

# Changes in Educators' Awareness of Racial Inequality in Two Small-City School Districts During COVID-19

## Introduction:

In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic forced the rapid closure of schools across the country. Many schools quickly transitioned to remote or hybrid lesson plans that required unprecedented flexibility on the part of teachers and school leaders. Alongside school closures was the abrupt pausing or refashioning of support programs for teachers, such as professional development and mentoring for novice teachers. Many of these support programs, like the workshops exploring racial justice described in this chapter, were challenged by changes in the professional lives of teachers caused by the pandemic and coinciding social unrest.

For teachers in racially diverse and economically disadvantaged communities, the changes experienced were particularly acute in terms of student academic engagement in communities disproportionately impacted by COVID-19. As Kraft and Simon (2020) observed:

*The differential patterns of perceived student engagement in remote learning by race and socioeconomic status likely reflect systemic disparities across communities in education, economic, and health conditions. For example, both low-income and Black communities have been disproportionately affected by the coronavirus, face greater job losses due to the pandemic, and are more likely to lack resources for remote learning... Research has also shown that schools serving these communities have systematically less supportive working environments for teachers (p. 7).*

This chapter provides a closer look at the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on teachers in two small-city school districts serving predominantly economically disadvantaged and racially or ethnically diverse communities. These analyses focus on the differential impacts of the pandemic and contemporaneous racial tensions between early career teachers and their tenured colleagues.

## *Background to the Pilot Project*

The chapter draws upon experiences and data collected during a four-year pilot project that started in 2018 with the goal of promoting educational equity through improved support for new teachers. This project was a collaboration between a state education union leaders and university faculty who worked with local teams consisting of district and labor leaders. The project focus was to develop and pilot professional development workshops for novice teachers and mentors to deepen their understandings of systemic inequalities, racial identity, and cultural competence in urban school districts. The goals of the project were to help partner districts retain more novice teachers, educate teachers on racial injustice in schools by addressing disparities in rates of student discipline, and to strengthen existing mentor programs.

This pilot was created to address several challenges prevalent among novice teachers in urban school districts. Teacher attrition, a pressing issue in education, is especially common in urban districts and more likely among pre-tenure teachers (Quartz 2003). Research suggests that to retain more early career teachers, activities that aid in teacher induction—such as solid mentoring programs—are crucial (Thomas-Alexander and Harper 2017; Brownell et al. 2004). Mentoring programs in schools, while a vital piece of the puzzle, must be carefully cultivated and monitored, especially in urban districts where tenured colleagues may harbor negative attitudes towards students and families. Mentors’ attitudes are a contributing factor in shaping the attitudes and beliefs that mentees carry about their professions, students, families, and districts (Thomas-Alexander and Harper 2017).

Prior to COVID-19, a series of four 90-minute workshops were held for untenured teachers and their mentors in each of the partner districts (authors forthcoming). Workshops were held on school premises after the school day ended. The university team observed the sessions and administered short feedback surveys. The workshops guided participants through an exploration of the historical roots of racism, their own social and racial identities, and strategies for improving their relationships with diverse students (Table 1). In examining their underlying beliefs and assumptions, new teachers were not only encouraged to develop a deeper understanding of their students whose family and cultural backgrounds were often very different from their own but also empowered advocate for their students. In addition to the workshops, cross-district convenings of the labor-management teams were held twice a year to discuss progress in each district and formulate action plans for future work. A school climate survey was administered to partner districts in Spring 2019, with other surveys planned for subsequent years.

Given the systemic instability COVID-19 introduced in schools across the United States, the activities of this pilot project were abruptly stopped, postponed, or altered to adhere to state and local public health protocols in March 2020. The project team witnessed firsthand the difficult transition to remote and hybrid learning partner districts faced; communication issues prevented coordinating activities across districts reeling from the sudden closure of schools and the rapid move to remote instruction. Internally, the partner districts also struggled to maintain contact with students and their families as the extent of the digital divide in New York State—and the nation as a whole—became known.

The workshops were restarted in Fall 2020, mostly as shorter virtual sessions. The online meetings created a space for teachers to consider unfolding equity issues in their own districts and across the country (authors forthcoming). Accordingly, teacher experiences in the rapidly changing crisis shared during these meetings illuminated the need to interrogate whether these experiences transformed previously held attitudes and beliefs toward social justice issue. This chapter explores how teacher opinions and attitudes toward racial and ethnic inequities in their districts changed during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic and analyzes their perceptions of the pandemic’s impact on related social issues, such as disparities in academic progress and mental health.

## Literature Review:

This chapter is framed by three related streams of literature around the impact of COVID-19 on inequity in education, which is a major determinant of health disparities (NASEM 2019). The first stream highlights the workplace challenges for teachers created by COVID-19 to provide a context for understanding differences in their responses to the survey. The second stream explores broader pandemic disruptions impacting racial inequality in education and related social unrest. The final stream examines how the pandemic impacted children and their families resulting in health disparities and increased behavior problems within classrooms.

### *Challenges to Teachers during COVID-19*

The professional lives of teachers around the world changed drastically due to COVID-19 pandemic. These changes include higher rates of burnout and job dissatisfaction related to higher levels of stress from pivoting rapidly to remote instruction and technological disconnects between educators and students due to barriers like the digital divide. Two RAND surveys—the 2020 American Educator Panel (AEP) survey and the 2021 State of the U.S. Teacher survey—found that roughly one in four teacher respondents were considering leaving the teaching profession after the start of COVID-19 (Dilberti and Kaufman 2020; Steiner and Woo 2021). The 2021 survey indicated half of Black teachers were considering leaving, a pressing issue for a teaching force already lacking diverse teachers. Similarly, a 2021 survey of educators in 38 schools in upstate New York found that respondents reported more frequently considering leaving their jobs than they recalled doing prior to the pandemic (authors in volume). These studies highlight that most teachers considering quitting had not considered leaving before the pandemic, suggesting that new stressors from the current situation may have prompted more teachers to leave. These trends suggest increasing challenges for the two small city school districts participating in the project with the goal of improving retention of new teachers, especially those from BIPOC backgrounds.

While frequent stressors that teachers faced in professional duties were commonly related to technical issues, lack of support from administration, and difficulties in communicating with students and families virtually, these issues did not impact all teachers uniformly. Evidence suggests that teachers at different stages of their careers faced unique challenges based on their individual situations. Kraft and Simon (2020) found that early career educators felt the least successful at teaching their students remotely, mid-career educators struggled the most with balancing work demands and personal responsibilities, and late-career educators were the least comfortable using online teaching tools. This chapter similarly explores differences between teachers at various career stages in how they perceive racial disparities before and during COVID-19.

### *COVID-19, Black Lives Matter, and Teacher Awareness of Social Justice Issues*

The pandemic illuminated systemic inequalities throughout society, with social justice issues receiving greater attention through events like the murder of George Floyd and Black Lives

Matter (BLM) demonstrations. While the digital divide between students in some districts had been an ongoing problem, COVID-19 exacerbated the issue due to an increased need for remote access to education. Tellingly, most students who face hardships in access and achievement during typical instruction were the same students experiencing pronounced difficulties during COVID-19 disruptions to instruction (Glenn, Kall, and Rubenson 2020). Just under 60% of parents with lower incomes surveyed by a Pew Research Center survey responded that their children were likely to face at least one digital obstacle during remote instruction (Vogels 2020). Several studies also provided evidence that COVID-19 heightened teachers' awareness of the digital divide between students in their schools (Thompson, Darlich, and Bartlett 2020; Hall et al. 2020), and the relationship between local inequality and larger social issues (Kaden 2020).

Many of the challenges that teachers experienced with communication and connectivity illustrate existing racial and socioeconomic inequities in their districts and communities. For example, teachers in high poverty and racially diverse districts were both less likely to be in contact with all their students and more likely to report having less resources to support students remotely (Dilberti and Kaufman 2020). This lack of resources is an important factor when access to technology is considered. Kraft and Simon (2020) found that teachers in high poverty schools reported only 64% of their students had access to necessary technology, compared to 87% of students in schools with lower rates of poverty. The same survey found that teachers in schools with higher rates of Black students enrolled reported that only 66% of students had adequate technology to engage in remote learning compared to 81% of students in schools with smaller populations of Black students (Kraft and Simon 2020).

Professional development provided by districts tended to focus on technical and instructional issues such as academic standards and curricula. In one study, around 62% of teachers reported receiving some form of training on navigating virtual platforms and managing technology (Hamilton, Dilberti, and Kaufman 2020). However, less than 30% reported receiving training on making remote instruction accessible to all students, engaging families, or building social and emotional well-being into distance learning. Significantly, teachers working with different age groups and in different district contexts reported receiving different types of training, with teachers in city schools and elementary grades receiving more instruction on supporting social and emotional well-being and directing families toward support services for meals and social workers (Hamilton, Dilberti, and Kaufman 2020).

### *Challenges to Student Engagement and Well-being during COVID-19*

Two key issues related to social justice that challenged teachers during the pandemic were concerns about engaging their students in learning, particularly during such a stressful time in students' lives, and mental health issues experienced by both students and educators. Throughout school closures, these challenges became increasingly prevalent in many school contexts. However, different districts experienced different levels of student engagement and mental health concerns.

At the beginning of the pandemic, teachers reported that student engagement was much lower in districts with majority Black student populations and higher poverty levels compared to low-poverty schools and schools with lower percentages of Black students (Kraft and Simon 2020). Teachers in high-poverty schools reported that only 50% of their students regularly engaged in remote learning, whereas 75% of students in low-poverty schools regularly engaged in remote lessons. Likewise, teachers reported only 45% of students in schools with majority Black student populations regularly engaged in remote lessons compared to 72% of students regularly engaging at schools enrolling less than 10% of fewer Black students (Kraft and Simon 2020). Hence, one factor potentially underlying changes in teachers' perceptions of racial disparities may be an increase in their visibility during COVID-19.

Student mental health and well-being was a concern for teachers who were having issues reaching students remotely, which made these inequities more visible. However, attention to the social and emotional impacts of COVID-19 upheaval varied across districts. Hamilton, Dilberti, and Kaufman (2020, 6) found that principals in city schools were the most likely to express a need for "high quality materials to support social and emotional learning while buildings are closed," and to advocate for leniency in attendance policies and instructional time requirements. Teachers reported sharing information on ways to support the social and emotional needs of students and information on how to access health services to families during school closures, suggesting they anticipated student mental health and well-being would increasingly become a priority as the pandemic developed (Hamilton, Dilberti, and Kaufman 2020). However, not all educators may acknowledge these mental health issues with the same sensitivity or assign similar importance to them when addressing student behavior and engagement in learning.

As discussed earlier, the school districts participating in this pilot project had been making efforts to provide teachers with support for addressing racial and ethnic disparities. This project was focused on addressing the needs of early career educators, many of whom come from more homogenous and affluent backgrounds than the students in their classes. This chapter explores how the pandemic impacted educators in two districts, with a focus on differential impact between early career teachers and their colleagues. The research questions guiding this analysis were:

- How did teacher perceptions of multicultural or BIPOC issues in schools change between Spring 2019 and Spring 2021?
  - o How do perceptions differ between teachers of different tenure statuses?
- How did untenured teachers, tenured teachers, and mentor teachers perceive the prominence of racial and ethnic inequalities during COVID-19?
  - o How did they describe related challenges in their work?
- How did untenured teachers, tenured teachers, and mentor teachers perceive students' struggles with mental health needs during COVID-19?
  - o How did they describe related challenges in their work?

## Research Methods:

To gauge educator attitudes on racial inequality and social justice both in their schools and in their communities, an initial school climate survey was developed and distributed to partner districts through the university's Qualtrics online survey system in April 2019. Mostly consisting of Likert-scaled items but also including open-ended questions, the survey took about 5 minutes to complete and remained open for about a month. Questions included items asking participants to consider interactions they had with colleagues and students, their experiences with school discipline policies, and their experiences with integrating racially diverse and inclusive materials into their teaching practices. Teachers were asked to identify their tenure status and, for tenured teachers, whether they served as a district mentor for new teachers. Because the survey was anonymous, the teacher status indicator provided a proxy for likely workshop participation to which both new teachers and their mentors were invited.

While a second school climate survey had been planned for Spring 2020, the escalation of the COVID-19 pandemic precluded its administration due to uncertain conditions in the districts. By April 2021 conditions had stabilized enough that a second school climate survey was conducted using the same data collection procedures as in 2019. The 5-minute survey again consisted of mainly Likert-scaled items and a few open-ended questions. The wording of some items was updated (e.g., replacing "minority" with "BIPOC"). A small number of COVID-19 specific items (e.g., instructional mode and perceptions of pandemic related issues) were also added.

For the purposes of this chapter, we treated responses from the two districts as one sample after confirming that trends were statistically similar in both for a given year. The main reasons for combining the samples were to reduce the likelihood of deductive disclosure and to simplify presentation of results. Combined across the two districts, 438 teachers responded to the 2019 survey and 444 to the 2021 survey. For both surveys, the estimated response rate was roughly 36% of full-time teaching faculty across both districts. Figure 1 shows the percentages of respondents indicating that they were untenured teachers or mentors of untenured teachers was slightly smaller in 2021 than 2019 (respectively 28.8% or 25.3% compared to around 20.5% for both groups in the latter survey). This decline may reflect the districts' smaller cohorts of new teachers due to pandemic-related budget freezes. After data collection was closed, responses were analyzed using SPSS statistical analysis software for Likert response items and qualitative coding for open-ended questions. For repeated items, analysis included comparisons of trends in responses across years.

In keeping with the project's focus, the analyses in this chapter explore differences in responses between untenured teachers, their mentors, and other tenured colleagues. The first group was the target audience of the new teacher workshops, which were also often attended by mentors. Responses from tenured non-mentors provided a comparison group who did not participate in the workshops. Responses to the scaled questions were analyzed using SPSS, with statistically significant differences tested using both Chi-square tests for proportions and t-tests for means. Responses to the open-ended questions were coded thematically for issues being raised by the educators.

## **District Contexts:**

The two districts discussed in this chapter are located in the same region of New York State about 70 miles from each other. Both districts are relatively large (approximately 6,000 and 9,000 students, respectively) and are in small city settings (Table 2). Both also serve large populations of economically disadvantaged<sup>1</sup> students (60% in District 1 and 75% in District 2) and BIPOC or multiracial students (50% in District 1 and 80% in District 2).

Between March 2020 and April 2021, the counties in which these two districts are located both saw very high COVID-19 infection rates. By September 2021, at least 1 in 11 residents in District 1's county had been infected with COVID-19; for District 2's county, at least 1 in 10 residents had been infected. Both counties had seen over 10,000 cases over the two years (nytimes.com 2021). These high rates of COVID-19 infections are reflected in almost all teachers (96%) reporting in April 2021 that they were teaching either fully remote or in a hybrid or mode (Figure 2). In contrast, teachers in many other districts in New York State had started to shift back to in-person only instruction (author in volume).

## **Results:**

Presentation of results from these two districts starts with a comparison of teachers' attitudes before and during COVID-19, followed by an exploration of differences in their perceptions of how COVID-19 has impacted two key factors affecting their work – racial and social inequality and students' mental health.

### *Attitudes towards Attention to Multicultural and Minority (BIPOC) Issues*

Between April 2019 and April 2021, educators' survey responses indicated a shift in attitudes toward racial inequality and multicultural issues in schools and society in these small-city districts. Both the 2019 and 2021 surveys asked teachers to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the statement that "Currently, multicultural or minority (BIPOC) issues are receiving too much attention."<sup>2</sup> The wording of this question was intentionally broad to capture educators' perceptions of attention to these issues generally rather than in a particular context. In 2019, a majority of teachers indicated that they either "strongly disagreed" (30%) or "disagreed" (29%) that multicultural issues were "receiving too much attention" (Figure 3). Over a quarter of all respondents indicated that they at least "agreed" with the statement, indicating a level of resistance to addressing educational disparities. In contrast, two years later

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<sup>1</sup> Per NYSED glossary of terms, economically disadvantaged students are defined as "those who participate in, or whose family participates in, economic assistance programs, such as the free or reduced-price lunch programs, Social Security Insurance (SSI), Food Stamps, Foster Care, Refugee Assistance (cash or medical assistance), Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC), Home Energy Assistance Program (HEAP), Safety Net Assistance (SNA), Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), or Family Assistance: Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). If one student in a family is identified as low income, all students from that household (economic unit) may be identified as low income."

<sup>2</sup> The 2021 survey replaced "minority" with "BIPOC" to reflect recent changes in terminology.

just over 43% of educators indicated “strongly disagree” and 33% “disagree” that multicultural issues were “receiving too much attention.” The percentage of respondents at least “agreeing” with the statement shrunk to just over 14%. These results suggest that, despite increased tensions related to BLM protests, educators in these two districts appear more receptive to these messages than they were two years before.

[Figure 3 about here]

However, the levels of and changes in disagreement about the attention paid to multicultural issues tended to differ by teacher status. In 2019, untenured teachers were most likely to indicate being sensitive to multicultural or minority issues, with just over 40% of untenured teachers strongly disagreeing with these issues are receiving too much attention compared to around a quarter of mentors and other tenured teachers. The new teachers’ mentors were the most likely to respond that they “somewhat disagree” (40%) that multicultural and racial issues were receiving too much attention. Their tenured colleagues were the most likely to at least “somewhat agree” with the statement at just over 35% compared to around 20% for their junior colleagues and their mentors. These results suggest generational differences in educators’ openness to multicultural issues that existed pre-COVID.

The generational pattern of responses across teacher groups was similar in 2021, with the greatest change found among the untenured teachers. Over 60% of the untenured teachers responding to the 2021 survey indicated that they “strongly disagreed” that too much attention was being paid to multicultural issues. In contrast, almost 38% of their mentors and just over 38% of their other tenured colleagues “strongly disagreed” about the attention paid to multicultural issues. The rates at which respondents at least “somewhat agreed” with the statements were similar, ranging from 8.8% for untenured teachers to around 15% for their tenured colleagues. These results suggest that while all educators are more willing to express openness to the importance of multicultural and BIPOC issues in 2021 compared to 2019, differences in sensitivity to these issues between novice and veteran teachers persist during the pandemic.

### *COVID-19 Impact on Social Inequality*

In these analyses we also explore some of the reasons that teachers may have become more sensitive to racial disparities in their districts. The clearest and most widespread of these inequalities may be lower rates of access to technology and internet service—popularly termed the digital divide—among students in these districts. The pandemic also has prompted increased attention to mental health issues for both youth and the adults caring for them.

The 2021 survey asked respondents to indicate whether they agreed that “Racial and ethnic inequalities are more prominent during COVID-19.” Over 92% of all respondents indicated they at least “somewhat agree” that “racial and ethnic inequalities are more prominent” (Figure 4). As before, responses tended to differ by teacher status. Half (50%) of untenured teachers “strongly agreed” with this statement, whereas just under 37% of their mentors and just under



30% of their other tenured colleagues gave this response. Consistent with the previous section, this trend suggests a reason for why educators' attitudes towards multicultural and BIPOC issues changed over the two years.

[Figure 4 about here]

Educators' responses to the open-ended question provided examples of inequalities that they were seeing in their communities and classrooms. Many teachers commented on a newly realized deeper understanding of inequalities due to COVID-19. One participant focused on how the digital divide played out in their district, with parents having to make increasingly hard choices:

*Because of COVID-19, our district has seen a large gap of households who have access to reliable internet and those who do not. Internet service, once optional for families due to need or financial reasons, are now crucial for a student to receive an education... Some families are faced with feeding their family of paying for internet.*

Others reflected on how those inequalities played out in their classrooms as students return to in-person classes, noting increasing racial and socioeconomic fault lines. One teacher shared a painful observation made from their own classroom highlighting academic inequalities based on race:

*I made a sad observation of my class. Many more students are far behind where they normally would be at this time of year while others are just fine... When I divided the students [by below, grade level, and high], I saw a clear defined line. The high and grade level class was 98% white while the below academic class would have been black or mixed race.*

These observations highlight how teachers in these two small-city school districts experienced first-hand how the pandemic increased educational disparities for some children and their families. Even though they have fewer years in the classroom, new teachers appeared to be more sensitive to the existence of racial and ethnic inequalities.

#### *COVID-19 Impact on Students' Mental Health*

In addition to disparities in access to resources, the survey responses indicated that the pandemic also exacerbated educators' challenges managing student behavior due to mental health issues. To explore this factor, the survey asked teachers to indicate their agreement that "Many students are struggling with mental health needs during COVID-19." Just under 80% of respondents to the survey indicated some level of agreement with the statement that "many students are struggling with mental health needs" (Figure 5). Again, the extent of agreement differed by tenure status with the new educators indicating stronger feelings. Just under 42% of untenured teachers "strongly agreed" with the statement compared to around 24% of their mentors and 26% of other tenured colleagues. Mentors, however, were more likely to "agree"

or “somewhat agree” with the statement than their tenured colleagues (63% compared to 48%). Over a quarter (26%) of tenured non-mentors disagreed that many of their students were struggling with mental health issues during the pandemic. These results suggest that those teachers with the least experience are the most concerned that their students have mental health needs, which may affect how they view the behavior of children returning to the classroom.

[Figure 5 about here]

As before, educators’ comments in the open-ended questions provided insights into experiences that may have shaped their responses about students’ mental health needs. One respondent linked a lack of attention to teacher mental health to teachers’ ability to address student mental health concerns:

*[I] feel like a lot of pressure is put on teachers, without thinking of their mental health... Teachers also feel that there is limited time to help students with their mental health, as the year has been much too curriculum-driven considering the circumstances.*

Other comments also expressed concerns that an inflexible focus on curriculum and assessments constrained their efforts to help children process the pandemic. One participant’s comment stood out for its empathic view of student experiences during COVID-19:

*My main concern for my students is that they have been through so many changes this year (and have adapted beautifully) but the assessments and report cards have remained the same. We expect students to achieve the same things they would in a normal year.*

One teacher verbalized the tension between the exhaustion many teachers are feeling and the sense of duty they feel toward their students:

*I am tired. So tired. Physically & mentally. No one is talking about the effects on the teachers, yet here we are, doing our best, every day. Why? The kids. It is all about the kids. They come first. Period.*

The statistical trends and open-ended question responses shed light on teachers’ experiences during COVID-19 that may influence attitudes, beliefs, and (largely virtual) classroom practices. Comments showed that teachers were struggling with their own mental health, concerned about the digital divide, concerned about student engagement, and struggling to adapt to changes in their jobs due to COVID-19. Many comments illustrated teachers had a deeper understanding of inequalities in partner districts due to COVID-19: they acknowledged these inequalities occur on racial and socioeconomic fault lines, and many questioned district and state policies on student assessment during the pandemic. According to these results, new teachers appear to be the most challenged by the pandemic.

## **Discussion and Implications:**

In summary, teachers' responses to school climate surveys administered before and a year into COVID-19 offered some intriguing findings. Overall changes in teacher attitudes toward multicultural and BIPOC issues suggested that all teachers were more sensitive to these issues in 2021 than they were in 2019. In addition, untenured teachers' disagreement that these issues were "receiving too much attention" was strongest at both time points and grew the most during the first year of COVID-19. These same untenured teachers were also the most likely to agree that racial and ethnic inequalities in their districts were more prominent during COVID-19 and that their students were struggling with mental health needs. In the open-ended questions, some teachers shared painful professional experiences and insights about inequality increasingly visible in their classroom. These survey responses also highlighted that new teachers were the most attuned to these racial disparities and the struggles of their students during the pandemic. These early career educators appeared to have different perceptions of broader social justice issues outside of their own schools and districts than their more experienced colleagues.

In schools, mental health concerns operate at multiple levels of the organization, but the impacts on teachers and students may not be uniform. For BIPOC students, unaddressed mental health needs may result in worse academic outcomes and behavioral problems than their white counterparts, an issue that has disproportionately affected these same students both before and during COVID-19. As one teacher observed, expectations put on students to perform to the same standards as any other year fueled these adverse academic outcomes and ignored the stark contextual differences between in-person and remote or hybrid instruction modes.

A contributing factor to continuing student mental health needs and disparate academic outcomes may be that teachers have insufficient resources to help students navigate COVID-19 upheavals and social emotional learning needs. Teachers in these districts expressed frustration over a lack of time to address both their own mental health and the mental health of their students due to districts' focus on curricular instruction. Many teachers struggled to juggle personal and professional responsibilities simultaneously, which could be emotionally draining. The teachers' comments clearly reflected mental and emotional exhaustion as well as stress over their ability to support their students.

These results highlight that teachers need support so that they can in turn support students who are currently facing mental health crises and personal barriers to their participation in education. This support, however, cannot be monolithic: teachers at different points of their careers are facing unique challenges, so different types of support are necessary to address a range of stressors and issues (Picower 2011). As previously noted, early career educators felt the least successful at teaching students remotely, while more experienced educators struggled to balance work demands with other responsibilities or were uncomfortable using online teaching tools (Kraft and Simon 2020). School and district leaders should consider a range of

supports to address issues in modes of instruction, workload balance, and mental health and wellbeing.

Some teachers need help processing and understanding local and national social issues, in addition to building a community with their peers and addressing changes in their professional duties. In some cases, these supports may help retain teachers who were at risk of leaving by providing them with both emotional and practical tools for navigating the COVID-19 upheavals. Online meetings between colleagues open spaces for emotional support and troubleshooting of problems like communicating with families and students experiencing connectivity issues (Kaden 2020). In addition, mentors may provide reassurance and advice to novice teachers struggling with anxiety (Moorhouse, Lee, and Herd 2020). Mentors' attitudes are a contributing factor in shaping the attitudes and beliefs that mentees carry about their professions, students, families, and districts (Thomas-Alexander and Harper 2017). Hence, mentors may serve as a counterbalance to other experienced colleagues who are not as sensitive to racial and social disparities surfaced and exacerbated by the pandemic.

As reflected in the survey responses, the pandemic has made racial inequalities more prominent to teachers and of special concern for new teachers. Hence, while initially halted by COVID-19, the new teacher workshops piloted in this project continued for another two years in virtual formats or in-house offerings in these two districts (authors forthcoming). Feedback from project leaders and participants indicated that they appreciated having a space to discuss their feelings on both local challenges and current events related to social justice. Looking to the future, professional development efforts could incorporate lessons learned during the pandemic. The first workshop could incorporate information on racial disparities during COVID-19 contained in other chapters of this volume to highlight systemic inequalities related to health and education during the pandemic. Strategically involving mentors in the second workshop would provide opportunities for teachers to share their pandemic experiences (e.g., encountering the digital divide) to further discussions on how teachers understand these inequalities. The final workshop may be the most important as all teachers explore strategies for reconnecting with their students, many of whom are struggling academically and emotionally.

In conclusion, mentoring programs are a resource that schools and districts can use to support teachers through mental health issues like anxiety or increased stress they may be experiencing because of the pandemic. As Moorhouse, Lee and Herd (2020) argued, having mentor teachers on hand to reassure novice educators during the pandemic is crucial during pandemic upheaval and uncertainty. Mentoring relationships may also offer support to veteran teachers struggling with operating their classrooms remotely as novice educators may be more familiar with online teaching tools. The creation of online spaces for teachers to mutually support each other with technical issues, student and family relations, and emotional difficulties may be one way to address the varying needs of teachers during COVID-19 (Moorhouse, Lee, and Herd 2020). School and district leaders must ask teachers how they can best support them through the ongoing pandemic to retain teachers in danger of leaving the profession. This need is especially true in urban districts, which already bore the brunt of teacher attrition before the pandemic escalated the situation.

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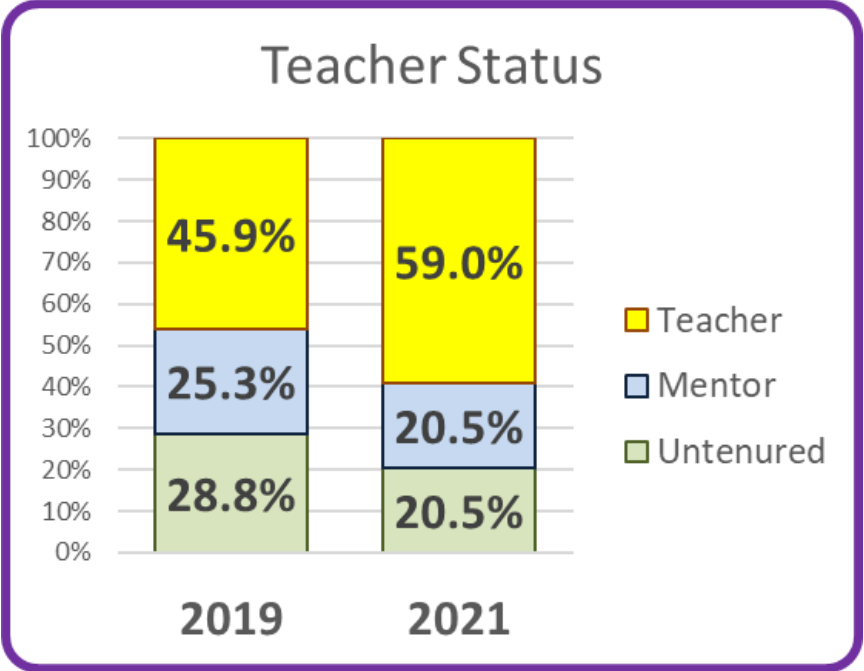
**Appendix A: Tables and Figures:**

**Table 1: Workshop Content Descriptions**

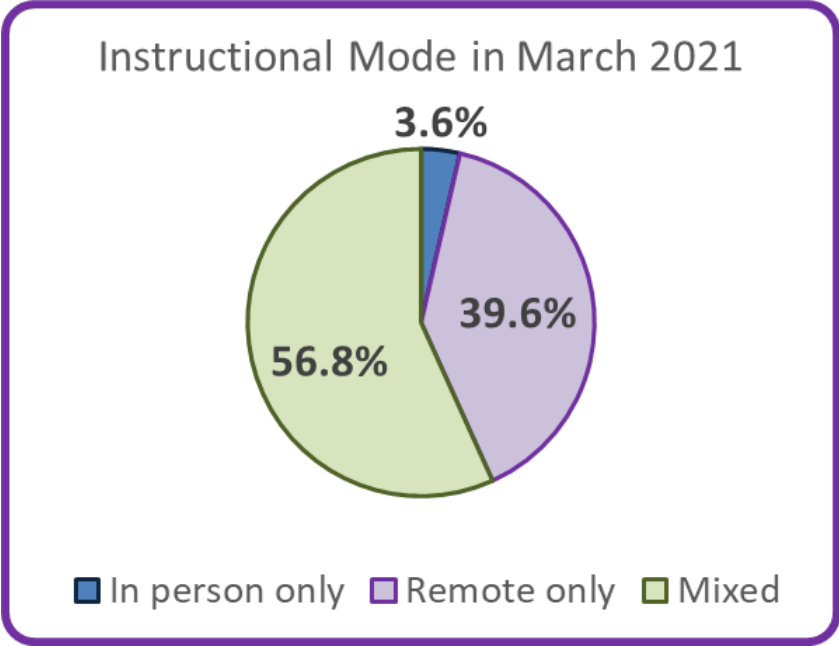
<b>WORKSHOP</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION</b>
<b>WORKSHOP 1</b>	Introductory session. Defines terms and concepts like structural racism, implicit bias, disciplinary disproportionality, race as a social construct. Provides history of race and racism in U.S., current racial climate in U.S., and discusses myths around race and racism in schools.
<b>WORKSHOP 2</b>	Examines race and ethnicity in the school context. Sets the stage for identity work in Workshop 3 by deconstructing how racist stereotypes infiltrate schools and institutions.
<b>WORKSHOP 3</b>	Teachers collectively engage in interrogating their own racial identity/racial group membership and what it means to them in breakout sessions. They discuss their perceptions of other racial identities and identify their own implicit biases. Whole group debrief follows breakout discussions.
<b>WORKSHOP 4</b>	Final session: group planning session for teachers to brainstorm strategies to disrupt racism in their districts and classrooms. Teachers work in groups for half the session with facilitator guidance, then reconvene to share ideas for the rest of the session. Teachers are encouraged to work collectively to implement strategies in their schools and educate colleagues on this work.

**Table 2: Partner District Characteristics**

<b>District Characteristics</b>	<b>District 1</b>	<b>District 2</b>
% Economically Disadvantaged Students Enrolled	60%	75%
% BIPOC or Multiracial Students Enrolled	50%	80%
Total # of Students Enrolled	approx. 6,000	approx. 9,000
District Type	Urban (small city)	Urban (small city)

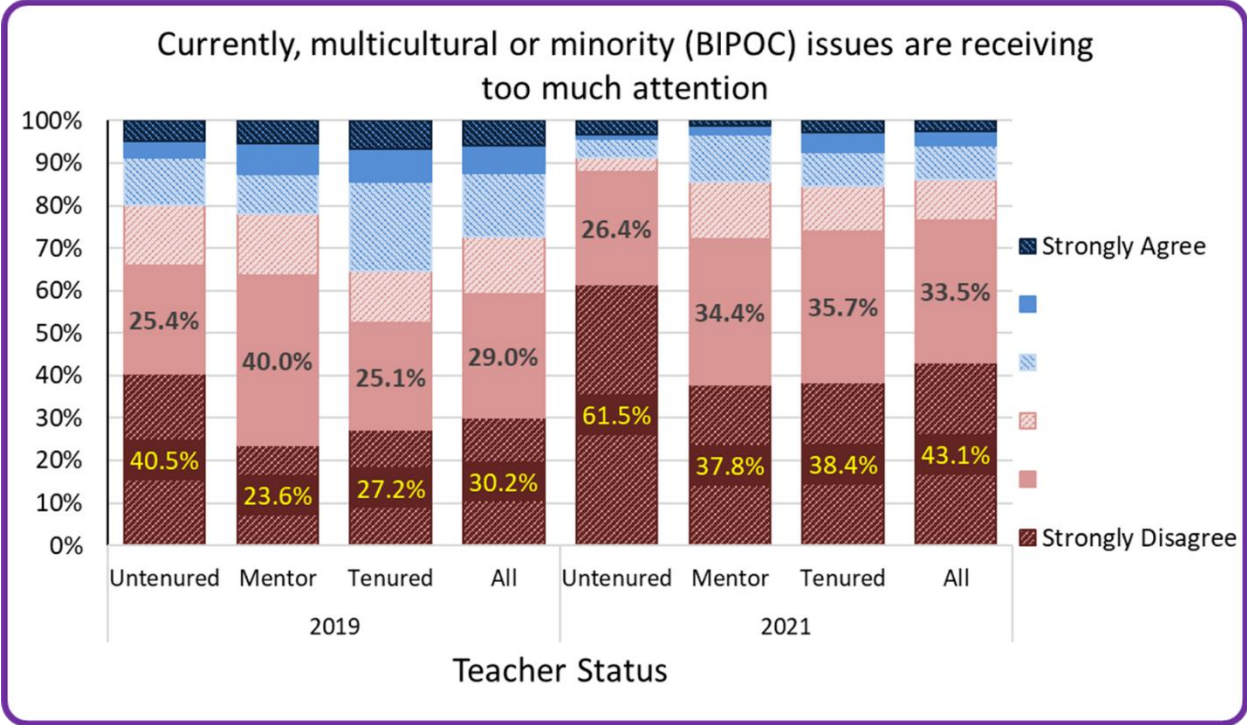


**Figure 1: School Climate Survey Sample Characteristics: Teacher Status**

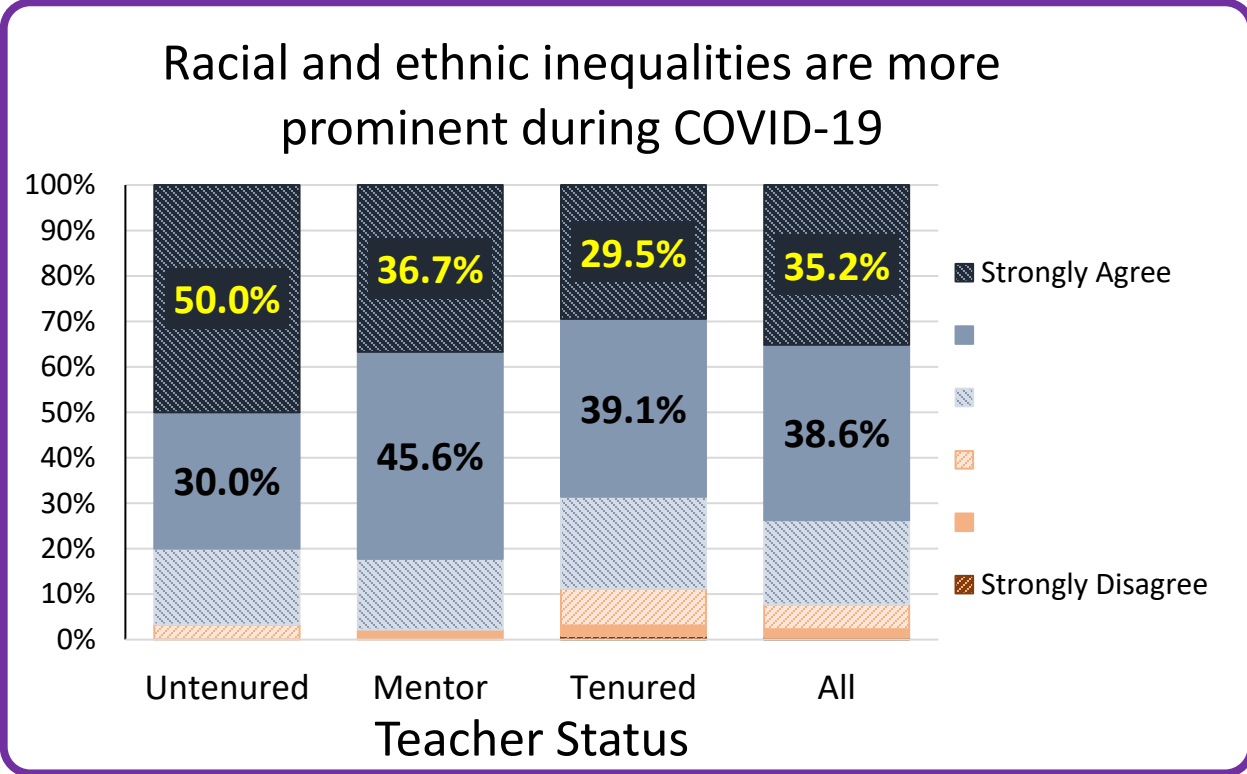


**Figure 2: School Climate Survey Sample Characteristics: Instructional Mode**





**Figure 3: Changes in Teacher Opinions on Attention Paid to Multicultural/BIPOC Issues**



**Figure 4: Teacher Perceptions of Racial and Ethnic Inequalities During COVID-19**

## Many students are struggling with mental health needs during COVID-19

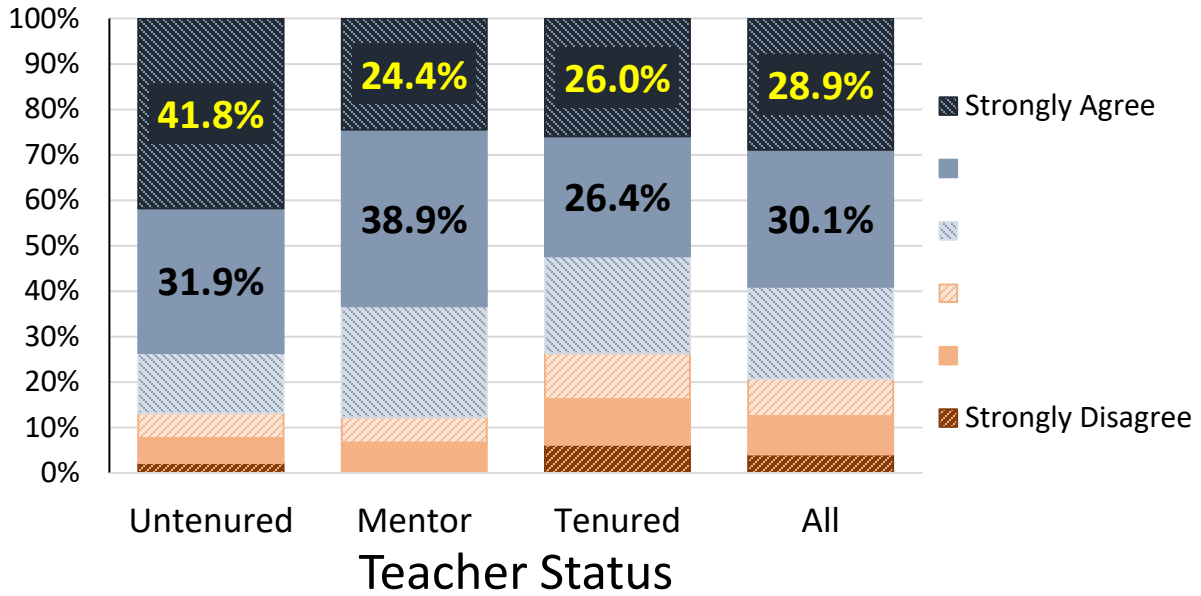


Figure 5: Teacher Perceptions of Student Mental Health Needs During COVID-19