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NYKids Study 2021-22:

Discovering Impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic on the Education Workforce – Phase 2: Methods and Procedures Report

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Contents

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Study Introduction and Purpose

In phase 1 of our study of differential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education workforce we utilized a survey instrument and principal interview protocol to investigate the following questions:

1. To what extent and how do school leaders and teachers experience stress in response to COVID-19 disruptions?
   a. How do school characteristics (i.e., level of urbanicity, level of economic disadvantage, level of ethnic and linguistic diversity), district and school leaders' practices, and district and school resources and workforce characteristics relate to these experiences?
2. To what extent and how do school leaders and teachers indicate a change in job satisfaction in response to COVID-19 disruptions?
   a. How do school characteristics (i.e., level of urbanicity, level of economic disadvantage, level of ethnic and linguistic diversity), district and school leaders' practices, and district and school resources and workforce characteristics relate to these experiences?

3. To what extent and how do school leaders and teachers indicate changes in their work or personal life in response to COVID-19 disruptions?
   a. How do school characteristics (i.e., level of urbanicity, level of economic disadvantage, level of ethnic and linguistic diversity), district and school leaders' practices, and district and school resources and workforce characteristics relate to these changes?

Related Literature

We know from other research that community resources and demographic factors (i.e. poverty and ethnic and linguistic diversity) relate to variable student outcomes (Bryk et al., 2009). We also know that school cultures and climates, leaders' practices and the policies and programs they support, school and community resources, and qualities of the education workforce also impact student outcomes (Anderson et al., 2020; Lawson et al., 2019).

In light of prior research, our phase one study findings and other COVID-19 pandemic-related research (Grissom & Condon, 2021), we designed this study with the goal of discovering how schools with more positive education workforce experiences in terms of levels of stress and job satisfaction adapt and innovate and how those adaptations and innovations relate to contextual and organizational factors.

This approach is in alignment with key principles of improvement science including the import of identifying performance variability and seeing the system that produces the outcomes (Bryk et al., 2009; Peurach et al.,2020). This study also applies an overarching equity lens with interest in how leaders and educators frame opportunities and challenges for supporting the development of

youth growing up in poverty and those from diverse backgrounds (Durand et al., in review; Wilcox et al., in review).

Study Design

This phase two of our study of educators' responses to the COVID-19 pandemic proposes to use multiple case study methods as they are appropriate when attempting to discern how and why certain outcomes might be different in different contexts and due to what contextual factors. As Yin (2014) explains, the purpose of using a case study approach is "... because you deliberately wanted to cover contextual conditions-believing that they might be highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study" (p.13).

Sample

School sampling was determined based upon the following criteria: 1) the outcomes of the phase one survey responses (all positive outlier status); 2) the school demographic profile including urbanicity and student population served; and3) school level (elementary or secondary). We sought a sample that would allow for methodological triangulation (across interview, focus groups, and documents); source triangulation (across educators, support staff, school and district leaders) and site triangulation (3 elementary and 3 secondary) (Patton, 2001).

As Yin explains, "multiple-case designs have distinct advantages and disadvantages in comparison to single-case designs. The logic underlying the use of multiple case studies is the same: each case must be carefully selected so that it either (a) predicts similar results or (b) predicts contrasting results but for anticipatable reasons" (p. 57). We chose schools with similar results in terms of all being of positive outlier status from the phase 1 survey. Our rationale was that investigating sites experiencing distress would hold the potential of retraumatizing participants and would be felt as an undue burden.

Following this logic, we sampled 6 schools to participate in this study with elementary and secondary school levels represented as well as schools serving demographically different communities in terms of urbanicity and ethnic, linguistic, and socioeconomic diversity.

Study Framing

An Ecologically- and Developmentally-Nuanced View

Social ecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2009) provides an overarching frame for this study. From a social ecological perspective, classrooms can be seen as micro-level systems that are nested within other systems (e.g., exo-level systems such as schools) and each of these systems is understood to have variable impacts on individual and group experiences and outcomes.
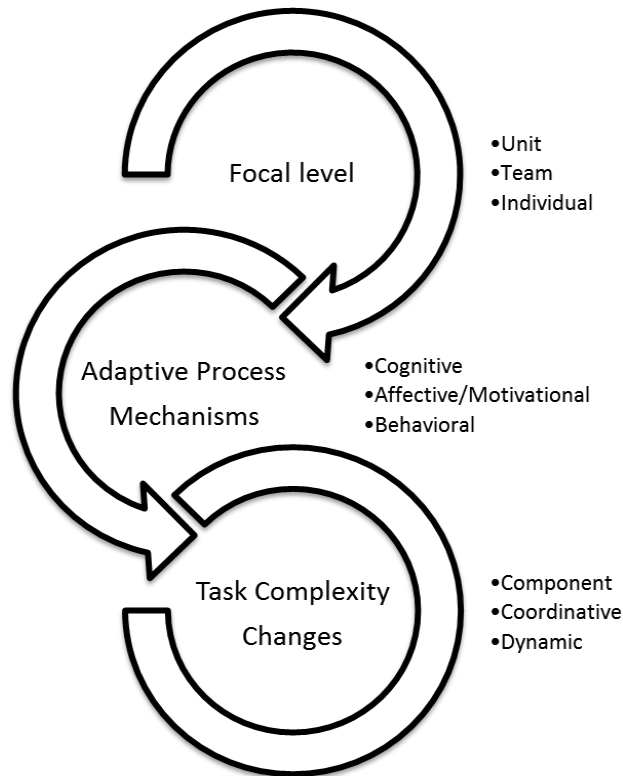
From a social-ecological view, the resources and assets of the host contexts-- classroom,

school, district office, and surrounding community--need to be investigated for their respective and joint influence on the ways individuals and groups interact within those contexts. Rural schools, for example—needed to adapt in unique ways as a pre-requisite to remote learning as broadband internet was not as accessible as in most suburban and urban areas. This is only one example of how the impacts of COVID-19 on schools has been experienced differently in different contexts. This variability in context and subsequent response is a core problem to be addressed.

Performance Adaptation Theory, Research and Practice

A complementary theoretical lens, offered by performance adaptation theory, provides insight into how organizations and people working within them adapt to new requirements and changing conditions internal and external to their workplace. Performance adaptations by educators have three related features: Cognitive, affective, and behavioral (Baard, et al., 2014). This lens demands attention to the individual and collective actions and orientations—e.g., professional learning communities and school-based teams and also prioritizes the qualities of task complexity changes (component, coordinative, or dynamic). Figure 1 presents a selective overview of performance adaptation and its focal levels and mechanisms (Baard et al., 2014). Baard et al. (2014) define performance adaptation as: "the cognitive, affective, motivational, and behavioral modifications made in response to the demands of a new or changing environment or situational demands" (p. 50).

Figure 1. Performance adaptation mechanisms

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- Unit
- Team
- Individual

Focal level

Adaptive Process Mechanisms

- Cognitive
- Affective/Motivational
- Behavioral

Task Complexity Changes

- Component
- Coordinative
- Dynamic

Performance adaptation theory provides a relevant complementary lens for social ecological theory as it focuses attention on the forces, factors, and actors that influence leaders and front-line educator staff as they encounter changing demands and the need to develop new competencies and organizational capacities (Wilcox et al., 2017). Performance adaptation theory's attention to adaptive process mechanisms and task complexity change features, particularly those defined as "coordinative" and "dynamic" (i.e., the tasks that require linkages and sequencing of cues and actions to meet changing demands and aims), are particularly important lens for this study because the pandemic-related disruptions are highly unpredictable and novel.

Research Questions

Overarching question: What leadership practices and academic learning, social-emotional learning, and family and community engagement adaptations and innovations do positive outlier schools share and what contributes to them?

1. How and with what resources do school and district leaders in schools with relatively more positive workforce responses to the COVID-19 pandemic adapt and innovate **to** mitigate negative impacts of staff **stress at work, job dissatisfaction and challenges for collaboration**?

2. How and with what resources do school and district leaders in schools with relatively more positive workforce responses to the COVID-19 pandemic adapt and innovate **their leadership practices**?

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3. How and with what resources do educators in schools with relatively more positive workforce responses to the COVID-19 pandemic adapt and innovate **to support youth's academic learning**?
4. How and with what resources do educators in schools with relatively more positive workforce responses to the COVID-19 pandemic adapt and innovate **to support youth's social-emotional development**?
5. How and with what resources do school and district leaders and educators in schools with relatively more positive workforce responses to the COVID-19 pandemic adapt and innovate **to engage families and community members**?
6. For questions 2-5, how and to what extent do
   a. school characteristics (i.e., level of urbanicity, level of school, level of economic disadvantage, and level of ethnic and linguistic diversity),
   b. organizational capacities (i.e., structures for collaborative learning/professional learning communities), and
   c. workforce characteristics (i.e., years of experience),
   …relate to the extent and quality of adaptations and innovations

Research Goals

To gain knowledge and understanding regarding how school and district leaders and educators adapt and innovate in response to disruptive events and especially societal crises like the COVID-19 pandemic posed—with special interest in performance adaptation mechanisms and outcomes.

To integrate and disseminate the research findings to inform and improve educational policy, school and district improvement frameworks, leadership preparation, and front-line educational practice.

To identify and describe the features of schools and district central offices that function as adaptive learning organizations able to facilitate desirable performance adaptations during times of crisis.

To generate tools and resources to inform crisis management in schools and districts.

Methods

Sample Selection

The survey population targeted for phase one of this study was instructional staff (e.g., teachers and teaching assistants) and school support professionals (e.g., social workers, school psychologists, counselors) in all New York state P-12 schools.

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The research team identified schools that qualify as positive outliers (i.e. exhibiting unusually more positive workforce responses with regard to stress, job satisfaction, and performance adaptation).

From this sample, the research team will solicit participation of up to 10 schools for participation in this phase two study.

Consent and Recruitment Procedures

A school invitation letter (1) was sent to principals in the targeted focal schools along with a consent form to be completed using Qualtrics.

Once the principal and designated district leader in charge of research approvals provided leader consent (2), the research team scheduled the school and district leader. These leader interviews were done with the school principal, the superintendent or assistant superintendent (and other school or district leader key informants identified by the school principal). See leader interview protocol (3).

During the leader interview, leaders were asked to identify teaching and support staff for focus groups and interviews (i.e. using snowball or chain sampling) in order to identify a variable group of educators with the experiences of interest to the study (i.e. adaptation and innovation in response to the pandemic) (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The leaders were provided purposeful sampling criteria related to grade level taught, content specialization, special student population served (e.g. English language learners, special needs, students receiving intervention services), instructional leadership role, and other team or professional learning community participation.

An educator invitation letter and consent form (4) was sent to those identified teaching and support staff in the targeted focal schools to be completed using Qualtrics or on paper if done in person. Once the educators provided consent, the research team scheduled focus groups.

In the support staff focus groups (5), support staff were asked to share their experiences adaptations and innovative practices.

During the teacher focus groups (6), teachers were asked to identify themselves or other teachers who have used particularly innovative practices.

An individual educator interview invitation letter (7) was sent to those teachers in the targeted focal schools along with a consent form to be completed using Qualtrics or on paper if done in person. Once the teachers provided consent for the interviews, the research team scheduled one interview with each of the teachers selected.

During the individual educator interview (8), the teacher was asked to share any documents such as lesson plans (that do not include any reference to specific children)—see documentary evidence list (9), with a focus on the teacher's use of new course designs and instructional technologies.

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Data Collection

Phase one of this study began with a Qualtrics survey of instructional and support staff and was followed by school leader interviews in 38 schools in New York state. From this sample 6 schools chosen for their school staff's survey response results. Due to the continued disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic entering the 2021-22 school year, some data collection was designed to be done remotely. Interviews and focus groups were conducted in person when allowable or by password protected Zoom.

Data Source Summary

This study included four major sources of data:
- educator (teachers, teaching assistants, school psychologists, social workers, and counselors) focus groups
- interviews with teachers
- interviews with school and district leaders
- documents (e.g. lesson plans)

The instruments can be found in the appendices A-D. Appendix E displays the timeline.

Data Analysis

Data were coded inductively using a constant-comparison method utilizing qualitative software (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, J., 2014). The code reports were used to craft individual school case studies (Yin, 2018) and inform the crafting of a cross-case report identifying major themes across all study schools. These reports were designed to highlight significant differences by school level, urbanicity, and demographic served.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

The positive outlier school and district leaders were identified with consent. All other leaders and all educators were promised that no personally identifying information (e.g., name, title) would be shared. They were assured that all information obtained in the study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law and notified that the Institutional Review Board and University or government officials responsible for monitoring this study may inspect these records.

Sharing of Results

Information about accelerators and mitigators of adaptation and innovation in various types of settings were shared so that educators and leaders may use insights to inform their own efforts to adapt and improve especially during times of significant disruption. Results were featured on the NY Kids website and made available to other educators through reports, articles, and

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presentations addressed to a variety of audiences including practicing professionals, policymakers, and researchers.

Project Sponsors

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Appendix A. Teacher Focus Group

Teacher Focus Group

Introduction Script:
Thank you for participating in this focus group. Before we begin, I would like to review the consent form and answer any questions you may have.

Part 1:
1. Please tell me your position in this school and how long you've worked in the field of education.

2. Please tell me about your roles and responsibilities. Describe the students you work with by grade level, needs, etc.

3. Please describe out [name] school and community (population served, any demographic shifts in recent years, general sense of community relationships with school staff).

Part 2:
4. Since the beginning of the pandemic, please describe some of the issues you've encountered in terms of students' **academic learning** and what you've done to address them.
   a. Focusing on an example, describe its origins and development.

   i)   What population or subgroup population was the focus of this work?
   ii)   Did you or someone else at your school invent it, or did you transport it from another school?
   iii)   To what extent was it easy to implement this innovation?
   iv)   What or who supported you in implementing this innovation?
   v)   Did the others in your school adopt this innovation? if so, what helped the spread of this innovation

5. Since the beginning of the pandemic, please describe some of the issues you've encountered in terms of students' **social and emotional well-being** and what you've done to address them**.**
   a. Focusing on an example, describe its origins and development.

   i)   What population or subgroup population was the focus of this work?
   ii)   Did you or someone else at your school invent it, or did you transport it from another school?
   iii) To what extent was it easy to implement this innovation?

iv) What or who supported you in implementing this innovation?

v) Did the others in your school adopt this innovation? if so, what helped the spread of this innovation?

6. Since the beginning of the pandemic, please describe some of the issues you've encountered in terms of **engage families and community members** and what you've done to address them.
    a. Focusing on an example, describe its origins and development.

    i) What population or subgroup population was the focus of this work?
    ii) Did you or someone else at your school invent it, or did you transport it from another school?
    iii) To what extent was it easy to implement this innovation?
    iv) What or who supported you in implementing this innovation?
    v) Did the others in your school adopt this innovation? if so, what helped the spread of this innovation?

Part 3:
7. Is there anything about your particular school context – population served, community and school resources, etc. that you feel has impacted how and to what extent you as support staff have adapted and innovated through the pandemic?
    a. what kinds of things related to your particular school context have helped or hindered in your ability to support your students in their academic learning and social-emotional well-being?
    b. what kinds of things related to your particular school context have helped or hindered in your ability to engage with families and community members?

8. How would you characterize how and to what extent the pandemic and your experience of it in this school has impacted your levels of stress at work, your job satisfaction and/or your future career plans?
    a. what kinds of things have helped or hindered you to manage your stress, job responsibilities, and work-life balance?
    b. what do you wish you had more of in terms of resources or support to do your job during these times?)

Part 4:
9. Is there anything else you would like to share with us about your work as teaching staff member and as it relates to adapting and innovating during significant disruption?

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Appendix B. Support Staff Focus Group

Support Staff Focus Group

Introduction Script:
Thank you for participating in this focus group. Before we begin, I would like to review the consent form and answer any questions you may have.

Part 1:
1. Please tell me your position in this school and how long you've worked in the field.

2. Please tell me about your roles and responsibilities. Describe the students you work with by grade level, needs, etc.

3. Please describe out [name] school and community (population served, any demographic shifts in recent years, general sense of community relationships with school staff).

Part 2:
4. Since the beginning of the pandemic, please describe some of the issues you've encountered in terms of students' **academic learning** and what you've done to address them.
   a. Focusing on an example, describe its origins and development.

   i) What population or subgroup population was the focus of this work?
   ii) Did you or someone else at your school invent it, or did you transport it from another school?
   iii) To what extent was it easy to implement this innovation?
   iv) What or who supported you in implementing this innovation?
   v) Did the others in your school adopt this innovation? if so, what helped the spread of this innovation

5. Since the beginning of the pandemic, please describe some of the issues you've encountered in terms of students' **social and emotional well-being** and what you've done to address them**.**
   a. Focusing on an example, describe its origins and development.

   i) What population or subgroup population was the focus of this work?
   ii) Did you or someone else at your school invent it, or did you transport it from another school?
   iii) To what extent was it easy to implement this innovation?
   iv) What or who supported you in implementing this innovation?

    v) Did the others in your school adopt this innovation? if so, what helped the spread of this innovation

6. Since the beginning of the pandemic, please describe some of the issues you've encountered in terms of **engage families and community members** and what you've done to address them.
   a. Focusing on an example, describe its origins and development.

    i) What population or subgroup population was the focus of this work?
    ii) Did you or someone else at your school invent it, or did you transport it from another school?
    iii) To what extent was it easy to implement this innovation?
    iv) What or who supported you in implementing this innovation?
    v) Did the others in your school adopt this innovation? if so, what helped the spread of this innovation

Part 3:

7. Is there anything about your particular school context – population served, community and school resources, etc. that you feel has impacted how and to what extent you as support staff have adapted and innovated through the pandemic?
   a. what kinds of things related to your particular school context have helped or hindered in your ability to support your students in their academic learning and social-emotional well-being?
   b. what kinds of things related to your particular school context have helped or hindered in your ability to engage with family and community members?

8. How would you characterize how and to what extent the pandemic and your experience of it in this school has impacted your levels of stress at work, your job satisfaction and/or your future career plans?
   a. what kinds of things have helped or hindered you to manage your stress, job responsibilities, and work-life balance?
   b. what do you wish you had more of in terms of resources or support to do your job during these times?)

Part 4:

9. Is there anything else you would like to share with us about your work as a support staff member and as it relates to adapting and innovating during significant disruption?

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Appendix C. Teacher Interview

Introduction Script:
Thank you for participating in this interview. Before we begin, I would like to review the consent form and answer any questions you may have.

Part 1:
1. Please begin by stating your position and how long you have been in that position.

2. Please share how long in total you have worked in this school and in the field of education?

3. Please tell me about your major roles and responsibilities including what students you work with by grade level, needs, etc.

Part 2:
4. Since the beginning of the pandemic, please describe some of the major issues you've encountered in terms of students' **academic learning** and what you've done to address them.

5. Focusing on an example, describe some change you have made to your instruction
   a. How did you design this lesson? Did anyone assist you?
   b. What materials or technologies did you use?
   c. What were the learning objectives?
   d. How did you adapt your lesson for students with different needs including ELLs and SWDs?
   e. How did you assess student learning?
   f. How did you report student progress?
   g. How did your students respond to this lesson? (Did you have any students who did not respond well to this adaptation?)
   h. Have you shared this lesson with colleagues, if so how and with what colleagues?

Part 3:
6. What resources or supports were available from the district or school to you to help you adapt and innovate your instruction?
   a. In what ways, if at all, did you connect with organizations outside of your school for your lesson planning or activities related to your content area?

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7. Please share any ways you engaged family and community members in helping your students engage in activities and with the content of your lessons.

8. Finally, please share any other comments you have about challenges and opportunities for innovation in instruction during the pandemic.

If you have any examples of lesson plans or activities that show your innovative work thank you for making them available to us.

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Appendix D. Leader Interview

Leader Interview

Introduction Script:
Thank you for participating in this interview. Before we begin, I would like to review the consent form and answer any questions you may have.
Part 1:
1. Please repeat your name and position.
2. How long you have been in your current position, and how long in total you have worked in the field of education?
3. Please tell me about your primary responsibilities.

Part 2:
4. Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic (spring of 2020), please describe some of the major issues you have encountered as a leader in [name] school (or for district leaders: in [name] district).
    1. Focusing on an example, please share
        a. How did you address this issue?
        b. Who else was involved in addressing this issue?
        c. How did you communicate with (or get input from) those affected most directly by this issue?
        d. What kinds of measures or actions did you take to mitigate negative effects of this issue on your staff?
        e. What were/have been your lessons learned in addressing this issue?
5. As the pandemic persisted, to what extent and how have **instructional adaptations and innovations to support academic learning** been made in [name] school (or for district leaders: in [name] district).
    1. Focusing on an example of an instructional adaptation or innovation, please explain
        a. What population or subgroup population was the focus of this work?
        b. How was this innovation discovered and by whom?
        c. What kinds of supports were available (if any) to encourage this innovation?
        d. To what extent and how was this innovation (or others like it) spread to others in [name] school?
6. As the pandemic persisted, to what extent and how have you and other leaders addressed **students' social and emotional well-being**?
    1. Focusing on an example of an adaptation or innovation to address students' social and emotional needs, please share

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    a.   What population or subgroup population was the focus of this work?

    b.   What resources did you find instrumental in meeting students' social and emotional needs?

    c.   Who has been involved in adapting any policies, practices, or processes to meet students' social and emotional needs?

    d.   How has collaboration among these people been supported?

7. As the pandemic persisted, to what extent and how have you and other leaders attempted to **engage family and community members** in meeting students' needs?

    1.   Focusing on an example of an adaptation or innovation to engage parents and families, please share

        i.   What population or subgroup population was the focus of this work?

        ii.   How was this adaptation or innovation discovered and by whom?

        iii.   What resources were available (if any) to support this adaptation or innovation?

        iv.   To what extent and how was this innovation (or others like it) spread to others in [name] school?

Part 3:

1. Is there anything about your particular school context – population served, community and school resources, etc. that you feel has impacted how and to what extent school [name] has adapted and innovated through the pandemic?

    a.   What kinds of things related to your particular school context have helped or hindered in your ability as a leader to support adaptation and innovation? what kinds of things helped or hindered you to manage your responsibilities as a leader? what do you wish you had more of in terms of resources or support to do your job during these times?)

2. How would you characterize how and to what extent the pandemic and your experience of it in this school has impacted your levels of stress at work, your job satisfaction and/or your future career plans?

    a.   what kinds of things have helped or hindered you to manage your stress, job responsibilities, and work-life balance?

    b.   what do you wish you had more of in terms of resources or support to do your job during these times?

Part 4:

3. Is there anything else you would like to share with us about leading as it relates to adapting and innovating through the pandemic?

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Appendix E. Timeline

January – May
- principal interview
- district leader interview
- educator (teachers, teaching assistants, school psychologists, social workers, and counselors) focus groups
- teacher interview
- document collection

May-June
- Final data analysis; case study writing; member checking

(transcription, researcher memoing, and coding throughout)