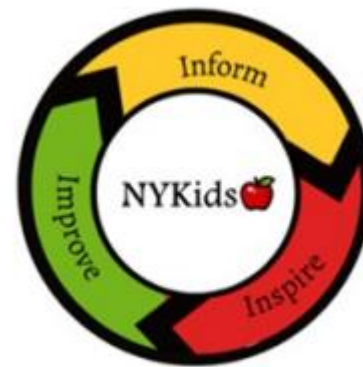
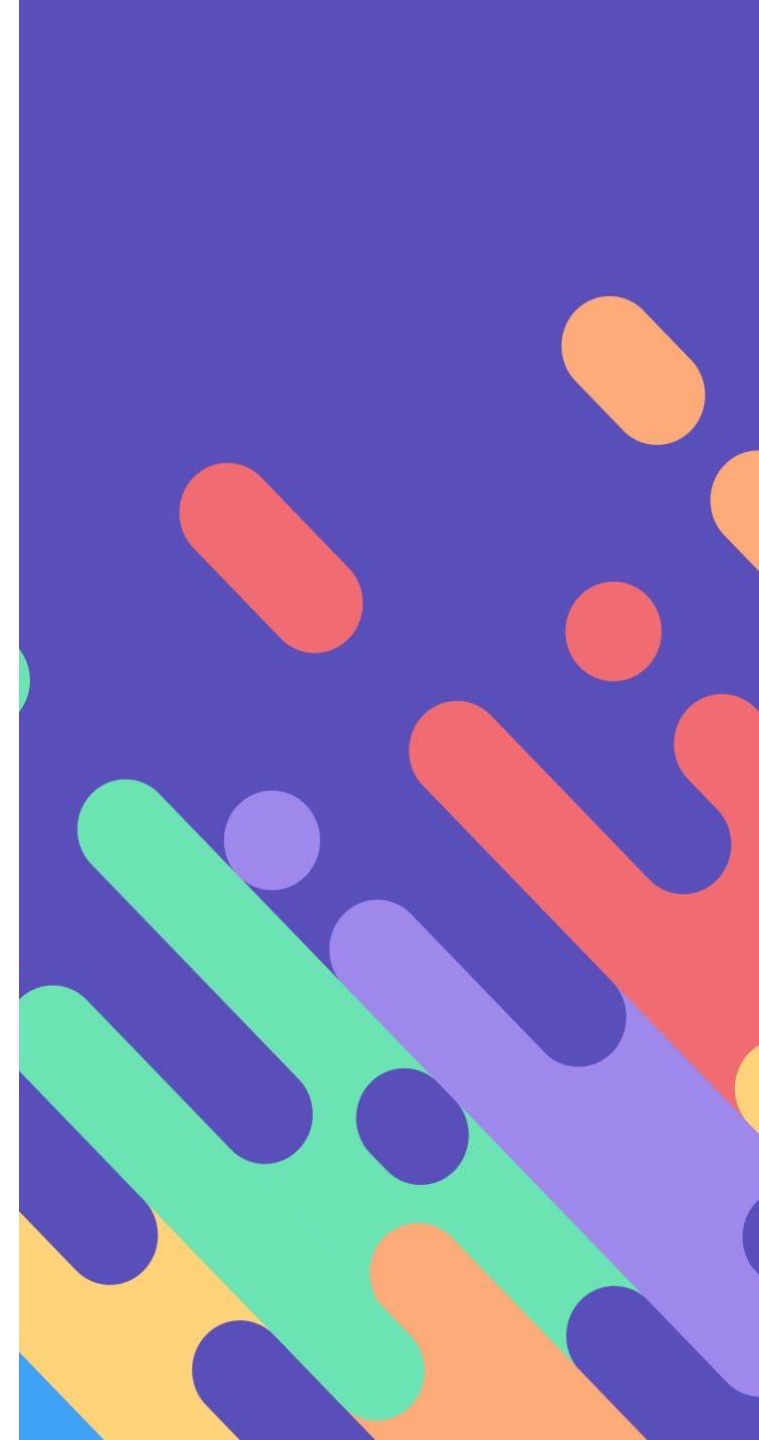


EDUCATORS' STRESS AND EMOTIONAL LABOR DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Toronto, ON, Canada



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Educators' stress and emotion during the pandemic

- Documented rise in educators' stress levels, anxiety, and depression
- More qualitative research and connection to teachers' emotions needed
- Significant impacts on educator workforce shortages and students' social-emotional wellbeing

Emotion and education

- Teaching is an “emotional practice” (Hargreaves, 2001)
- Ideas of the “good teacher” involve displays of positive emotions in the classroom and suppression of negative ones (O’Connor, 2008)
- Emotions always set within larger context – or what Zembylas (2007) calls an “emotional ecology”

— Educator emotion during a pandemic

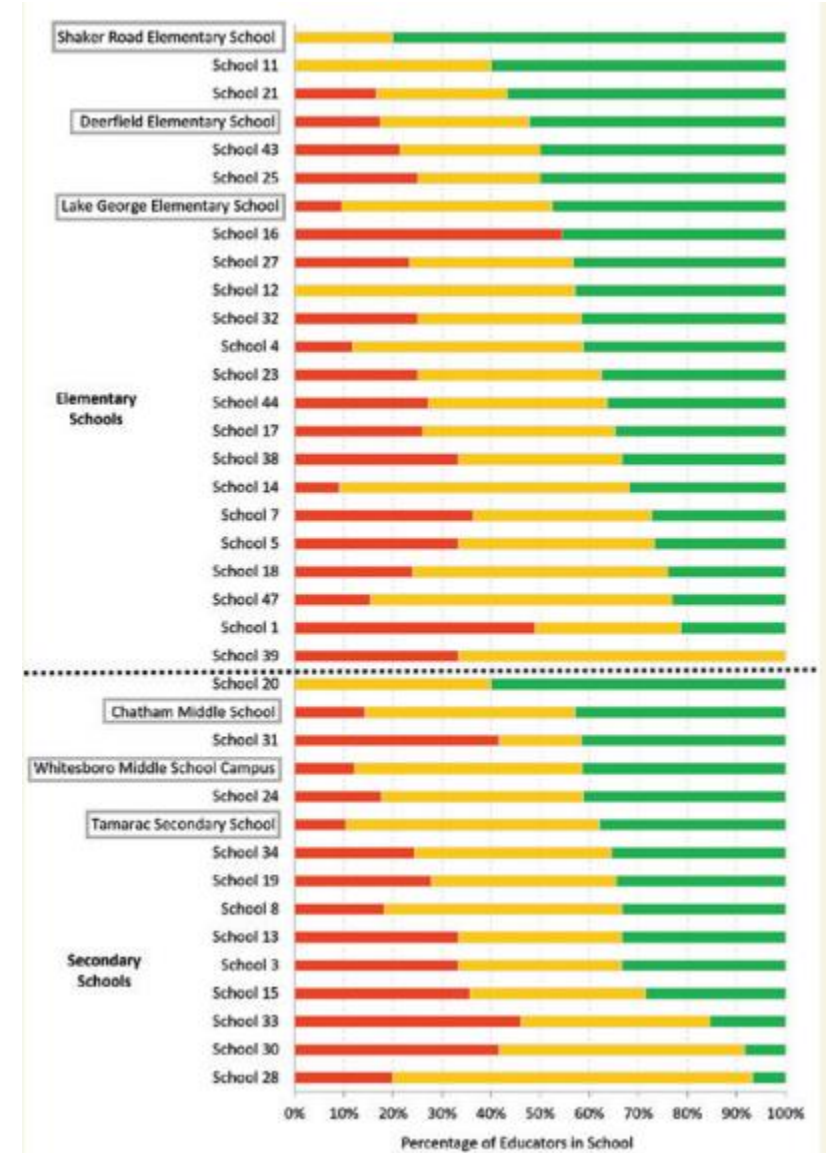
- Rising stress levels and negative emotions connected to a range of factors (Hirshberg et al., 2023):
 - Feeling concerned for students but disconnected from them
 - Drop in self-efficacy during periods of remote teaching
 - Rising tensions between communities and families

— Teachers' emotional labor

- Workers' emotional responses are restricted by “display rules” set by employers (Hochschild, 1983)
- Emotions as a commodity – “service with a smile”
- Conflicts between actual emotions and expected emotional displays can lead to stress and burnout
 - Surface acting – superficial display of emotion without genuinely feeling it
 - Deep acting – workers try to alter their felt emotions to align with display rules

Methodology

- Six schools selected from survey (n=38) of ~900 educators across New York State focusing on stress during pandemic
- Schools selected based on comparatively less severe responses than schools serving similar populations
- Interviews and focus groups conducted with 88 educators from these schools (fall 2021-spring 2022)
- Focus on subjective experiences of stress during pandemic as well as adaptations to meet new challenges



— Anxious, “spent”, and stressed

- Pandemic created new and difficult expectations for teachers to manage emotions
- Descriptions of “surface acting” by participants

It's one of those things that you know, is very hard on the teachers... I didn't want [students] to see that I was spent. No, it means you're always trying to just have that game face on. Try to be as positive as possible. Because...like, you'll get through this. We got it. It'll be all right.

– principal

And there's just some times that I have to go and take a deep breath, count to 10, you know, even with them [students] in the room, because it's, you know... but I think we mask it. – teacher

Worry, guilt, and frustration

- Participants worried about students and felt frustrated over their perceived inability to directly support them
- Educators also felt guilty about their quality of teaching during periods of remote schooling

But they weren't satisfied with doing anything less than what they normally do. So a lot of their pain and frustration came from "I'm not being the teacher that these kids deserve. Whether it's to the kids in front of me or the kids at home when I have them both. I can't be my best to any of them." - district admin

And [we] worry, and then where are they? And knowing the environments that some kids go [home] to, and school was their safe place. And when they're not connecting with you online, you know, where are they? Are they okay? Are they eating? Are they safe? - teacher

Colleagues and emotional labor

- Colleagues provided crucial support for struggling educators during the pandemic
- Provided spaces for participants to express actual felt emotions

Like you can lose it, and you could lose it with your colleagues, and it was okay. You could be angry, frustrated, mad at the world. And it was okay to be angry, frustrated, mad, or mad at the world. Because if we weren't allowed to be that, then we couldn't have come back and restarted every day.

- teacher

And just being able to talk to colleagues, acknowledging that you're not alone, that you're in it with everybody else. Even if you feel like the voice of the teachers is kind of falling on deaf ears at times, just being able to be there for each other I think has been important.

- teacher

Positive emotional experiences

- Some educators expressed pride for overcoming challenges and support teachers/colleagues
- Others expressed heightened levels of empathy for students and their families due to pandemic

You know, and I have to say, you know, I was pretty damn proud of our sixth-grade team, you know, to make it work, you know, both teaching in person and doing remote and keeping track of all that. - teacher

I think one positive also was when we were Zooming, I think it made staff more aware where our families were coming from. Because we really got an open view in the home life, and it's kind of an eye-opening experience. - teacher

Discussion

- Negative impacts on teachers' emotions and stress levels during the pandemic – prevalence of “surface acting”
- Significance of collegial relationships; yet staff cannot function as sole support for coworkers' wellbeing
- Negative impacts on administrators as well as classroom teachers
- Increased empathy, but also risk of secondary traumatic stress (STS)
- Need to complement “psychic rewards” (Lortie, 1975) of teaching with tangible benefits
- Attention to changing “display rules” and wider context in which workers perform emotional labor

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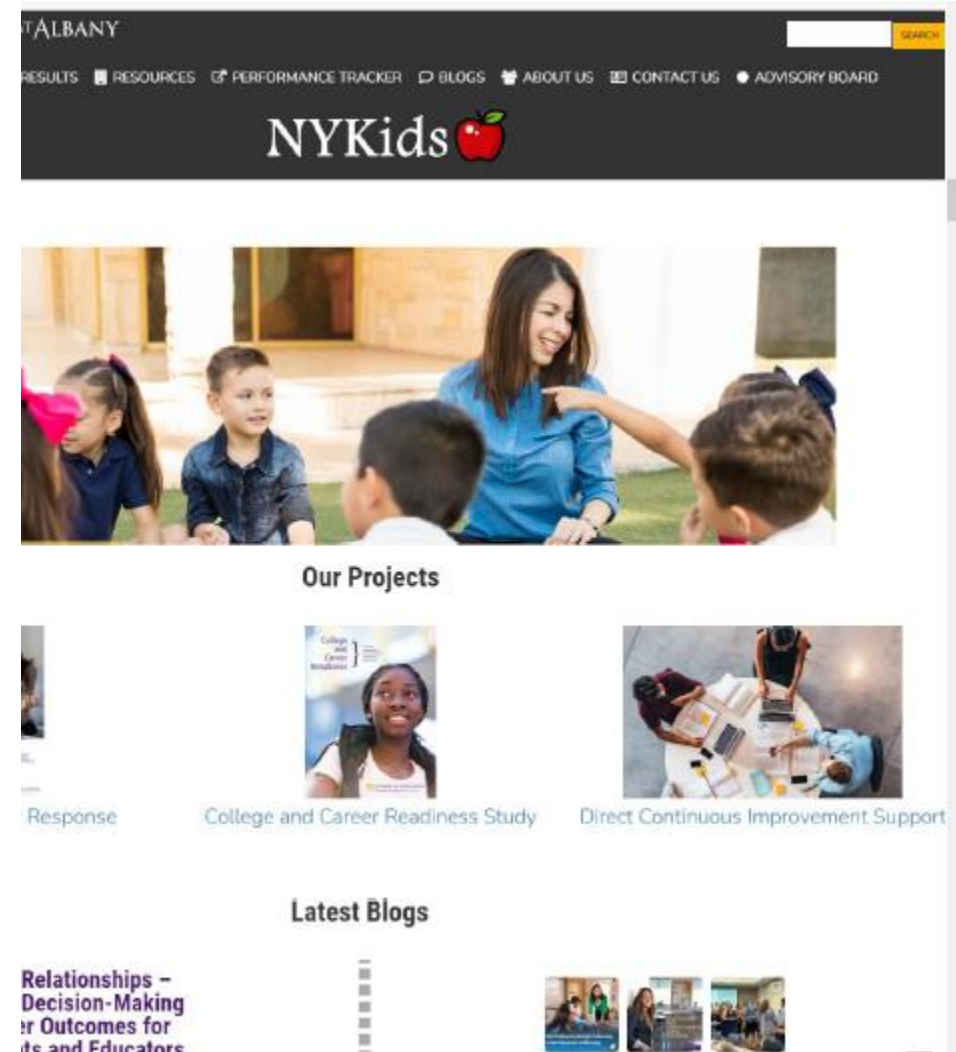
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Thank you!

- Acknowledgements: Thanks to Kristen C. Wilcox for assistance in preparing this presentation
- Learn more about our research at www.ny-kids.org



The screenshot shows the NYKids website interface. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the text "ST ALBANY" on the left and a search bar on the right. Below this, a menu includes "RESULTS", "RESOURCES", "PERFORMANCE TRACKER", "BLOGS", "ABOUT US", "CONTACT US", and "ADVISORY BOARD". The main header features the "NYKids" logo with a red apple icon. Below the header is a large photograph of a woman in a blue shirt sitting on the grass and talking to a group of children. Underneath the photo is the heading "Our Projects". Below this heading are three project cards: "Response" (with a small image), "College and Career Readiness Study" (with a photo of a young woman), and "Direct Continuous Improvement Support" (with a photo of people around a table). At the bottom, there is a "Latest Blogs" section with a vertical list of five small images and a larger image on the right showing a group of people in a meeting.