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Teachers' Perceptions on the Effects of COVID-19 on Juniors and Seniors in High School

A dissertation

presented to

the faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis

East Tennessee State University

In partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by

Martha J. Meredith

August 2022

Dr. Pamela Scott, Chair

Dr. Ginger Christian

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Keywords: trauma informed, social and emotional learning, blended learning,
transformational leadership

ABSTRACT

Teachers' Perceptions on the effects of COVID-19 on Juniors and Seniors in High School

by

Martha Jane Meredith

The purpose of this study was to examine the academic, social, and emotional effects of COVID-19 on 11th- and 12th-grade students. There has been little documentation regarding the specific change that the pandemic has had on these students; it is imperative that we look at the effects of COVID-19 on the students who experienced COVID-19 pandemic.

Data collection was completed through individual interviews. Analysis of data occurred in three phases: (a) categorization of data under the four organizational factors, (b) building the explanation in a phenomenological form, and (c) re-examination of the data. The analysis of the narrative study was based on the theoretical proposition that the teachers were focused on the whole child and not just academic standards. The humanistic theory framework was established as teachers examined the influences in their classrooms based on the well-being of their students. The credibility of the analysis was protected by triangulation of data through multiple sources of evidence, establishment of a chain of evidence, and member checking.

The results revealed that the main concerns were students attending school and getting the credits needed to graduate through both in-person classes and online learning. The themes that emerged were classroom management, relationship building, communication, social-emotional learning, trauma-informed learning, and the effects of COVID-19.

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family for supporting my endeavors and for picking me up when I thought I could not finish. To my husband, Arnie, thank you being my biggest supporter and for being by my side throughout this whole adventure. To my children, Arnie, Bethany, Aaron, Clay, and Victoria, thank you for putting up with the crazy days and for understanding when all I did was stress, you are my world. To Cooper, thanks for being your normal crazy, smart self. To Tucker, thank you for always making me take breaks and sitting with me through most of my homework. Thanks for always making me take breaks to make jelly sandwiches, I love you to the moon and back.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

High school juniors and seniors must make many important decisions regarding their future as they determine the right steps for them as they continue their education or join the workforce. Those that were coming to the end of high school were facing challenges when deciding whether to attend post-secondary schools or the workforce (Daniel, 2020). In March 2020 schools that were brick and mortar buildings were closed due to the outbreak of COVID-19 as one of the measures to stop the spread of the virus in the schools. However, learning continued with hybrid learning, online learning, or student packets.

Background

In December 2019 the SARS-CoV-2 virus, which causes Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19), was first diagnosed in Wuhan, China. Globally, schools began closing their doors to students and faculty to stop the spread of COVID-19. In January the virus was first reported in the United States in the state of Washington. By March 2020 the virus was accelerating through many states prompting school systems to consider closing to protect families from the spread of the virus (Baron et al., 2020). By April, many states had decided not to return to school for the remainder of the school year and cancelled spring sports, proms, and graduation ceremonies. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), by May 2020 there were 1.43 million confirmed COVID cases in the United States (Baron et al., 2020). More than 20% of health and safety referrals to the Department of Children's Services prior to COVID-19 were made by school personnel; however, with school closures in place, referrals were not made by educators because they were not seeing issues firsthand with their students (Baron et al., 2020). The health concerns that have been seen in juniors and seniors in high schools have increased along with the issues with their social and emotional well-being. By focusing on Adverse Childhood

Experiences (ACEs) educators can identify students who have experienced traumas in their childhood and begin helping them to deal with those traumas in order to have a successful transition into the next stage of their lives outside of school. In California, for example, 62.3 % of adults had experienced some traumatic event in their lives.

Statement of the Problem

Concern for students as they navigated the education system's changes through the course of the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted educators to search for ways to address social and emotional learning skills with students in grades 11-12. Forty percent of students have dealt with trauma in some aspect of their childhood and have had to learn to cope with the consequences of COVID-19. There are few studies on the effects of students' well-being during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Online learning options were available for students in many areas; however, in rural communities issues with connectivity could cause learning gaps among students (Jacobs & Ellis, 2021). "Learning disruption could have profound long-term implications not only for individual students but for our future economy" (Kwakye & Kilbort-Crocker, 2021). There were students who were behind with their schoolwork before there was a change in how their education was delivered. In some cases, students graduated early because they were at home and able to do more work than if they were in school (Al-Maskari et al., 2022) There is literature that shows the effects of students and social-emotional learning, but there is little research on the effects of trauma on secondary education students in grades 11-12 and how COVID-related trauma has changed their lives.

Significance of the Study

This study is important as educators adapt to the academic and mental health demands that students are facing during the pandemic. Data is beginning to surface from the 2020-2021 school year showing academic gaps due to learning loss as it compares to learning loss during the summer months. Some students were out of the classroom for 6 months while others completed their education in alternative ways (Aurini & Davies, 2021). School children across the world have lost an estimated 1.8 trillion hours (about 910,000,000 years) of in-person learning since the onset of the pandemic causing important benefits of the school system to decrease in students' lives (UNICEF, 2021). Teachers were tasked with planning alternative ways of educating their students while both groups were working from home. The effects of a student's well-being and academic success in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic are still unknown, and research is minimal in relation to the effects that COVID-19 has had on students in grades 11-12. Due to a lack of data on students who have issues in school with academics, behavioral issues, and social-emotional wellness, research is necessary to examine the influence that closing the school buildings has had on our secondary students (Azevedo et al., 2021). The closure of the school buildings resulted in students having to complete packets created by the teacher or working on an online platform.

This research focused on secondary educators and their perceptions of the different methods that they use in their classrooms that relate to social and emotional learning, trauma-informed care, and brain-based learning as well as the newest technological advancements. Through the perceptions of the teachers in the classroom, this study will focus on the humanistic learning theory framework and its relationship to social and emotional learning, trauma-informed care, brain-based learning, and the way it connects to blended learning and online learning. "It is

important to understand the interplay between academic achievement, social schema, learning, and academic self-concept because doing so provides clear target areas to help children maintain achievement across the transition to secondary education (Evans et al., 2018). Due to many students completing their schoolwork online, different learning styles were used to help maintain academic focus and keep students' social well-being intact.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine 11th- and 12th- grade teachers' perceptions of students' academics in connection with their social and emotional health during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic. This research focused on the educators' perceptions of how COVID-19 has influenced their students' lives academically, socially, and mentally.

Humanistic Learning Theory

The term *humanistic learning theory* was developed by Maslow, Rodgers, and Bugental during the early 1900s. The theory focused on the whole child and was the basis of the conceptual theory of this research. This theory of learning was capitalized in students through beginning a new way of education along with a new idea of living. "In the theory of humanistic learning, the learner plays a very active role throughout the educational process" (Hollis, 1991). The main principles of Humanistic Learning Theory are (a) giving students choices in what they want to do, (b) fostering engagement to inspire students to become self-motivated to learn, (c) helping them to self-evaluate, (d) acknowledging their feelings and emotions, and (e) providing them with a safe learning environment (Western Governors University – Tennessee, 2020).

Research Questions

The central question for this study was: What are 11th- and 12th- grade educators' perspectives through their lived experiences of students during the COVID-19 pandemic? The following research questions were used to guide the study.

1. What specific methods have been used to help guide students through the past three years?
2. What are the teacher's perceptions of students' social and emotional well-being during COVID-19?
3. What are the teachers' perceptions about how 11th- and 12th- grade students tolerate the traumas associated with COVID-19?
4. How do educators perceive students' ability to stay on track academically and how has that ability influenced students during COVID-19?

Definitions of Terms

To provide a clear understanding of the terms specific to this study, definitions for the following terms have been included.

1. *Blended Learning* – (also known as hybrid learning) is a method of teaching that integrates technology and digital media with traditional instructor-led classroom activities giving students more flexibility to customize their learning experiences (Panopto, 2021).
2. *Social and Emotional Learning* – “refers to a wide range of skills, attitudes, and behaviors that can affect student success in school and life” (NCSL, 2021).

3. *Transformation Leadership* – a model that principals and teachers can use to lead by example. It places a high value on creating community bonds that encourage both students and teachers to greater levels of achievement (Steinmann et al., 2018).
4. *Trauma-Informed* – “Individual trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual’s functioning and physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being” (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2013).

Limitations and Delimitations

This study was limited to educators who have taught 11th- and 12th-grade students for three consecutive years during the COVID-19 pandemic. Those experiences may not represent those of other educators who have taught during those same school years. Participation in this study was voluntary and participants had the right not to respond to any question during the interview phase. This study delineated the experiences of educators in grades 11 and 12 throughout eastern Tennessee.

Chapter Summary

This study is organized and presented in five chapters. Chapter 1 includes an introduction with the statement of the problem, research questions, significance of the study, definitions of terms, and delimitations and limitations. Chapter 2 contains an overview of relevant research related to the main idea or topics: the theoretical framework, COVID-19, online learning, social-emotional learning, and trauma-informed care. Chapter 3 describes the methodology and the research questions, research design, site selection, population and sample, data collection strategies, data analysis strategies, and assessment of quality and rigor. Chapter 4 presents the

findings of this study in relation to the research questions. Chapter 5 provides further context and implications for practice and future studies.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

The review of essential literature contributes to the understanding of the techniques that teachers implemented in secondary education during the years of the COVID-19 pandemic and resulting school and other closures. This review also investigated social and emotional learning, trauma-informed care, and brain-based learning techniques used for both in-person and online instruction.

COVID-19 Implications

In March 2020 COVID-19 began to spread quickly around the globe; as a public health measure, academic and other institutions closed. Academic gaps were already an issue in many districts, and with school closures those gaps continued to expand. Thirty-one percent of students worldwide were not able to continue their education online during COVID-19 (UNICEF, 2020). UNICEF's research shows that of low-income families, only 47% of their students had access to the internet; in the same group, 80% of students had access to the radio. Ninety percent of the low-income students had access to instruction either with the internet, the radio, or the television to provide them a way to access remote education. Although that is a high percentage, there were still 463 million students who did not have access to remote learning. Children who lived in rural areas struggled to have adequate access to educational information due to lack of technological connections (e.g. cable) and materials such as laptops, tablets, or cell phones. School districts are essential to constructing a new normal in the wake of the effects COVID has had, and, with other agencies and systems, rebuild the structure of our communities with the physical, economic, social, and emotional health help that students and teachers need in order to navigate challenging times (Fay et al., 2020). Distance learning became the new normal for education during the COVID-19 pandemic. Students and teachers needed time to understand how learning processes

would have to change during COVID, and for many, the changeover was very difficult (Mirsa & Mazelfi, 2020). Multimedia creativity was necessary for success in distance learning. When the school systems shut down, human interaction had to cease, causing many concerns regarding accessibility to technology, guidance for students who needed help while at school, and students who would fall behind without teacher-student interaction. While some were already prepared for a 1-to-1 student-to-computer ratio, many did not have a platform to continue their year in schools. Group work had to be facilitated in diverse ways because online options were different for every platform.

Academics alone was not the only concern that faced educators around the world. In 2016-2017, 26 million students – approximately 52% of all school children – were estimated to be receiving free or reduced school lunches; by 2019, estimates had risen to 3.6 billion receiving free or reduced lunches (Fay et al., 2020). Cafeteria workers continued food preparation for students twice a week and continued that program throughout the summer. Ultimately, they provided over 140 million meals during the summer of 2020 (Fay et al., 2020). The World Bank Group foresaw that students' well-being would be compromised as around 368 million children rely on the school feeding programs that each district provides. (World Bank Group Education, 2020). Children who were already living in dangerous or substandard conditions and being monitored by the Department of Children's Services were also of concern to educators and is evidence of the need for implementation of a better social and emotional program. UNESCO stated the population most affected by the consequences of the shutdown will be the most vulnerable children who rely solely on the school system for their educational and nutritional needs. Those that are socially or economically disadvantaged or students who have disabilities

will suffer the most because of what they are lacking by not being in an educational setting (UNESCO, 2021).

Students in grades 6-12 coped differently with the closures by taking on many different jobs within their family structure. Many students had to work on their schooling, and, in many instances, they were also asked to care for younger siblings. The economic disruption to families during previous world crises such as Ebola led many to wonder what the consequences would be for the youth in our school systems. During the Ebola crisis (2014-2016), students in Sierra Leone lost an entire school year. Sixteen percent of the female student population did not return to school – thus contributing to an increase in child labor, child marriages, and teenage pregnancy (World Bank Group Education, 2020). Programs were instituted to contact families who needed assistance financially, academically, and emotionally. Students were given access to online programs during the outbreak which gave them an opportunity to work from home and complete schoolwork at different times. As the COVID-19 pandemic continued, vulnerabilities in students grew due to their concern about family members being affected and the worry that the world would never be the same again. There was a dropout increase that was linked as the emergency school closures continued thus causing academic knowledge to suffer (Azevedo et al., 2021). Student loss and dropout rates became more damaging the longer schools were closed.

The concern over health issues that came about because of the pandemic continues to grow as students begin doing more online learning. Some students' vision has changed over the course of the past three years due to the amount of time they have spent online doing schoolwork or playing video games because they were not permitted to do physical activities outside of their homes. There are concerns that young children might develop early myopia due to increased screen time (Liu et al., 2021) as students are becoming more dependent on technology. With the

increasing rates of more students needing corrective lenses, the concern is that in a few decades we will see an epidemic in vision impairment. The consequences of this pandemic in relation to students' health may not be known until much later as they continue their education and join the workforce. Concerns, both short and long term, are mental stress, anxiety issues, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Maqsood et al., 2021). Adolescents were a vulnerable group as emotional disorders became increasingly more prevalent (Xu et al., 2021). The adolescent population was of particular concern for mental health and substance abuse professionals prior to the pandemic and numbers increased throughout the pandemic; however, many youths have had positive training in coping strategies to help guide them through this stage in their lives (Hawke et al., 2021).

Distance learning became a common term as school systems had to decide if they would return to school in August 2020. School districts produced a variety of reopening options that they felt would best suit their needs and the community's. Districts chose between complete virtual, a modified opening with students attending school on different days, and returning full time with the option of distance learning if families felt that was best for them at the time. Many low-income families without internet access had no choice but to have their children return to school. Al-Samarraie and Sneed (2018) reported that 21% of families in America were making less than \$40,000 a year and were struggling to get internet connectivity at their homes. The digital divide was seen in rural areas as students did not have access to the internet at their homes. Students who needed help with English as a Second Language (ESL) or students with an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) were not given as much help and guidance as before due to lack of resources. A hidden issue with online learning became cyberbullying as technology facilitated a new form of violence. Harassment at the high school level increased due to rising

use of social media and email in the past decade, and this harassment has increased since the onset of the pandemic as students were using their phones and their computers to continue the bullying. Cyberbullying is a contributing factor to many students having increased mental health concerns (Babvey et al., 2021).

Pivot recommended that teachers put their priority on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs rather than Bloom's Taxonomy as caring for students' well-being is more critical during the midst of the pandemic (Flack & Walker, 2020). The emotional well-being of students continues to be an issue, and with the change in normalcy, educators had to re-adjust their teaching methods and make sure that the whole student was considered. Teachers were also at a disadvantage during this time due to having more responsibilities assigned to them while they were also adjusting to concerns about COVID-19. They were struggling to produce ideas on how to reach their students while they were simultaneously dealing with family concerns about COVID and protecting their own family. Teacher burnout is a rising concern as teachers struggle to determine ways to manage more responsibilities and still be effective in the classroom. The existing academic gap has grown, and students are still being asked to complete their assignments per grade level even though so much learning has been lost. Students who chose to do a distant learning format could possibly now be further behind due to the lack of constant teacher conversations. Some students thrived at home while other students struggled and did not complete much of their curriculum.

The effects of COVID-19 on education has been a focus of every country as they decide how to move on with what is the new normal. "The CARES (Chronic Absenteeism Reduction in Every School) Act Elementary and Secondary Emergency Relief Fund aims to provide financial support to school districts affected by the disruption and closure of schools from COVID-19"

(Schleicher, 2020). These funds were sent to enable the schools to make assistance available to any family who was struggling because of school and business closures. Remote learning became a necessity as teachers began to teach via online platforms. Younger teachers began helping veteran teachers with technological issues as they had to move to online learning without sufficient training or guidance. Adapting to an online platform caused concerns throughout the world as there was not enough lead time to get the students prepared and the teachers educated as to what direction they would be headed. Academic achievement-related data and details about the psychological effects of COVID-19 as related to the loss of teachers and school counselors has only recently begun to be gathered (Hammerstein et al., 2021). Teachers had to be aware of each student's situation and what each family would be able to accomplish depending on the level of technology in their homes and their availability to work with their children. Research by educators will exhibit their current levels of strategies in the classroom along with awareness of their psychological needs of their students to determine their readiness to go forward with either online learning or in-person learning (Qazi et al., 2021).

Households across America were asked to be confined to their homes which left parents and guardians concerned about their own economic state of affairs; asking them to begin instructing their own children left them in a constant state of worry especially if technological concerns existed at their homes (Daniel, 2020). Students were asked to stay out of school and stay inside their homes for weeks resulting in less exercise and a greater variety of technology use added into their daily routine. Although screen time can cause health concerns the primary problem was the lack of exercise. Not being outside increased students' levels of isolation yielding a more significant concern for parents and educators. Social and emotional development was more critical to determine the level of isolation students felt in relation to their friends and

teachers and in turn try to develop lifetime healthy practices (Loades et al., 2020). School systems in America were able to use federal funding to help pay for social and emotional programs to help students cope with the pandemic and their feelings of isolation.

Humanistic Learning Theory

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, educators had been using various sorts of technology to deliver instruction. However, having a large percentage of PreK-16 students learning online was a novel situation and open to many unknown factors. “Decision-makers should collaborate with school/university administrators, educators, students, parents, and other stakeholders about the educational needs after COVID” (Korkmaz & Toraman, 2020). A one-size-fits-all idea will not work for school systems dealing with the backlash from the pandemic. Every system will need to look at the students and the community they serve to decide the best measures for their students. Transformational learning had to be created quickly as learning loss would be imminent.

The psychological and social aspects of education had to be addressed by every educational institution or system. The online world became a new way of educating students as they were being rushed into a world without in-class discussions and assignments. Students in many rural areas were being asked to learn without full access to technology. The humanistic theory was at the forefront of every district’s decision-making process. “Humanism with its inherent attunement to individual potential has decisively shaped transformative learning theory” (Hodges et al., 2020). Educators precisely analyzed what had to occur to get students engaged in active learning and comfortable with the concepts that they were being given.

The individual student had to take on more responsibility for developing a learning plan for home that required preparation and follow-through. In some households the older child was

charged with watching their younger siblings as well as teaching them while their parents were working (Fay et al., 2020). Their teachers set goals and worked with the students so they could work efficiently. The strategies that teachers employed had to work with the student's learning styles. As the pandemic continued, educators focused on different strategies that used brain-based learning, transformative learning, online learning, and social and emotional learning. There were deficiencies because some students did not have internet access in the home and were given packets that were not tailored to the individual's learning style. Across the nation students were falling behind because there was not an adequate way to teach those without internet accessibility. In 1983, *A Nation at Risk* suggested that the answers to teaching and learning deficiencies could be solved through more testing, more homework, more math, and more science. (Ansary, 2007). Teachers were held to a higher standard of accountability than ever before; however, the ideas expressed in *A Nation at Risk* did not alleviate problems with learning. Teachers want to teach the whole child rather than focus on testing.

Self-directed learning is imperative with online education and, when the schools closed, students had to guide themselves as they completed assignments. They had to become aware of their own learning style and be equipped to adjust to situations. Humanistic theory develops students who know how they learn best and can aid their learning without extra guidance from their teachers. Part of the humanistic theory is for students to feel like they belong in the world. With COVID-19 changing the course of how students live their lives, humanistic theory became more important.

The human development of students in grades 11-12 is vital as they begin to contemplate their future. "Personal growth is central to both learning and social progress" (Seaman et al., 2017). As students move from elementary to secondary schools there is a huge transition in how

they are educated as well as what they are learning in academics. Evans et al. says that “it can be the most stressful in a young person’s life” (Evans et al., 2018; Zeedyk et al., 2003). Evans et al. also point out that “it is important to understand the interplay between academic achievement, social schema, learning schema, and academic self-concept because doing so provides a clear target area to help children to maintain academic development across the transition to secondary education” (Evans, 2018, p 5).

The conceptual framework of humanistic theory was developed because of the need to focus on the individual person and their basic needs; educators must meet those hierarchies of needs to create a positive learning experience for the students to maintain academic growth.

Online Learning

There is a difference between emergency remote learning and online learning. The spread of COVID in March 2020 forced students and schools into emergency remote learning. It was problematic for educators to create a well-planned online learning concept in the short period of time between notification and implementation. High-quality online education takes time to prepare and cannot be done hastily; most online programs take approximately six to nine months to plan (Manfuso, 2020). To begin an online program, there must be a deliberate design for the class being created before going online (Manfuso, 2020). Students were given minimal instruction and were expected to be able to learn and stay up-to-date with lessons for the remainder of the school year. Teachers, as well, did not have time to devote to creating quality lessons for a virtual platform.

Instruction had to continue and, at the same time, staff members had to be kept safe. Colleges and universities had been teaching in an online environment prior to COVID, but students in PreK-12 encountered challenges. Many found this to be a stressful undertaking that

added to the anxiety of the issues that they were facing. This program had to be carefully designed; for it to be successful, nine dimensions had to be addressed. The many dimensions of an online program could range from pacing through the curriculum, the ratio between students and teachers, what curriculum will be used, and the roles of all stakeholders (Hodges et al., 2020). When designing a program based on these dimensions, one must look at how much time will be spent online, how students will communicate with teacher and peers, the student-teacher ratio, and how grading will take place. For students to be able to function on an online platform, they must be taught how to use this program. Issues were exacerbated because many of these programs were not designed to be used as instructional tools. The response to emergency remote learning had to be addressed by all stakeholders in the school system and the community.

Many students are comfortable with the use of technology; however, a concern is how well staff can manage while assisting their students and providing quality education via online platforms. The potential for student success is extremely high, but the individual must be goal-oriented for success. Medical and public health professionals determined that social distancing was the way to flatten the curve of COVID-19 spread; therefore, creating an online program so that students can still interact effectively is the key to making online learning work (Lederman, 2020). To meet the social and emotional needs of our students, school systems struggled to find ways to implement online programs that would help students interact with each other and their teachers.

Students who were placed in asynchronous learning did not receive consistent feedback because the class was not being held at the same times as their peers. Students were able to do work at their own convenience – which was useful for students in secondary education as many of them began to work jobs during the day and did schoolwork at night. It also aided parents to

allow their children to do their work at night so parents could assist or so the older child could care for younger siblings if their parents were at work. Some school districts created synchronous learning environments that allowed teachers to work with students at specific times so that instruction could occur along with discussions. This helped students have peer interaction which helped them feel like they were still a part of their school. Students can receive constant feedback when students and teachers are on the same site at the same time. Students can meet with their classmates and teachers during a specific time but due to it being online students are allowed to finish their classwork at any point in the day. There are difficulties with an online platform – many students were never taught how to get on the program, how to use the program, or how to download videos or assignments. The biggest difficulty for many is the bandwidth that they receive at their homes (Dhawan, 2020).

Online learning has become a new tool for educators as an addition to face-to-face learning; however, the onset of COVID created an immediate need for online learning. During COVID-19 the usual methods of instruction began to crumble when students and educators were asked to take on many more tasks and responsibilities and learn to teach with creative and innovative methods (Dhawan, 2020). The new normal in education has begun and educators are having to adjust to new methods of teaching and learning. Families are having to adapt to ever-changing technology and many families do not have access to the internet at their home – making it impossible to keep up with an online platform. One of the ways that learning can be enhanced is by positive collaboration between students and the ability to be able to research more information with ease (Silalahi & Hutaaruk, 2020).

Research has already shown that students who have heavy online usage have more anger issues, isolation problems, and struggle with social skills (Cockerham et al., 2021). Many

teenagers see technology as a form of entertainment, and it is used as a source of distraction rather than a tool for completing homework assignments. The fear is that students will become more isolated due to being alone and less likely to follow through with their assignments. The other fear is that students will be expected to take on more responsibilities than previously. Online learning is an option for those who still have pandemic-related health and other concerns and for students who excelled at self-motivation and have chosen to continue learning from home.

Blended Learning

Methods and tools change in education constantly, but the past three years have seen an accelerated rate of change. Prior to the pandemic, many educators had begun to use technology in their classrooms; however, teaching completely online was not something that they were prepared to do when the need arose. At the beginning of COVID-19, some colleges were already working online but students in high school were not used to that concept. It took time for them to adjust to the new way of learning and gave educators a chance to learn their online platforms. School districts had to understand what changes would need to occur and the effects they would have on each student's life. A digital transformation requires time, money, and the technology to make it a success; also required is the leadership of staff who are knowledgeable and experienced to create a process that will guide all stakeholders (Sow & Aborbie, 2018). Using monies awarded from the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER), many districts that were not already 1:1 (school system providing every student with a device) have purchased laptops so that every child would have one to take home if they had to be absent because of sickness or another closure. For transformation to occur, there had to be time to add training for the teachers to learn how to do everything that was being asked. Creative leaders had

to discover other ways of getting students to learn and still manage to consider their students' needs – not just academically but personally.

Blended learning is an innovative approach to education. Blended learning can be seen in numerous ways in the classroom: face-to-face teaching, peer work, group discussions, research, online assessments, and virtual laboratories (Lalima & Dangwai, 2017). One of the aspects of blended learning is that students can get training in life skills by learning about empathy, patience, critical thinking, and self-management. For this to work, teachers must be well-versed in how to run a blended learning experience for their students and invest time into planning. Teachers must think creatively to incorporate different ideas and be flexible in their teaching styles to create a blend of face-to-face learning and technology.

Self-regulation in blended learning is a vital skill; students are required to create their own learning goals and learn how to use time management skills appropriately. At the beginning of COVID-19, some colleges were already working online but students in high school were not used to that concept for the most part; therefore, it took time for them to adjust to the new way of learning (Rasheed et al., 2019). There is a possibility that a learning gap may occur if students are not taught the proper ways to do online learning. Due to diverse levels of abilities and behaviors in the group, learning in different environments is a social process that cannot be determined (Chen et al., 2018). The types of social interactions students have will change with the use of online learning. Students who can regulate their learning and their time will be able to be more successful than those who are more challenged by not being able to focus.

Students may also feel isolated by not seeing their peers in class daily. Students may alienate themselves from their peers especially if they are experiencing a trauma in their lives. They may not know where to turn if they are struggling. They may become disinterested in what

is being taught if there are issues in their lives other than their coursework. There may also be technical issues because of where they live or because of the lack of technology in their homes. Low socioeconomic families who may not want anyone to know that they need financial help to provide the resources their children will need to function successfully in a blended or online environment. (Rasheed et al., 2019).

Using the goal-setting theory, student motivation can only be achieved if the student is challenged by the specific task that they are being asked to do in class (Lam et al., 2018). Students may thrive when they are online and be able to discuss without having someone there to intimidate them. When anonymity is promised, students will be able to dive deeper into the material and say what is on their mind without fear of retaliation (Baczek et al., 2021). This allows for a deeper introduction to class work with a question that serves as bell work or as a quick summative quiz that serves as an exit ticket as students can focus on what they have learned and take it to the next level as they analyze what they have learned. They are also able to take what they have learned and apply it to other concepts that are found online. This allows for higher cognitive functioning, and it also takes the cognitive load from the teacher to the student and allows for more solid learning to occur as they can really focus on the standards that they are learning (Basogain et al., 2018).

The community of inquiry model focuses on social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence. Educators can set the climate and select appropriate content for their students which leads to appropriate discussions among their students. This sponsors an opportunity for students to feel safe while they discuss things in their lives that may feel confrontational in the classroom. The reflection that occurs often leads to students feeling more a part of the class than they would have had in the actual classroom (Law et al., 2019).

The fear is that students who do not handle online learning well will eventually stop doing the work and drop out. Kintu et al.'s (2017) research shows that there was a connection issue for the students during online learning that lead to students dropping out of school. Students who have issues with technology in their homes struggle with wanting to be online. For learning to be effective, students must be involved in the learning process. The motivation of both the students and the educators must be high so that students want to come back online and interact with their peers. To have successful teaching and learning in any format, the faculty and the students must be committed to the system. In an environment of distance learning, the student must be more committed due to it being more self-paced.

Brain-Based Learning Strategies

Understanding the brain and how it works can supplement any educational situation. Whether in class or conducting an online school, educators need to discover ways to determine how students learn best and determine the most effective ways that they learn and teach. Neuroscientists have long known that the brain is a highly capable and robust part of the human body that is able to change as needed by the type of learning that takes place. The brain changes how it learns as a child grows from infancy to adulthood (Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, 2008). During adolescence the brain is far from mature and will undergo major changes that causes many teenagers to be unstable and immature. Managing emotional regulation is the key to teaching teenagers. It allows students to learn, to problem solve, and to support the relationships between themselves, their peers, and their teachers.

Teachers began looking for strategies to get students accustomed to learning and to regain academic standards that were lost during the shutdown. Brain-based learning is a strategy that teachers employed; this approach considers the whole person and what each student requires

for learning. Research shows that brain-based learning is the current way to teach as it connects to neuroscience. While students are being asked to learn in unfamiliar ways while working from home or in the classroom, educators are looking into how students learn in order to guide them (Yudha et al., 2020). Educators must develop new skill sets by reshaping the learning environment to include all levels of social and emotional learning to help guide secondary students with the tools that they need to identify their emotions. An online platform changes what strategies need to be addressed when collaborating with peers and teachers. Educators who create themes for their classrooms can set a focus on academic standards and will also be able to incorporate the social and emotional skills needed to guide students.

Student motivation is key to acknowledging student success. Activities that are created must be motivational, proper for the age group, and have group options. Online programs have the feature of breakout rooms where students can work together and teachers can quickly visit and check for any stresses, add deeper questioning, and guide students to stay on task. Students can assume the cognitive load in the assignment thereby adding more learning potential by taking the responsibility for their own learning. They can draw their own conclusions from what they learned and return to look at the mind map that they created at the beginning of each unit to see how it all connects to the essential question for that unit.

Managing student learning can be done either through the online platform or in the classroom with blended learning when students adopt the seven aspects of brain-based learning and institute them into the lessons. Students must use (a) preexposure, (b) preparation, (c) initiation and acquisition, (e) elaboration, (f) incubating and inserting memory, (g) confirmation and verification, and (h) celebration and functional integration which can be divided into three categories: introduction, core, and closing activities (Yudha et al., 2020). Teachers struggled

with determining what steps needed to occur first when students returned from the pandemic. The decisions about how best to meet the needs of all students in whatever abilities they possessed would be a long process with guidance from every stakeholder. Students who have a positive classroom climate are more likely to experience a better learning experience and better recall of what has been learned, and they may experience a higher level of self-esteem (Jensen, 2008). Stimulating students through activities with their peers where there could be honest dialogue helps students with anxiety; students also gain safe spaces for discussion and sharing concerns about changes and COVID-related concerns.

The brain is capable of adapting to different situations allowing for change in how individuals learn (Bonomo, 2017). All students can succeed if placed in the right setting; the issue that has been seen throughout the pandemic is that many students struggled with online learning. Teachers were left with the role of developing methods to enable learning for each student in their classroom while supporting the rigor and relevance to the lessons. Engaging students and creating a repetitious concept allows for retention and understanding so they can understand the importance of what they are learning and how it is relevant to them (Maryati et al., 2020). Students must be engaged in their learning, and they must be aware that they are responsible for their own learning. With the onset of online learning, students had to decide their goals for the day and create a plan for accomplishing goals.

Educators who addressed social and emotional learning also looked at multiple intelligences or “people smart” skills to decide the best ways to look at social skills and other aspects of students’ lives. When considering brain-based learning it is essential to understand that “one side of the brain organizes the information into parts and the other perceives and works with the information in a series of wholes” (Bonomo, 2017; Caine & Caine, 1991). When

educators do not understand or choose to overlook this fact, students can find learning difficult. The brain develops systems in emotional, social, cognitive, physical, and reflective learning as it develops ways a student can learn in different situations (Handayani & Corebima, 2017). Educators must use this knowledge to apply proper teaching strategies to focus on the student – thus allowing optimized learning to occur.

There have been many breakthroughs in learning strategies in both secondary and higher education based on a neuroscience approach to brain-based learning. The relationship between the brain and how students learn is developed through “emotions, patterns, meanings, environment, rhythm, attitudes, stress, trauma, judgment, music, movement, gender, and enrichment” (Jazuli et al., 2019). Knowing how the student perceives stress and trauma affects the way they learn. Teachers must determine ways to make sure that all pathways are working together for success (Yudha et al., 2020).

Higher-order thinking skills reflect Bloom’s Taxonomy – students begin with small tasks related to an academic standard and then move higher up the pyramid to application and creation. Students build on what they have learned and make something work from that in another form. By using those immediate responses and creating something from that information, students can incorporate what they have learned and apply it to future knowledge. Challenging students to develop and apply what they have learned will create an impression of that material (Jazuli et al., 2019). The safety mandates during the pandemic created challenges as face-to-face collaboration could not occur (Yudha et al., 2020). While students were at home, it became more challenging for them to complete projects. However, it did allow students to learn how to create technological projects, leading them to a better understanding of the digital world.

Making connections between the subject matter in secondary education can create an atmosphere of learning in higher complex questioning. Creating a word map of information to be gleaned from the text at the beginning of the study will allow students to see where their studies will take them and, in turn, give them an opportunity to see what they already know and how they can build on that knowledge to create a deeper understanding of the text. The positive effects of using different strategies can have a direct bearing on learning and retention (Al-Balushi & Al-Balushi, 2018). Some worry that the use of technology may hamper students' excitement because they are frightened to try something new (Rasheed et al., 2019). Many students now have been using technology since their toddler years but are not adept at learning in a classroom. Teaching students with a blended learning environment gets students used to diverse ways to experience educational techniques (Dziuban et al., 2018).

Guided discovery learning connects to brain-based learning as students are guided through the learning process by action instead of listening. Instead of a teacher-led classroom where the cognitive load is on the teacher, the load should be shifted to the students as they discover for themselves the skills that are being discussed (Paas & van Merriënboer, 2020). This contextual approach begins with an introduction, moves to exploration of the questions, and closes with discussion with the class. The teacher is then able to ask those higher-order thinking questions to make sure students understood the process; they follow up by practicing what they have learned. Students can then be assessed on what they have learned through the process (Kartikaningtyas et al., 2017).

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leadership begins at the head of an organization and filters down to each level of the organization. Transformational leadership in the classroom is initiated by the

teacher. Successful leadership is evidenced by student performance as measured at the end of each year. Educators can transform students by elevating learning by creating goals and providing students with the confidence that they need to achieve the next level (Eden et al., 2002, Nolan & Richardson, 2014). The elevation that is made at the classroom teacher level is the one that will make the biggest difference in children's lives. The first step in transformational leadership is individualized consideration as educators treat every person as if they are a person with a success story waiting to happen and not just a number. The second step focuses on guiding students through problem-solving patterns by allowing them to think for themselves which enables them to increase their intelligence building by asking focused questions (Nolan & Richardson, 2014). Teachers start at the beginning of the year working on social and emotional skills that allow students to build relationships that will create a bond between themselves, their teacher, and their fellow students. By creating this bond, teachers can focus more on problem solving and questioning – approaches that will make the student's experience more hands on and interesting. This allows students to learn more creative ideas which will allow more growth to occur in their educational knowledge base. The third priority is to focus on the inspirational motivation that involves formulating, articulating, and sharing a vision or goal for the team through excitement of the school culture (Nolan & Richardson, 2014). By fostering self-directed learning students can be empowered in their own learning which changes the social contexts of their lives (Morris, 2019). The goal of leadership is to create an overwhelming sense of motivation to be better than you were before. The work that educators produce will show how well they led their organization as well as the success they had as a leader. The essence of administrative leadership will show itself as they show their own type of leadership in their classroom and take ownership of the teacher's classroom.

The motivation behind transformational leadership is to change the culture of the school setting where teachers and students want to learn and be better at what they are doing (Polirstok, 2017). Faculty training does not stop with professional development conferences; it must move past the conference to the next level – to the heart of education: the students. The fourth and ultimate step of transformational education is to allow respect for all people involved.

The burnout factor is a concern for all educators as the stress of teaching during the pandemic has caused concern about how the culture of the classroom has been adapted (Tafvelin et al., 2019). Educators are being asked to take on more tasks every day which takes them away from instructional time. Teacher burnout continues to be high – leading to educators leaving the field of education for other opportunities because they feel undervalued and exhausted due to being overworked (Vargas & Oros, 2021). The education community has had to manage and navigate having students complete their academic requirements under the mandates from the states regarding completing the school year remotely as they address issues that did not exist prior to the pandemic. Academic loss in student learning was an issue prior to the pandemic; however, it was exacerbated due to the additional loss of learning that resulted from COVID-related issues. Elementary and secondary school students are missing the basic skills will be needed in later years. Students in high school, on a block schedule, missed half of their classes due to the closures in March of 2020. Students did not have to do any of the work in some states thus making learning loss imminent.

The leadership of a building can affect teacher burnout; COVID-19 and other challenges will require leaders to have to transform the ways things are done to make sure school retain high quality instructors. Leaders challenge their followers to be creative and think for themselves as they are motivated for greater success (Tafvelin, 2019). Stagnation in the classroom can cause

teachers to want to change careers or retire. The challenge to administrators is to ensure that they support their teachers. Many teachers know how to reach their students, they just must be freed to instruct their students in the way that they learn best (Turan, 2013).

Leadership is about having an unobstructed vision for the future and creating ways of achieving success by creating innovative programs to help students with their daily lives (Jovanic & Ciric, 2016). At the educational administration level, staff members must produce a vision and a mission statement for their school. Individual teachers must produce a vision for the classroom that is aligned with the school's vision but is solely for their classroom. Educators must have administrative support as they share their vision of high standards which promotes a climate that works for every stakeholder (Baptiste, 2019). Encouraging teachers to be innovative and creative in their shared vision will bring ownership to them and to their students. It is a fluid statement that can be updated by the quarter, semester, or year depending on the need for change. Quality educators are a product of consistent training in developing their skills (Yusof et al., 2016). The training that they have received improve the ways they form their classroom, but the culture of the school also has a significant effect on how things are run in their classrooms.

Administrators who develop a vision, share the vision with their staff, and inform their teachers on how they expect the vision to be implemented as they go forward in the school year allow teachers to see where the culture of the school building is heading (Smith et al., 2017). Teachers, both new and veterans, need guidance as they go through the year. The guidance should inform them about the vision and how it is going to be implemented. An instructional leader guides the stability of their school with their ideas and their leadership. Support and follow-through on what the administration expects will aid in improving the quality of the school and can limit burnout at the classroom level. To increase one's awareness of their own values as

a human being guides children to make important decisions in their lives that will affect them as they leave the school system. A clear purpose designed for the improvement of all students will transform their successes in academics and in life.

Social and Emotional Well-Being

The role of emotional intelligence is important to creating culture change moments for students and individual schools. Goleman's emotional intelligence theory was first developed in 1995 and discusses the competencies of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management (Goleman & Boyatzis, 2017). The social and emotional learning aspect of our schools must be a top priority if we are to expect improvements in instruction and the well-being of students to occur. Change can disrupt a person's comfort level causing anxiety and stress among students – especially in the times of transition (Issah, 2018). With the disruptions that have occurred recently, teachers have had to take on more responsibility for creating sustainability. Change can be frightening for students of any age as they have had to create a sense of normalcy by creating a different welcoming environment. The five levels of social and emotional learning have been more important tools for teachers to allow students to be self-aware, self-motivated, acquire social skills, exhibit empathy, and learn to self-regulate their world. Every person that works together on a task brings different skills and knowledge that are essential to making teamwork viable (Kumar, 2014). Allowing students the time to work together to solve problems is important, and, although that has been difficult recently, teachers have found ways to make that work for the benefit of the students.

The onset of puberty causes a change in hormone levels and brain activity that can create issues as even minor social difficulties can make high school students feel rejected by their peers high school students (Yeager, 2017). COVID-19's shutdown caused students to be without peer

interaction for months and may have contributed to setbacks in social progress for teenagers. Social and emotional programs are implemented in elementary schools across the country; in many instances counselors go into the classrooms at least once a week to provide mini lessons, but as students transition to middle and high school those lessons are not as frequently offered. As students enter higher grade levels, academic standards are addressed with such depth that the time that it takes for a lesson to be completed leaves limited opportunities to engage in social-emotional learning (Gosner, 2020). Students do not know how to manage their feelings when their anxiety gets more difficult to handle and it is harder for adults to ascertain how the young person is feeling.

Relationships that are formed between students and educators based on common interests can lead to collaborations that can help solve problems. Allowing students and educators to find ways to discuss their similarities and differences can build those relationships allowing students a voice (Jagers et al., 2018). Educators must look for ways to incorporate these concepts into the secondary school's curricula. Teaching students to acknowledge the ways that we are different and to allow people to be themselves will guide the culture of our schools. For transformational SEL to function in our schools, we must focus on diverse cultures and make sure everyone feels represented and acknowledged. Supporting everyone's voice and giving them a platform to express their feelings and thoughts can support a more open and engaging culture. Staff can benefit from having their views heard to allow them creativity and the opportunity to share their ideas.

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

The National Council of State Legislatures (NCSL) (2018) focused on the benefits of social and emotional learning through the lens of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Research has shown that a solid social and emotional program can improve students' academic achievement and lead to lifelong benefits on students as they transition to adulthood. In 2011, an analysis of 214 school-based programs spanning kindergarten through high school showed that participants gained an 11% gain in achievement in their academic career (National Council of State Legislatures, 2018). A 2018 NCSL study showed significant associations between social-emotional skills in kindergarten and young adults across education.

ESSA was signed into law December 2015 by President Obama (U.S. Department of Education, 2017). The goal of ESSA was to have at least one non-academic indicator to measure student success. According to Title IV, Part A: Student Support and Academic Enrichment (2020), the goals of all local agencies are to “provide all students access to a well-rounded education, improve academic outcomes by maintaining safe and healthy students, and to improve the use of technology to advance student academic achievement” (Texas Education Association, 2020). Educating our students must focus on more than academics; there must be a well-rounded program where the focus includes the child's ability to function outside of the classroom. ESSA Sec. 4108 [20 U.S.C. 7118] (Healthy Future Students and Earth Pilot Program Act, 2019) identifies activities to support safe and healthy students through programs or activities that (a) integrate health and safety practices into school or athletics; (b) support a healthy, active lifestyle; (c) help prevent bullying and harassment; (d) improve communication; and (e) improve safety with mentoring and counseling to students (ESSA, para. C). Part D of ESSA Sec. 4108 calls for high-quality training for all school personnel about (a) suicide prevention, (b)

effective and trauma-informed practices in classroom management, (c) crisis management and conflict resolution techniques, (d) human trafficking, (e) school-based violence prevention strategies, (f) drug abuse prevention, and (g) bullying (ESSA, para. D). ESSA focuses on creating an environment for students so that every child will have access to training that allows them to be a more involved citizen.

At least 16 states have plans to include school climate in their ESSA plans, and most of the remaining states have pledged to encourage districts to support social-emotional learning (SEL) in some way (Learning Policy Institute, 2018). The process of social and emotional learning competencies is divided into five categories: (a) self-awareness, (b) self-management, (c) social awareness, (d) relationship skills, and (e) responsible decision making. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has organized a consortium of leading researchers and practitioners in the fields of PreK-12 education to ensure the assessments for both social and emotional learning are scientifically sound and can be used in action plans in schools (CASEL, 2017). CASEL looks at social skills as well as student achievement. Educators must determine whether students are able to learn in their current climate and, if not, determine how can that climate be made relatable for all students. The promotion of social skills such as problem-solving and risk-taking can lead to better collaboration of student work and can show students how to work with each other as they reach adulthood in a high-functioning global society. Accountability must be measured to address social-emotional skills and school climate. Governmental agencies have developed multiple resources for states to access SEL. In the past, districts saw teaching SEL as a distraction from the academic requirements that were in the standards; however, studies suggest that districts are seeing a need for more SEL services in schools. Suggestions made by the Learning Institute and

CASEL stated that educators should use the students' strengths to look at student achievement, behavior, and suspension rates (CASEL, 2017). SEL practices have been linked to better attendance rates and lower discipline issues at schools. Schools implementing the behavior programs that fit their school the best will be held accountable for their success rate by looking at increased attendance and decreased suspension rates as the schools determine the correct ways for their school to increase student achievement along with behavior concerns being addressed through the social-emotional programs that are being implemented (CASEL, 2017).

Social and Emotional Legislation

Legislation passed by the House of Representative in the 115th and 116th Congress on SEL practices has implications for both students and teachers. H.R. 4626 (Social and Emotional Learning for Families Act, 2018), the Social and Emotional Learning for Families Act (SELF), made instruction available to parents on social and emotional skills and provide training to teachers on how to reinforce those ideas (Social and Emotional Learning for Families Act, 2018). This grant would supply money for pre-service and professional teachers and will encourage the participation of all stakeholders. H.R. 4108 (Healthy Future Students and Earth Pilot Program Act of 20212019), the Chronic Absenteeism Reduction in Every School (CARES) Act, looks at students who have missed more than 10% or more of the school year. Fourteen percent of all students in school had missed more than 10% of school days with overwhelming internal and external reasons behind the absenteeism. This act would provide funding for mentors, and, as noted in the legislation, students who meet with mentors are 52% less likely to than their peers to skip a day of school and 37%less likely to skip a class. With the intervention of success mentors, students are engaged in class and can gain at least a full week of class attendance (Healthy Future Students and Earth Pilot Program Act of 2021, 2019).

Teacher burnout is a rising concern as teachers struggle to manage new responsibilities and still be effective in the classroom. Teachers are under a great deal of stress which affects their health and contributes to teacher burnout; many seek other employment in positions that have lower stress levels (Vargas Rubilar & Oros, 2021). Wellness programs have showed improvements to teachers' overall health, attendance, and engagement. To address the issue, Congress passed The Teacher Health and Wellness Act H.R. 4221 (Teacher Health and Wellness Act, 2019) which requires "the Director of the National Institutes of Health to carry out a study to add to the scientific knowledge on reducing teacher stress and increasing teacher retention and well-being, and for other purposes."

Collegiate teacher education programs are looking into the heart of the educational process, the student, as they focus on new programs that are beneficial for implementation into the school systems. "The recent report *From a Nation at Risk to a Nation at Hope* (Berman et al., 2018) presented a vision of what an appropriate education should be by integrating social, emotional, and academic development in constructing essential life skills" (D'Emidio-Caston, 2019).

Competencies of Social-Emotional Learning

Social and emotional learning competencies can be broken down to show the strengths of the program. When addressing self-awareness, it is important that students can show emotions, recognize their own strengths, have self-perception, self-confidence, and self-efficacy. Self-management helps students with impulse control, stress management, self-discipline, self-motivation, goal setting, and organizational skills. Social awareness leads to perspective-taking, empathy, appreciating diversity, and respect for others. Relationship skills can be a momentous success with communication, social engagement, relationship building, and teamwork. The last

competency is responsible decision-making which will aid in identifying problems, analyzing situations, solving problems, evaluating, reflecting, and ethical responsibility (CASEL, 2017).

The Aspen Institute supplied a deeper understanding of social-emotional learning. Social, emotional, and academic development is relevant to all areas essential to life (Berman et al., 2018), and will be relevant to students as they progress from school to the workplace. Showing students that they matter no matter their race, their sexual orientation, or their income level will increase their work efficiency now and later in life. These skills are flexible and will continue to change throughout the course of an individual's life. Success in social-emotional learning occurs when teachers foster these skills from an early age and urge students to strive for excellence. These are not just skills to be taught in early preschool but throughout their entire PreK-12 career. The price tag may be high on the programs that will truly show progress in students' lives, but it can be proven to be beneficial (Berman et al., 2018). The Council of Distinguished Scientists closed its report by noting that integrating social and emotional development and academic instruction is the foundation to success for students and the overall society at large. A key goal of creating the best program for students is to be certain to allow all students to be successful by incorporating data from their interests, intelligence, race, and culture. All students need to have a sense of belonging and it is imperative that as we engage with others, we get a sense of who they are and where they hope to be in the future. Ensuring that all students have access to the same opportunities regardless of their resources, economics, or partners is imperative to ensuring success to all schools and students. Strong leadership is central to making social-emotional learning a key part of allowing students to succeed. Administrations need to allow time and resources to each core and elective subject to allow for constant teaching of an SEL curriculum. Embedding social and emotional competencies into the academic calendar is a

way to provide support to both academics and the community. To bring a more positive tone to the climate in schools and classrooms we must be willing to support the growth of an SEL climate where all students are welcome and accepted.

The historical nature of social and emotional learning conflicts with the broader school climate if there is not a supportive district leadership at the helm of the school system. State and federal mandates have just recently started adding SEL content as a requirement for all levels of education Prek-12. A new wave of programs has shown a significant move toward “coordinated, systematic, schoolwide, and districtwide programming that is ecological” (The Pennsylvania State University, 2018) as all stakeholders are being involved in building a positive environment for students. Social and emotional competence and school climate overlap through (a) supportive relationships, (b) engagements, (c) safety, (d) cultural competence, (e) cultural responsiveness, (f) challenge, and (g) lofty expectations. Teachers prepare lessons that encourage responsibility, choice, discussions, and cooperative learning to allow students to master competencies.

Teachers can create change in their classrooms by fostering a positive climate in their lessons. Given that teachers spend a lot of time with their students during the school year, they can foster a welcoming environment (Harvey et al., 2016). Teachers create change by fostering one-on-one relationships with students. There are five domains that teachers can promote in their classroom: (a) open-mindedness, (b) conscientiousness, (c) emotional regulation, (d) extroversion, and (e) agreeableness (Evolve Treatment Centers, 2022). Open-mindedness focuses on teaching curiosity, tolerance, and creativity as children grow and learn. Children can learn to be conscientious and be achievement-oriented, be responsible, self-controlled, and be persistent when striving for their goals. Students should be emotionally regulated to be able to withstand stress, have a positive outlook, and have emotional control over themselves to keep balance.

Students need to be social, assertive, and have the energy to succeed. Students who are agreeable need to be able to show empathy, trust others, and cooperate in a group setting. These five items can all be taught in a classroom setting and involve the soft skills that are taught in early elementary school and are improved upon as they get to their later years in school.

The trends in education show that the benefits of social-emotional learning are clear. Districts cannot forge ahead in the upcoming year without debating how they plan to introduce topics in the SEL curriculum. Distance learning and virtual learning are growing in numbers due to the pandemic (Katzman & Stanton, 2020). It is imperative that those skills are not neglected because we are unsure what continued online learning looks like; districts may have to address the effects of students losing the social interactions they would have experienced had they been at school. Integrating SEL in a distance learning world has six components:

1. A conducive environment would allow students to have a schedule that is consistent and predictable as well as supplying a schedule for families to follow.
2. Use teachable moments as students learn about the world around them through current events – especially in the areas of social and emotional learning.
3. Add discussion prompts that allow students to talk through their feelings.
4. Allow students to practice opportunities of self- and social-awareness, build in brain breaks, write journal entries to process emotions, and encourage the families to go out and play.
5. Give students an opportunity to build strong relationships with their peers by using technology to do a show and tell, book clubs, and interviews to produce positivity and encourage learning. Teachers at all levels should remain to teach with explicit instruction while incorporating SEL strategies in reading, writing, and discussions.

6. Thoughtful modeling supports boundaries of when/then strategies. All students need to look at the when/then model as when this happens to me then I need to respond in this correct manner (Sutcliffe, 2019).

All six of these components will fit with the competencies of SEL but are transformed to help students who are feeling alone while they are learning at home.

Social and emotional concern in homeschooling can be a significant issue for some children. The fear is that children will lose the opportunity to interact socially with peers and not have opportunities to interact with different people with divergent backgrounds through asking for help and sharing experiences with others. If the child becomes less social, then the fear is that they will develop anti-social behavior as an adult which could be problematic for them in the working world. Rahma et al., (2018) examined the Javanese HSG Khoiru Ummah Curriculum which is based on the child's thinking level. This program allows students to learn at their own pace with many students thriving academically. During COVID-19, students were given an online option that allowed them to complete credits at their own pace which allowed students to gain credits for graduation.

According to Rahma et al. (2018), for a child to be successful the child needs to be learning all the time and they must learn according to their interests. The student must know why they are learning the material that is being presented to meet set standards and sub-goals. Social and emotional assets such as friendships, feeling concern for others, learning how to work for others, working on their own, and the maturity to strive to be better are key components to this curriculum. The aspects of social-emotional learning can be lost in a homeschooling in a single environment; however, if there is a community homeschooling concept, there is a possibility for social-emotional learning to occur. The other concept that is most forgotten is the need for

playing outside and role playing. Those are key concepts in early childhood that are left out of middle and high school. Those skills may look different as students grow older but are still needed for social interaction.

Trauma Informed Care

Students who were repeatedly exposed to childhood traumas are more likely to experience mental health diagnoses; those who are living below the poverty line are at a higher risk (Porsche, 2016; Taylor, 2021). COVID-19 affected 188 countries which has affected 1.5 million children and youth (Taylor, 2021). According to UNESCO this disruption is unparalleled educationally (Lee, 2020; Taylor, 2021). While students were home, educators did not know what they were experiencing at their homes. Educators reported anecdotal evidence about students who never left their bedrooms, refused to eat, did not shower, or did not leave their beds (Lee, 2020; Taylor, 2021). The stress of jobs being suspended or ending caused stress on the families as did having family members contract COVID and not knowing if they would survive. In cases when family members did not survive COVID, children were alone or moved to family or foster care. In 2008, nine percent of students were being raised by their grandparents (Baker et al., 2008); older adults were especially vulnerable to the COVID virus, and younger people had additional concerns if they were living with someone who could easily become infected and perhaps die.

According to Davidson (2017), 66-85% of youth report lifetime traumatic event exposure with many reporting multiple exposures. Low socioeconomic status students are at a higher risk of trauma exposure. When these events occur, building relationships in the classroom can be difficult, and, based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, those relationships are key to success in the classroom.

Promoting healthy schools became a priority as over 1.1 million confirmed cases of COVID-19 were reported worldwide in a span of 3 months (Lee et al., 2020). Mental health among adolescents became a national concern (Cook et al., 2015), but as COVID-19 concerns grew, educators became concerned that students were struggling. School nurses (approximately 95,800 FTE nurses) and counselors (approximately 111,000 school counselors) were responsible for 75% students' mental health (Fay et al., 2020).

Students must develop a solid growth mindset that can allow them to grow and develop ways to explore different courses of action that can lead them to success. Davidson (2017) discusses core values of safety, trustworthiness, choice, and control, collaboration, and empowerment. For many trauma victims, empowerment is extremely meaningful because it allows them to take back their lives and ownership of themselves and not exist only as the trauma victim.

Students who have had trauma in their lives experience a constant state of fight or flight. The fight or flight mode results from adrenal release of epinephrine and cortisol that allows the threat to be approached by the individual; short term effects raise the heart rate and the blood pressure (Forkey et al., 2021). The stress or fear of the unknown makes brains adapt so they can survive under the circumstances that they are experiencing (Ng, 2020). The brain identifies immediate danger when a person is on edge – a response (fight or flight) controlled by the amygdala, a small almond-shaped structure found deep inside of the brain (NCMH, 2019). The prefrontal cortex controls decision-making and determines how one should act in different situations.

Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs)

“Adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) refer to the abuse, neglect, and traumatic experiences in childhood that directly affect long-term adolescent and adult health” (Goddard, 2021). According to the CDC (2019), 1 in 6 adults experienced four or more traumas in their childhood. Kaiser Permanente’s Health Appraisal Clinic, in coordination with the Centers for Disease Control, initiated ACEs studies in 1995-1997 that resulted in the largest research studies to ever be conducted on the negative aspects of trauma on children through age 18 (Leitch, 2017). Goddard identified the four R’s approach to trauma-informed care: (a) realize, (b) recognize, (c) respond, and (d) resist re-traumatization. ACE is used to describe any traumas that occur to individuals under the age of 18. Students who have had chronic traumas can also have brain development issues in their childhood. “Trauma survivors are ‘primed’ to respond to situations and relationships that embody characteristics of past traumatic events or in which there was a perceived threat” (Sweeney et al., 2018). As a result of school closures at the beginning of the pandemic, students who may have already had traumas in their lives were sent home to an uncertain situation.

There was an understanding that the world had changed for students in middle and high school and how they were being educated had to change with the pandemic. Students who felt unsafe at home struggled with that stress, and many students were being asked to take on the responsibilities of going out to find a job, helping more around the house, supervising younger siblings, and supporting their own schoolwork. Usher et al. (2020) reported increases in family maltreatment during cases of families being confined to their homes for extended periods. Students could have delayed responses to traumas that surfaced during the shutdown – situations that they did not even realize were still issues. Closing schools can cause an increase in violence

in homes because educators would otherwise see daily concerns in their students' lives (Fore, 2021).

Preventing ACEs can reduce the numbers of health issues during adulthood which could translate to 21 million cases of depression, 1.9 million cases of heart conditions, and 2.5 million cases of obesity (CDC, 2019). The California Surgeon General's Report (Bhushan et al., 2020) states that social concerns, developmental, behavior issues, and high school incompletions are some of the biggest concerns. Overall, the expected amount of money to be spent on ACEs in California over the next 10 years (2019-2029) could surpass \$1.2 trillion. Throughout the course of the pandemic people have managed chaos and survival, and navigated the elements that were created to mitigate the outbreak (Fullen, 2021). Fullen stated that everyone will grapple first with their well-being – food, safety, and shelter – and later focus on a global competency. Global competency occurs after students can resolve their own personal existence. After that happens students can look outside of themselves at the world around them and be able to communicate from different perspectives.

The biology of toxic stress adds to the ACEs that students encounter and makes students at a much higher risk for health and social concerns for many years. Their trauma could also affect future generations if the individual does not find way to deal with their traumas (Franke, 2014). Stress can be defined as positive, tolerable, or toxic as not all stress can cause harm. Some students thrive on stress as they fight instead of using the flight mode. Students who thrive through the stress become resilient – being able to recover from the stressors in their lives and nurture relationships with their peers, teachers, and family members. Toxic stress increased during COVID-19 due to the death of a loved one or even the fear that after someone contracts the disease that they will not survive (U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

The Resiliency Model is a mindfulness-based paradigm that focuses on somatic therapy that is gaining exposure with dealing with trauma survivors. Awareness of the physical sensations that underlie emotions helps clients learn different techniques to help them cope with the emotions that they are feeling (Grabbe & Miller-Karas, 2018). Resilience can be enhanced by strengthening protective factors: individual, family, and community (Wilder Research, 2014). Resilience can be achieved through non-teaching roles with childcare agencies, departments of children services, and employment for the adults (Fay et al., 2020). Resilient families are critical for children through supporting them and listening to them; the community can provide many positive school experiences with the right support. The individual is the primary person that can aid with developing resiliency as they learn coping skills along with being able to self-regulate their emotions.

Neuroscience

Studies in neuroscience indicate that the emotional status during learning determines the level of academic success. Looking at education through the lens of neuroscience ideas of growth mindset allows students to change the way they view education. The more students can make an emotional connection to their lesson, the greater the imprint it will make on their education (Bonomo, 2017). If students are stressed in class, the learning that takes place in that classroom will have a negative effect on the student's education. Educational neuroscience connects the relationship between biology and medicine which allows a collaboration between academic school psychology and educational neuroscience programs (Wilcox et al., 2021). The attachment theory has been explored through neurobiological research; the prefrontal cortex has been shown to be critical for social cognition, empathy, self-awareness, and flexibility (Kaiser et al., 2018). Parent-child relationships are critical to the child's acquisition of social interaction

skills. The developmental trauma theory relies on the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis and its influence on the immune system which makes a direct connection to the ACEs study that was conducted (Kaiser et al., 2018).

Shifting the story for all children dealing with adverse childhood experiences can be accomplished through learning how to cope with their traumas along with the support of their families and their communities. Developing healthy children starts with full health checks, social-emotional lessons, and finding ways for the community to assist families in need. Many issues result from failure to get treatment due to financial concerns – an example of economics as it affects children’s mental health (Metzler et al., 2017) – as members of some families are at a higher risk of having more ACEs than others due to their socioeconomic status. This aligns with the social construction that includes child abuse and neglect but also social and economic concerns throughout their children’s lives (Metzler et al., 2017). The maltreatment of children was increased due to the parental stress that was shown during the pandemic (Katz et al., 2021).

Trauma Informed Practices

Trauma-informed practices in the schools must have administrative backing from district leaders and school leaders. These programs can support students as they cope with trauma and give teachers the knowledge that they will need in order to manage the issues in their classrooms. Many teachers have not been trained to address behavior or trauma issues, and they struggle to find solutions about what to do for their students. Many states have programs for trauma-informed care, and “it has been embedded in or connected to the domains of social and emotional learning, school safety, school discipline, and/or Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS)” (Thomas et al., 2019). Funding for these programs has become more widely available due to the pandemic and schools having a much higher need for student well-being

programs. Many school systems were able to provide programs to their schools in middle and in high school through ESSER funding.

Educators, as persons with frequent contact with students, must be able to recognize warning signs from their students. There is a cycle of trauma that people experience and educators want to learn how to break that cycle and allow students to get the help they need so that they can become successful citizens (McInerney & McKlindon, 2015). Educators can provide safe spaces and understanding for students to express the trauma that has occurred to them. By allowing them to take ownership students can start to cope with issues and work through them. Students must feel that they can trust the educator and that they are completely safe. Students must take control of their own processes of healing for them to move forward; children can be strong and resilient in their healing process if they rely on their strengths. All shame must be removed so that they do not believe it is their fault and let the blame fall on the person that created the trauma in their lives (Purkey, 2018).

Because of “limitations that have been placed on educators from the public health recommendations and emerging COVID-19 through all education, schools have expanded the practice of teaching and learning to include both academics administrators’ decision making about teaching and learning practice and educators’ planning and implementation of teaching and learning practice” (Harper & Neubauer, 2021). Although monies from legislative sources are being placed in the school districts for funding, there are concerns about how the money will be spent in the school systems.

There was not a clear path for students to follow when the shutdown occurred, and an online platform caused some trauma in students’ lives. There was a collective level of trauma forced on many students in secondary education because they worried about “their safety, our

ability to control their own circumstances, and the human experience” (Crosby et al., 2020). Teachers had to create intentional lessons that restored students’ sense of safety and to model adaptive ways of functioning. Teachers had to perform self-care to guide them as they had to cope with similar traumas that students were experiencing and maintain their composure for their families and their students.

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) is a delivery framework grounded in public education to prevent mental health issues and promote positive successes in the classroom by focusing on social and emotional issues as well as the academic successes of students (Cook et al., 2015). By exposing new risks that arose throughout the pandemic, it will provide insights into offering interventions for students (Fore, 2021). A stand-alone part of any intervention program is observation combined with universal prevention, suicide prevention, and child maltreatment a multi-system can help to find a ways to promote positive success in schools. The development of school-based prevention would target various risk factors to students and what preventive measures need to be in place to aid student success. Tier 1 is used to support programs seeking to help children develop coping skills and learn to solve problems in their lives. Tier 2 programs are implemented to intervene with students who are at risk of adverse childhood experiences while completing support groups. Tier 3 is implemented to support students already severely affected by trauma (Fondren et al., 2020).

Response to Intervention is guided to focus on the tiers of making sure that students’ academics do not fall behind in all academic subjects. Response to Intervention Behavior tiers are guided to allow students the opportunity to work on mistakes that they have made in hopes of guiding them in a positive way. Multi-tiered systems provide a framework for academic success

as well as a guidance system for behavioral development through programs guiding them for the future (Ziomek-Daigle et al., 2016). These programs must be implemented by all staff and must follow the framework that follows both the data and the evidence-based practices that will provide for a positive school climate. Successful completion of high school is catalyst of a student's journey, and an important part of that outcome can be a multi-tiered support system which will guide the relationships (Bohanon et al., 2016). Another facet of the multi-tiered framework is the use of a social-emotional learning program which guides the students through self-regulation (Bohanon et al., 2016).

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports

Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) along with Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) programs were developed as a part of a multi-tiered prevention program. As of 2019, 40 states had a program in place for intervention, but few states had interventions that led toward dealing with traumas (Temkin et al., 2020). PBIS draws upon behavior change, social learning, and positive organizational change among the students (Bradshaw et al., 2015). The primary features of a PBIS program are to capitalize on the prevention of problems caused by students and work on appropriate behaviors by acknowledging what actions are acceptable and creating a system to learn how to make correct decisions (Childs et al., 2016). PBIS is not a program but a process that uses data-based and team-based decisions to build a positive culture that can lead to school improvement (Gage et al., 2018). By investing in a student's life and building a support system, the goal is that positive behaviors will emerge.

A Tier 1 school-wide PBIS component involves six to ten staff members and an administrator who develop an action plan for distribution to the student body and staff. A behavior support coach could be onsite to help with implementation; typically this person is a

counselor or psychologist (Bradshaw et al., 2015). According to Bradshaw only 20% of youths will need a Tier 2 or 3 of PBIS to be successful in school.

Restorative Practices

Restorative Practices addresses the needs of a community through learning to resolve conflicts by holding people accountable for their actions. It focuses on building healthy relationships between educators and students which gives students a positive outlook if they are making harmful decisions (National Education Association, 2014). The differences between a zero-tolerance education system and a restorative program are that students have supports in place that can help them focus on ways to look at behaviors that are unacceptable and find ways to make amends; they can work with a peer program that allows students to be able to talk to through the behaviors and consequences (National Education Association, 2014).

Chapter Summary

Chapter 2 contains an overview of the relevant research related to educational, emotional, and health effects on juniors and seniors during the years of COVID-19; Specifically the Humanistic Learning Theory, and online learning, social and emotional learning, and trauma informed care were addressed. Through relevant research on the changes that occurred during COVID-19 and different techniques that were used to help students continue their education during unchartered times, the research can show different methods of achieving that success. Social and emotional learning has been researched for decades but now an increased level of the conceptual framework where educators are focusing on the whole child has become immanent. Trauma-informed care research has been developed to guide educators in the best practices for helping students succeed. Chapter 3 describes the methodology.

Chapter 3. Methodology

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore teacher perspectives of the academic, social, and emotional effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on students in 11th and 12th grades. Teachers were asked to respond to questions that focused on any changes they witnessed in their students during the school closures and the return to school. They discussed ways their classroom culture provided a safe and secure environment for their students. Teachers have built relationships within their classroom to allow students to focus on their social and emotional well-being. This researcher's goal was to understand the ways that classroom teachers changed the culture of their classrooms by allowing relationships to be built first and focusing on academics afterwards. The researcher also reviewed on the teachers' focus on the traumas that were happening in their students' lives. Classroom teachers had to teach their academic standards but also consider on the lives of their students and their families as COVID-19 disrupted lives throughout the school communities. Topics of discussion included trauma-informed care, social and emotional education, online learning, and the effects of COVID-19 on students in high school. After receiving verbal consent from participants, the researcher gave each an advance copy of the research questions. Interviews were conducted via Zoom, and each participant reviewed the transcript of their interview to ensure accuracy.

Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to examine educators' perceptions of how high school juniors and seniors dealt with the traumas associated with COVID-19 in their academics and their well-being. The researcher collected data regarding the perceptions of educators through interviews and documentation and then analyzed the following research questions:

1. What specific strategies have been used to help guide students through the past three years through the experiences of high school?
2. What are the teacher's perspectives of students' social and emotional well-being during COVID-19?
3. What are the teacher perceptions about how 11th- and 12th-grade students have been able to handle the traumas associated with COVID-19?
4. How do educators perceive students' ability to stay on track academically and the influences that it has had on students during COVID-19?

Design of the Study

The researcher determined that this study would be appropriately examined through a qualitative approach. Phenomenological research is the study of the lived experiences from first person point of view (Groenewald, 2004). Qualitative study explores real world experience to give a deeper meaning to the phenomenon that is being evaluated (Tenny et al., 2021). This study described the lived experiences of teachers in multiple counties throughout eastern Tennessee by collecting non-numerical, rich, and descriptive data through interviews and document analysis. Analysis of the data is required for finding common themes and ideas to understand the experiences of high school juniors and seniors through the experiences of their teachers.

Qualitative studies focus on a specific group which means that the sample size is small. In this study, only educators who have collaborated with high school juniors and seniors were interviewed. Their opinions may not be shared by other educators elsewhere.

The qualitative method employed for this research study was a narrative. The narrative approach is a collection of stories in which the individual's experiences are shown through

storytelling (Butina, 2015). The stories are conducted via interviews which allows the person to tell their story from their perspective. The type of narrative interviews that were conducted were open ended interview questions that were prepared ahead of time and given to each participant before the interview occurred. The questions were all asked in the same sequence in all the interview processes. If, during an interview a participant mentioned an idea not included in the questionnaire, the researcher followed that line of questioning to gain deeper understanding of the participant's views. The data analysis that was used throughout the interviews was to translate the information through the documents and look for common themes. Narrative research design is beneficial to the research as the lived experiences of each educator will allow for the research to be coded for themes that will help examine how the students fared throughout the pandemic.

Site Selection

The sites chosen for this research study are found in Lakeville County. These high schools were chosen because they are not trauma informed care schools, and they are all rural schools that dealt with issues with COVID-19 along with internet concerns.

Population and Sample

The researcher used purposeful sampling and snowball sampling as some interviews led to identifying participants. Purposeful sampling was chosen for this research as it was limited teachers in grades 11 and 12 (Palinkas et al., 2015). Snowball sampling also known as chain reaction sampling was used to gather content-rich information from educators who taught with students during the pandemic. Snowball sampling is used for studying relationships, and for this research study the relationships between the educators and the students were examined (Lavrakas, 2008). The researcher identified two criteria to define participant eligibility. The first

criterion was that the teacher currently teaches students who are in the 11th or the 12th grade. The second criterion was that the teacher must have taught from the beginning of COVID-19 to the current year, 2019-2022. These selections were made to understand how the pandemic has affected students in higher secondary education from the beginning of the school closures to the current school year.

Data Collection Strategies

The first step in the data collection process was to obtain permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at East Tennessee State University. Upon approval from IRB, the researcher contacted the directors of schools from the districts chosen for the study. The researcher was given permission to contact the high schools from the different districts which lead to identifying the high school educators that qualified for the study. Each potential participant was provided with a description of the study and the purpose of the study. The researcher requested an interview, and each potential participant was given a list of the research questions; through that process a list of educators was created.

Individual Interviews

The primary data collection method for this study was through semi-structured interviews. The use of semi-structured interviews allows for a flexible dialogue to be implemented that can be supplemented with follow-up questions, probes, and comments that can explore the sensitive issues in the study (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Interviews can be scheduled in advance giving the participants time to review the questions and to think about different events that can answer the questions in full detail. It delivers a personal perspective to the research while giving it a reflective nature to the questioning.

Two types of field notes were recorded during the data collection process: descriptive and reflective. Descriptive fieldnotes include descriptions of the accounts of the questioning. Data was recorded in concrete and precise terms. The reflective fieldnotes are for recording thoughts, feelings, and ideas during and after the interviews to preserve the richness of the interviews. The reflexivity in qualitative research allows the researcher to dive into the data and connect the human experiences to allow a deeper connection (Reid et al., 2018). It enhances the experience and is a way for the researcher to record nonverbal communication and associated ideas while reading the interview transcripts and connect the interviews together to create common themes.

Interviews were conducted via Zoom at a time that was convenient for the participant. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Data Analysis Strategies

The researcher framed this study by looking at humanistic theory. The humanistic theory was investigated by looking at the well-being of the student and how their lives were affected by the COVID-19 closures.

Data were collected through interviews that were recorded, transcribed, and coded. Coding allows the researcher to dive deep into the interviews and find the common themes that are mentioned throughout. The coding process begins with open coding – moving line by line throughout the interview creating many different codes. As the researcher continues to code the material, new themes emerge and patterns are formed. Following the open code format, a selective coding process occurs allowing for the important categories to emerge as the themes. Through these themes the researcher can understand the collected data. Thematic analysis will show how all the data is connected as themes are identified located (Frey, 2018). By coding line

by line, researchers can connect common themes and create themes to guide them in document analysis.

Data analysis was ongoing through the entire process of the data collection phase. The interview protocol was given to prospective participants so that they could review the questions and choose not to respond to any questions that they may not feel qualified to answer. The researcher transcribed all the interviews onto Microsoft Excel for review and began coding for themes. As interviews progress, the researcher compiled descriptive and reflective fieldnotes on each interview and review for common themes. Information will be outlined in the order questions were asked during the interviews. Data will be triangulated (Salkind, 2010) through multiple sources as drafts of each interview and quotes are reviewed by the participants through member checking and the numbers of times each theme was mentioned by frequency. All the interviews were anonymous, and each participant was given an alias to protect identities. By implementing triangulation, it allows for greater validity and removes the bias of the researcher allowing for credibility, dependability, and confirmability.

Assessment of Quality and Rigor

Credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability is shown throughout research in qualitative studies to prove the authentic nature of the data (Anfara et al., 2002). Throughout the data collection phase the participants will be asked to check their information for accuracy and that it was reported in the right context. Fieldnotes, both descriptive and reflective, will be kept to maintain a record of what the interviewee mentioned in the exact tone and meaning that it was intended. Every participant was given an alias to allow for the discussion to be truthful and encourage each participant to be forthcoming and comfortable in relation to each

question. Each participant was allowed to amend their interview if something came to their mind that they felt needed to be added.

Purposeful sampling to get participants was used to supply a thick description of the literature to show the need for the study as well as future studies that can be presented. This study can be reviewed and amended as more COVID-related data becomes evident.

The researcher maintained an audit trail of the information that was received during the data collection phase. The researcher transcribed and coded the information and used the program ATLAS.ti for help in determining themes. Peer reviewers were asked to evaluate the report for accuracy.

Throughout the data collection phrase, reflexivity will be used to allow the interviews to have validity and maintaining accuracy from the interview process.

Ethical Considerations

The Institutional Review Board will review the ethical considerations. All participants will be given aliases to protect anonymity. Informed consent was given by the director of schools and the participants that chose to participate in the interview process. A separate Zoom link was created for each interviewee, and the recorded interviews were saved via OneDrive through East Tennessee State University. No participant was harmed in any way throughout the course of this research study. If at any time the participant felt uncomfortable with the questioning, they could choose to leave the study. They were given a list of questions before the interview so that they could review them and inform the researcher know if there were any questions that they do not feel comfortable answering.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in a qualitative study is to examine the thoughts and the feelings of the participants in the study as they listen to their stories (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The interviews must be transcribed verbatim before the data analysis; memoing allows for the researcher to be able to record their thoughts as they reflect on the data that has been collected during the interview. The researcher must monitor and reduce bias throughout the research and develop competence in their study. Advance copies of the interview questions were sent to each participant so they could be prepared. The data collection process and the analyzing of the data must follow the format as presented at the beginning of the study. The researcher then produces their findings through the data collection process and presents the findings of their study.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 3 describes the methodology related to the essential research question, what are the 11th- and 12th-grade educators' lived experiences of students during the COVID-19 pandemic? The research questions and research design, site selection, population, participant information, data collection strategies, data analysis strategies, and assessment of quality and rigor are included. Chapter 4 presents the findings of this study in relation to the research questions and emergent themes.

Chapter 4. Results

The purpose of this study was to examine the educator's perceptions of students affected by the onset of COVID-19 during their junior and senior years in high school. The researcher collected data regarding the perceptions of educators through interviews; analysis was based on the following research questions.

1. What specific strategies have been used to help guide students through the past three years through the experiences of high school?
2. What are the teacher's perspectives of students' social and emotional well-being during COVID-19?
3. What are the teacher perceptions about how 11th- and 12th-grade students have been able to handle the traumas associated with COVID-19?
4. How do educators perceive students' ability to stay on track academically and the influences that it has had on students during COVID-19 through the experiences of high school?

Data were collected primarily through semi-structured interviews with individual teachers. These interviews were collected via Zoom meetings that were done separately to gather independent answers. This allowed the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences that were shared by each educator. Transcripts of interviews were provided to each participant to ensure accuracy. Participants were allowed to provide any additional information they would like to include. Transcripts were reviewed, coded, and examined for emerging themes.

Table 1 represents how the interview questions addressed each research question. The numbered interview question in the interview question column corresponds to the research question it addressed.

Table 1

Research Question and Interview Question Matrix

Research Questions	Interview Question
What specific strategies have been used to help guide students through the past three years through the experiences of high school?	5, 6, 7
What are the teacher’s perspectives on students’ social and emotional well-being during COVID-19?	9, 12
What are the teachers’ perceptions about how 11 th and 12 th grade students have been able to handle trauma associated with COVID-19?	3, 4
How do educators perceive students’ ability to stay on track academically and the impact it has had on students during COVID-19?	8, 10, 11

Individual Interviews

Through purposeful sampling, 11 classroom teachers and 2 school counselors were identified to complete individual interviews. Table 2 provides a summary of the demographic information pertaining to the educators’ gender, years of experience, and subjects taught.

Table 2*Participants*

Name	Gender	Years of Experience	Grade Level	Subject.
Educator 1	Female	23	11 th /Curriculum Coach	Academic Core
Educator 2	Female	5	11 th /12 th Grade	Academic Core
Educator 3	Male	16	11 th /12 th Grade	Career Technical
Educator 4	Male	18	11 th /12 th Grade	Academic Core
Educator 5	Female	34	11 th /12 th Grade	Foreign Language
Educator 6	Male	7	11 th /12 th Grade	Academic Core
Educator 7	Female	20	12 th Grade	Counselor
Educator 8	Female	16	11 th /12 th Grade	Special Education
Educator 9	Female	22	11 th /12 th Grade	Academic Core
Educator 10	Male	7	11 th /12 th Grade	Career Technical
Educator 11	Male	23	12 th Grade	Academic Core
Educator 12	Female	33	11 th /12 th Grade	Counselor
Educator 13	Female	5	11 th /12 th Grade	Career Technical

Interview Results

Data collected through participant interviews were transcribed and coded. The researcher began with open coding, moving line-by-line through the interview's transcripts (Frey, 2018). Codes were created for as many categories as necessary. The researcher continually changed codes throughout the coding process and saturated the topics as the coding process continued. Following open coding, the researcher conducted a selective coding process where themes

emerged to provide insight into the collected data from the participants. The main categories were determined throughout the process. Credibility was determined through semi-structured interviews with 11 classroom teachers and 2 school counselors who have worked with juniors and seniors for the past three years.

The researcher determined the themes that emerged in response to Research Question 1 which dealt with building relationships in their classrooms, having high expectations, giving appropriate feedback, and communication between all stakeholders. Themes that emerged in responses to Research Question 2 were self-awareness, self-management, and social awareness. Themes that emerged from Research Question 3 were relationship traumas, mental health concerns, and accepting responsibilities for where they were headed next. Themes that arose from Research Question 4 in response to the effects of COVID-19 on students were school, sports, attendance, long-term mental health, the ability to graduate from high school, and concerns about the first years after graduation. The results of this study are organized by the research questions that guided this study.

Research Question 1

What specific strategies have been used to help guide students through the past three years?

The themes that emerged when teachers discussed their techniques for working with students in their junior and senior years of high school were: (a) building relationships, (b) setting high expectations, (c) giving appropriate feedback, and (d) communication.

Building Relationships

Participants indicated that during COVID-19, the primary technique teachers used was building relationships by learning more about their students and how best to guide them through the remainder of their high school years.

Educator 3 said:

You know, you hope to get up the trust and relationship that you build with these students to where you know they can confide in you; they will share with you or especially you know when it's emotional or traumatic situation that you know is affecting them as a student you want to try to get to the bottom of that.

Educator 4 said:

At the alternative school when they came back to us, we changed how we reached out to our kids because we are at a school, that is, you know, we have some of the kids that are the less than desirable on your campus. But because they are so far behind and they reached the point, an in an age, category [aging out] would have a bunch that became 18 as a junior 18 midway through their senior year; we must really develop a relationship and mentoring to guide them to finish their regular high school program rather than seek out a GED just because it is easier. So, it has been a transition of we are here to make sure, that you serve your time to make sure that you are successful when you are finished here.

Educator 7 said:

I'll even call them by their first, middle, and last name to get their attention, just so they know that they're seen, and they're valued and they're part of this community. By showing our faces, we build a rapport and encourage students to always come to us.

Educator 8 said:

I just develop relationships with them. It helps set up a good year, I've been their English teacher since freshman year so basically just developing high expectations and constantly discussing what is expected. I explain effort and that it takes you a long way instead of expecting something to be given to you.

Educator 9 said:

I'll do some interest inventories at the first of school and we have a little icebreaker that we do, and that kind of lets me know what they're into what they like to read, what they like to watch, what they are involved in and if I can know that then I have a little way into them and start building that relationship.

Educator 12 said:

I make a point every day to speak to every student I see. I do morning duty and afterschool duty to speak to every student I see so I can socialize with the kids to build that trust and relationship where they feel comfortable just to come and sit and talk about whatever.

Educator 13 said:

One thing is my relationship with my students, and I feel like I have great relationships with them and they feel like they can confide in me, but I also have high standards so if you come into my classroom, you're going to respect me, my classroom, and you will know all the things you need for this class and be confident about it, but you must put forth the effort and I've had students that have come into my class, and they got those expectations and they drop my class. That is fine because they're not going to be successful if they stay.

Setting High Standards and Giving Appropriate Feedback

Participants indicated that by setting high standards for their students and being able to collect their daily homework to give appropriate feedback, they were able to help build relationships. The educators report that using these techniques allowed students to bond with their teachers; this helped foster and continue relationships when students returned to the classroom. Educator 3 said:

We've had a lot of online stuff and getting them and keeping them engaged or even active is a huge challenge. Adding feedback assignments to where I am looking for specific data or specific information, I'll always try to include a couple extra questions in there that are more geared toward are you getting all of this and can you explain it to me.

Educator 6 said, "I think holding them to high standards has helped. Some students come from places where they really don't have high expectations, I think people inherently doubt themselves." Educator 10 said:

I need you to be more of a leader and act like you're a lot more mature and more experienced than other children, which you are. I'm depending on you to hold down this classroom instead of being disruptive. Nine times out of 10 that has worked. I have not had a lot of trouble out of seniors' work. In the CTE pathway, it's all voluntary, you must sign up for my classes so rarely are kids truly stuck with it, so to speak, like a core class, and I have overall a positive experience especially with the juniors and seniors.

Educator 11 said, "I take their answers, even it is wrong and run a different way, almost like I can see why you answered that that way and try to steer them back to the right answer.

Educator 12 said:

We do that in our check ins, as far as academics and some students may turn from semi-annual into month or biweekly meetings. I meet with every student at least twice a year, just to touch base and say, okay this is where you are at, this is where you need to be, this is what we can do to help get you where you need to be. And some of the kids need a lot more assistance than just that once a semester meeting.

Educator 13 said:

I have expectations where I expect them to be professional, dress professionally, act professionally in my classroom. I also oversee HOSA and that is a different type of relationship, when you have that organization, you have those kids that are competing. Being in the medical field is hard and I want them to be successful, my goal is for everyone to pass for everyone to be successful, but you must learn and learn how to take notes. You must learn how to be professional; you must learn how to work with people you don't really like, and I try to teach that in my classroom.

Communication

Participants believe that the most effective technique that they have used in the past few years is communication between themselves and their students. Educator 2 said:

Adopting Microsoft Teams and similar things to open that line of communication. If you are stressed about something going on in your life, I need to know about it, and they're more responsive to talk to me like me now than they were before. They want to communicate with me whether it's face-to-face, whether it's through Teams, email, or a phone call. They feel overwhelmed and if something is going on, they tell me about it. Communication is the best thing I've had; students whose family members have passed away due to COVID and just the stress. I don't have the same expectations or the same

deadlines for them as I do for other students if something is going on with them, if they have communicated with me, I am able to work with them and help them out. If they are out of school due to COVID, we have a great level of communication. The biggest thing is I've tried to stress to them is that communication is the most [important] asset that they have. Some of them use it as an excuse not to do their work but you're still responsible for the work and for learning that material.

Educator 7 said, "I shoot a quick text and they feel comfortable and texting me back. I delete nothing." Educator 8 said, "We have constant communication and never leave them alone while checking on them throughout the school day." Educator 13 said:

Communication is the key; Using Microsoft Teams has been good and the chats to reach out so I feel like that's been the best thing during the past three years to help keep kids on track are the best part of the communication.

Research Question 2

What are the teacher's perspectives of students' social and emotional well-being during COVID-19?

Each participant was asked their how they perceived their students' social and emotional well-being throughout the pandemic. Educators discussions focused on students being self-aware, learning how to self-manage, and a new sense of social awareness as they returned to school after being out of school – some for six months and those that chose distance learning, a year and a half.

Focus on Self-Awareness

Participants indicated that out of the five core concepts of social and emotional learning, self-awareness was the key to helping them through the pandemic. Educator 2 said:

It's my job to teach them, but you know I must teach them more than math. I must teach them how to go on about in the world, and how to handle these emotions and stressors, because a lot of them don't have that from other places.

Educator 6 said, "I think it made a profound mental health impact on them. You know, they are just isolated. It is like they were in solitary confinement." Educator 7 said:

If you're not feeling great about yourself and [all] you have is social media of people who put the very best out there for you to see, what does it do to your self-esteem? It goes down; so I just really feel like it played a lot of negative forces into our kids in terms of socialization. They struggle with carrying on a conversation and how to have a good self-esteem. Social media is not real life. These are major issues for our kids.

Educator 12 said:

They did not get the close guidance that I normally would have given to them as far as career options. They were not independent enough to pull those options, even though they had the resources such as College Board, College for TN, and other sites for the next step. Military thoughts and everything to give them ideas on what they should be doing and exploring different careers and the things that they can do to enhance their choice options that they did not take advantage of that on their own. They kind of need more of a motivating factor there, whether that be a parent, teacher, or somebody to help guide them with it.

Focus on Self-Management

Participants believed that helping students self-manage both academically and behaviorally helped them cope with the issues they were facing both at home and at school.

Educator 1 said, “Some kids already have some social anxiety issues. I had one student who did well online because she didn’t have to be in a crowd of people so she could do her thing at home.

Educator 4 said:

They lost those skills they should have been learning and they lost the ability to socialize outside of their peer group. The only place that students learn how to communicate with adults [is school] and when they could not do that, they communicate with everyone like they do with their peer group – which in the workplace and even in college oftentimes is unacceptable. They lost the skill set to be ready to be for taking notes or working out problems where you do not look the answers up.

Educator 5 said:

I inform the students on the first day that I am available before school if need be. I arrive at school at 7 a.m. if not before. I can count on one hand, who has come to get help. I often talk to their counselors if they are struggling in class, showing habits, lack of focus, to see if the counselor has suggestions.

Educator 12 said:

Some students did okay, but a lot of the kids’ overall study habits were not good, especially on the time that they were on our channel. That’s where we saw the largest percentage of our failures in different courses; the students needed more guidance.

Focus on Social Awareness

Participants perceived social awareness to have the greatest effect on students during their junior and senior years of high school as many students did not behave appropriately when they returned to school and were together again. Educator 3 revealed:

The social aspect of just being together at school with friends and peers – I think some of them continued that same lifestyle, even when school was shut down or isolation was being implemented. I feel they really missed the social environment of school, but in hindsight, they probably didn't either because they may not have been allowed to come to school and gather in this sense, but you know, according to the student's current system of the parents. If they still have social gatherings, they still, you know, hung out with some of their friends, so it wasn't total isolation. When the students got back into the classroom there was just an incredible amount of tension and anxiety. You had a lot of conflict as far as some of the mandates with masks. The lockdown along with the restrictions made it hard for some students to return with dealing with real social situations and then all a sudden, that was taken away from them and then they got back together, and they didn't know how to talk to each other or if they could touch each other. There was a lot of stress and a lot of anxiety in a lot of them upon return.

Educator 9 said:

I think some of my students, it really didn't affect all that much because they were so used to communicating with social media and texting, video game platforms so that they can interact with their friends there for them that wasn't such an issue, but for others who didn't have all those opportunities and for the more social, the more extroverted they are, I think that made a difference. They needed some socialization; they are really feeling like they were missing out.

Educator 12 said:

People are social beings that they did not abide by the isolation and everything and that it's just not good. The kids that did stay isolated seem to be more depressed and have

more of the psychological isolation going on. The loss of the contacts, the constant friendship that I did have, I see a lot of those kids, no longer have those contacts that they once had that help keep them healthy.

Research Question 3

What are the teacher perceptions about how 11th- and 12th-grade students dealt with the traumas associated with COVID-19?

Educators were asked questions that related to student traumas both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the interview process there were three primary categories that arose throughout the questioning: relationship trauma, mental health, and increased responsibilities given to students during their junior and senior years of high school.

Relationship Traumas

Participants believed that the most significant trauma that they have experienced was navigating relationships between their families and their relationships with their peers. Educator 3 said, “Students have dealt with personal trauma at home related to family. I’ve had several cars crash victims in the last couple of years. I have had several major surgeries in the last few years.” Educator 5 said, “Over the years, there have always been family issues, drug/alcohol abuse.” Educator 6 said, “I think we’re used to seeing maybe a trauma of kids not having a traditional family. Food lapses and things like that, but it seems like now you must deal with relationship trauma with drugs and alcohol trauma.” Educator 7 said:

Most common traumas are usually stuff that’s happened at home that morning. Parents, sibling something like another trauma. That seems to really affect our kids, the loss of a loved one through death. Family members, friends, suicidal things like that and it’s even been like that this year. We’ve had some traumas since we got back from school, mainly

dealing with parents who ask them to leave the home. Maybe it's a temporary situation but we have several students who are either stay with friends, but it's usually at parents urging and not the students.

Long-Term Mental Health

Participants reported existing long-term mental health issues as a trauma that was exacerbated during COVID-19. Educator 1 said:

One of my students early in the school year had his car repossessed, and all of his belongings were in his car, and he didn't have a way to get to school or to work for a few days. Another student had been in foster care for three years and had her custody returned to her biological father. There was an entire ordeal in and out of the court system.

Another student went through a nasty divorce of her parents which was traumatic for the mother and the child who was 17 had to miss an entire week of school to take care of her mother.

Educator 2 said, "The students still talk about what they have missed out on during the shutdown and things that are still missing out on. This has had the largest impact on their lives. Educator 8 said:

A lot of them are living in poverty and live in broken homes. They deal with abuse, hunger, a lot of depression, anxiety, mental health, any normal mental health, drugs mostly just about everything that could happen has happened. The learned helplessness of the mentality that it must be given to them, or they don't need to work for it. I mean, they don't have that work ethic that should be established in them by that grade level.

Educator 11 said, "They're dealing with suicide awareness and so they had meetings, they had groups that did skits for the student body to help with awareness."

Educator 12 said:

Well, I have done a lot more referrals to third party persons for actual therapy sessions. You know, school counselors are kind of limited in what we can legally do as far as therapy sessions and some kids really need that. The depression rate is up, meaning the suicidal tendencies have increased a lot so I deal a lot with those issues. So, I have made a lot more referrals since the pandemic began, than in prior years for more intense care.

Responsibilities because of Increased Traumas

Participants perceived students were given more family responsibilities during the past three years. Educator 1 said, “I had one student who would try to cut the class, but there were always toddlers in the background because she had to babysit.” Educator 2 said:

A lot of students in my room are struggling with deadlines because you must do it in class, not do it whenever and turn it in tomorrow. They are used to online work where they can do it at any time. I think I have some students who worked from home last year, and this is their first year after working from home with COVID, and they are having a really hard time with this is your designated time to work on things, not you can do it whenever you want to. You can ‘t stay up until 3 o’clock in the morning and do at your home.

Educator 6 said, “Working with students – it is hard to not want to fix everything for them but not being able to because they need to make their own decisions, but obviously you can’t make the decisions for them.” Educator 10 said:

You stay focused on what’s right in front of you because there’s always going to be this big stuff here to worry about, but you still must do your lesson right here and gain the knowledge and the experience that it’s right here in front of you. That will make you

better for the bigger stuff sometimes, and you know I just try and not ignore and jump on it, if I can.

Research Question 4

How do educators perceive students' ability to stay on track academically and the impact it has had on students during COVID-19?

The participants were asked how they perceived the impact of COVID-19 on students both academically and emotionally. The themes that emerged from their interviews dealt with academics, sports and extracurricular events, and attendance as well as mental health and the aftereffects of their next steps in academics such as graduating on time and post-graduation options.

School/Sports-Extracurricular/Attendance

The participants agreed that there were concerns that arose from COVID-19 closures on school activities, sports, other extracurricular activities, and students attending school post return to the school campus.

Educator 1 said:

I think the athletics were hard on them, especially kids who were hoping to get an athletic scholarship. They missed the opportunity; you know, to have their sport and to shine in their sport or to finish out their senior year, and something that they've devoted, you know their life to; so I think that was probably hard and I coach track. I know it was hard on my track team.

Educator 4 said:

I do think that it was hard to monitor when you could not see him eye to eye and talk to them face to face. I do not know the exact right answer, but it is easier when you can hold

them accountable, and they have to see that you know what they are doing. It is just like having them in any other classroom when you say whose work is this really and then somebody must face up when we were doing the pandemic teaching, that was out of the window, and you never saw anybody turning in lessons at different times There it was harder to compile them and you could not send them somebody else's work at different times, so it's extremely hard. Challenging to say the least to hold them accountable for their cheating just to be honest.

Educator 5 said:

They have little self-discipline, poor study habits, and lots of excuses. Many have missed more days than they are here. When I checked with the attendance secretary, the students are habitual in their absences with few excuses. They try to use COVID as an excuse but then do little to try and make the work up. We are required to send work through Teams, but I usually get "viewed" in the assignment column, not done.

Educator 9 said:

Some of them missed out on college tours where we would have school-sponsored college tours – they missed out on that and if their parents or guardians couldn't provide that then they just totally missed out. I had a real struggle trying to get kids to respond and a lot of students who did not have access to a laptop or a desktop, really anything, some form of communication, it was a struggle and a lot of them just checked out when I came back in the fall. I think they're complacent I think complacency of, oh you know, can use COVID as an excuse to not have this number of credits that I'm supposed to have right now. I can use it as a crutch and socially I think they're still learning how to communicate with people too, it wasn't as bad as I think as the first year.

Educator 10 said:

To me, they got a little lazy and not used to showing up in the morning and staying all day and working their way through stuff, and it really was disappointing because a lot of activities were missed and we got so far out of our groove that still to this day we've not been able to get back into it. We've had to cancel all kinds of road trips because [of] the attendance policy kids aren't showing up for school enough there and if you have x number of absences you're not allowed to attend, any of these trips and my group is heavy on student activity trips. We have state conventions in Gatlinburg National Convention in Indianapolis. We have a lot of trips and we've had to cancel almost every one of them, because we have barely any kids that can go.

Educator 11 said:

During our FLEX block, I have a credit recovery class. I've got kids that are finishing stuff from last year. I know years ago I started doing an extra credit to reward everybody; it started to get better and then really, I think, but has switched that back the other way. Many students lost hanging out with their buddies and I mean that would be tough missing your last part of your senior year. We had just started softball season and you had a couple of them that didn't get their last chances to play.

Educator 12 said, "Having them present to stay on top of everything and keeping them informed has been hard. Their attendance has been difficult for all the illnesses and everything then distance learning, just overall the communication with everything." Educator 13 said:

We did get to do lab, so they still had the hands-on labs not at TCAT but in my classroom; they got to do skills and we have 27 skills that we learned in that program. They got to do those in the classroom so that was good – and at TCAT, like it all helped,

so, I do feel like that it's been me to try and find the right word and [it is a] disadvantage to my students even wanting to get into the program because they don't get to do that clinical where we're going into the facilities. Even this year, we are not allowed to do that so, we're doing simulation labs at TCAT. So still, we're not actually even at the present time we're not allowed to go into the facilities for clinicals, so we are still doing the simulation labs at TCAT, at TCAT we set up 40 hours and my students go on Saturdays.

Aftereffects of COVID and Mental Health

Participants monitored their students daily to make sure they were receiving appropriate care. Participants were also concerned about their students' mental and emotional stability.

Educator 1 said:

It was a culture shock; they've had a hard time getting along socially again. The demands of school, you know, we have kids who identified themselves as honor students, but you could not make those demands of an honors class that's like that right now.

Educator 9 said:

I had several who just checked out – that just totally checked out. They wouldn't attend the class meetings. They expected a free pass, really because of COVID a lot of them did, and just saying that wasn't going to happen. They just kind of struggled and I think they have not gotten back to where they were since they're just still kind of in that mode.

They're not taking responsibility, they just checked out.

Educator 12 said:

The pandemic has been big, I've had a lot of kids that worry about it and the impact it has on them and their families. We always deal with broken home and drugs, depression, lots of depressions have gotten a lot worse the last couple of years. It's gotten a lot worse; it's

been an issue for some, but not the majority and it's an issue for the majority of the students, I think.

Educator 13 said:

I've had several students that had parents that have passed away and then they lived with their grandparents and I have one student that comes to mind specifically that has taken all my classes and she has really struggled but she has passed because she has kept in contact with me. Her mother passed away and her dad ended up passing away and she lives with her grandparents and both set of grandparents want her to live with them so that causes conflicts.

Graduating Concerns and Life after Graduation

Participants were asked about whether students were able to finish high school and how they might cope after graduation as they continue their education or join the workforce.

Educator 1 said:

I can see it in academic performance and social behaviors in school this year after coming off the COVID year and then last year when we were back. We had a large chunk of our population who opted to do distance learning and kids that hadn't been in school in 18 months (about 1 and a half years) and then try to come back to a structured environment have struggled. In terms of my juniors this year, they missed a big part of their first year in high school, so they missed their first-year English class, so they didn't do any writing.

Educator 2 said:

I think that it was a very hard hit to some students so a lot of them are playing catch up, or maybe they don't have all their credits they need to graduate so they're in credit recovery classes and they're just trying to make it to the finish line.

Educator 3 said:

Just the lack of continuity in our educational system or, you know, if they really miss that much content to where they couldn't succeed rapidly, it was a huge learning curve for a lot of them trying to get back into the swing of it.

Educator 7 said, "I think we are down around 25 students who just decided not to return to school." Educator 8 said:

This is the largest group of students that we have not had to finish, and I have 4 or 5 that I know for sure that are not going to graduate because they've just given up because they have turned 18 and they learned that they can get a job. They would rather go to work instead of worrying about that "piece of paper" as they call it, so it has drastically changed since COVID hit. It has gotten worse; I am not sure how it looks in general education but in special education our dropout rate has increased from years past.

Educator 10 said:

When we had the virtual options, a lot of kids were trying to take agriculture online and I was looking over the curriculum with the person who is handling that and it looked like sophomore or junior college level agriculture classes, that these high school kids were trying to tackle, and it was daunting. Now personally, my students who chose not to do that just followed me on Google classroom and Teams and all that I had still had a hard time.

Educator 12 said:

I guess their connection to that next level of education was lost. Several of them have done well in their career fields but I've also seen a lot of kids that have job danced. They don't have that stability that they once would have had.

Education 13 said:

Some of my students just can't wait to turn 18 and get out of high school. They can't wait to move off to college, but of course they get burnout because they have done all the things that you do after graduation. Many of my students were interested in what was going on and they wanted to be a part of the cure to COVID-19, and I was taken back by the number of students still wanting to go into the medical profession when COVID-19 hit. They did not change their minds at all, and it may be more exciting for them. I have spoken with my students and I've tried to keep in contact with my students after they leave and move on to college, TCAT, or the workforce. Whatever they do and they are doing, they are still in the medical field pathway, and they are helping so I'm really impressed with their drive and enthusiasm to continue.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 4 presents the data analysis related to the essential question, What are 11th- and 12th-grade educators' perceptions of their lived experiences of students during the COVID-19 pandemic? The sub-questions examine the techniques that teachers felt were most important to their students to aid them with social-emotional learning, dealing with traumas, and learning to prosper through high school and after graduation. Humanistic Theory was the framework used to examine and categorize data as major themes were identified. The interpretation of the data relating to the emergent themes is presented in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5. Summary

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of COVID-19 on juniors and seniors in high school from the perceptions of their classroom teachers and school counselors. The central question that guided this study was: What are the 11th- and 12th-grade educators' perceptions of their lived experiences of students during the COVID-19 pandemic? The following research questions were used to guide the examination of educators' perceptions of the changes in high school junior and seniors.

1. What specific strategies have been used to help guide students through the past three years through the experiences of high school?
2. What are the teacher's perspectives of students' social and emotional well-being during COVID-19?
3. What are the teacher perceptions about how 11th- and 12th-grade students have been able to handle the traumas associated with COVID-19?
4. How do educators perceive students' ability to stay on track academically and the influences that it has had on students during COVID-19?

The qualitative method employed for this research was a narrative study. A narrative study allows the researcher to develop an in-depth study into the social context of the stages of the process of investigating a phenomenon (Brandell & Varkas, 2001). Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with classroom teachers and school counselors. The researcher interviewed these participants individually to gain an understanding of the connection between them and their students.

Research Question 1 Discussion

What specific strategies have been used to help guide students through the past three years?

The participants responded in unison throughout the interview phase that to instruct the whole student, during COVID-19 they had to rely heavily on building relationships with their students, constantly setting and maintain high standards with rigorous academic feedback, and maintain constant communication through face to face or a learning management system. The findings from the analysis of the interviews revealed that many teachers had already been using different techniques in their classrooms that aided in helping students learn; however, when online learning became a necessity, teachers had to alter their classroom teaching methods to adapt to the needs of remote learning.

These findings reflected the work of Chamberlain et al. (2020) as they looked at the skills in literacy that were affected by the school closures. Teachers began using mini lessons for writing and learning to compose across the curriculum while they stressed the importance of writing along with literature (Chamberlain et al., 2020). Teachers had to rethink how they were going to support their students and their families as learners while considering the whole person and supporting them as human beings Chamberlain et al. continued. One result that came from the research was the method by which the alterations with the teaching and learning process took place. Carrion-Martinez et al. (2021) discussed the radical changing of the process by students completing their education in many different forms including face-to-face, blended learning, and, with many school systems shutting down, virtual and distance learning. Teachers began turning educational digital tools into daily lessons which students had no choice but to succeed from if they wanted to go further.

The relationships between student and teacher were important as both needed guidance. Teachers fostered relationships with students by assigning many short lessons at the beginning of the year to get to know the students. They also intensified their efforts to deliver assigned tasks to their students to be able to help struggling families (Carrion-Martinez et al., 2021). One of the participants stated:

I try to find a balance between maintaining rigor and then have high expectations, but not making their successes out of reach because of everything else they must do – recognizing all the stresses that they’re going through all the traumas they’re going through, and then being able to address them either as a group or as an individual. The best thing I did for my students and for myself was to flip my classroom. When COVID hit 2 years ago, I really did a share in how I approached my class and teaching. Instead of sending difficult work home as homework, their homework is now easy work. So for homework they maybe have some reading with guided notes.

Another participant stated that:

I would go to the homes, deliver work packets, do home visits, constant check-in between classes. I mean just reiterate and say we’re almost there and remind them. Especially with juniors and seniors because they start getting lazy mentally because they’re close to 18 and I’m like, hey you got to have this degree. I mean helping them just with those career goals doing those field trips. We were able to take a group of juniors to TCAT this year and the students were so excited to go.

Research Question 2 Discussion

What are the teacher’s perspectives of students’ social and emotional well-being during COVID-19?

The participants' concern for the well-being of the students was evident in every interview conducted. Analysis of the interviews revealed these themes: (a) self-awareness, (b) self-management, and (c) social awareness. Students struggled with managing their time when they returned to school, especially the students who got jobs during the school closures. Many of them got used to working during the day and getting their homework done at night; therefore, when school re-opened they had to work hard at focusing on getting things done at the appropriate time. This research corresponds to the work done by Williams et al., (2021) where they discussed safety protocols due to COVID having unintended consequences for students which showed the need for peer connections as well as isolation concerns that lead to anxiety, frustration, mood changes, and fear. Students had a challenging time self-regulating which led to traumatic mental health situations. High school students tend to feel more stress at the junior and senior levels of high school in any given year; however, the issues surrounding the pandemic heightened their levels of stress.

Students had to navigate through school demands such as learning in a virtual setting and not knowing if they would get to graduate or have their prom while also looking into making their next steps in their academics and in their lives outside of school (Williams et al., 2021). As they returned to the classroom, students struggled with control over their behaviors, and they had concerns about how to treat each other when they were back together. They were afraid to be in the classroom for fear that they would hurt a loved one if they got COVID and were fearful that if they had to quit their jobs how their families would pay their bills. One of the participants commented on self-management:

You have a little more freedom; you are more responsible for yourself. You must manage your own time, you must keep up with your own due dates. You will be given the

opportunity to sink and swim because nobody's going to be standing over your shoulder. So, I think, having the opportunity to adapt before they were just when thrown into the pandemic. I'm still having to remind them to turn in their homework because they don't have the best time management skills, or can't, Heaven forbids they like add something to a calendar, and write it down due dates so that's my biggest thing they want to be out there.

Another participant noticed that:

Oh, my kids came back, and they did not know how to talk to people. They had lost that skill and unfortunately for a lot of the kids that we have in our school at the alternative school they haven't gotten that back. They are the adults in their house and the adults that they have there are a lot of them are products of their environment, so they had they really lost the ability to be respectful to other people and respectful to one another and respectful to any other adult. It has been a real struggle to gain back that, that were not peers, that we are the educators, and they are the students because when they're getting everything through a computer.

Research Question 3 Discussion

What are the teacher perceptions about how 11th- and 12^t-grade students dealt with the traumas associated with COVID-19?

The traumas associated with students as they are finishing their last two years in high school can be insurmountable but adding the traumas of COVID-19 to their situations changed their lives in ways that could be hard to imagine according to the participants in this research study. Some students soared through online learning and making decisions about the next step in their education while others were uncertain as to what to do next. Many students had relationship

concerns with their families as they were isolated in their homes with parents who had been abusive at some point or abused drugs and alcohol; some worried that their grandparents would get COVID-19 and pass away. The mental health concerns that students had prior to the pandemic were taken to a deeper level as students were struggling with the traumas of, not only graduating during a pandemic, but with making tough decisions for their lives. The participants noticed many students taking on more responsibilities during the pandemic as they were asked to watch their younger siblings, help them with their schoolwork, or even work to help with family financial matters. The stresses of the household in relation to food insecurities, unreliable living conditions, and dealing with their family's expectations regarding finishing high school caused undue stress to the students (Williams et al., 2021). Many families were forced to begin a new role in their children's education which caused some concerns among students and their parents (Carrion-Martinez et al., 2021). These situations oftentimes provide opportunities for families to spend time together, share struggles with each other, and see what each member of the family does daily (Behar-Zusman et al., 2020). One participant provided evidence:

So, that has been a whole ordeal in and out of the court system with her trying to think – what else just this year. I had a student whose parents have been through a nasty divorce this year that I think has been very traumatic for the mother, and the children and then this girl who is just 17 has had to take care of her mother – had miss a whole week of school. She took her mom drove her to North Carolina to a specialist, or she had to have surgery, and then she stayed because she was going to have to go right back and get her. So, she was diligent about checking in every day, doing her assignments on teams. She and I talked on the phone daily, but you know she had to take on a lot of responsibility.

Another participant describes the trauma as:

Every year to kind of be on the lookout for, you know, I think we're used to seeing maybe a trauma of kids not having a traditional family. Maybe food lapses and things like that, but it seems like now you must deal with relationship trauma.

Research Question 4 Discussion

How do educators perceive students' ability to stay on track academically and the impact it has had on students during COVID-19?

The participants responses indicated that students suffered as a result of school closures during the school year 2019-2020. The results of the study aligned with the supporting research found within the literature review. Their experiences were described throughout their interviews, and showed an effect on academics, attendance, sports, extracurricular, mental health, credits to graduate, and lastly their next step after graduation.

A few of the results from the study showed that students were anxious and needed more guidance than they normally would have needed pre-COVID. They were unable to take freshman- and sophomore-level courses needed for advanced classes in high school, and those that were already in their junior or seniors year missed the opportunity to take advantage of the guidance that was needed to help direct them with their transition out of high school. The educators heard students stressing over not having all the information they needed to make appropriate decisions when it came to universities, community colleges, vocational schools, or joining the workforce. Students who were involved in spring sports could not play, and for those that were being potentially considered for playing at the collegiate level lost their chances to be recruited by the respective schools. Attendance rates dropped drastically throughout the high school setting especially with junior and seniors as some of them began jobs during the school closures and did not feel it was necessary to return to school. Many students decided to use the

distance learning path during 2020-2021 and struggled when returning to the in-person classroom. Many were behind because they did not finish the credits they needed while on distance learning. Mental health was on every educator's mind as students struggled long-term with their emotions.

During participant interviews many respondents reported having concerns about academic issues for students the year after graduation. Although some students thrived academically while online, there were some students who struggled with keeping up while using the online platform. This finding aligns with the research by Nathwani et al. (2021). There are major concerns with students' academic regressions during COVID-19. Schools are an essential part of both academic success as well as mental health. As schools had to close, students were left with internet inaccessibility, limitations to data plans, or having no one at the home who could guide them in their studies. (Nathwani et al., 2021).

Among the concerns that the research showed was the effects on students and their mental health. This correlates to findings by Behar-Zusman et al. (2020) that discusses students having chronic stress, poor coping mechanisms, and levels of substance abuse that began taking place during COVID-19. As these are common problems with juniors and seniors in high school, it might be difficult to determine if those issues became more pervasive during the pandemic. While doing research, the researcher was able to determine that there had been an increase in the stress level throughout the pandemic. Millions of students were asked to finish their last semesters with only 35% of students having an online class before making an adjustment in how they completed their course work (Clabaugh et al., 2021).

One participant commented on examples of worsening stress that “caused a lot of conflict issues when they came back together. I think it is harboring resentment, frustration, and anxiety, but I noticed behaviors were different.”

Another participant further described the anxiety that students felt when determining what their next step would be after high school:

Students were concerned, “I’ve got to get my FAFSA down, how am I going to get this letter of recommendation to when I’m not even at school.” They just needed a support system. So, for our district, I think it is going to be a while before we recover from it.

One of the participants noted:

I will say that I’ve been pleasantly surprised when how they are doing. The first group, the COVID group, I guess kind of what I can them, deep down I think they struggle. Maybe that first year in college, but I mean I feel like the ones that I knew they really hit their groove. A lot of the students were questioning what to do next and if they were going to be able to get their transcripts into colleges, because I can’t get my counselor or nobody’s in the admission offices. I mean it was a lot of questions what’s next, what I’m going to do and how are things going to get resolved.

Recommendations for Practice

After a review of the relevant literature and an analysis of the data collected, the researcher has made the following recommendations for practice:

- School districts need to implement a trauma-informed-care plan into their schools at the K-12 level. Teachers have seen many students throughout the COVID pandemic that are struggling with multiple traumas and adverse childhood experiences that need to be addressed. The need for an informed program for behaviors and understanding the depth

of the traumas does not just rely on the families. Educators in all areas need to be aware of the issues that are facing their students – whether that be academically or socially. Trauma-informed schools must have support from the district and the administration in each school. Trauma-sensitive classrooms as well as policy changes to discipline plans and mental health awareness in the classroom need to be delivered to the teachers (Thompson et al., 2017).

- Attendance needs to be addressed at the K-12 continuum for intervention level; based on the research that was collected this was one of the top concerns for educators. Attendance matters can be addressed in many ways according to Nathwani et al. (2021) with school refusal (suspension) as a common method. During the COVID pandemic, there were many days that many students missed due to contracting the virus or having a household contact. Additionally, for many students, refusal to complete their course work or refuse to come to school at all have become common. Working with families on getting students back in the classroom can be the key in getting students the help they need both academically and mentally.
- Educators need to find ways to work hand-in-hand with school counselors and school psychologists to allow students the needed opportunities for help for those that have continuing COVID-related issues and assistance with post-graduation planning. The participants in this research study reported that some students did well overall with online learning because they were able to function by themselves while others lacked the level of responsibility that was needed to stay on track. Those that failed to stay on track were referred to credit recovery classes; however, some did not return to school at all. All stakeholders need to cooperate and create plans for getting all students back to some form

of education and provide guidance for the years following high school. There is a significant fear that many students will regress with academics along with their social, emotional, and physical well-being (Hoffman & Miller, 2020).

- All stakeholders need to work together to guarantee students access to resources – both in-person and online during times of illness. Many governments realized during COVID the impact of the lack of technological resources had on our students and began to look into ways to get access to all areas including the rural ones.

Recommendations for Future Research

Recommendations for future research include:

- A study could be done with educators at the K-12 level to they determine what aspects of COVID-19 have affected the students.
- A study focusing on students who were in middle or high school during COVID could be done five years from now detailing the effects that COVID-19 has had on ACT scores and end-of-course testing in English and Math.
- A study could be conducted to examine the graduation rates of students who were in high school during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic to track students from their senior year to two years past graduation.
- A study could be designed to determine the relationship between the implementation of a trauma-informed school program and the climate of the school after implementation of the school.
- A study could be done for K-12 schools on implementation of resilient schools.

Conclusion

As educators continue to feel the pressure of COVID-19 on our school classrooms and our students, the demand is for all educators to meet all academic standards but also be able to work with students in a social and emotional learning program and a trauma-informed-care program. These programs assist student with readjusting to school settings after they return to the school setting after closures. Many students struggled with online learning due to issues with technology, level of attentiveness, or added responsibilities (L. Wang et al., 2022). The pressures of increased attentiveness in the last two years of high school show students struggling with thoughts of what is next, and without the guidance of teachers and counselors they were struggling to be able to make those decisions. In the school years that have been affected by COVID-19, students have had the added pressure of deciding their next steps on their own more than before; the resources were still available, but there was not someone constantly there to guide them. The effects that COVID-19 had on this study's school district was seen in many ways; however, the purpose of this research was to focus on the impact to juniors and seniors in high school from the perspective of their classroom teachers and school counselors. The focus of this paper is on the overall wellbeing of the students through the lens of the humanistic theory. Robbins (2021) discussed a humanistic approach to understanding the whole individual as students cope with being broken, being grounded, being centered, and overall being a put together person. Throughout the course of this research it is evident that every participant has a goal of helping the student be the best they can be during a challenging time .

The research found that students struggled coming back into the school setting. Some students who decided that they would rather do online learning had become unaccustomed to being around others; for them, the fear of being back in the building and catching COVID that

they might transmit to a family member was a scary concept. The participants for this study described their experiences, and when collectively analyzed, these experiences brought upon an understanding of the effects of the pandemic on their lives.

Although the researcher recognizes that the findings apply only to one county, the results of this study are supported by relevant literature. By examining the educators' perceptions in this study, high schools across the country can begin to look at the need for a social-emotional learning and/or a trauma informed care program to aid with teaching and helping the whole child and not just focusing solely on their academics.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 5 presents the interpretation and discussion of data related to the research question, "What are the 11th- and 12th-grade educators' perspectives of their experiences of students during the COVID-19 pandemic? The framework of Humanistic Theory was used to guide the process and include additional information that would summarize the discussion as appropriate.

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APPENDIX: Interview Protocol

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. What do you teach?
3. Can you talk with us about your understanding of trauma's impact on your students?
4. What has been the most difficult challenge that you have faced personally in working with high school junior and seniors?
5. What strategies did you use to build resilience on your team, recognize secondary traumatic stress risk, and address this risk for the team or an individual?
6. What techniques have you found to be effective in developing trusting relationships and rapport with students?
7. Please provide an example of how you monitored/managed the morale and health of your students to make sure they were working to their potential.
8. How did you perceive your students' academic studying experience during this period of COVID-19 pandemic?
9. How did you perceive the condition of social isolation imposed during this period of COVID-19 pandemic?
10. What were the biggest challenges that students in 11th and 12th grade have academically and socially?
11. How did you see your students adapt to the challenges of school closures and online learning while also trying to finish high school and decide what they wanted to do with their future?
12. What socially did you see that students missed during COVID-19 and what was the impact that you saw on their lives?

Please Note: Interview will be semi-structured meaning these questions may not be asked verbatim and conversation will be allowed to flow by the subject into areas that might not be touched up on here, but that will remain within bounds of minimal risk.

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