure 3 shows the percentage of teachers reporting serious mental distress by their reported feelings of support across the seven types measured. As a reminder, 23% of the teacher respondents reported serious mental distress. Teachers who reported feeling supported were less likely to report serious mental distress. Conversely, teachers who reported not feeling supported were more likely to report serious mental distress.

Figure 3. Teachers reporting serious mental distress by feelings of support (scores ≥ 3)



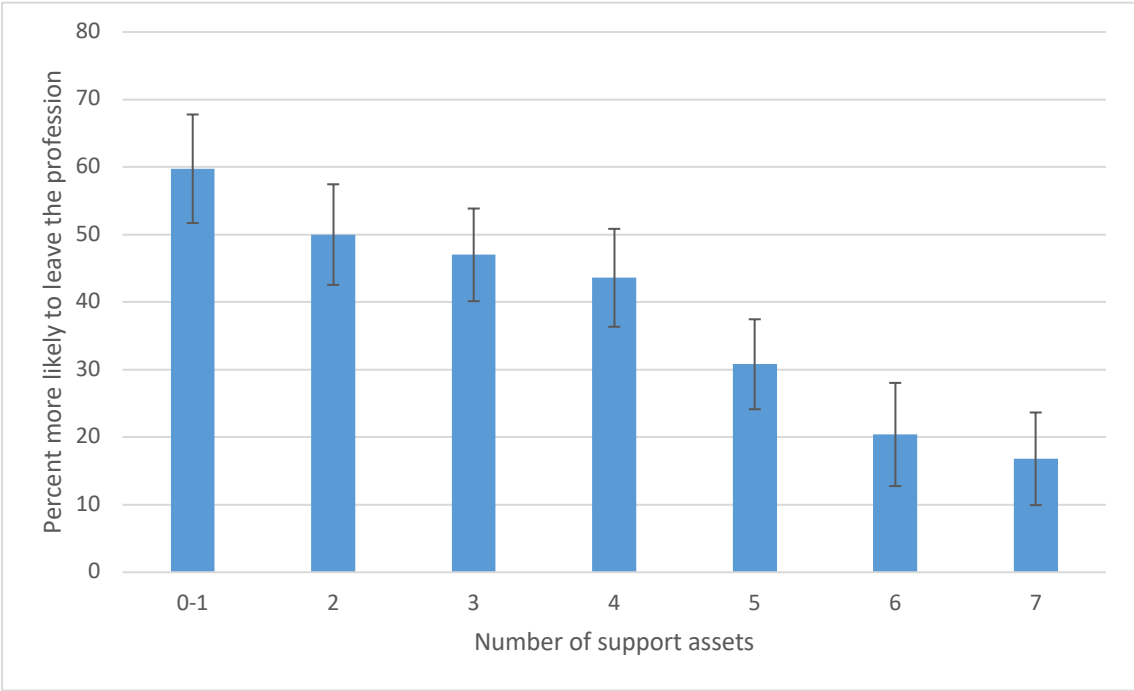
Note. ‘Supported’ was categorized as average scores of 3 or more across the seven types of support. ‘Not supported’ was categorized as average scores below 3. Teachers indicated their perceptions of support using the following scale response options: 1 (*Not at all true*), 2 (*Slightly true*), 3 (*Moderately true*), 4 (*Very true*), and 5 (*Completely true*). Percentage differences are statistically significant (Chi-square(1) = 35.31, $p < .001$). Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

SOCIAL SUPPORT AND TURNOVER INTENTIONS

“I retired early..... because of my age and possible concerns surrounding COVID-19.”
Elementary school teacher (over 25 years of experience)

Figure 4 shows the percentage of teachers more likely to seek to leave the profession compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic based on the number of sources of support they reported (ranging from 0-7). The pattern shows a support gradient: Reporting a greater number of social supports was associated with a lower likelihood of seeking to leave the profession.

Figure 4. A support gradient: percentage breakdown of teachers more likely to leave the profession based on the number of support assets they reported (support assets scored ≥ 3)



Note. Each of the seven types of support were considered to be present (i.e., a ‘support asset’) if the respondent indicated ‘moderately true’ to ‘completely true’ when asked to what extent this was a source of support for them. Teachers indicated their perceptions of support using the following scale response options: 1 (Not at all true), 2 (Slightly true), 3 (Moderately true), 4 (Very true), and 5 (Completely true). Given that there were seven types of support measured, the number of support assets a teacher could have ranged from 0 to 7. As a reminder, the seven sources of support were 1) principals and school-based administrators, (2) school board, (3) Ministry of Education, (4) union, (5) colleagues, as well as (6) recognition within their schools and (7) recognition within their communities (outside of school). Chi-square test of independence was statistically significant (Chi-square(6) = 88.05, p < .001), indicating that overall, the percentage of teachers more likely to leave the profession differed depending on the number of supports.

TYPES OF SUPPORT AND TEACHER WELL-BEING

We examined the associations between each of the seven types of support and teacher well-being indicators (i.e., reports of changes in mental health, mental distress, turnover intentions, general health, quality of life, and job-related positive affect; see Table 9). All of the seven types of support were positively associated with mental health, general health, quality of life, and job-related affect. Furthermore, all seven types of support were negatively correlated with mental distress and turnover intentions. As a reminder to the reader, these are correlational statistics and therefore, they show associations between variables but they do not imply that one variable causes another variable.

Table 9. Bivariate correlations between each type of support and changes in mental health, mental distress, turnover intentions, general health, quality of life, and job-related positive affect.

Type of support	Changes in Mental Health ^a	Mental Distress	Turnover Intentions	General Health	Quality of Life	Job-Related Positive Affect
	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>	<i>r</i>
Principal and school-based admin	.18***	-.22***	-.22***	.15***	.17***	.35***
School board	.27***	-.31***	-.27***	.19***	.20***	.32***
Ministry of Education	.26***	-.28***	-.28***	.19***	.16***	.28***
Union	.14***	-.17***	-.20***	.11***	.17***	.23***
Colleagues	.11***	-.11***	-.13***	.08**	.16***	.19***
Recognized within school	.22***	-.26***	-.22***	.17***	.20***	.43***
Recognized within community	.22***	-.25***	-.19***	.20***	.20***	.34***

Note. **indicates correlations significant at the 0.01 level. ***indicates correlations significant at the .001 level (2-tailed).

^aHigher scores on this scale indicated better mental health whereas lower scores indicated worse mental health, compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic.

4. UNMET NEEDS FOR STUDENTS

“There are far more students struggling with anxiety and mental health and we’re struggling to provide enough support which creates even more stress and anxiety for teachers because we feel we are not supporting our students to the best of our ability.”

Elementary school teacher (over 10 years of experience)

MEETING STUDENTS’ ACADEMIC, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL, AND DIVERSE NEEDS

Teachers were asked to report on the extent to which they felt students’ needs were being met during this school year, the results of which are outlined in Table 10. The majority of teachers reported that they felt students’ academic needs were being moderately, very much, or completely met, whereas a smaller proportion (18.1%) felt that students’ academic needs were slightly or not at all met. In contrast, 42.8% of teachers reported feeling that students’ social and emotional needs were slightly or not at all met this school year and another 43.5% felt that social and emotional needs were only moderately being met. Nearly half (48.6%) of teachers reported feeling needs were slightly or not at all being met for students with disabilities and diverse abilities this year, whereas only 15.6% indicated that needs for these students were very much or completely met.

Table 10. Percentage breakdown of teachers’ responses about meeting student needs this school year

	Meeting Students’ Academic Needs (%)	Meeting Students’ Social and Emotional Needs (%)	Meeting the Needs of Students with Diverse Abilities (%)
Slightly or not at all	18.1	42.8	48.6
Moderately	53.1	43.5	35.8
Very much or completely	28.8	13.7	15.6
Valid total	100.0	100.0	100.0
Missing	(n = 60)	(n = 54)	(n = 192)

Note. Teachers were asked the extent to which they felt students’ academic, social and emotional, and diverse needs were being met in general during this school year.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF STUDENTS WHO ARE MARGINALIZED, STRUCTURALLY VULNERABLE, OR EXPERIENCING ADVERSITIES

“My students desperately need the breakfast program and a hot lunch. Food security is huge and I have students who are extremely hungry.”

Elementary school teacher (years of experience not stated)

Teachers were asked to indicate the extent to which their school has been able to be inclusive, compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic, for students with marginalized or structurally vulnerable backgrounds or those experiencing cumulative adversities. As can be seen in Table 11, 31.0 % of teachers felt that their school was slightly or not at all able to be inclusive for this group.

Table 11. Percentage breakdown of teachers’ responses about meeting the needs of students from vulnerable backgrounds, compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic.

	Inclusiveness for students who are marginalized, structurally vulnerable, or experiencing adversities (%)
Slightly or not at all	31.0
Moderately	38.7
Very much or completely	30.3
Valid total	100.0
Missing	(n = 286)

Note. Teachers were asked to what extent their school was inclusive for students who are marginalized, structurally vulnerable, or experiencing adversities *compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic.*

5. WORK EXPERIENCES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

“...Having to implement programs and support for remote students while simultaneously supporting in-person students has increased workload tremendously...”

Secondary school teacher (over 20 years of experience)

WORKLOAD CHANGES

Teachers were asked about specific COVID-19 related work experiences, namely workload changes and the implementation of COVID-19 safety measures. The majority of teachers (66.6%) reported that their workload was more or a lot more than before (see Table 12 for more detail).

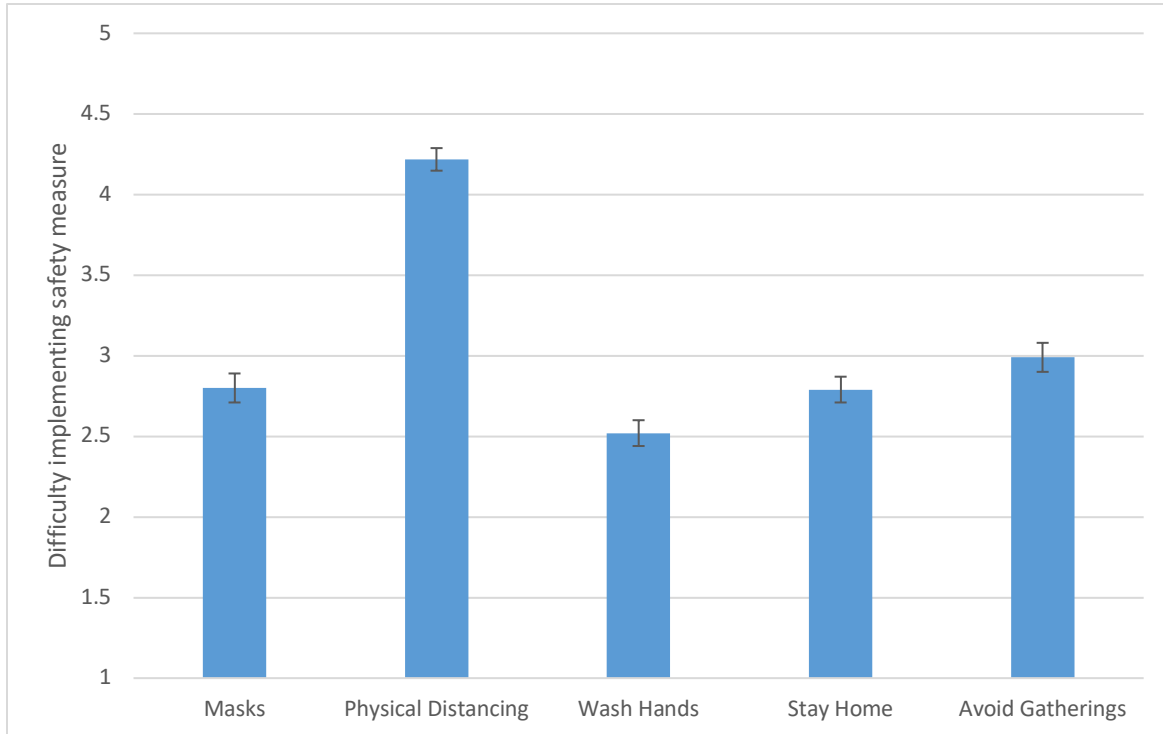
Table 12. Survey response breakdown related to teacher reports of workload change

Compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic, my workload is:		
	Frequency	Valid Percent
Less than before or a lot less than before	78	6.6
About the same as before	316	26.8
More than before or a lot more than before	787	66.6
Valid total	1181	100.0
Prefer not to say / missing	25	--

IMPLEMENTING COVID-19 SAFETY MEASURES

With respect to the implementation of COVID-19 safety measures at school, teachers generally reported that the safety measures were somewhat easy to neither hard nor easy to implement, with the exception of physical distancing, which teachers generally reported to be somewhat hard to very hard (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Mean response to difficulty in implementing five different safety measures at school



Note. Represents Estimated Marginal Means with 95% Confidence Intervals. Survey question was: “How easy or hard is it to implement the following safety measures at your school”. Response options were: 1 (*Very easy*), 2 (*Somewhat easy*), 3 (*Neither hard nor easy*), 4 (*Somewhat hard*), 5 (*Very hard*).



WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?


The research presented in this report offers insights into the experiences of BC teachers 11 months after the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Teachers completed this survey during a time when approximately 3000 cases in BC were reported per week in the province (BCCDC, 2021a). As described in the report, teachers reported strong declines in their mental health and fewer opportunities to connect with students, families, and colleagues. A large proportion of teachers reported that students' needs were not being met this school year. They furthermore reported challenging work situations, such as increased workload and difficulty implementing physical distancing as a COVID-19 safety measure. However, feeling supported played a protective role for teachers' mental health and well-being – feeling supported (i.e., within schools, districts, the union, the Ministry of Education, and communities) was positively associated with factors such as general health and quality of life, and negatively associated with factors such as mental distress and turnover intentions.

The research findings need to be interpreted with care. The results presented here are descriptive in nature; in cases where we present associations, it is important to note that these do not provide information about causal relationships. Lastly, the participants in this research were self-selecting to participate in the survey and may not be representative of all teachers in BC.

The findings presented in this report offer important evidence for policy makers and other stakeholders who are tasked with making decisions to support teachers. To that end, the teacher survey data summarized here can help inform effective ways to support teachers, and the education system in BC in general, in addressing the needs and promoting the well-being of teachers during the pandemic and beyond.

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