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Teachers' work experiences, portrayals of teachers in policy, and teacher perception of policy during COVID-19

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY
WHEELOCK COLLEGE OF EDUCATION & HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Dissertation

**TEACHERS' WORK EXPERIENCES, PORTRAYALS OF
TEACHERS IN POLICY, AND TEACHER PERCEPTION
OF POLICY DURING COVID-19**

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to the 122 full-time teachers who made it possible. I am profoundly grateful for the time and energy you took during a chaotic and stressful school year to share your experiences.

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A number of people were essential to not only helping me with this dissertation but teaching and inspiring me to carve out my voice as both a practicing teacher and fledgling academic over the course of the past four plus years.

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has immeasurably impacted nearly every aspect of schools from day-to-day operating procedures to the way students attend classes to curricular and instructional matters. In the early stages of the pandemic, while COVID-19 spread across the country, the large-scale, nationwide closure of schools in March 2020 forced educators, students, and families alike to adjust to emergency remote teaching with virtually no warning or preparation (Marshall et al., 2020; Hodges et al., 2020). As the 2019–2020 school year came to a close remotely, states began the process of reopening after initial COVID-19 related closures; and the predicament of how to reopen schools in the fall became a major topic of debate. This contentious debate continued throughout the rest of the 2020–2021 school year as school buildings went in and out of in-person, hybrid and remote instructional models; and the public health crisis persisted.

Caught squarely in the crossfire of the debate and on the receiving end of policy coming down from state governance were public-school classroom teachers. Historically, this top-down dynamic is certainly not new for the teaching profession (Lortie, 1975; Cohn et al., 1993; Gratch, 2000). Intersecting with this reality is the view of teachers as

executors of policy that others create (Cohn et al., 1993; Cochran-Smith et al., 2009) — a view that situates teachers in a web of bureaucracy (Elvira, 2020) that is often at odds with their expertise and local knowledge of practice (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009). This view ultimately results in the exclusion of teachers’ voices in decision-making arenas (Cohn et al., 1993).

While preliminary research investigating the impacts of COVID-19 on teachers and the teaching profession has established some of the emotional and physical toll that has occurred, more details with respect to the way that teachers experienced the work of teaching itself in conjunction with policy decisions is necessary. The three studies in this dissertation address these needs by teasing out teachers’ perspectives, challenging the lingering image of teachers as technicians and the status quo of top-down policy enactment, and determining a way to move forward.

More specifically, these studies occur within the context of public-school teaching in the state of Massachusetts (MA) and involve data sources that include survey responses from full-time, public-school teachers in MA who actively taught in the 2020–2021 school year as well as policy memos that came from the MA state educational agency (SEA).

The combination of articles in this dissertation examines topics including the status of teachers’ voices and influence in decision-making forums, the relationship between policy and teachers’ work, teachers as experts versus technicians, and teacher demoralization throughout the pandemic. By drawing upon teacher survey data from 122 full-time, public-school teachers in MA, the first study captures their experiences

teaching during the pandemic from the onset of the pandemic in March 2020 through April of the 2020–2021 school year. This first study provides a window into the direct experiences teachers had teaching during the pandemic in comparison to teaching prior to the pandemic and sets the groundwork to show how teachers’ experiences do not align with images of teaching as put forth by the MA SEA and the policy rolled out during the pandemic. The second study uses document analysis to examine policy artifacts produced by state governance in the wake of COVID-19 and the way they communicate certain perceptions of teachers and the work of teaching. The third study returns to teacher responses to inquire about their perceptions of the state educational agency’s level of support and policy developed during the pandemic. As such, this third study demonstrates the teacher demoralization that results from the lack of inclusion of teachers’ voices in decision-making forums and the disconnect between policy and teachers’ work during the COVID-19 pandemic. Together these studies reflect that the COVID-19 pandemic has further underscored the gap between the individuals in the classroom and those in decision-making forums. As such, it has revealed the need for a more detailed understanding of the commitments that teachers juggle at the classroom level in order to better align policy, research, and state and national responses with the daily needs of students and teachers.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
ABSTRACT	vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	x
LIST OF TABLES.....	xiv
LIST OF FIGURES	xv
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	xvi
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION.....	1
Excerpts from K–12 Teachers	1
Overview of the Problem.....	3
Statement of Positionality.....	7
Overview of the Dissertation	8
CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE.....	10
Introduction.....	10
The Pre-COVID-19 Landscape in K–12 Public School Teaching	10
Conclusion	34
CHAPTER THREE: PLAN OF INQUIRY	36
Overview.....	36
Articles One and Three: Survey Design & Details.....	36
Survey Rationale.....	36
Article 2: Document Analysis Methodology and Rationale.....	47

Article One.....	49
Rationale.....	49
Article Two.....	54
Rationale.....	54
Article Three.....	61
Rationale.....	61
CHAPTER FOUR: ARTICLE ONE	69
Abstract.....	69
Introduction.....	70
Relevant Literature	72
The Pre-COVID-19 Landscape in K–12 Public School Teaching	72
Conceptual Framework.....	77
Methods	80
Study Design Rationale	80
Positionality	86
Findings	90
Teachers’ Experiences of Intensification.....	94
Discussion.....	101
APPENDIX 4-A: April 2021 Survey for Full-Time, Public-School Teachers In	
Massachusetts	106
References.....	110
CHAPTER 5: ARTICLE TWO	117

Abstract.....	117
Introduction.....	118
Relevant Literature	122
The Pre-Pandemic Landscape.....	122
Conceptual Framework.....	131
Methods	136
Study Design Rationale.....	136
Data Analysis	141
Findings	144
Images of Teachers-as-Technicians and Teaching as Solely Technical Work.....	145
Discussion.....	155
References.....	163
CHAPTER 6: ARTICLE THREE	174
Abstract.....	174
Introduction.....	175
Relevant Literature	177
The Lack of Teachers’ Voices in Educational Policy.....	177
Conceptual Framework.....	182
Methods	184
Study Design Rationale.....	184
Data Analysis	190
Findings	194

Discussion.....	219
APPENDIX 5-A: APRIL 2021 SURVEY FOR FULL-TIME, PUBLIC-SCHOOL TEACHERS IN MASSACHUSETTS.....	224
APPENDIX 5-B: 8/21/2020 DESE MEMO FOR SURVEY	228
APPENDIX 5-C: 1/5/2021 DESE MEMO FOR SURVEY	231
APPENDIX 5-D: 3/9/2021 DESE MEMO FOR SURVEY.....	234
References.....	236
CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION	242
Summary of Findings.....	242
Limitations	243
Reflecting on the Three Studies.....	244
Future Directions	247
APPENDIX A: April 2021 Survey for Full-Time, Public-School Teachers in Massachusetts.....	249
APPENDIX B: 8/21/2020 DESE Memo for Survey	253
APPENDIX C: 01/05/2021: DESE Memo for Survey	256
APPENDIX D: 03/09/2021 DESE Memo for Survey	259
APPENDIX E: Statement from the Office of Charlie Baker Regarding Teacher Vaccine Eligibility.....	261
CUMULATIVE REFERENCES	262
CURRICULUM VITAE.....	278

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3-1. Respondents' Grade, Subject Area and Level (if applicable).....	47
Table 3-2. Coding Example for Article One.....	54
Table 3-3. Coding Example for Article Two.....	60–61
Table 3-4. Coding Example for Article Three.....	67
Table 4-1. Operationalized Framework as Data Codes.....	88
Table 4-2. Coding Example.....	89–90
Table 4-3. Teacher Responses Reflecting Sources of Demoralization.....	91–92
Table 5-1. Documents Reviewed.....	139–141
Table 5-2. Coding Example.....	143–144
Table 6-1. Respondents' School Types.....	189
Table 6-2. Respondents' Grade, Subject Area, & Level.....	190
Table 6-3. Operationalization of Framework.....	192–193
Table 6-4. Coding Example.....	193
Table 6-5. Most Common Words Used to Describe the SEA.....	195
Table 6-6. Most Common Themes from Word Descriptions of the SEA.....	196
Table 6-7. Survey Responses Expressing Desire to Leave Teaching.....	202–203
Table 6-8. Responses Commenting of Lack of Trust.....	207–208
Table 6-9. Reactions of Concern about Student Mental Health.....	210–211
Table 6-10. Responses Noting Contradictory Messaging within the Standardized Testing Decision.....	214
Table 6-11. Responses Re: Return Mandates Without Teacher Vaccine Eligibility.....	218

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 3-1: Histogram of Respondents' Years of Teaching Experience.....	47
Figure 4-1: Breakdown of Survey Respondents' School Regions.	85
Figure 4-2: Survey Respondents' School Type.....	86
Figure 4-3: Teachers' Experiences of Concurrent Pandemic-Induced Factors Contributing to Demoralization and Intensification.....	94
Figure 6-1: Histogram of Respondents' Years of Teaching Experience.....	189
Figure 6-2: Visual Representations of Responses to Question 8.....	197
Figure 6-3: Visual Representation of Responses to Question 9.....	197
Figure 6-4: Visual Representation of Responses to Question 7a.....	205
Figure 6-5: Visual Representation of Responses to Question 7c.....	209
Figure 6-6: Visual Representation of Responses to Question 7e.....	216

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DESE.....	Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
MA	Massachusetts
NCLB.....	No Child Left Behind
SEA.....	State Educational Agency
TNTP.....	The New Teachers Project

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Excerpts from K–12 Teachers

The following excerpts detail K–12 public-school teachers’ perspectives and experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It will be very difficult to recover from the emotional damage this year has caused. It has changed how I feel about being a teacher. I know we have no value in our communities to many beyond being free childcare. I spent so much of my personal time and my own money to make this year work and have gotten nothing in return but disrespect and increasing demands. It will make it hard to forget what our community leaders have said about us and our worth. Teachers will not be able to stick it out when there are other fields we can work in instead.

This year was extremely deflating, and it made me really torn over whether I think that the teaching profession will ever see better days.

For the first time in 15 years, I’m not sure I’ll continue in this profession. Why should I?

I truly do believe students NEED to be back in the building and I have always supported getting them there. It was less the push to get them back in school and more the way it was done – with threats from Commissioner Riley (working remotely from his home) and without ensuring teachers had access to vaccines –

AND then doubling down and saying teachers were taking vaccines away from the most vulnerable population? It speaks volumes about the level of respect given to teachers. Clearly, very little.

It was double/triple the work to teach the in person and the hybrid and the fully remote simultaneously all while juggling new technology and rewriting curriculum to make it fit online learning...all while worrying about how to keep ourselves, families, and students safe.

I've cried so much this year. We teachers have been made to do three times the work that we're used to doing while being criticized for not wanting to work in unsafe conditions.

...Many days I cried and cried. It was discouraging to hear so many people think that teachers weren't doing their job or were lazy when I was killing myself.

...the frustration is that it doesn't seem to matter what I do in my classroom because the rhetoric never matches and teachers are not given a seat at the table to make the actual decisions about what we're doing. Everyone above us has been so out of touch during this entire thing, and that speaks volumes.

Though it has always been frustrating to "defend" being a teacher, and how hard educators work, it was especially difficult this year. We were not only attacked

from parents/families, we were politically attacked from the very top down, consistently and constantly. We had minimal support (even from our own state-level union leaders who only made us look worse). Social media has only allowed it to escalate on a grander scale. When educators try to explain things from their perspective, people either do not want to hear it, believe it, or accept it. Educators, especially public-school educators, are one of the most maligned [career professionals] ...

I begin this proposal with excerpts of teachers' voices as the primary aim of this dissertation is to center the perspectives and experiences of public-school classroom teachers – a portion of the educational sector whose voices have been starkly missing from conversations about schooling in the United States. While the abovementioned excerpts represent only ten MA teachers' thoughts and feelings toward teaching from March 2020 through April of the 2020–2021 school year during the COVID-19 pandemic, the profound sentiments that they noted pervade the vast majority of teacher responses that serve as the data for two out of the three studies in this dissertation.

Overview of the Problem

The COVID-19 pandemic has immeasurably impacted nearly every aspect of schools from day-to-day operating procedures to the way students attend classes to curricular and instructional matters. In the early stages of the pandemic, while COVID-19 spread across the country, the large-scale, nationwide closure of schools in March 2020 forced educators, students, and families alike to adjust to emergency remote teaching with virtually no warning or preparation (Marshall et al., 2020; Hodges et al., 2020). As

the 2019–2020 school year came to a close remotely, states began the process of reopening after initial COVID-19 related closures; and the predicament of how to reopen schools in the fall became a major topic of debate. This contentious debate continued throughout the rest of the 2020–2021 school year as school buildings went in and out of in-person, hybrid and remote instructional models; and the public health crisis persisted. Due to the vital role schools play in society, this debate involved the opinions and attention of a wide swath of participants – politicians, policymakers, the news and media, parents, students, school districts, state education agencies, administrators, educators, etc. (Licon et al., 2020; Pawlewicz, 2020).

Caught squarely in the crossfire of the debate and on the receiving end of policy coming down from state governance were public-school classroom teachers. Historically, this top-down dynamic is certainly not new for the teaching profession (Lortie, 1975; Cohn et al., 1993; Gratch, 2000). Even before the pandemic, discussions of accountability, teacher quality, tight regulation of teachers' work and sole blame for student underperformance (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009) in conjunction with crisis mentality news coverage (Coe et al., 2018; Alhamdan et al., 2014; Shine, 2020) enmeshed teachers as common figures of public scrutiny (Lortie, 1975; Goldstein, 2014; Cohn et al., 1993; Cochran-Smith et al., 2009). Intersecting with this reality is the view of teachers as executors of policy that others create (Cohn et al., 1993; Cochran-Smith et al., 2009) – a view that situates teachers in a web of bureaucracy (Elvira, 2020) that is often at odds with their expertise and local knowledge of practice (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009).

This view ultimately results in the exclusion of teachers' voices in decision-making arenas (Cohn et al., 1993). As Lefstein et al. (2014) note,

A frequent and unfortunate result of the intensification of political and public involvement in educational deliberations has been the marginalisation of teachers' participation. This outcome is doubly problematic: as the adults closest to the classrooms and schools, teachers possess critical knowledge and expertise about the issues under discussion, and furthermore, they are among the members of the public with the greatest and most direct stake in the policies developed. (p. 33)

Perhaps the most striking consequence of the exclusion of teachers' voices from policy and decision-making forums is the way it positions teachers as technicians who simply transplant policy and actions into classrooms that others create in non-classroom spaces (Cohn et al., 1993; Cochran-Smith et al., 2009). Atkinson et al. (2007) explicate this notion of teachers as piece workers instead of professional decision makers, asserting that this view of teachers does not consider many important aspects of teaching practice and removes consciousness and creative intelligence from teachers' work. This oversimplification causes problematic misperceptions of what the work of teaching entails; as a result, policy that impacts teaching stems from a misaligned perception of teaching to the detriment of students and the frustration of teachers.

At the same time that teachers continue to experience the effects of issues related to demoralization and lack of voice and decision-making capacity when it comes to topics and issues within the realms of education, research indicates that the teacher is one of the most critical school-level variables impacting student achievement (Ingersoll,

1999; Rockoff, 2004). In fact, Hanushek (1992) estimated that over the course of a single school year, the difference between a student being taught by a highly effective versus less than effective teacher results in a full grade level of student achievement. As such, there is no doubt about the essential value and import teachers have on the health and success of students, schools, and society. With the added uncertainty and complexity teachers face in their work due to the pandemic, the long-standing disconnect between teachers' realities and the public and policymaking forums has heightened exponentially. To this end, the school reopening debate in the wake of COVID-19 has made clear the need to better listen to and understand the nuanced experiences of teachers, especially as teacher shortages affect the country, already high attrition rates increase, and reports of teacher stress and mental health throughout the 2020–2021 school year become more universal (Garcia et al., 2019; Golodryga et al., 2021; Singer, 2020; Sokal et al., 2020; Santoro, 2020).

While preliminary research investigating the impacts of COVID-19 on teachers and the teaching profession has established some of the emotional and physical toll that has occurred, more details with respect to the way that teachers experienced the work of teaching itself in conjunction with policy decisions is necessary. The three studies in this dissertation address these needs by teasing out teachers' perspectives, challenging the lingering image of teachers as technicians and the status quo of top-down policy enactment, and determining a way to move forward.

More specifically, these studies occur within the context of public-school teaching in the state of Massachusetts (MA) and involve data sources that include survey

responses from full-time, public-school teachers in MA who actively taught in the 2020–2021 school year as well as policy memos that came from the MA state educational agency (SEA). In MA, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) oversees all public-school services in the state from preschool through high school. Within this dissertation, because there is one SEA in MA, I use the terms SEA and DESE interchangeably (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2021).

Statement of Positionality

Before diving into the ways that this dissertation responds to the problem laid out in the previous section, it is necessary to explicate the main parts of my professional identity relevant to this work. First, the part of my positionality that involves being a White, female, full-time, high school English teacher in my tenth year of teaching in a public, regional, suburban district allowed me to experience teaching during the pandemic firsthand. In fact, my experiences teaching on the ground level while witnessing the experiences of my colleagues and students provided the impetus for this study. While my experience is certainly not every teacher’s experience, having attempted to navigate the chaos of teaching in completely new modes, managing health and safety risks, undergoing the various emotions and pressures, and being on the receiving end of state policy all profoundly inform the way I approach this research.

Second, the doctoral student aspect of my professional identity equips me with research-oriented training and education as well as resources available to me in the world of academia such as literature, colleagues, and critical friends (Kember et al., 1997).

More specifically, the coursework and research apprenticeships that are part of my doctoral program exposed me to the research tools and methodologies that will help me answer the questions that arose from my experiences within my classroom and school as a teacher during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Overview of the Dissertation

The combination of articles in this dissertation examines the topics of the status of teachers' voices and influence in decision-making forums, the relationship between policy and teachers' work, teachers as experts versus technicians, and teacher demoralization throughout the pandemic. By drawing upon teacher survey data from 122 full-time, public-school teachers in MA, the first study captures their experiences teaching during the pandemic from the onset of the pandemic in March 2020 through April of the 2020–2021 school year. This first study provides a window into the direct experiences teachers had teaching during the pandemic in comparison to teaching prior to the pandemic and sets the groundwork to show how teachers' experiences do not align with images of teaching as put forth by the MA SEA and the policy rolled out during the pandemic. The second study uses document analysis to examine policy artifacts produced by state governance in the wake of COVID-19 and the way they communicate certain perceptions of teachers and the work of teaching. The third study returns to teacher responses to inquire about their perceptions of the state educational agency's level of support and policy developed during the pandemic. As such, this third study demonstrates the teacher demoralization that results from the lack of inclusion of teachers' voices in decision-making forums and the disconnect between policy and teachers' work during the

COVID-19 pandemic. Together these studies reflect that the COVID-19 pandemic has further underscored the gap between the individuals in the classroom and those in decision-making forums. As such, it has revealed the need for a more detailed understanding of the commitments that teachers juggle at the classroom level in order to better align policy, research and state and national responses with the daily needs of students and teachers.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Introduction

This chapter reviews the complex and intersecting issues involving the status of the teaching profession, teacher voice or lack thereof in policy making forums, the outdated images of teachers as technicians, the disconnect between policy and practice, and the resulting demoralization that teachers experience. All of these issues existed well before the onset of COVID-19; therefore, the first half of this chapter focuses on these issues prior to the beginning of the public health crisis. This pre-pandemic examination is necessary to understand the complicated landscape teachers faced, subsequently allowing for a more intricate analysis of the way the pandemic acted upon this landscape. Because the pandemic has drastically exacerbated these issues, the second half of this chapter provides an appraisal of these issues since the arrival of COVID-19. A consideration of these issues through a pre-pandemic and post-arrival lens is critical to discerning the current, complex state of the teaching profession and hopefully improving it for the future.

The Pre-COVID-19 Landscape in K–12 Public School Teaching

This section begins by detailing the complex reality of teachers' work. Then, this section contrasts this complex reality with the outdated images of teachers and teaching in the media, policy, and public forums, thereby illuminating issues such as the lack of teachers' voices in important decision-making forums. Finally, this section ends by reviewing how the disconnect between images of teaching in public and policy forums versus teachers' realities impacts the status of the teaching profession and causes stress,

demoralization, burnout, and high attrition among teachers.

The Complexity of Teachers' Work

In contrast to the oversimplified portrayal of teaching in the news, policy, and public forums, the uncertainty, number of dilemmas, and factors for consideration as well as the intricate decision-making processes teachers undergo (Helsing, 2007) reveal that teaching is “unforgivingly complex” (Cochran-Smith, 2003, p. 4) work. The subsequent two sections examine two aspects of this complexity: teachers’ multifaceted decision-making process and the emotional demands of teaching.

Teachers’ Multifaceted Decision-Making Work. A substantial amount of research examining the teacher planning process emphasizes the great deal of bandwidth necessary to navigate the cyclical, iterative, and interactive nature of decision-making while creating, executing, and reflecting on lessons (Bishop, 1976; Borko et al., 1990; Fang, 1996; Lampert, 1985; Clark et al., 1986). This multifaceted planning process involves the synthesis of information relating to the students in a class; interactions between the students and the teacher; and interactions between students, the context, and the content material to name a few of many considerations. As Clark et al. (1986) assert, “Research on interactive decision-making studies indicates that teachers encounter decision situations at two-minute intervals while teaching — literally hundreds of decision points per day” (p. 28).

In addition to the many factors and decisions teachers navigate on a daily basis, they must also figure out how to manage the vast amount of uncertainty inherent in the practice of teaching. This uncertainty stems from internal components of teaching such as

the goals, means, and definitions of teaching; the measurements of student learning; and the human relational aspects as well as external components that impact teaching such as political agendas, ideological shifts, societal changes, top-down mandates, etc. (Helsing, 2007; Fransson et al., 2012). Oftentimes, decision making that affects educational matters occurs within the out of touch and problematic, broader contexts of media and policy. Such uncertainty often leads to dilemmas within teaching that force teachers to juggle various, ongoing, and competing commitments that add to the complicated nature of their work (Lampert, 1985; Cuban, 1992).

The Complex Emotional Work of Teaching. Along with undervaluing the complex decision-making work and the way policy plays out in the classroom, policy, news sources, and other entities oversimplify the work of teaching by overlooking the emotional labor (Hargreaves, 1998). The acts of teaching and learning are at the center of social and emotional experiences (Hargreaves, 1998), so discussions of these acts is key to understanding the process of learning. This emotional dimension is equally as important to teachers' work as the cognitive and intellectual dimensions (Hargreaves, 1998; Hargreaves, 2021). Despite this dimension's importance, policymakers tend to ignore the fact that "emotions are at the epicenter of teachers' work" (O'Connor, 2008, p.118) because the emotional work of teaching is "intangible" (p. 188) and not measurable.

Disregarding this dimension of teaching, however, discounts a major part of the labor involved in a teacher's role. In a qualitative study of secondary school teachers' professional identities and emotional experiences, O'Connor (2008) found that at least

three different forms of caring were evident in teachers' work: performative caring — teacher actions directed toward motivating students toward a pedagogical goal; professional caring — the management and maintenance of appropriate relationships with students; and philosophical/humanistic caring — the personal decision to care in accordance with an individual philosophy or code of ethics. To a similar end, in a mixed method analysis of 468 K–12 teachers, Brown et al., (2014) found that 100% teachers in the study engaged in the emotional labor of teaching.

Disregarding the emotional dimension of teachers' work not only omits an essential ingredient of the teaching and learning process, furthering the disconnect between policy and practice, it also has significantly negative effects for teachers. In his seminal, sociological study of the teaching profession, Lortie (1975) discovered that teachers do not simply pass on knowledge to students, guide them through pedagogical milestones, and teach them academic skills; they also care for and foster students' social and personal development. According to Lortie, the psychic or emotional rewards of teaching are a crucial part of teacher self-efficacy and well-being; therefore, "working conditions that threaten these emotional rewards have damaging consequences for teachers and for their students in turn" (Hargreaves, 2021, p. 1845). Furthermore, conditions that force teachers into situations where they feel they must enact policy or mandates that compromise their sense of caring for students as human beings constitute a form of moral stress (Colnerud, 2015) and are substantially destructive to teacher morale (Santoro, 2011, 2018).

The Disconnect Between Reality and Policy

Despite the fact that the research detailed in the previous section illuminates the complexity inherent in the work of teaching, policymaking forums and other entities with decisional capacity that impact education continue to overlook this complexity and the expertise of teachers. The following section contrasts the intricacy of teaching as intellectual work with the outdated images of teachers in policy and other forums.

The Lack of Teachers' Voices in Educational Policy. While previous research has established the distance between policymaking forums and classroom realities as an enduring source of tension (Lortie, 1975; Cohn et al., 1993; Lefstein et al., 2014), the depth of the pandemic's effect on schools has further highlighted the extent of the divide and its impact on the teaching profession. At the same time that literature reveals the gap between decision-making forums and classrooms on the ground level, it also shows that teachers who feel their voices matter and feel they have influence over decisions that impact them are less likely to leave the profession (Gyurko, 2012; Harrison Berg et al., 2005; Liu, 2007; Johnson, 2019). Beyond the advantageous, professional outcomes for teachers themselves, teachers' perspectives and influence on policy also positively enhance school improvement efforts and student success (Clarke, 2013; Reeves et al., 2016; Johnson, 2019).

Despite these widely touted benefits related to reducing high teacher attrition rates and facilitating school improvement that make the case for the inclusion of teachers' voices (Dewey, 1916; Lefstein et al., 2014; Kumar et al., 2000), the problem of teachers as recipients of educational policy that others create has remained for a century

(Hargreaves et al., 2011; Cohn et al., 1993; Kumar et al., 2000). In fact, studies found that most teachers do not feel decision or policy-making entities value their voices in discussions of educational matters (Markow et al., 2011). Furthermore, teachers feel they are rarely part of the policy making process as decision-making entities institute, revise, and then eliminate policies without consulting teachers (Hargreaves, 2000; Kumar et al. 2000).

Several problems with this lack of inclusion are that it fails to capitalize on firsthand experience, intimate insight into complex classroom realities, a direct view of the learning that occurs in classrooms, and expert understanding teachers have of local knowledge of practice (Lefstein et al., 2014; Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; Atkinson et al., 2007). As Chubb (1988) asserts, "...important educational decisions have increasingly been rendered by people geographically and experientially removed from specific information about the classrooms and schools they intend to affect" (p. 15). This distance often results in disconnects between what policies intend and what they look like in action. Elvira's (2020) phenomenological study corroborates that decisions occurring within educational arenas that impact the teaching profession often times do not come from individuals with teaching or education-related experience; therefore, teachers are the individuals "caught in the middle of our bureaucratic schooling system, the ones in the classroom juggling societal and political expectations while trying to help students reach their academic potential..." (p. 74).

Without the inclusion of teachers' voices, it is no surprise that teachers' firsthand knowledge of teaching and practical classroom realities often contrasts with the

oversimplified, straightforward conceptions of teaching within policy discussions (MacDonald, 1986, 1988). Such contrasts, as they intersect with teachers' positioning in the larger educational system, yield an "overdetermined and over-regulated situation of schoolteachers' work" along with "the matrix of power relations in which they are enmeshed" (Elvira, 2020, p. 106).

To further exacerbate matters, the accountability era that No Child Left Behind (NCLB) ushered in has increasingly limited the already scarce teacher voices in reform and policy conversations (Atkinson et al., 2007; Cochran-Smith et al., 2009). Jeong et al.'s (2018) study of global changes in school governance from 2000–2015 found that teachers in the U.S. lost responsibility for professional matters in this time frame. Along with Greece, Belgium, and Hungary, the U.S. showed the largest government gains in responsibility, indicating an increase in centralization of school governance. Growing centralization goes hand in hand with shrinking teacher responsibility and autonomy as well as attempts to teacher-proof schools and promote compliancy that may conflict with teachers' local knowledge of practice regarding what is best for student success. To this end, tension and conflict characterize teachers' role at the intersection of policy implementation and practice. As Ilisko et al. (2010) highlight, "Schools play the role of bureaucratic institutions, thus weakening the voices of teachers and making them perform the role of technicians who merely follow the state mandatory standards" (p. 51). These layers of bureaucracy within "the web of governance" (Elvira, 2020, p. 42) contribute to the "layers of decisions" (p. 42) and "bureaucratic control through accountability measures" (p. 153) that degrade teachers' moral connection to the work of teaching.

The Outdated View of Teachers as Technicians. In part, dismissal of teacher voices in policymaking forums relates to the persistent images of teachers as technicians that exist across policy forums, the media, and public opinion (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; Cohen, 2010). In addition to the portrayal of teachers as the enactors of other people's decisions, the decisions themselves come from the perception of teaching as a transmission-based activity instead of intellectually complex work. The origins of this conception date back to the beginnings of public schooling and the mass education model that evolved based on a factory-like system (Lortie, 1975; Hargreaves, 2000). While many changes have since transformed the way teaching practice occurs, traces of this system still impact the physical egg crate structure of schools (Lortie, 1975; Johnson, 2019) and the perceptions of what teaching and learning is (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; Hargreaves, 2000).

Policy that evolves from this perception also tends to result in an oversimplification of teaching, further muddying the policy and practice waters. As Bulkley et al. (2017) note, social conceptions have important ties to the advocacy of policy; in other words, the portrayal of teachers in the news, media, and policy forums influences policy that ultimately moves forward. Policy, media, and public portrayals of teaching that are at odds with the reality of teaching put teachers at the crossroads of enacting top-down policy and reacting to what is in front of them on a daily basis (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; Fullan, 2001). As such, the following few sections explore the pervasive effects this problematic "teacher-as-technician" image has on education discourse and policy.

Teachers in the Media and Public Discourses. As Buchanan (2015) notes, prior to the occurrence of the pandemic, “teachers in the USA currently operate in a contentious professional landscape” (p. 700). Goldstein (2014) begins her book, *Teacher Wars: A History of America’s Most Embattled Profession*, with the assertion that “public school teaching has become the most controversial profession in America” (p. 1). These observations, in light of the reform and accountability era movement, have only become more relevant since COVID-19 has drastically impacted schools. Pre-pandemic research has established that media coverage of education significantly impacts people’s views of public education (Anderson, 2007; Wallace, 1993; Rotherman, 2008; Goldstein, 2011, 2015; Cohen, 2010; Thomson, 2004).

Media campaigns about teachers inevitably impact teachers’ emotions toward the value of their work, job satisfaction and other aspects (Mockler, 2011). These campaigns also contribute to the outside noise teachers contend with as they go about their work. Because media coverage is highly influential and tends to convey negative images of teachers that play into a crisis mentality, this unbalanced perspective ends up dominating public perception (Goldstein, 2014). Cohen (2010) details that “Most consumers of news media are not directly involved in the daily work of education. They were at one time students... and likely carry strong memories, negative or positive, of teachers who were significant to them...” (p. 106). In conjunction with the 2012 MetLife report of over 1,000 teachers recording substantial dips in teacher satisfaction rates, the demonization of teachers and participation in teacher bashing by politicians and media figures plays into teachers’ feelings of alienation and dissatisfaction (Heitin, 2012).

Not only do these media portrayals infiltrate public perception, but they also inevitably impact teachers' identities and well-being. According to Mockler (2011), "The domain of the external political environment comprises the discourses, attitudes and understandings surrounding education that exist external to the profession, experienced by teachers through the media..." (p. 4); therefore, the external political environment is one influencing factor that affects teacher identity. Corroborating this impact on teacher identity, Rogers et al., (2008) delineate that "identity is influenced and formed within multiple social, cultural, political and historical contexts..." (p. 733) as one of four assumptions related to teacher identity. Teacher identity is critical to teachers' commitment to their work and the ability to maintain belief that their work matters especially in the context of a stressful and chaotic public health crisis (Jones et al., 2020). Therefore, the oversimplified image that the devaluation of teachers' voices promotes detrimentally affects the way teachers view their work.

Educational Policy's Portrayal of Teachers. Inextricably connected to the well-worn images of teachers and teaching in the news and public discourse is research that documents certain prototypes of teachers and assumptions about the practice of teaching. These assumptions heavily inform the creation of policy (Hargreaves, 2000; Cohn et al., 1993; Lefstein 2014). As Hargreaves (2000) asserts, "Images of and ideas about... the nature of teaching, linger on from other agendas and other times — remaining as real forces to be reckoned with in the imaginations and assumptions of policymakers, the public and many parts of the teaching profession" (p. 153). Cochran-Smith et al. (2009) observe this trend in NCLB related policy that "positions practitioners as the recipients of

other people's knowledge" (p. 11). At the same time that the policy image of teachers in NCLB places sole responsibility for student learning on teachers' shoulders at the exclusion of other societal factors, it also depicts teaching in a narrow and reductionist way. This dynamic is certainly not new to the NCLB era. As mentioned previously, teachers have always been on the receiving end of policy made in forums other than classrooms; however, since the beginning of the accountability regime in U.S. educational realms, both media and policy have furthered this view of teachers as technicians who carry out policy decisions "made by others who are far away from actual classrooms" (Buchanan, 2015, p. 702) — a view that coincides with tight control, regulation, and scrutiny of the work of teaching. These neo-liberal tendencies continue to grow in educational spheres and shortchange understandings of the complexity and uncertainty inherent in teachers' work (Mockler, 2011).

While policymaking entities might view teachers as recipients of policy, teachers are the ones constantly interacting with students in the classroom where the policy and curriculum play out. As Dreeben (1973) describes, teachers need a wide latitude for decision making as it is not possible to anticipate the way a lesson or policy plays out in practice, particularly in the business of dealing with human beings. This disconnect results in "overworked and underpaid teachers" who "have had to master and comply with centrally imposed learning standards, detailed curriculum targets and pervasive testing regimes — and they have seen their work and their work become broken down and categorized into checklists of performance standards" (p. 152).

Beyond the image of teachers as passive enactors of policy, another major disconnect exists between the broader purposes that teachers hold for teaching that evolve from their experiences within classrooms of human beings and the more technical purposes and agendas of outsiders that evolve from pressures for academic outcomes that state mandates and national policy regulate. As Cohn et al. (1993) illuminate, “the agendas and perspectives of the insiders and the outsiders are often quite different” (p. 28). Complicating matters is the infiltration of economic imperialism within education policy and research, “narrowing the lens through which policymakers have designed educational forms, influencing the normative aims of education, and limiting the types of research methods that inform policies” (Jabbar et al., 2021, p. 6)

The Status of the Teaching Profession

The deep disconnect between the profound reality of teachers’ work and the public, media, and policy’s perception of teachers’ work inevitably contribute to the complicated status of the teaching profession. As previously mentioned, teachers tend to be drawn to the work of teaching for the psychic or intrinsic rewards of teaching related to the satisfaction that comes with helping students learn and enter the profession with the hopes of enacting these purposes (Lortie, 1975; Cohn & Kottkamp, 1993; Santoro, 2011, 2018; Johnson, 2019). Yet, teachers’ professional perceptions and experiences of their work once they enter the profession portray a less-than-ideal picture characterized by high attrition rates and reports of dissatisfaction (Ingersoll, 1999, 2001, 2018; Borman et al., 2008; Simon et al., 2015).

Part of this dissatisfaction stems from teaching’s complicated status as a

profession. In his study of the teaching profession, Lortie (1975) described teaching as “special but shadowed” (p. 10). This phrase invokes the dichotomy between the moral importance of teachers’ work in society and the relatively low status the profession receives (Cohn et al., 1993). In fact, debates over whether teaching constitutes a profession or a semi profession have existed for decades (Ingersoll et al., 2011). In their study of Florida public school teachers, Cohn et al. (1993) note that teachers feel “public regard for them has diminished drastically...The status decline has...demoralized a large number of teachers. When asked whether they would again choose teaching, many of our interviewees said they would look for something else with higher status and respect” (p. 162). Comparing the status of the teaching profession in other high performing countries such as Finland, Singapore and Korea, the Gallup (2014) study notes,

Unfortunately, too many young people with the potential and motivation to be outstanding teachers don’t go into the profession. It’s hard to blame them, given that the profession has been vilified repeatedly in recent years. As New York Times columnist Charles M. Blow put it in 2012, ‘Teachers have been so maligned in the national debate that it’s hard to attract out best and our brightest to see it as a viable and rewarding career choice...’ (p. 23)

More recently, The New Teacher Project (TNTP) (2013) confirmed this complexity within teachers’ perceptions of their own profession. The TNTP surveyed 206 teachers they deemed outstanding by seeking out teachers who had recently received awards and nominations. Containing both multiple-choice and open response questions on a wide range of topics including these teachers’ thoughts about the teaching profession

in general, the survey found that teachers loved their work with students but were typically consistently frustrated with issues such as bureaucratic annoyances, lack of career advancement opportunities, and poor working conditions among others. Confirming the importance of the psychic rewards of teaching, the most commonly chosen factor that mattered to teachers during their career was “being able to help students develop intellectually and academically” (p. 30).

Outside of working with students, teachers also noted factors that disenfranchise them from the work they love. As the report states, “in short, these teachers love the work of teaching — but that seems to be the only part of their jobs they love” (p. 20). For example, “many respondents cited burnout as a major concern, and told us that teaching at an elite level can be physically and emotionally exhausting,” (p. 22) mentioning workload, lack of time or exhaustion. In fact, 60% referenced not being able to see themselves sustaining the amount of time and energy over the long run. Liu et al. (2008) corroborate workload and insufficient time for planning and preparation as a major factor in teacher job dissatisfaction based on the 2000–2001 Teacher Follow Up Survey. In fact, Liu and colleagues conclude that “we’ll keep losing our best teachers until we treat them like true professionals” (p. 26). This pre-pandemic observation becomes even more relevant in light of renewed division with regard to the U.S. education system since the pandemic’s arrival.

Teacher Stress, Burnout and Demoralization

A sizeable body of pre-pandemic literature has detailed the stress, burnout, and demoralization that all too often accompany teachers’ professional work. Kyriacou

(2001) defines teacher stress as a “negative emotional experience being triggered by the teacher’s perception that their work situation constituted a threat to their self-esteem or well-being” (p. 28) and includes the following common sources, among others, of teacher stress: time pressures and workload, constant change, dealings with colleagues, self-esteem and status, administration and management, role conflict and ambiguity, and poor working conditions. The emotional demands inherent in teaching that often go unnoticed comprise a source of stress as well (Isenbarger et al., 2006).

According to a 2014 Gallup study of twelve professions, teachers recorded the highest amount of daily stress (46%) along with nurses (46%) and physicians (45%). Greenberg et al. (2017) confirm, “High levels of stress are affecting teacher health and well-being, causing teacher burnout, lack of engagement, job dissatisfaction, poor performance, and some of the highest turnover rates ever” (p. 2). In fact, in a rank-ordered list of 26 professions, teaching took second place for being stressful on both physical and psychological states (Johnson et al., 2005). High stress levels are so common within the teaching profession that the concept of chronic educator stress – a result of repeated exposure to political and educational structures, heavy workload and job requirements, student disciplinary issues, parental over and under involvement, and negative school environment due to persistent understaffing and underfunding – has developed in the literature (Matthews et al., 2021). Research indicates that chronic educator stress leads to physical health issues such as indigestion, high blood pressure, headaches and body aches as well as mental health issues such as depression, low self-esteem, insomnia, etc. (Matthews et al., 2021; Richards, 2020; Shernoff, 2011).

In combination with high levels of stress, teachers were least likely out of twelve professions to indicate that their professional opinions matter (Gallup, 2014). The experience of stress over extended periods of time and the lack of opportunities for influence translate into burn out — a loss of idealism and enthusiasm that leads to depersonalization, reduced personal accomplishment and emotional exhaustion (Richards, 2012). Because teaching requires a delicate balance of physical, emotional, and cognitive work (Hargreaves, 1998, 2021), factors such as the accountability regime, lack of administrative support, cutbacks in time, and overloaded classrooms create extremely challenging conditions that surround teachers (Cohcran-Smith et al., 2009; Johnson, 2019). As Richards describes, “The student performance expectations have increased, but the support and resources to support that goal have been reduced. The levels of stress for teachers across America have escalated” (p. 300). This stress is particularly frustrating as many teachers enter the profession with an enthusiastic commitment to make a difference in student lives and create meaningful purpose (DeLong, 1987; Richards, 2012; Watt et al., 2012); therefore, the destruction of this commitment or vocational purpose has significant moral and emotional ramifications. Since the pandemic has further complexified the demands and workload without increased support, the impact of COVID-19 has magnified these stressors and negative conditions for teachers.

Teacher Attrition

Given the conflagration of issues regarding lack of teachers’ voices and influence in policy, outdated understandings of teaching, and a contentious educational landscape

within the U.S., it stands to reason that high teacher attrition rates have perennially plagued the teaching profession. Such high attrition rates result in persistently looming threats of teacher shortages and continuous turnover (Natanson, 2022; Newberry et al., 2017). Of the approximately 3.5 million teachers, roughly half a million teachers leave the profession each year (Simon et al., 2015). Estimates from the last 15 years approximate that 44% to 50% of teachers within their first five years quit the profession (Ingersoll, 2018), and anywhere between 8%–14% of all teachers leave any given year (Ingersoll, 2001). Borman et al. (2008) cite that more qualified teachers with better training, more experience, and more skill tend to be lost to turnover with the greatest frequency. When quality teachers leave a school, they take acquired expertise as well as accumulated knowledge of students, school practices, and curriculum with them, destabilizing that school's capacity and triggering considerable financial, organizational, and human capital costs (Simon & Johnson, 2015; Johnson, 2019). Since a teacher's effectiveness increases with number of years on the job, students who have a revolving door of new teachers consistently experience lower quality instruction (Ingersoll et al., 2018; Reeves et al., 2016). Because the teacher is one of the most critical school-level variables influencing student achievement (Ingersoll, 1999; Rockoff, 2004; Hanushek, 1992), policy priorities should center on adequately addressing the U.S. teacher attrition issues. Part of addressing these issues involves updating and revising understandings of what teachers do in the classroom.

While the public, policymakers, and others have been quick to point out the issues with schools, often blaming teachers at the exclusion of all other factors for perceived

student underperformance, only relatively recently have issues that plague the teaching profession and contribute to high attrition rates become a topic of interest (Santoro, 2018; Johnson, 2019). The almost exclusive focus on individual teachers and their tests scores in the wake of the accountability era assumes that teachers work in a vacuum; however, the environments and conditions that surround teachers constitute important pieces of the puzzle (Santoro, 2018; Johnson, 2019). Within these pieces, factors impacting high attrition rates include workload, stress, lack of personal/professional connection, lack of professional opportunities for growth, problematic school cultures, physical isolation, and philosophical isolation to name a few (Newberry et al., 2017; Johnson, 2019; Harrison-Berg et al., 2005).

The Impact of COVID-19 on K–12 Public School Teachers’ Work

While the first section of this chapter delineates various issues at work in the teaching profession and educational landscape at large, this second half of the chapter focuses on the aforementioned issues in light of the COVID-19 pandemic’s intensification and complication of the work of teaching. Teaching since March 2020 through the present times has constituted a unique and tumultuous experience (Marshall et al., 2020). The long-lasting effects of the experience of teaching during COVID-19 will not disappear. Therefore, it is paramount to understand the ways that COVID-19 has altered teachers’ views and perceptions of their work. To this end, this section builds upon the foundation of issues previously set forth by examining the increased uncertainty that the work of teaching entails during COVID-19 and the stress that the pandemic brought on for teachers. This section then elucidates the consequences of the

aforementioned issues that the pandemic has heightened, involving the decline in teacher well-being and the incline in dissatisfaction and potential attrition.

Increased Uncertainty During COVID-19

Considering the inordinate amount of uncertainty inherent in teachers' work pre-COVID-19, it is hardly surprising that the onset of the pandemic greatly intensified the quantity and nature of the uncertainties teachers face (Anderson et al., 2020). Marshall et al. (2020) reported that the unexpected pivot to emergency remote teaching when school buildings first closed increased the challenge of teaching. In a study of secondary mathematics teachers' experiences during the first stretch of school building closures in Spring 2020, Horn et al. (2020) found that teachers encountered more dilemmas as they attempted to maintain ambitious mathematics instruction via remote teaching. Such considerations involved figuring out how to elicit and build upon student thinking in a new virtual space, troubleshooting the lack of access to familiar materials, engaging students while not sharing the same physical space with them, managing their own time as they adapted lessons to meet digital forums, recreating systems for recordkeeping, and assessing students' cognitive understanding and emotional well-being through a screen.

Compounding upon the unique challenges the pandemic-induced school closures presented was the lack of previous experiences with any type of comparable circumstance. Any previous knowledge, research, or experience that already existed about teaching during a crisis generally only pertains to one-time emergency situations (Martinez, 2021). The pandemic presents a unique emergency in its sustained presence and impact on schools. On top of the uncertainty inherent in teaching, the lack of

previous knowledge to draw from, and the uncertainty of when the public health crisis would end (Anderson et al., 2021), the pandemic upended various aspects of teaching and learning, adding an exponential number of considerations to the mix for teachers. Such considerations include how to deliver instructions across different remote, hybrid and in-person instructional models, what grading practices are appropriate during a public and mental health crisis, what assessments are feasible and meaningful under the circumstances, and how to gauge social and mental health across various mediums (Hargreaves, 2021; Horn et al., 2020; Marshall, 2020; Hodges, 2020; Kraft et al., 2020).

Teacher Stress During COVID-19

Preliminary research suggests that the unprecedented impact of the pandemic on teachers and teaching has increased and complexified teachers' job demands under chaotic circumstances; as a result, these impacts have increased teachers' stress levels (Pressley et al., 2021). As Pressley (2021) suggests, "With all the new demands teachers faced coming back to the classroom during the COVID-19 pandemic, they also faced the possibility of new anxieties and stressors" (p. 325). To a similar end, Kraft et al. (2021) found that the initial school closures and subsequent shifts to remote learning caused teachers across career phases to struggle more, encounter an overload of job responsibilities during these periods of change, and feel the less-than-efficacious results of their labors.

Beyond the initial pivot to emergency remote teaching, once school buildings reopened in the fall of 2021, teachers "returned to different environments, routines, and instructional approaches" (Pressley et al., 2021, p. 325) as well as different instructional

models, social distancing requirements, and other safety measures that drastically dictated how teaching could occur. Moreover, health and safety concerns such as contracting COVID-19 within the school environment, spreading it to family, and dealing with the monumental changes to daily life that everyone underwent continuously affected teachers. Most notably, many teachers expressed that caring for and worrying about students experiencing hardship and suffering as a result of the pandemic resulted in added stress – a stress that researchers have labeled secondary traumatic stress (Walker, 2019; Bride et al., 2004).

To this end, in a study of 1,876 primary and secondary educators in the U.S., Matthews and colleagues (2021) found that educators felt overwhelming “dissatisfied and ill-equipped” going into the 2021–2022 school year. Part of the concern stemmed from not trusting SEAs and districts to make informed decisions about health and safety as schools reopened for in-person learning. Eighty five percent of respondents expected negative and/or dangerous outcomes as a result of these uninformed decisions, 90% of respondents felt they would be infected with COVID-19 during the school year, and 91% of respondents were concerned they would bring it home with them to the detriment of their families. Another part of the concern stemmed from constantly changing circumstances; for example, 90% of the 1,876 survey respondents in Matthews et al.’s study expected that the teaching model of their school would change throughout the school year, making planning – an already complicated endeavor – even more difficult.

In conjunction with teachers’ complexified experiences in the classroom, they also dealt with the ongoing public and media discourses about teaching and schools that

included contentious debates about the process of reopening school buildings (Strauss, 2021). While research characterizes much of the pre-pandemic discourses surrounding teachers and teaching as playing into a crisis mentality, the negativity in such forums reached new levels since the pandemic (Goldstein, 2014; Alhamdan et al., 2014; Coe et al., 2018; Cohen, 2010). Ferguson (2021) described the early days of the pandemic when she saw an endless stream of videos of committed teachers comforting and teaching their students in creative ways even while not being face-to-face. For a fleeting second, she thought that “it seemed that Americans finally understood the kind of commitment it takes to be a lifelong educator” (p. 62). However, as school buildings remained closed and the pandemic persisted, “many parents became fed up, accusing teachers and administrators of standing in the way of a return to normal” (p. 62). To a similar end, Sherman (2021), focusing on the effects of the negativity on teachers, asserts that “Attacks on public education threaten the morale of all teachers...dispirited teachers feel overwhelmed – physically and mentally exhausted by relentless new demands and/or a lack of resources” (p. 23).

Some research has begun to capture this physical and mental toll. For example, a report analyzing data from district leadership across 17 California school districts showed that one of the biggest concerns the pandemic produced was for teacher mental health (Carver-Thomas et al., 2021). Comparably, of the 1867 U.S. teachers surveyed in Matthews et al.’s (2021) study, 83% chose *often* and *always* as their responses to the question: thinking about the past two weeks, how often did you find your job stressful? Furthermore, 40% of respondents chose *poor* and 39% chose *fair* on a five-point Likert

scale in response to the question: thinking about the past two weeks, how would you assess your overall sleep quality (Matthews et al., 2021)?

The Decline of Teacher Well-Being During COVID-19

Given the high levels of stress that research documents educators undergoing during the pandemic, it is no surprise that teacher well-being is seemingly on the decline since the inception of COVID-19. Several recent studies chronicle this decline in well-being. For instance, in their study of 151 elementary school teachers in the U.S., Chan et al. (2021) report teachers experienced declining professional health: “Most teachers felt emotionally exhausted, faced tremendous workload, and perceived ambiguity in their job duties during the first 3 months of school closures” (p. 541). With the new increase in job demands, an increase in resources and support from national, state, and district levels has not seemed to follow; as a result, the overload on teachers takes a significant physical, emotional, and mental toll (Golodryga and Pomrenze, 2021; Singer, 2020).

Corresponding with increased demands and insufficient support, Matthews et al.’s (2021) study of 1,876 teachers in the U.S. found that on average out of the last 14 days, respondents indicated their mental health was not good for 7.5 days; and their physical health was not good for 5 days. To a similar end, Pressley’s (2021) study of 359 K–12 teachers in the U.S. in October 2020 – roughly one month into the fall reopening of school buildings– used electronic survey methods to report a high level of average teacher burnout scores.

Teacher Professional Dissatisfaction and Attrition During COVID-19

In keeping with the physical and mental toll the pandemic has had on teachers

professionally, concern for the augmented teacher attrition rates has understandably risen. Research has established that teachers generally enter the profession with strong ideals and vision to make a difference in students' lives (DeLong, 1987; Richards, 2012; Watt et al., 2012); however, when they cannot access a sense of success for various reasons, they leave (Johnson et al., 2003). While there were many pre-existing reasons that hinder teachers' professional efficacy and sense of satisfaction, the pandemic complexified the work of teaching as well as the discourse surrounding it. Matthews et al.'s (2021) study of 1,876 teachers found that 74% of respondents reported feeling less enthusiastic about their jobs at the time of the survey than when they first started. Similarly, Sherman (2021) describes, "Such unhappiness exacts an emotional and physical toll from even the most highly committed teachers, may discourage talented teachers from remaining in the profession, and could dissuade potentially gifted teachers from considering teaching in the first place" (p. 23).

So far, information about COVID-19-induced teacher attrition has mostly come from news sources reporting drops in enrollment in undergraduate teacher preparation programs as well as teacher shortages across the country (Gecker, 2021; Walker, 2021; Bartlett, 2021; Goldberg, 2021). In one study, Dilberti et al. (2020) used the RAND American Teacher Panel to invite former public-school teachers to take a survey in December 2020. In order to tease out the impact of the pandemic on teacher attrition, the authors compare 527 pre-pandemic leavers – teachers who left in the two years leading up to the pandemic – with 431 pandemic leavers – teachers who left after the onset of the pandemic in March 2020. Dilberti et al. assert, "Among the 248 teachers in our sample

who taught during the pandemic and left of their own volition...almost half (44 percent) said that the COVID-19 pandemic was their main reason for leaving” (p. 5). The 56 percent that left not related specifically because of COVID-19 cited reasons such as stress and disagreement with decision making at their schools. The report sums up the two-pronged issue succinctly: “The teacher leavers in our survey left for both COVID-19-specific reasons and because of longer-standing structural problems with the profession that the pandemic has exacerbated” (p. 15).

In essence, the pandemic has shed light on issues with a lack of teacher voice in decision-making forums, issues with problematic working conditions that surround teachers, and high levels of job-related stress that plagued the profession prior to the inception of COVID-19 and worsened during this unprecedented crisis. Dissecting the overlay of COVID-19 onto the already complex teacher attrition problem is critical to the health of the U.S. public education system and revitalizing the satisfaction rates, stress levels, and conditions surrounding teachers’ work.

Conclusion

While literature documents many of the details of the issues within the teaching profession prior to COVID-19, there is an exigent demand for research examining the particulars of the complexification of these issues that the pandemic presents. First, there is a need for research that highlights the way teachers experienced the work of teaching during the pandemic through the words and descriptions of teachers’ themselves. Therefore, the first article in this dissertation seeks to understand the experiences, perspectives, and emotions of teachers about teaching during the 2020–2021 school year.

Second, Cochran-Smith et al. (2009) present an analysis of the images of teachers and teaching in NCLB policy documents to emphasize the ways that policy constructs the work of teaching. Jabbar et al. (2021) provide a framework that examines economic imperialism in educational arenas. Examining the assumptions within policy documents is work that is essential to addressing the policy and practice gap and ultimately improving the policymaking process to include teachers' voices, increase student learning, and improve public education. To this end, the second study in this dissertation focuses on the images of teachers and teaching as well as the presence of economical imperialism within policy documents that the SEA released throughout the pandemic.

Third, this review establishes that the disconnect between policy and public discourses about teaching and the work of teaching itself is problematic (Cohn et al., 1993; Lefstein, 2014). As such, the third article in this dissertation centers on capturing teachers' perceptions of policy throughout the pandemic. Better unraveling the way teachers experience policy that the SEA sets forth — particularly during a crisis — allows for improvements and alignment between policy and practice in the future.

CHAPTER THREE: PLAN OF INQUIRY

Overview

As outlined in chapters one and two, teachers have experienced a rollercoaster of new demands, emotions, and experiences since the onset of the pandemic in March 2020. In addition to the new demands related to teachers' work of planning curriculum and enacting instruction, the effects of the pandemic increased student logistical, academic, social emotional, and mental health needs. Teachers continuously face an overload of job responsibilities in conjunction with augmented healthy and safety concerns, negative discourse, and other stressors. This chapter explains how the studies within this dissertation address: 1) the need for research since the arrival of COVID-19 that elevates teachers' voices, experiences teaching, and managing policy that the SEA produced during the pandemic (articles one and three), and 2) the images embedded in the policy memos that the SEA produced (article two).

Articles One and Three: Survey Design & Details

Survey Rationale

The first and third articles in this dissertation utilize anonymous survey data collected from 122 full-time, public-school teachers in MA who taught during the 2020–2021 school year. The survey consists of 14 questions. Beyond the initial demographic questions, many of the questions contain a multiple-choice question and then an optional open response space for respondents to elaborate on their multiple-choice selection. The use of survey data that captures teachers' voices and experiences intentionally bookends the first and last articles in this dissertation to ensure that the voices at the ground level

guide this work, particularly in light of the issues with a lack of authentic teacher voices mentioned previously. This section provides a rationale for the use of survey data to fit the purposes of articles one and three.

Despite the potential benefits that qualitatively based surveys offer (Braun et al., 2020), research attributes their underuse to the limited methodologically focused literature available and misperceptions that surveys are too rigid, lack opportunities for follow up questions, and generate insufficient data to be the sole methodology of a study (Terry et al., 2017). As a result, researchers must pair surveys with interviews to achieve “adequate depth and richness” (Braun et al., 2020 p. 2). Challenging the “unquestioned dominance of interviews in qualitative research” (p. 2), Braun et al. argue “that qualitative survey datasets can provide richness and depth, when viewed in their entirety, even if individual responses might themselves be brief” (p. 2).

The rationale for using a survey as the primary data collection method for these two articles is inextricably connected with the aim of this dissertation: to directly spotlight the voices of teachers as they experience unprecedented changes to their professional work. First, the survey as a data collection method matches the research questions and aims of the studies in articles one and three. According to both Terry et al. (2017) and Braun et al. (2020), the open response sections of a qualitative survey align well with exploring people’s experiences, views, and perceptions and allow for the generation of rich and varied data from a wide sample. The studies in both articles one and three aim to capture a wide swath of teachers’ voices as they navigated the experience of teaching in the pandemic and perceived the SEA’s policy that resulted from

the pandemic. As Terry et al. (2017) assert, “for some research questions, such as wanting to understand social norms or dominant practices, a larger sample provides a broad base, and hopefully a highly diverse sample, allowing you to explore the data and consider possible variation within responses” (p. 21). This aspect of the survey methodology is particularly important to this study to both avoid the all-too-common practice of tokenizing only a few teacher voices and/or provide a forum for certain teachers’ voices that the researcher(s) purposely selects. While such a practice allows for in depth analysis of a few teachers’ views, the studies in articles one and three of this dissertation seek to provide a broader sense of teachers’ experiences and perceptions. To this end, the survey methodology better avoids positioning research participants as spokespeople: “This representational/ethical issue...is one where qualitative surveys can shine” (Braun et al., 2020, p. 3). The 122 survey responses that constitute the data for these articles are certainly not representative of the entire, full-time, public-school teacher population in MA; however, the number of responses, which are generally higher than what an interview methodology provides, allows for a slightly fuller scope of teacher sentiments on the classroom level. Additionally, the larger number of responses that the survey methodology accommodates lends more credence to the recurrence of certain themes in the data. Braun et al. (2017) affirm that qualitative surveys offer a unique wide-angle lens on a topic and provide “the potential to capture a diversity of perspectives, experiences, or sense-making” (p. 4).

Moreover, while a common misperception is that surveys do not facilitate rich data collection, the open response space for many of the questions in the survey for this

study provides opportunities to capture teachers' descriptions of their perspectives and experiences on their own terms. Surveys can generate rich and complex accounts of experiences and perspectives since "participants respond by typing responses in their own words, rather than selecting from pre-determined response options...qualitative survey data capture what is important to participants and access their language and terminology" (Braun et al., 2020, p. 1).

Furthermore, from a practical and executional perspective, online qualitative surveys enable access to "large geographically dispersed populations" (p. 4). The full-time, public-school teacher population in MA relevant to articles one and three is one example of a larger sample that exists across a state, making other qualitative methodologies not feasible. As Braun et al. (2017) affirm, "Through design, then, online qualitative surveys can allow social researchers to hear from a larger and more diverse sample...the aim in hearing from multiple participants is typically about gaining rich(er) insights into the topic of interest, not generating a sample that achieves statistical representativeness..." (p. 4). Using data reflective of a diversity of voices matters for both the quality and validity of knowledge that potentially informs practice.

Second, online surveys can provide a completely anonymous space for respondents. While researchers partake in various efforts to preserve anonymity of participants involved in interviews and other face-to-face forms of data collection, the survey offers an increased level of anonymity critical to the nature of the data collected in studies one and three. The survey's anonymity is also important in order to collect the most honest responses possible and assuage potential participant hesitancy around

providing identifying information, particularly because this study does address topics (i.e., views about the SEA) that participants might have concerns sharing freely about without backlash.

In fact, one of the optional, first few demographic questions asks respondents for their school district if they were willing to provide it. One respondent replied, “terrified I’ll be identified.” Many other respondents answered similarly with concerns they had about anonymously sharing their school district. As such, the anonymity that the survey afforded plays a crucial role in this data collection. As Braun et al. (2017) elucidate, “online surveys can nonetheless feel completely anonymous – from the participant’s perspective, the researcher cannot see them, and does not know their name – which can facilitate participation and disclosure...” (p. 4); therefore, “online qualitative survey research potentially ‘gives voice’ to people who might choose to abstain from face-to-face research due to the nature of the topic or ‘might not otherwise be able to participate...’” (p. 4). In this way, this particular survey methodology reflects goals of inclusiveness, accessibility, and feasibility for the target population of teachers. The anonymity that the survey offers allows participants to feel a high level of protection and facilitates authentic data collection. As Braun et al. state, “Another advantage of survey felt-anonymity relates to topics where issues of ‘face’ and social desirability might strongly impact face-to-face data collection” (p. 5).

Third, related to the survey presenting an opportunity to elevate the voices of a wider segment of the teacher population in an anonymous space, the format is flexible for participants, giving them the ability to respond however, whenever, and wherever they

want (Terry et al., 2017). Braun et al. (2020) corroborate that surveys are “unobtrusive as people do not need to travel to meet a researcher...this method is also typically less burdensome for participants than face-to-face methods that necessarily take place at a particular time or in a particular location” (p. 6). In this way, participants have control over decisional capacity of their survey responses and the data collection occurs in a way that is convenient for them. As Braun et al. further detail, “without the social pressure resulting from a researcher sitting opposite them, survey participants can choose how long they spend with the survey, as well as when, where and how they complete it” (p. 6). These convenience and flexibility pieces were extremely important to me because teachers at the time (and always) were under enormous stress dealing with unprecedented demands, scrutiny, and workload. As a full time, public-school teacher myself, I knew from my own situation as a teacher that the pandemic had already overloaded teachers; therefore, the survey offered the best option to collect as many teacher voices and experiences as possible in a way that respected the current situation and time demands teachers faced to the maximum extent possible.

While the survey and sampling techniques provide a qualitative and wide-angle lens on the research questions for these two studies, they also present certain methodological limitations regarding generalizability and the inability to further probe respondents’ answers. The purpose of these studies is not to obtain generalizability; instead, it aims to shed a detailed and contextualized light on teachers’ perceptions of their experiences teaching and their reactions to policy throughout the pandemic. In order to address these limitations to the extent possible, the mix of both quantitative results and

qualitative open responses reveal complementarity – “an enlargement of perspectives that permit a fuller treatment, description and explanation –” (Kelle et al., 2004, p. 174) of the subject at hand. Second, I used a formal coding partner at various points in the data analysis process detailed below to lend investigator triangulation (Flick, 2004). I organized the raw data by paper, created a codebook using my theoretical frameworks for each paper in conjunction with free codes, and then sent the data and codebooks to the coding partner.

Specifics of the Survey

In this section, I provide details about the contents of the survey. The survey contained 14 questions total intended to capture teachers’ experiences and perceptions of different aspects of their profession throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The first question asked respondents to check a box confirming they were a public-school teacher in the state of MA that was currently teaching during the 2020–2021 school year. Questions two through five and 14 asked about demographic information (see Figure 3-1 and Table 3-1). These demographic questions were self-identified. Question six asked respondents to describe the SEA in three words and took the form of an open response question. Question seven was prefaced with a statement asking participants to describe their reactions, if they had any, to several policy decisions that came out of the SEA over the course of the year: the decision to require teachers in remote districts to work from schools (8/21/2020), the decision to continue with standardized testing during the year (1/5/2021), and the decision to mandate schools to open for full in-person learning by certain dates in Spring 2021 (3/9/2021). In the preface to question seven, I provided a

link to a Google Folder that had each of the policy decisions documented in the memo that the SEA released for reference. See Appendices B, C and D for the memos. I selected the three policy decisions I thought would have had the most impact on teachers' work this year due to 1) the widespread applicability to schools, educators, and students across the state and 2) the amount of news, media, and attention the decisions received from stakeholders across the state and 3) the amount of polarization the decisions caused. Each of the three policy decisions were listed in a separate, required, multiple-choice question asking for respondents to select the answer choice that best described their reaction from the following scale options: extremely negative, negative, no reaction, positive, extremely positive. An optional open response space where respondents could choose to elaborate on their required, multiple-choice answer followed each of the multiple-choice questions.

Question eight asked about how the three decisions listed in question seven impacted the way respondents approached and/or viewed their work last year, if at all, with the same multiple-choice options as listed above. Question nine asked respondents to select a multiple-choice option that best describes the level of support they felt from the SEA as they navigated teaching during a pandemic from the following choices: not supportive, somewhat supportive, very supportive. The question also had an optional open response space for respondents to elaborate on their answer to the previous, multiple-choice question.

Question ten asked respondents to describe their overall perception of the portrayal of teachers in the news, media, and public since last March and through the

school building reopening conversation as it continues to occur. Respondents were provided with the following answer options for this required, multiple-choice question: gross mischaracterization of teachers, somewhat of a mischaracterization of teachers, no thoughts, somewhat accurate characterization of teachers, very accurate characterization of teachers. There was an optional open response space provided for respondents to elaborate on their multiple-choice answer to question ten.

Question 11 asked respondents to describe their reaction to a statement, listed on the survey, that the Baker-Polito administration issued about teachers and vaccine eligibility via the following multiple-choice options: extremely negative, negative, no reaction, positive, extremely positive. See Appendix E for the Baker-Polito administration's statement. This question also had an optional open response space for respondents to elaborate on their multiple-choice responses.

Question 12, a required question, asked respondents to describe their experience teaching during the current year of the pandemic in comparison to their experience teaching prior to the pandemic. The question was a check-all-that-apply type question with the following options: extremely different, somewhat different, the same, more stressful, about the same level of stressful, more challenging, about the same level of challenging, less challenging. An optional open response space followed for respondents to elaborate on their responses. Question 13 consisted of an optional open response space for respondents to provide any other comments they wanted to share regarding the work of teaching during the pandemic or the portrayal of teachers by the SEA, the public, and/or the media throughout the pandemic.

Throughout the survey, the combination of required, multiple-choice questions and optional open response spaces produced both quantitative and qualitative data. The questions aimed to capture teachers' reactions to policy from the SEA and experiences teaching during the pandemic. As such, I chose the content of most questions to cover teacher experiences in comparison to their experiences with their work prior to the pandemic and teacher reactions to major policy decisions coming down from the state – decisions that would have the most widespread impact on teaching during the school year. Aside from demographic-focused questions, each of the multiple-choice parts of the abovementioned questions were required whereas the open response space to elaborate was optional. The multiple-choice questions produced percentages that gave a sense of how the larger sample was generally responding to the focus of each question; however, the vast majority of data collected and analyzed from the survey was qualitative in nature, based on the optional open responses teachers submitted after the multiple-choice questions. In total there were 654 open response submissions collected by the survey on the various topics detailed above in the questions.

Survey Data Collection & Participants

I created the survey for these two studies via Google Forms (see Appendix A for the full survey) and circulated it by sending the link to full-time, active, public-school teachers that I knew and asked if they could send it to other teachers they knew. I also posted it in a private Facebook group of MA educators. The Facebook group requires approval by administrators and proof of educator status to join, making it an invaluable forum to disseminate the study to the target population. As such, data collection methods

for this survey used random purposeful sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to draw a sample of teachers from the larger MA public-school teacher population. Before sending the survey out to teachers, I piloted it in a group of two university professors and two public-school teachers in MA to acquire feedback from a methodological and practical perspective. I started by sending it to two professors. I then met with them both at the same time to obtain their feedback and suggestions. Edits included re-wording and re-ordering questions for clarity purposes. I then sent the survey to two of my K–12 teacher colleagues to get the perspective of someone answering the survey. They provided minor edits on rephrasing questions for clarity as well. Once revised based on feedback from the aforementioned individuals, I circulated the survey in April 2021.

122 teachers in total responded to the survey. The breakdown of respondents' school type is as follows: 8.2% reported working in schools in Western MA, 11.5% worked in Northern MA, 19.7% worked in Central MA, 23% worked in Eastern MA, and 37.7% worked in Southeast MA. 70% reported working in a suburban school, 25% in an urban school, 4.2% in a rural school and 0.8% in "other." Figure 3-1 contains the years of experience for the 122 survey respondents, ranging from 1 year to 35 years. Table 3-1 contains information about respondents' grade, subject area, and level (if applicable).

Figure 3-1

Histogram of Respondents' Years of Teaching Experience

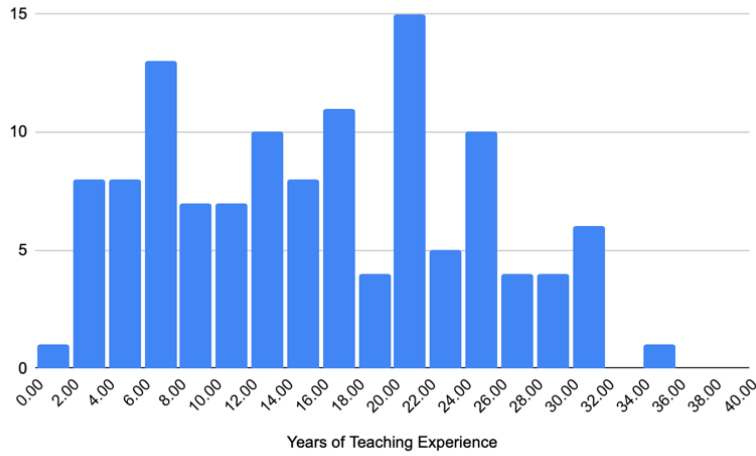


Table 3-1

Respondents' Grade, Subject Area, and Level (if applicable)

	Frequency	Subject Areas (if listed by respondent) *frequency of individual grade level or subject listed after if provided
Elementary	33	Kindergarten – 5, 1 st grade – 4, 2 nd grade – 3, 3 rd grade, 4 th grade – 2, 5 th grade – 2, 6 th grade – 2, Special Education – 5, History, ESL, Math – 2, Music
Middle	23	Math – 7, ELA – 3, Spanish, French, Science – 2, Civics – 2, History – 2, Special Education, ESL
Secondary	66	Special Education – 9, English – 15 (AP Lang – 4, AP Seminar – 1), Chemistry – 3 (AP – 1), Math – 2, History – 11 (AP Human Geography, AP U.S. History – 1), Physics – 2 (AP – 1), Science – 3, French, Music – 3, Health, Art, ESL, German, World Language – 2 (AP Latin – 1)

Article 2: Document Analysis Methodology and Rationale

The second article utilizes a document analysis (Bowen, 2009) methodology to analyze policy memos that the SEA produced from the onset of the virus in March 2020 through the end of the following 2020–2021 school year. This document analysis

specifically examines the images of teachers and teaching embedded within these documents. This section provides a rationale for the use of this methodology in article two.

Document analysis is the investigation of social meanings inherent in texts to elucidate the ideas and philosophies that infuse texts, such as policy documents, with meaning (O'Connor, 2019). As O'Connor posits, document analysis serves as a means to examine the “underlying, socially constructed knowledge” that “informs the content and form of the language we use to communicate, both formally and informally” as well as critically analyze texts to “challenge the assumed, often biased or unjust assumptions” (p. 67) they contain. This particular method aligns with the goals of the study that involve uncovering images, portrayals, and perceptions of teachers and teaching that the SEA as a policymaking entity holds and uses to inform policy decisions. Within the overarching goals of this dissertation, the policy memos produced during COVID provide samples of such images (Bowen, 2009). The SEA documents provide a stable way to access such images and perceptions straight from the source.

Furthermore, the personal, social, political, and historical contexts of documents play a key role in understanding the messages the documents contain (McCulloch, 2004). The various social, political, and historical context that surround the policy memos that the SEA produced are key to understanding the impact these documents have and the messages within them. As O'Connor (2019) asserts, document analysis involves “highlighting dominant, often unjust discourses which underpin governmental policy, media and other material around important issues in education, health, and social

equality. Such discourses are frequently invisible or well hidden within rhetorical and euphemistic language” (p. 68). To this end, discourses about teachers and the work of teaching and learning within the SEA policy documents are important to recognize as these documents have a profound impact on the work of teaching as well as the perceptions that affect larger educational discourses in the public and news.

Article One

Rationale

While much has been made of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on schools in the news, media, and public forums, there is an urgent need for more authentic teacher voices who have faced the day in and day out realities to inform policies, public forums, and decision-making entities. As research demonstrates, there is often a disconnect between policy and teachers’ perspectives and experiences, leading to misunderstandings about the work of teaching. This study aims to elevate teachers’ voices, experiences, and perspectives of their work during the pandemic – to peel back the layers of the complex challenges teachers navigated and the resulting emotions, demands, changes, etc.

In order to achieve this purpose, the following research question guides this study: What impact did the COVID-19 pandemic have on the way public-school teachers experience the work of teaching? This question situates the study in the larger arc of the three-article dissertation because it seeks to establish the foundation of what teachers experienced to set up how teachers’ experiences measure up to the images of teachers and teaching during the pandemic that the SEA’s documents and policies portray.

Conceptual Framework

Santoro’s (2011, 2018) concept of teacher demoralization comprises the

framework for this study. According to Santoro (2011), “While demoralization may be accompanied by some of the same emotions as burnout, such as depression, discouragement, frustration, and shame, demoralization is better understood as the process of continually being frustrated in one’s pursuit of good teaching” (p. 17). From the perspective of the burnout explanation, when a teacher leaves the profession, it is because they could not adapt to the changes occurring or lacked the resilience to continue through trying professional times. In contrast, through the perspective of demoralization, the conditions surrounding the teacher were the problematic entity that caused the teacher to leave. Elvira (2020) corroborates the focus on the external when describing demoralization “as a form of exogenous depression because these negative emotions stem from situational or experiential factors in one’s environment” (p. 39). Essentially, the demoralization framework shifts the focus of teacher attrition and dissatisfaction from the teacher to the conditions surrounding the teacher (Santoro, 2018; Johnson, 2019).

While research has described the psychic or moral rewards of teaching (Lortie, 1975; Cohn et al., 1993; Santoro, 2011, 2018), arguably the import of these rewards has not been given its full weight in pre-pandemic teacher attrition discussions; and these rewards will become even more important to the discussion of teaching in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, studies show that these intrinsic rewards can be more important factors in solving the teacher attrition issue than factors such as money and status (Margolis et al., 2009; Ng et al., 2010; Johnson, 2019).

Adding the perspective shift that demoralization provides to issues within the teaching profession elucidates the complexity of what factors impact teachers most

exigently. As Santoro (2018) delineates, the shift from burnout to demoralization “may provide a way to confront the problem politically and systemically rather than bearing the burden only on a personal level” (p. 20).

Santoro (2018) identifies a variety of sources of demoralization for teachers, including:

- Complying with mandates that compromise teachers’ professional ethics
- Understanding that policies designed to support students render teachers as expendable laborers
- Realizing the profession has been transformed in ways that make career longevity unsustainable and unrealistic
- Experiencing increased one directional communication about teaching that does not include the voices of practitioners
- Witnessing the rejection of teacher expertise and initiative
- Witnessing colleagues leave the profession

Furthermore, the reality of intensification — “the increased professional demands added to teachers’ workloads without concomitant time provided to incorporate new expectations or any reduction in previous duties” (2018, p. 91) — illuminates much of the stress and demoralization relevant to the discussion of pandemic teaching.

Data Collection, Data Sources & Participants

The data in this study is part of a larger project to capture teachers’ experiences teaching during COVID-19 as well as their perceptions of their SEA, state leadership, and the news, media, and public throughout the pandemic via a basic qualitative survey

(Merriam et al., 2016). While this study draws data from the survey described in detail in the first part of this chapter, survey questions relevant to this study include questions one through five, which ask respondents for certain demographic information as well as question 12. Question 12 asks respondents to describe their experience teaching during the pandemic year in comparison to their experiences teaching prior to the pandemic and is a check all that apply type question with the following options: extremely different, somewhat different, the same, more stressful, about the same level of stressful, more challenging, about the same level of challenging and less challenging. The question is followed with an optional, open response space for respondents to elaborate on their previous responses. 92 teachers chose to submit an optional open response.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the quantitative results entails examining the raw percentages derived from question 12 — the check all that apply question asking respondents to describe their experience teaching during the pandemic year in comparison to their experiences teaching prior to the pandemic. For example, 102 of the 122 respondents selected the option that teaching during the 2020–2021 school year was “extremely different” in comparison to previous years, 11 chose that it was “somewhat different,” and zero chose that it was the same. 90 respondents selected that it was more stressful, 6 selected that it was about the same level of stressful, and zero selected that it was less stressful. Lastly, 86 teachers indicated that it was more challenging, 7 indicated it was about the same level of challenging, and zero indicated it was less challenging.

Familiarizing myself with the quantitative results first provided me with an overview of

the broader response sentiments before diving into the optional qualitative responses.

In conjunction with reviewing the quantitative results, I conducted three rounds of iterative coding with the data from the optional open response space provided for teachers to expand upon their check-all-that-apply responses and utilized a coding partner to triangulate the data. The first round of open coding consisted of combing through the responses and using concept coding to label important ideas in each of the open responses (Miles et al., 2020).

During the second round of coding, I introduced some of the framework related codes. Santoro's (2011, 2018) conceptualization of demoralization guided the framework related codes. For example, Santoro's framework identifies several sources of teacher demoralization such as "mandates that force teachers to compromise ethics," "policies that render teachers as expendable," "teacher career longevity unsustainable and unrealistic," "one directional communication that does not include practitioner voices," "rejection of teacher expertise and initiative," and "attrition of colleagues." As I apply these framework related codes to the data, I grouped some of the data within similar codes together. At this point, I took the codebook that I develop of free codes and framework related codes and the data and send them to my coding partner.

During the third round, I went through each code category again, performing a more fine-grained analysis of each response in relation to the code category it falls under and write analytic memos describing different themes that occur within each code category (Miles et al., 2020). The following Table 3-2 provides an excerpt of data as an example of an open response with the coding process listed above applied:

Table 3-2

Coding Example for Article One

Data Excerpt	Coding Round
<p>I watched my teacher peers struggle all year and then be bashed by parents who were looking for “babysitters” (several parents stated this during a school committee meeting). I watched 2 staff members have to go home because they were so anxious they were having a breakdown...</p>	<p>Round 1 (open concept coding) I would code the excerpt with the following codes: consistent struggle, teacher breakdowns, teacher mental health, negative parent perspective</p>
	<p>Round 2 (grouping similarly labeled data together) I would group this piece of data with another response such as “I’m replaceable if I die or choose to protect myself...” for the similar idea of teachers as expendable. In the original excerpt, the respondent mentions teachers as babysitters; and in this excerpt, the respondent mentions teachers as replaceable and expendable – one of the sources of demoralization that Santoro (2011, 2018) identifies.</p>
	<p>Round 3 (creating analytic memos) This piece of data highlights the respondent’s feelings that their job is not perceived with respect; in fact, it is “bashed by parents” who only view the job as “babysitting.” This term strips teaching of its intellectual complexity and reveals an uninformed view of the work necessary to facilitate student learning. Along the same lines, the second excerpt that indicates the other respondent’s feelings that teachers are easily replaceable echoes the sentiment that anyone can teach because it does not require training or intellectually complex work. These sentiments exemplify one of Santoro’s (2018) sources of demoralization: understanding that policies designed to support students render teachers as expendable laborers</p>

Article Two

Rationale

After the first article details teachers’ experiences teaching during COVID, this second article aims to provide a point of comparison between how teachers experience their work and how policy viewed and constructed the work of teachers and teaching. While the first study draws from teacher responses, the second study uses policy documents that the SEA released throughout the pandemic as evidence of the ways that

policy forums and policymakers conceptualize the work of teaching. In service of this goal, the following research question guides this study: how do the DESE memos/guidance released during the pandemic portray teachers and the work of teaching?

Conceptual Framework

Two frameworks guide the analysis within this study: Cochran-Smith et al.'s (2009) images of knowledge, teachers and teaching, and teacher learning as well as Jabbar et al.'s (2021) economic imperialism. Together, these two frameworks work in complement to elucidate the way that the DESE policy memos frame teachers and the work of teaching and derive the basis for these images. Cochran-Smith et al.'s images shed light on what the portrayals of teachers and teaching during the pandemic are whereas Jabbar et al.'s economic imperialism helps to illuminate where these images come from and why they exist.

While originally derived from their analysis of NCLB's conception of teachers and teaching, this study draws upon Cochran-Smith and Lytle's (2009) images of knowledge, teachers and teaching, and teacher learning as a framework with a specific focus on the images of teachers and teaching. Despite occurring roughly two decades apart, policy resulting from the pandemic's impact on schools arguably takes a similar approach to teachers and teaching as did the policy that resulted from NCLB. Both pandemic and NCLB policy and rhetoric share striking similarities that are "flawed – linear, remarkably narrow, and based on a technical transmission model of teaching, learning and teacher training" (p. 62). Comparable to the way that NCLB's accountability

regime created “exceedingly trying times for practitioners...who are addressing the concerns of policymakers differently and who persist in asking a different set of questions” (p. 34), the SEA’s policymaking and policy dissemination approach to teaching during the pandemic hold a fundamentally different viewpoint about the nature and purpose of teaching and learning than practitioners do, especially during the unprecedented circumstances of the pandemic.

I apply Cochran-Smith et al.’s (2009) use of the term images as “the central common conceptions that are symbolic of basic attitudes and orientations to learning” (p. 63) in this study. Their framework furnishes the following images and underlying assumptions of knowledge, teachers and teaching, and teacher learning:

- Images of knowledge – assumptions regarding the knowledge teachers need in order to teach

- Images of teachers and teaching – assumptions regarding what teachers do, what the practice of teaching entails, and the purpose of teaching

- Images of teacher learning – assumptions regarding what, how and from whom teachers learn and what supports and hinders their learning

Cochran-Smith et al. (2009) conclude from their analysis of these three main images within NCLB policy that it has a “potentially devastating impact...on American public education – and on both our understandings of the nature of teaching as an activity and a profession” (p. 61). Furthermore, their inquiry reveals the outdated view of knowledge as static and teaching as predominantly a transmission-based activity. Such images that inform policy then impact teachers’ work and experiences teaching, widening

the gap between the complex realities of teaching practice and policy approaches.

In concert with Cochran-Smith et al.'s (2009) images of knowledge, teachers and teaching, and teacher learning, this study also draws upon Jabbar et al.'s (2021) economic imperialism – a framework that unearths the way that neoclassical economic logic and influence pervades beyond economics-related topics to explain all human social behavior, thought, decisions, and actions. The influence of economics in education exists in policies that support merit pay, school choice, standardized assessments, the purpose of school as solely economic to prepare students for the workforce over other Democratic aims, the value-added model of teacher effectiveness, and the public announcement of teacher ratings to name a few. As Jabbar et al. note, economic imperialism is evident in education research concepts such as neoliberalism, market-based reforms, and incentive-based reforms, emphasizing the individual over the collective and efficiency and cost-effectiveness over equity and other important matters. As a result of their review, the authors posit three elements of economic imperialism relevant to the education realm that provide guiding tenets for this study's document analysis:

- 1) "Economics has...narrowed the lens through which policymakers have designed education reforms,...limiting the types of research methods that inform policies...By understanding this troubling colonization, policymakers can rethink their disciplinary lenses and approach decision making through alternate frameworks and models" (p. 6).
- 2) "...an overreliance on economic rationales for human behavior neglects other explanations...by acknowledging the narrow lens offered by economic models, researchers can seek out wider explanations to inform policy and practice" (p. 6).
- 3) "...a focus on economic outcomes of education have subjugated and sometimes neglected other significant aims of education...Economic imperialism captures key dimensions of how education policies become embraced, are enacted, implemented, and persist" (p. 6)

These elements assist in elucidating the origin of some of the portrayals of teachers and teaching within policy memos that have roots in economic framings of education. The authors note that this economic perspective “has likely led to an outsized influence of economists in education policy spaces as advisors, providers of expert testimony, and dominant presences in the news, media” (p. 6). Given the influence of economists within education policymaking spheres, it stands to reason that policy coming from the MA SEA with respect to COVID-19 may be too narrowly created through this single lens at the exclusion of other disciplinary lenses and expertise. In fact, the authors suggest that “Qualitative analysis conducted using data such as interviews might offer insights into how policymakers and educators actually understand (or misunderstand) economic logic when adopting certain economic assumptions...and how they weigh different sources and forms of evidence” (p. 6). To this end, I argue that COVID-19 policy out of DESE’s overemphasis on economics comes at the expense of teacher expertise, leading to an incomplete and flawed portrayal of teachers and their work. This study might further extend these theories because the exigency of the COVID-19 situation and the quite immediate impact the policies in the memos had on teachers’ health and well-being were more pressing than ever before. In this way, the pandemic forced the issue of lack of teacher voice in policies when these policies so directly affected teachers – the adults in most close contact with students at a time of heightened health and safety concerns.

Data Collection & Data Sources

This study draws upon DESE policy memos and releases disseminated for school districts, educators, and families spanning from the initial school closures in March 2020 through July 2021 of the following 2020–2021 school year. I chose these memos as the focus of this study’s analysis as they constitute the main policy documents, mandates, and guidance for school districts that came from the SEA. As a teacher during this time frame, I read, downloaded, and saved the memos as they came out. In order to ensure that I was compiling a complete set of memos that the SEA released, in April 2021 I cross referenced the documents I had saved with the list of documents released on the SEA’s website. In July of 2021, I went back to the DESE website to double check the documents that had come out from April 2021 through July 2021, and all of the documents had been deleted on the SEA’s website. Instead, I used Google to search for the opening phrase on each of the memos – “On the Desktop” – as well as the SEA’s acronym, “DESE,” “COVID” and “DESE guidance.” Because many school districts re-shared these memos with students, parents, and families via their own websites, I was able to double check with reasonable confidence that I had digital downloads of most, if not all, of the memos from April 2021 through July 2021. In total, this study will examine 33 documents released by DESE.

Data Analysis

My plan for analyzing the data within the DESE policy memos started by cataloging the date and topic of each memo into a table. I proceeded with axial descriptive coding (Merriam et al., 2016) of each memo to gain a firm grasp of the

content of each memo using NVivo software. Following the first round of open coding, I went through the memos again creating common themes from the descriptive coding. After creating free codes of common themes, I then performed a third round of coding specifically using the conceptual framework involving Cochran-Smith et al.'s (2009) three images of knowledge, teachers and teaching, and teacher learning and Jabbar et al.'s (2021) economic imperialism. The specific conceptual framework related codes were applied in this third round in order to ensure that other images potentially outside of the images that Cochran-Smith et al. detail also have the opportunity to surface. At this point in the iterative data analysis process, I sent certain pieces of documents and the codebook developed in the previous rounds to a coding partner who independently coded documents to create intercoder reliability. Table 3-3 displays the initial steps with a piece of a policy document as an example.

Table 3-3

Coding Example for Article Two

Data Excerpt	Coding Round
From DESE Memo (8/21/21): It is the Department's expectation that teachers and critical support staff working in districts that have a remote learning model will report to their schools to work from the classrooms and educational spaces each day. Having teachers and critical support staff in the school will be beneficial to students,	Round 1 (open descriptive coding): teachers of remote districts working in-person from schools, monitorization of level and amount of instruction, administrative monitoring, risking teacher health
	Round 2 (application of framework codes): Accountability regime, surveillance, monitorization, regimented supervision, lack of trust, lack of professional treatment, images of teaching (misunderstanding of what teaching entails)
	Round 3 (creating analytic memos): DESE released this memo three days before the start of the school year, indicating that teachers of remote districts would report to work even though students would not be present. The particular reason in this

<p>teachers, staff and administrators for several reasons, including, but not limited to:...It allows administrators to monitor the level and amount of instruction students receive throughout the course of the school day.</p>	<p>excerpt – “allowing[ing] administrators to monitor that level and amount of instruction students receive throughout the course of the school day” – ties into a lack of professional trust in teachers to complete their job responsibilities without administrators surveilling them in-person. This emphasis on micromanagement and surveillance is in keeping with the strict monitorization, standardization and regimentation of the accountability regimes except in this situation, the stakes are even higher – risking teachers’ health by making them come in-person even though students are not in-person at a time when vaccines are not available. Additionally, the in-person surveillance misunderstands the task of teaching, relegating teachers to low-level employees who administrators simply need to watch sit at a computer screen in order to ensure they are working. Such a requirement vastly underestimates what quality teaching entails, oversimplifying the work to exclude various elements of emotional labor, support of class culture, etc.</p>
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Article Three

Rationale

While the first two articles in this dissertation juxtaposes teachers’ experiences of teaching during the pandemic with the images of teachers and teaching embedded within SEA policy documents, the third article brings the first two articles together by considering teachers’ perspectives of the way that the SEA’s policy and decisions impacted their work of teaching. The following research questions support this purpose:

- 1) What perceptions did teachers have of the level of support they received from DESE throughout the pandemic?
- 2) What perceptions did teachers have of the decisions and policy DESE implemented throughout the pandemic?
- 3) How did these perceptions impact teachers’ experience teaching during the pandemic?

Conceptual Framework

This study draws upon Santoro's (2011, 2018) conceptual distinction between teacher burnout and demoralization. Whereas burnout locates the problem within an individual teacher, demoralization analyzes working conditions and the state of the profession, asserting that "burnout fails to account for situations where the conditions of teaching change so dramatically that the moral rewards, previously available in ever-challenging work, are now inaccessible" (2011, p. 3). As Santoro (2011) aptly explains, the burnout explanation makes a fundamental attribution error, "attributing too much to individuals' personal traits to explain their behavior and too little to the context in which the behavior takes place" (p. 7).

Central to Santoro's (2011) argument around demoralization is understanding teachers' valuation of the moral rewards of teaching. These rewards are present in the work of teaching when teachers engage in their work in a way that does right by their students. In fact, without recognizing the import that the desire to do good work has for teachers, it is not possible to see the problem of demoralization and attrition clearly. Especially in the United States where low status and pay characterize the teaching profession, teachers choose the profession because they are attracted to the possibility of doing good work and exercising "their moral and ethical commitments to their practice and the students with whom they work" (2011, p. 4). However, as Santoro points out, other high-achieving countries have half the attrition rates as the United States. To exacerbate the problem, in addition to the work itself contributing to demoralization, the outside perception of teaching that makes it "difficult to maintain a commitment to work

that is historically underpaid as well as emotionally and intellectually demanding when outsiders seem to undervalue or denigrate it” (2018, p. 91). Despite Santoro’s identification of demoralization within the teaching profession initially occurring pre-pandemic, this point in particular about outsider denigration is increasingly important when examining the impact of pandemic teaching on teachers.

According to Santoro (2018), there are various sources of demoralization for experienced teachers. A few of these moral concerns applicable to this work include having to carry out policy that conflicts with teachers’ professional ethics or makes teachers feel as though they are adding to student distress, seeing teachers as expendable laborers, realizing teacher expertise and voice is not solicited or valued, being on the receiving end of policy that does not consult practitioner voices, and bearing witness to colleagues leaving the profession.

Data Collection, Data Sources & Participants

The survey contains 14 questions total as part of the larger project to capture teachers’ experiences and perceptions of different entities throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. A handful of the total 14 questions are relevant to this study. The first question asked respondents to check a box confirming they were a public-school teacher in the state of MA that was currently teaching during the 2020–2021 school year. Questions two through five and 14 asked about demographic information (more details below). Question six asked respondents to describe the SEA in three words and took the form of an open response question. Question seven was prefaced with a statement asking participants to describe their reactions, if they had any, to several policy decisions that came out of

DESE over the course of the year: the decision to require teachers in remote districts to work from schools (8/21/2020), the decision to continue with standardized testing during the year (1/5/2021), and the decision to mandate schools to open for full in-person learning by certain dates in Spring 2021 (3/9/2021). In the preface to question seven, I provided a link to a Google Folder that had each of the policy decisions documented in the memo that the SEA released for reference. I selected the three policy decisions I thought would have had the most impact on teachers' work this year due to 1) the widely applicable nature and subsequent widespread, large-scale effect on teachers across the state and 2) the general amount of media attention and corresponding polarization the decisions received and generated. Each of the three policy decisions were listed in a separate, required question asking for respondents to select the answer choice from the following scale listed via multiple-choice that best described their reaction: extremely negative, negative, no reaction, positive, extremely positive. Each of the multiple-choice questions were followed by an optional open response space where respondents could choose to elaborate on their required, multiple-choice answer.

Question eight asked about how the three decisions listed in question seven impacted the way respondents approached and/or viewed their work this year, if at all, with the same multiple-choice options as listed above. Question nine asked respondents to select a multiple-choice option that best describes the level of support they felt from the SEA as they navigated teaching during a pandemic from the following choices: not supportive, somewhat supportive, very supportive. This question also had an optional open response space for respondents to elaborate on their answer to the previous

question. All of the optional open responses from each of the aforementioned questions relevant to this study totaled to 301 open responses.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the quantitative results entailed examining the raw percentages derived from the five multiple-choice questions relevant to this study. As just one example, in response to the multiple-choice question asking teachers what level of support they felt from DESE during the year as they navigated teaching during the pandemic, 92.6 chose “not supportive,” 6.6% chose “somewhat supportive,” and 0.8% chose “very supportive.” Reviewing the quantitative results provided a broader sense of the scope of sentiments across the 122-teacher sample before I perused the optional qualitative responses. Additionally, I looked for trends across multiple-choice questions.

In conjunction with the quantitative results, I reviewed the qualitative results derived from teachers submitting optional open responses elaborating on their multiple-choice selections. 79 teachers submitted optional open responses in response to question 7b, asking teachers reactions to DESE’s statement that it is their expectation for teachers in remote school districts to work from their classrooms. 86 teachers submitted optional open responses in response to question 7c, a question asking teachers to describe their reactions to the continuation of standardized testing during the 2020–2021 school year. 83 teachers chose to submit an optional open response to question 7e, a question asking teachers to describe their reactions to DESE mandates that schools return to fully in-person learning by certain dates in the spring. 53 teachers chose to submit optional open responses to question nine, a question asking teachers about the level of support they felt

from DESE as they navigated teaching during the pandemic.

I conducted three rounds of coding for each open response except those in response to question six, which asked respondents to describe the SEA in three words. For this particular question, I grouped words expressing similar ideas together as well as tallied the number a word or phrase is used to describe DESE. For example, a brief scan of the words listed in response to this question reveals that “out of touch” was one of the most common phrases used to describe DESE. I noted the frequency of individual words as well as groups of words expressing similar sentiments.

For the rest of the qualitative data, during the first round of open coding, I applied descriptive coding to the open response data (Miles et al., 2020). As part of the second round of coding, I began grouping similar pieces of data together under slightly broader concept codes developed from the conceptual framework of demoralization similar to those of article one (Miles et al, 2020). The combination of free codes and framework-related codes illuminated both demoralization related sentiments as well as new sentiments that the pandemic evoked within teachers. At this point in the coding process, I sent the codebook and data excerpts to my coding partner, who independently applied the codebook to the data excerpts. We then compared codes and reconciled any discrepancies. The third round consisted of going through the newly grouped together pieces of data and refining both the codes as well as the data included as part of each code. Table 3-4 contains an example of this coding process applied to an excerpt of data for clarification.

Table 3-4*Coding Example for Article Three*

Data Excerpt	Coding Round
<p>Mandates are not support. Why did DESE never consider involving teachers in creative thinking around learning models, pandemic teaching, whole-child considerations, and return to in-person learning? Instead, DESE double-downed on mandates again with no view to the context of this unimaginable year.</p>	<p>Round 1 (open descriptive coding) I would code the excerpt with the following codes: double-downed mandates versus support, lack of teacher involvement, DESE as out of touch</p>
	<p>Round 2 (grouping similarly labeled data together) I would group this piece of data with another response such as “DESE did nothing to support schools, education, or students. Top-down decisions made by those that either spent little time in the "trenches" as they moved up in the system, and/or no time in the trenches in recent years are never about the work: their decisions are about politics, control, and money. DESE and the governor claimed to be concerned about the social/emotional and mental health of students, which is all about appearances. Educators and schools have been screaming about the rise of mental health issues and concerns in schools for years, begging for funding for more support staff - all of which fell on deaf ears.” Both the original excerpt and the abovementioned excerpt share sentiments related to DESE not being in touch with what occurs on the classroom level. The first response indicates that DESE had “no view to the context of this unimaginable year,” and the second response indicates that policy decisions came from those who spent little or no time in the classroom.</p>
	<p>Round 3 (creating analytic memos) As these responses show, teachers felt they had specific knowledge of what was happening on the ground level of schools, yet this knowledge was not solicited as the state educational agency created policy, often creating a distance between policy and reality and leaving teachers with the feeling that their voices did not matter. These findings ring similarly to Cohn et al.’s (1993): “one theme that underlies much of the dissatisfaction teachers expressed was not being respected, listened to, or trusted...they believed their feelings and perspectives were often ignored or dismissed...” (p. 229).</p>

For the data in response to question six — the three words to describe the SEA — I engaged in two rounds of coding separate from the rest of the open response data, starting with making six loose categories based on the meaning and connotation of each word. I grouped all of those words together and count how many of each individual words as well as words under each larger category exist, which provided me with an idea of what the most common words and groups of words are. From there, I refined the groups and words contained in each group until each group of words has a distinct conceptual definition and do a final count of words per category.

CHAPTER FOUR: ARTICLE ONE**‘EXHAUSTING AND DIFFICULT’: TEACHERS’ EXPERIENCES TEACHING DURING THE PANDEMIC-IMPACTED 2020–2021 SCHOOL YEAR****Abstract**

Research suggests that the unprecedented impact of the pandemic on teachers and teaching has increased and complexified teachers’ job demands under chaotic circumstances; as a result, these impacts have increased teachers’ stress levels. By drawing upon teacher survey data from 122 full-time, public-school teachers in MA, this study captures their experiences teaching from the onset of the pandemic in March 2020 through April of the 2020–2021 school year to provide a window into the direct experiences teachers had teaching during the pandemic in comparison to teaching prior to the pandemic. Findings include that in comparison to teaching prior to the pandemic, teachers described teaching during the pandemic as extremely different, more stressful, and more challenging. Such findings indicate the pandemic greatly intensified teachers’ work as teachers experienced increased stress and time demands, encountered more instability on a consistent basis, and suffered from increased demoralization.

Keywords: teacher well-being, uncertainty, teacher voice, demoralization, attrition

Introduction

Research suggests that the unprecedented impact of the pandemic on teachers and teaching has increased and complexified teachers' job demands under chaotic circumstances; as a result, these impacts have increased teachers' stress levels (Pressley et al., 2021). As Pressley (2021) suggests, "With all the new demands teachers faced coming back to the classroom during the COVID-19 pandemic, they also faced the possibility of new anxieties and stressors" (p. 325). To a similar end, Kraft et al. (2021) found that the initial school closures and subsequent shifts to remote learning caused teachers across career phases to struggle more, encounter an overload of job responsibilities during these periods of change, and feel the less-than-efficacious results of their labors.

Beyond the initial pivot to emergency remote teaching, once schools reopened in the fall of 2021, teachers "returned to different environments, routines, and instructional approaches" (Pressley et al., 2021, p. 325) as well as different instructional models, social distancing requirements, and other safety measures that drastically dictated how teaching could occur. Moreover, health and safety concerns such as contracting COVID-19 within the school environment, spreading it to family, managing the monumental changes to daily life that everyone underwent, and worrying about students experiencing hardship during the pandemic through secondary traumatic stress continuously affected teachers (Walker, 2019; Bride et al., 2004).

Some research has begun to capture this physical and mental toll. For example, a report analyzing data from district leadership across 17 California school districts showed

that one of the biggest concerns the pandemic produced was for teacher mental health (Carver-Thomas et al., 2021). Comparably, of the 1,867 U.S. teachers surveyed in Matthews et al.'s (2021) study, 83% chose *often* and *always* as their responses to the question: thinking about the past two weeks, how often did you find your job stressful? Furthermore, 40% of respondents chose *poor* and 39% chose *fair* on a five-point Likert scale in response to the question: thinking about the past two weeks, how would you assess your overall sleep quality (Matthews et al., 2021)?

In keeping with the physical and mental toll the pandemic has had on teachers professionally, concern for the augmented teacher attrition rates has understandably risen. Dissecting the overlay of COVID-19 onto the already complex teacher attrition problem is critical to revitalizing the satisfaction rates, stress levels, and conditions surrounding teachers' work. As such, an exigent demand for research exists that a) examines the particulars of the complexification of these issues that the pandemic presents and b) highlights the way teachers experienced the work of teaching during the pandemic through the words and descriptions of teachers' themselves. Therefore, this article seeks to understand the experiences, perspectives, and emotions of teachers about teaching during the 2020–2021 school year through the following research question: What impact did the COVID-19 pandemic have on the way public school teachers experience the work of teaching?

Relevant Literature

The Pre-COVID-19 Landscape in K–12 Public School Teaching

This section begins by detailing the complex reality of teachers' work that existed prior to the inception of the pandemic. This pre-pandemic examination is necessary to understand the multifaceted work teachers performed within the context of a complicated landscape and subsequently allows for a more intricate analysis of the way the pandemic acted upon this landscape. Because the pandemic has drastically exacerbated these issues, the second part of the literature review appraises teachers' work and well-being since the arrival of COVID-19.

The Complexity of Teachers' Work

The uncertainty, number of dilemmas, and factors for consideration as well as the intricate decision-making processes teachers undergo (Helsing, 2007) reveal that teaching is “unforgivingly complex” (Cochran-Smith, 2003, p. 4) work. A substantial amount of research examining the teacher planning process emphasizes the great deal of bandwidth necessary to navigate the cyclical, iterative, and interactive nature of decision-making while creating, executing, and reflecting on lessons (Bishop, 1976; Borko et al., 1990; Fang, 1996; Lampert, 1985; Clark et al., 1986). This multifaceted planning process involves the synthesis of information relating to the students in the class; interactions between the students and the teacher; interactions between students, the context, and the content material to name a few of many considerations. As Clark et al. (1986) assert, “Research on interactive decision-making studies indicates that teachers encounter decision situations at two-minute intervals while teaching — literally hundreds of

decision points per day” (p. 28).

In addition to the many factors and decisions teachers navigate on a daily basis, they must also figure out how to manage the vast amount of uncertainty inherent in the practice of teaching. This uncertainty stems from internal components of teaching such as the goals, means, and definition of teaching; the measurements of student learning; and the human relational aspects as well as external components that impact teaching such as political agendas, ideological shifts, societal changes, top-down mandates, etc. (Helsing, 2007; Fransson et al., 2012). Such uncertainty often leads to dilemmas within teaching that force teachers to juggle various, ongoing, and competing commitments that add to the complicated nature of their work (Lampert, 1985; Cuban, 1992).

Along with the multifaceted decision-making process teaching requires is the complex emotional labor as acts of teaching and learning are at the center of social and emotional experiences (Hargreaves, 1998). This emotional dimension is equally as important to teachers’ work as the cognitive and intellectual dimensions although often overlooked by policymakers (Hargreaves, 2021) because it is “intangible” (O’Connor, 2008, p. 118). Disregarding this dimension of teaching discounts a major part of the labor involved with a teacher’s role. In a mixed method analysis of 468 K–12 teachers, Brown et al., (2014) found that 100% teachers in the study engaged in the emotional labor of teaching. Emotional labor involves tasks such as caring for students in ways that support organizational goals; optimizing student behavior and performance; managing emotions as they interact with varying levels of emotion coming from students, parents, and colleagues; responding to educational reforms; and navigating their own feelings of job

stress.

Teacher Stress, Burnout and Demoralization

A sizeable body of pre-pandemic literature has detailed the stress, burnout, and demoralization that all too often accompany teachers' professional work. Kyriacou (2001) defines teacher stress as a “negative emotional experience being triggered by the teacher’s perception that their work situation constituted a threat to their self-esteem or well-being” (p. 28) and includes the following common sources, among others, of teacher stress: time pressures and workload, constant change, dealings with colleagues, self-esteem and status, administration and management, role conflict and ambiguity, and poor working conditions. The emotional demands inherent in teaching that often go unnoticed comprise a source of stress as well (Isenbarger et al., 2006).

According to a 2014 Gallup study of twelve professions, teachers recorded the highest amount of daily stress (46%) along with nurses (46%) and physicians (45%). Greenberg et al. (2017) confirm, “High levels of stress are affecting teacher health and well-being, causing teacher burnout, lack of engagement, job dissatisfaction, poor performance, and some of the highest turnover rates ever” (p. 2). In fact, chronic educator stress — a result of repeated exposure to political and educational structures, heavy workload and job requirements, student disciplinary issues, parental over and under involvement, and negative school environment due to persistent understaffing and underfunding — (Matthews et al., 2021) leads to physical health issues such as indigestion, high blood pressure, headaches and body aches as well as mental health issues such as depression, low self-esteem, insomnia, etc. (Matthews et al., 2021;

Richards, 2020; Shernoff, 2011).

Increased Uncertainty During COVID-19

Considering the inordinate amount of uncertainty inherent in teachers' work pre-COVID-19, it is hardly surprising that the onset of the pandemic greatly intensified the quantity and nature of the uncertainties teachers face (Anderson et al., 2021). Marshall et al. (2020) reported that the unexpected pivot to emergency remote teaching when schools first closed increased the challenge of teaching. In a study of secondary mathematics teachers' experiences during the first stretch of school building closures in Spring 2020, Horn et al. (2020) found that teachers encountered more dilemmas as they attempted to maintain ambitious mathematics instruction via remote teaching. Such considerations involved figuring out how to elicit and build upon student thinking in a new virtual space, troubleshooting the lack of access to familiar materials, engaging students while not sharing the same physical space with them, managing their own time as they adapted lessons to meet digital forums, recreating systems for recordkeeping, and assessing students' cognitive understanding and emotional well-being through a screen.

Compounding upon the unique challenges the pandemic-induced school closures presented was the lack of previous experiences with any type of comparable circumstance. Any previous knowledge, research, or experience that already existed about teaching during a crisis generally only pertains to one-time emergency situations (Martinez, 2021). The pandemic presents a unique emergency in its sustained presence and impact on schools with no ending in sight. The lack of previous knowledge to draw from, the uncertainty of when the public health crisis would end (Anderson et al., 2021),

and the various aspects of teaching and learning that the pandemic upended added an exponential number of considerations to the mix for teachers. Such considerations include: how to deliver instructions across different remote, hybrid and in-person instructional models; what grading practices are appropriate during a public and mental health crisis; what assessments are feasible and meaningful under the circumstances; and how to gauge social and mental health across various mediums (Hargreaves, 2021; Horn et al., 2020; Marshall, 2020; Hodges, 2020; Kraft et al., 2020).

The Decline of Teacher Well-Being During COVID-19

Given the high levels of stress that educators continue to undergo during the pandemic, it is no surprise that teacher well-being is seemingly on the decline since the inception of COVID-19. Several recent studies chronicle this decline in well-being. In their study of 151 elementary school teachers in the U.S., Chan et al. (2021) report teachers experienced declining professional health: “Most teachers felt emotionally exhausted, faced tremendous workload, and perceived ambiguity in their job duties during the first 3 months of school closures” (p. 541). With the new increase in job demands, an increase in resources and support from national, state, and district levels has not seemed to follow; as a result, the overload on teachers takes a significant physical, emotional, and mental toll (Golodryga et al., 2021; Singer, 2020).

Corresponding with increased demands and insufficient support, Matthews et al.’s (2021) study of 1,876 teachers in the U.S. found that on average out of the last 14 days, respondents indicated their mental health was not good for 7.5 days; and their physical health was not good for 5 days. To a similar end, Pressley’s (2021) study of 359 K–12

teachers in the U.S. in October 2020 — approximately one month into the fall reopening of school buildings — used electronic survey methods to report a high level of average teacher burnout scores. As the effects of the pandemic linger upon an already fraught landscape within the teaching profession, this study aims to illuminate the intricate experiences teachers faced to generate a better understanding of what teaching entails, ultimately leading to better policy, resources, and support to sustain the work teachers do.

Conceptual Framework

This study draws upon two interlocking and closely related frameworks. First, Santoro's (2011, 2018) concept of teacher demoralization serves as the main framework that provides the contextual backdrop of teacher working conditions prior to the pandemic that the pandemic acted upon while also helping to illuminate the way that aspects of the pandemic exacerbated issues within the teaching profession. Second, the notion of intensification aids in highlighting the intensity and immediacy of the way that the pandemic changed the nature of teachers' work so swiftly and urgently.

Santoro's (2011, 2018) concept of teacher demoralization comprises the main framework for this study. According to Santoro (2011), "While demoralization may be accompanied by some of the same emotions as burnout, such as depression, discouragement, frustration, and shame, demoralization is better understood as the process of continually being frustrated in one's pursuit of good teaching" (p. 17). From the perspective of the burnout explanation, when a teacher leaves the profession, it is because they could not adapt to the changes occurring or lacked the resilience to continue through trying professional times. In contrast, through the perspective of demoralization,

the conditions surrounding the teacher were the problematic entity that caused the teacher to leave. Elvira (2020) corroborates the focus on the external when describing demoralization “as a form of exogenous depression because these negative emotions stem from situational or experiential factors in one’s environment” (p. 39). Essentially, the demoralization framework shifts the focus of teacher attrition and dissatisfaction from the teacher to the conditions surrounding the teacher (Santoro, 2018; Johnson, 2019).

While research has described the psychic or moral rewards of teaching (Lortie, 1975; Cohn et al., 1993; Santoro, 2011, 2018), arguably the import of these rewards has not been given its full weight in pre-pandemic teacher attrition discussions; and these rewards become even more important to the discussion of teaching in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, studies show that these intrinsic rewards can be more important factors in solving the teacher attrition issue than factors such as money and status (Margolis et al., 2009; Ng et al., 2010; Johnson, 2019).

Adding the perspective shift that demoralization provides to issues within the teaching profession elucidates the complexity of what factors impact teachers most exigently. As Santoro (2018) delineates, the shift from burnout to demoralization “may provide a way to confront the problem politically and systemically rather than bearing the burden only on a personal level” (p. 20).

Santoro (2018) identifies a variety of sources of demoralization for teachers, including:

- Complying with mandates that compromise teachers’ professional ethics

- Understanding that policies designed to support students render teachers as expendable laborers
- Realizing the profession has been transformed in ways that make career longevity unsustainable and unrealistic
- Experiencing increased one directional communication about teaching that does not include the voices of practitioners
- Witnessing the rejection of teacher expertise and initiative
- Witnessing colleagues leave the profession

Furthermore, the reality of intensification — “the increased professional demands added to teachers’ workloads without concomitant time provided to incorporate new expectations or any reduction in previous duties” (2018, p. 91) — illuminates much of the stress and demoralization relevant to the discussion of pandemic teaching and underlines the way the pandemic so abruptly acted upon the already problematic issues within the landscape of the teaching profession. Per Apple’s (1986) original workload intensification thesis, changing working conditions for teachers grew out of increasing demands of policymakers and societal expectations that augmented pressure on schools. Ballet et al. (2009) elaborate that the experience of intensification “coincides with growing external pressure, due to the fact that teachers must perform an increasing number of (imposed) tasks for which they have insufficient time and resources” and that “the shift is emotionally taxing for teachers and can lead to a chronic sense of work overload, both during schools hours and beyond” (p. 1151). While intended to describe the changes to teachers’ work that occurred at an earlier time over many years, this study

applies the same notion of the experience of intensification to describe the immediate shift in working conditions teachers faced because of the pandemic. These two interlocking concepts of demoralization and intensification elucidate teacher respondents' experiences in context and frame this work with an organizational versus individual focus.

Methods

Study Design Rationale

The rationale for employing a survey as the data collection method for this study is inextricably connected with the intention to directly spotlight the voices of teachers as they experience unprecedented changes to their professional work. Despite the underuse of surveys in qualitative research and the misconceptions that they are too rigid and generate insufficient data to be the sole methodology for a study, according to Terry et al. (2017) and Braun et al. (2020), the open response sections of a qualitative survey align well with exploring people's experiences, views, and perceptions and allow for the generation of rich and varied data from a wide sample. This study aims to capture a wide swath of teachers' voices as they navigated the experience of teaching in the pandemic. As Terry et al. (2017) assert, "for some research questions, such as wanting to understand social norms or dominant practices, a larger sample provides a broad base, and hopefully a highly diverse sample, allowing you to explore the data and consider possible variation within responses" (p. 21). This aspect of the survey methodology is particularly important to this study to both avoid the all-too-common practice of tokenizing only a few teacher voices and/or providing a forum for only certain teachers' voices that the researcher(s)

purposely selects.

Additionally, the larger number of responses that the survey methodology accommodates lends more credence to the recurrence of certain themes in the data. Braun et al. (2017) affirm that qualitative surveys offer a unique wide-angle lens on a topic and provide “the potential to capture a diversity of perspectives, experiences, or sense-making” (p. 4). From a practical and executional perspective, online qualitative surveys enable access to “large geographically dispersed populations” (p. 4). The full-time, public school teacher population in MA relevant to this study is one example of a larger sample that exists across a state, making other qualitative methodologies not feasible. As Braun et al. (2017) affirm, “Through design, then, online qualitative surveys can allow social researchers to hear from a larger and more diverse sample...the aim in hearing from multiple participants is typically about gaining rich(er) insights into the topic of interest, not generating a sample that achieves statistical representativeness...” (p. 4). Using data reflective of a diversity of voices matters for the quality of knowledge that potentially informs practice.

Moreover, while a common misperception is that surveys do not facilitate rich data collection, the open response space for many of the questions in this study’s survey provides opportunities to capture teachers’ descriptions of their perspectives and experiences on their own terms. Surveys can generate rich and complex accounts of experiences and perspectives since “participants respond by typing responses in their own words, rather than selecting from pre-determined response options...qualitative survey data capture what is important to participants and access their language and terminology”

(Braun et al., 2020, p. 1).

Related to the survey presenting an opportunity to elevate the voices of a wider segment of the teacher population in an anonymous space, the format is flexible for participants, giving them the ability to respond however, whenever, and wherever they want (Terry et al., 2017). Braun et al. (2020) corroborate that surveys are “unobtrusive as people do not need to travel to meet a researcher...this method is also typically less burdensome for participants than face-to-face methods that necessarily take place at a particular time or in a particular location” (p. 6). Given the increased amounts of stress and demands on teachers’ time, I wanted the data collection method to respect the overload of responsibilities that teachers already faced as much as possible. Therefore, the survey offered a method to collect teachers’ responses that afforded them maximal convenience. Furthermore, with the ongoing pandemic, the survey provided a safer and more feasible option than in-person data collection.

Lastly, the complete anonymity that the survey offered was also critical to this article’s data collection. In fact, one of the optional first few demographic questions asks respondents for their school district if they were willing to provide it. One respondent replied, “terrified I’ll be identified.” Many other respondents answered similarly with concerns they had about anonymously sharing their school district. As such, the anonymity that the survey afforded plays a crucial role in this data collection. As Braun et al. (2017) elucidate, “online surveys can nonetheless feel completely anonymous – from the participant’s perspective, the researcher cannot see them, and does not know their name – which can facilitate participation and disclosure...” (p. 4); therefore, “online

qualitative survey research potentially ‘gives voice’ to people who might choose to abstain from face-to-face research due to the nature of the topic or ‘might not otherwise be able to participate...’ (p. 4). In this way, this particular survey methodology reflects goals of inclusiveness, accessibility, and feasibility for the target population of teachers.

While the survey and sampling techniques provide a qualitative and wide-angle lens on the research questions of this study, they also present certain methodological limitations regarding generalizability and the inability to further probe respondents’ answers. The purpose of these studies is not to obtain generalizability; instead, it aims to shed a detailed and contextualized light on teachers’ perceptions of their experiences teaching at a particularly complex point in time. In order to address these limitations to the extent possible, the mix of both quantitative results and qualitative open responses reveal complementarity — “an enlargement of perspectives that permit a fuller treatment, description and explanation —” (Kelle et al., 2004, p. 174) of the subject at hand. I also used a formal coding partner at various points in the data analysis process detailed below to lend investigator triangulation (Flick, 2004).

Data Collection and Participants

The data in this study is part of a larger project to capture teachers’ experiences teaching during COVID-19 as well as their perceptions of their state educational agency; state leadership; and the news, media, and public throughout the pandemic via a basic qualitative survey (Merriam et al., 2016). The survey contained 14 questions total intended to capture teachers’ experiences and perceptions of different aspects of their profession throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. The first question asked respondents to

check a box confirming they were a public-school teacher in the state of MA that was currently teaching during the 2020–2021 school year. Questions two through five and 14 asked about demographic information. In addition to the demographic questions one through five, out of the fourteen total questions, the question most relevant to this study is question 12, which asks respondents to describe their experience teaching during the pandemic year in comparison to their experiences teaching prior to the pandemic and is a check all that apply type question with the following options: extremely different, somewhat different, the same, more stressful, about the same level of stressful, more challenging, about the same level of challenging and less challenging. The question is followed with an optional, open response space for respondents to elaborate on their previous responses. 49 teachers chose to submit an optional open response. See Appendix A for the full survey.

Following a basic qualitative design with random purposeful sampling (Merriam et al., 2016), this study recorded 122 responses from full-time, public-school teachers in MA during the 2020–2021 school year. I constructed the survey using Google Forms in April 2021. After the first draft, I piloted it in a group of two university professors and two public-school teachers in MA to acquire feedback from a methodological and practical perspective. I started by sending it to two professors. I then met with them both at the same time to obtain their feedback and suggestions. Edits included re-wording and re-ordering questions for clarity purposes. I then sent the survey to two of my K–12 teacher colleagues to get the perspective of someone answering the survey. They provided minor edits on rephrasing questions for clarity as well. Upon revising the

survey, I disseminated it via two ways. First, I posted in a private Facebook group of MA educators. The Facebook group requires approval by administrators and proof of educator status to join, making it an invaluable forum to disseminate the study to the target population. Second, I sent the link to full-time, active, public-school teachers that I knew and asked if they could send it to other teachers they knew.

Figures 4-1 and 4-2 contain demographic information about respondents' school regions and type. 33 respondents were elementary school teachers, 23 were middle school teachers and 66 were high school teachers. Teachers at all levels taught a range of grades and subjects including AP subjects at the high school level. The minimum years of experience was 1 year, the maximum was 35 years, and the average was 15.4 years of experience.

Figure 4-1

Breakdown of Survey Respondents' School Regions

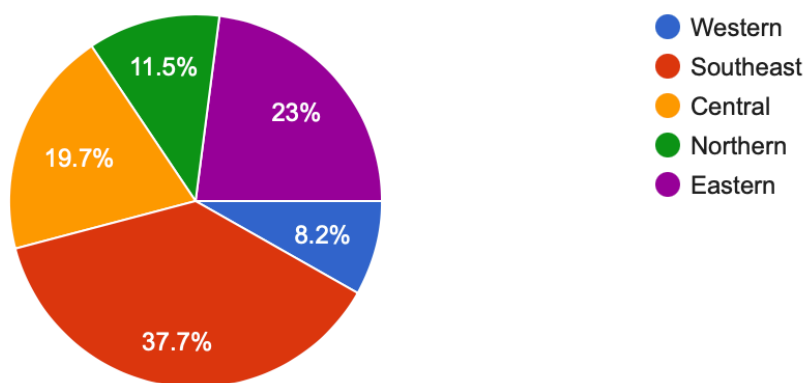
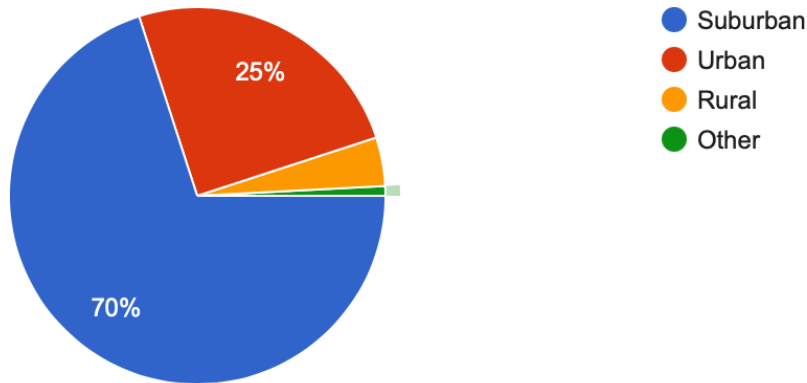


Figure 4-2*Survey Respondents' School Type***Positionality**

During the 2020–2021 school year I was in my eighth year as a full-time public-school English teacher in a suburban, regional district in MA. As such, I had personal experience of teaching during the pandemic that I bring to this work; and the impetus for this study itself was largely borne out of my observations of my own experience. This insider perspective (Wagner, 1993) colors the way that I as the researcher interpret and analyze the data from the 122 teachers in the state that responded to the survey. I consider the teacher aspect of my identity as integral to my understanding of the data. At the same time, I use the resources at my disposal as a doctoral candidate to execute the research process.

Data Analysis

The analysis of the quantitative results entailed examining the raw percentages derived from question 12 — the check all that apply question asking respondents to describe their experience teaching during the pandemic year in comparison to their

experiences teaching prior to the pandemic. I noted the percentage of respondents that chose the various options (less, about the same level, or more stressful; less, about the same level, or more challenging, etc.) Familiarizing myself with the 122 teachers' quantitative results first provided me with an overview of the broader response sentiments before diving into the 49 optional, qualitative open responses.

In conjunction with reviewing the quantitative results, I conducted three rounds of iterative coding with the data from the optional open response space provided for teachers to expand upon their check-all-that-apply responses and utilized a coding partner to triangulate the data. The first round of open coding consisted of combing through the responses and using concept coding to label important ideas in each of the open responses (Miles et al., 2020). I used open concept coding prior to the introduction of framework related codes to ensure that I captured any free codes outside the framework that might exist in addition to the framework related ideas within the codes.

During the second round of coding, I introduced some of the framework related codes and operationalized Santoro's (2011, 2018) conceptualizations of demoralization and intensification to illuminate sources and factors within teachers' responses that explained the major quantitative findings. For example, Santoro's framework identifies several sources of teacher demoralization such as "mandates that force teachers to compromise ethics," "policies that render teachers as expendable," "teacher career longevity unsustainable and unrealistic," "one directional communication that does not include practitioner voices," "rejection of teacher expertise and initiative," and "attrition of colleagues." These sources of demoralization helped tease out the particulars of

teachers' experiences teaching during the pandemic that locate the issue within the profession's working conditions versus the individual experience. Table 4-1 contains details about the way I operationalized the framework as codes.

Table 4-1

Operationalized Frameworks as Data Codes

Aspect of Framework	Operationalization as Code
Mandates that compromise teacher ethics	data segments that contain sentiments expressing that mandates/guidance/policies that teachers are forced to carry out being in conflict with their own sense of professional ethics
Teachers as expendable	data segments that contain the idea that teachers are easily replaceable/don't have any specific expertise that is hard to replace
Unsustainable career longevity	data segments that contain the idea that teachers cannot stay in the profession long due to conditions that make it difficult
One directional communication about teaching	data segments that indicate teachers feel that they are told about teaching/schools/etc. through one way policy versus having a discussion
Lack of inclusion of teacher voice in policy	data segments that contain the idea that teachers do not feel their voices are heard or matter
Rejection of teacher expertise	data segments that contain the idea that teacher expertise is specifically ignored or not sought out in discussions about school related matters
Attrition	data segments that contain the idea that teachers themselves are considering leaving the profession or watching their colleagues leave/contemplate leaving the profession
Intensification	data segments that contain the idea that teachers experienced an increase in workload, stress, job demands, etc.

As I applied these framework related codes to the data, I re-grouped some of the data within similar codes together. At this point, I took the codebook that I developed of free codes and framework related codes and the data and sent them to my coding partner. My coding partner, another doctoral student at a different university, was chosen with the

help of a mutual professor and mentor who suggested that I reach out due to her background in classroom teaching yet her distance from the classroom during the pandemic. This combination complimented the closer proximity to teaching I had as an active teacher during the pandemic. I gave my coding partner segments of data as well as the codebook.

During the third round, I went back through each code category again, performing a more fine-grained analysis of each response in relation to the code category it fell under and wrote analytic memos describing different themes that occurred within each code category (Miles et al., 2020). The following Table 4-2 provides an excerpt of data as an example of an open response along with the coding process listed above:

Table 4-2

Coding Example

Data Excerpt	Coding Round
I watched my teacher peers struggle all year and then be bashed by parents who were looking for “babysitters” (several parents stated this during a school committee meeting). I watched 2 staff members have to go home because they were so anxious	Round 1 (open concept coding) I coded the excerpt with the following codes: consistent struggle, teacher breakdowns, teacher mental health, negative parent perspective
	Round 2 (grouping similarly labeled data together) I grouped this piece of data with another response such as “I’m replaceable if I die or choose to protect myself…” for the similar idea of teachers as expendable. In the original excerpt, the respondent mentions teachers as babysitters; and in this excerpt, the respondent mentions teachers as replaceable and expendable – one of the sources of demoralization that Santoro (2011, 2018) identifies.
	Round 3 (creating analytic memos) This piece of data highlights the respondent’s feelings that their job is not perceived with respect; in fact, it is “bashed by parents” who only view the job as “babysitting.” This term strips teaching of its intellectual complexity and reveals an uninformed view of the work necessary to facilitate student learning. Along the same lines, the

they were having a breakdown...	second excerpt that indicates the other respondent’s feelings that teachers are easily replaceable echoes the sentiment that anyone can teach because it does not require training or intellectually complex work. These sentiments exemplify one of Santoro’s (2018) sources of demoralization: understanding that policies designed to support students render teachers as expendable laborers
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Findings

The purpose of this study was to capture teachers’ experiences of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic and the ways that the pandemic impacted teachers’ professional demands and responsibilities. Findings include that in comparison to teaching prior to the pandemic, teachers described teaching during the pandemic as extremely different, more stressful, and more challenging. As such, the pandemic contributed to sources of demoralization and greatly intensified teachers’ work by increasing workload and stress and heightening instability on a consistent basis.

In response to survey question 12, a required “check all that apply” question that asked teachers about their experiences teaching this year (the 2020–2021 school year) in comparison to their experience teaching prior to the pandemic, 102 of the 122 respondents selected the option that teaching during the 2020–2021 school year was “extremely different” in comparison to previous years, 11 chose that it was “somewhat different,” and zero chose that it was the same. 90 respondents selected that it was more stressful, 6 selected that it was about the same level of stressful, and zero selected that it was less stressful. Lastly, 86 teachers indicated that it was more challenging, 7 indicated it was about the same level of challenging, and zero indicated it was less challenging. These results reflect Santoro’s (2018) interrelated concepts of demoralization and intensification – the increase in professional demands added to teachers’ workloads

without reduction in previous duties or sufficient time to incorporate new expectations.

The following section examines sources of demoralization stemming from factors related to the pandemic’s impact on teaching. The subsequent section specifically focuses on the ways that teachers’ work intensified during the pandemic.

Sources of Demoralization

49 out of the total 122 respondents chose to submit an optional open response in the space provided for teachers to elaborate on their “check all that apply” answers to question 12. Many of the responses echoed Santoro’s (2018) sources of demoralization. Table 4-3 contains excerpts of data as examples of some of these sources.

Table 4-3

Teacher Responses Reflecting Sources of Demoralization

Santoro’s (2018) Source of Demoralization	Data Excerpts
Complying with mandates that compromise teachers’ professional ethics	... We are also approaching summer and next school year with the deficit model that kids are behind. Please see articles arguing that kids aren't behind and arguing that if we spend the next years of their schooling on "make-up" and deficit thinking (much as we've had to spend this year, with state testing looming), we will do great harm by killing students' confidence and interest in school, thereby doing more damage than the loss of time in seats could ever do.
Understanding that policies designed to support students render teachers as expendable laborers	I’m replaceable if I die or choose to protect myself... I watched my teacher peers struggle all year and then be bashed by parents who were looking for “babysitters” (several parents stated this during a school committee meeting). I watched 2 staff members have to go home because they were so anxious they were having a breakdown...
Realizing the profession has been transformed in ways that make career longevity	There were way less of the psychic rewards, so the job felt empty. The year was chock full of safety concerns and trying to manage huge classes and major student social emotional concerns. Getting through content and maintaining engagement

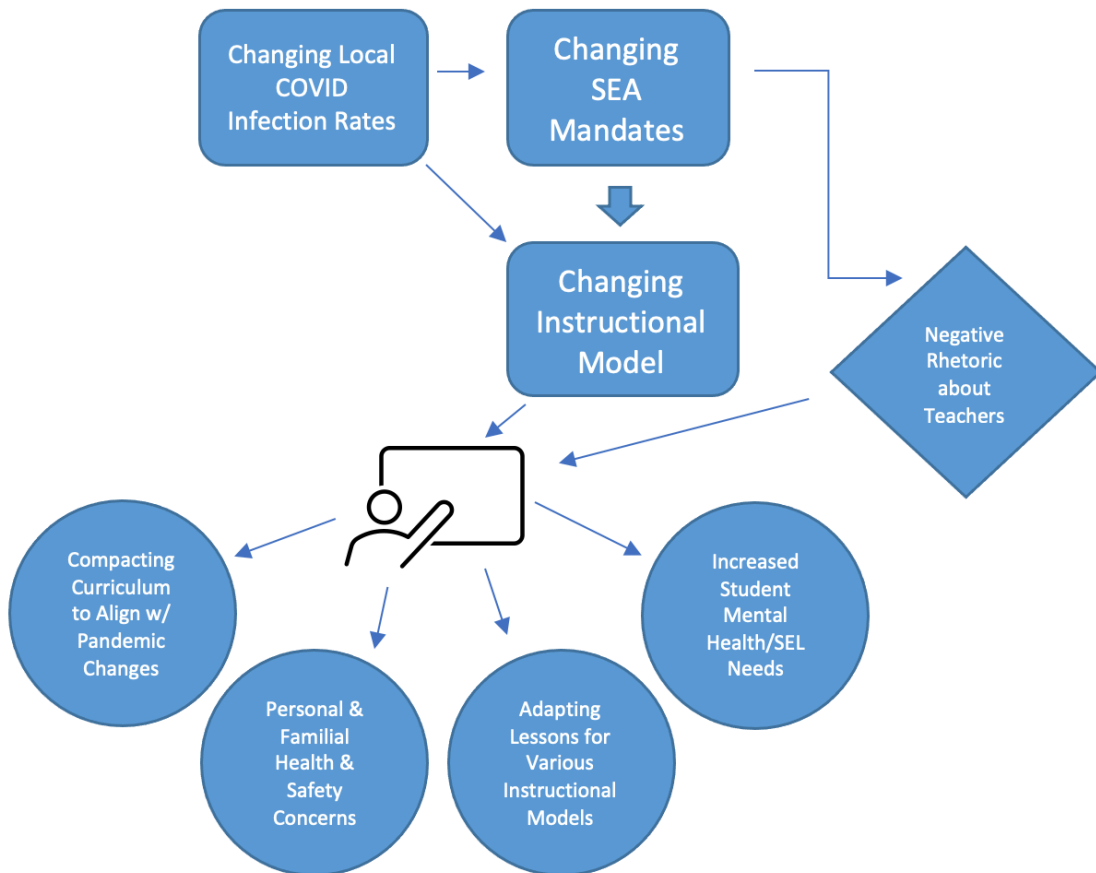
unsustainable and unrealistic	while concurrently teaching in-person and via Zoom was exhausting.
Experiencing increased of one directional communication about teaching that does not include the voices of practitioners	<p>...the frustration is that it doesn't seem to matter what I do in my classroom because the rhetoric never matches and teachers are not given a seat at the table to make the actual decisions about what we're doing. Everyone above us has been so out of touch during this entire thing, and that speaks volumes.</p> <p>Though it has always been frustrating to "defend" being a teacher, and how hard educators work, it was especially difficult this year. We were not only attacked from parents/families, we were politically attacked from the very top down, consistently and constantly. We had minimal support (even from our own state-level union leaders who only made us look worse). Social media has only allowed it to escalate on a grander scale. When educators try to explain things from their perspective, people either do not want to hear it, believe it, or accept it. Educators, especially public-school educators, are one of the most maligned [career professionals]... Other professions that require master's degrees are more respected, accepted, and compensated. I do want to add that the superintendent in our district did the best he could given the many (sometimes daily) mandates and changes that came down from the CDC, governor, the SEA, and the School Committee. I felt as though he was trying to make decisions based on what would be best for the district as a whole (students, staff, community). Though I did not necessarily agree with every decision, overall I felt as though our administration was as supportive as they could be under the circumstances...</p> <p>...In the discourse, teachers are widgets, not public servants who do this work because of our convictions and care / concern for our students' wellbeing by educating the next generation.</p>
Witnessing the rejection of teacher expertise and initiative	No matter how much trash the media talks, how poor the public perception of teachers is, no matter how many angry parents we hear from, no matter how unsafe our conditions, did you ever see teachers STOP working? No. Because we care about these kids and ironically, we seem to be the only ones who TRULY are in it for the kids - no political motivation and definitely no financial motivation. We see them, we know them, we have relationships with them. To have the general public and our governing bodies treat us with such disrespect is incredibly demoralizing. And now that the events of the past year have occurred, it feels like teachers have even less of a voice than we did before. In 2021, 74% of US teachers are White women. Can you imagine how the narrative would be different if it were 74% men?

As these responses portray, teachers dealt with multiple sources of co-occurring demoralization. Teachers felt “replaceable,” like “widgets” and “politically attacked” at a time when they were contending with the sudden changes to their professional work as well as coping with the general concerns that the pandemic presented for everyone. The sentiment that teachers did not feel accurately heard or heard at all pervaded across several of these sources of demoralization. Phrases such as “the rhetoric never matches” and “when educators try to explain something from their perspective, people do not want to hear it” and references to the “trash the media talks” and “how poor the public perception of teachers is” indicate a great and problematic disparity between how teachers experience their work and how they feel others perceive their work.

Additionally, several responses expressed bewilderment that the efforts teachers made to care for students’ academic and social emotional well-being were largely ignored in favor of other more negative narratives about teachers. This disparity only serves to distract from obtaining a precise sense of student and teacher realities in the classroom and align them with resources, policy, etc. that alleviate demoralization instead of cause it. Figure 4-3 visually arranges the various, aforementioned factors teachers mentioned that served as concurrent sources of demoralization and intensification.

Figure 4-3

Teachers' Experiences of Concurrent Pandemic-Induced Factors Contributing to Demoralization and Intensification



Teachers' Experiences of Intensification

Intertwined with the various sources contributing to teacher demoralization is the way that the pandemic caused sudden, simultaneous changes and resulting adaptations along with the emotions, stress, etc. that accompanied the adaptations. The sections below detail various factors that contributed to teachers' experiences of intensification during this school year.

Increased Workload and Stress

Teachers reported various ways that their workload and stress increased. These ways included the fact that they had to exert more time and effort, faced heightened challenges, had to adapt to new technology, had to split their attention across instructional models, had to attend to student social emotional needs, and had to manage their own increased emotions.

Exerting More Time and Effort. The most common difference between teaching during the pandemic in comparison to previous years mentioned in teachers' open responses was the increased time necessary to adapt lessons, curricula, and instruction to fit the different instructional models resulting from pandemic related restrictions. One respondent describes the amount of adaptation necessary: "Nothing was the same. The way I taught, how I taught and where I taught changed..." As another respondent put it, "It was double/triple the work to teach the in-person and the hybrid and the fully remote simultaneously all while juggling new technology and rewriting curriculum to make it fit online learning...all while worrying about how to keep ourselves, families and students safe." Another response similarly noted, "Everything was quadruple the effort and work; teaching to multiple groups/multiple ways simultaneously and learning many new technologies and putting them to immediate use, creating new teaching materials and rewriting curriculum on the fly just to mention a few." These responses characterize pandemic teaching as "double/triple" and "quadruple" the work as compared to a normal year when teachers' caseload, planning, and grading historically is already a lot of work (Cohn et al., 1993; Johnson, 2019).

Facing Heightened Difficulty of Challenges. Along similar lines, respondents also commented on the difficulty of the year in addition to extra time demands. According to one respondent, “This has been the hardest and most challenging year of my 21-year profession. I have never worked harder in my life. I have recreated my entire curriculum piece by piece to be digital. I have taught myself technology literally while I am using it...” Another teacher described, “I have had to reinvent my entire curriculum to teach remotely and teach students in-person and on Zoom at the same time.” Still others commented, “Teaching students on Zoom and in-person has been exhausting and difficult to say the least.,” and “I have never worked the amount I have worked while in the hybrid model. Most days were 12-hour days with 5–6 hours each day on the weekends. As well, I was always available for students and families; so there was never time away from work.”

Adapting to New Technological Demands. As noted in some of the responses above, teaching students in-person and via a remote platform not only increased the amount of work teachers had to put in; but it also brought new and unknown technology into the picture. As one respondent noted,

“...Learning new platforms, teaching students those platforms, troubleshooting, and developing lessons in these new platforms was stressful, challenging and completely different than anything I had previously done. The amount of time spent outside of the school day prepping and learning made for stress not only in school but in my personal life.”

Another respondent stated, “Had to learn several platforms and use them without proper equipment. Also had to help students troubleshoot THEIR tech issues. All while dealing with my own family's stress and issues. I spent at least double the time preparing lessons.” These responses clearly exemplify Santoro’s (2018) concept of intensification in no uncertain terms: workload and demands have increased without an increase in time during the workday to manage the increase.

Splitting Attention Across Instructional Models. Intersecting with the increased workload and technological learning curve was the stress that came from not feeling effective having to consistently split attention across a number of models. One respondent described “juggling in-person and online” as “horrible.” Another stated, “Teaching both remote and in-person students simultaneously made me feel like I wasn’t helping either group well. Hours upon hours of additional planning went into every lesson this year.” Still another described the year as “harder than my first-year teaching.” Such responses reflect Santoro’s (2011) notion regarding the demoralization that accompanies not being able to engage in good work.

Attending to Student Social Emotional Needs. Responses also focused on the overwhelming nature and increased workload associated with not only meeting the academic needs of students but increased social emotional needs as well. One respondent wrote, “There were so many students who were suffering from terrible trauma...more than ever before. It felt like I could never do enough to reach all of them.” As this response highlights, teachers registered a level of trauma students faced that was more than they had seen in prior years.

Managing Their Own Increased Emotions. To exacerbate these challenges arising from the actual work of teaching were external factors such as anxiety about being exposed to the virus at school and hearing negative comments about the teaching profession. One teacher noted, “I have never worked harder or felt less appreciated.” Another commented, “I’ve cried so much this year. We teachers have been made to do three times the work that we’re used to doing while being criticized for not wanting to work in unsafe conditions.” Still others described, “It was very frustrating to put in extra hours and hours into work and dealing with multiple challenges, only to be referred to as being lazy and not wanting to work,” “...Many days I cried and cried. It was discouraging to hear so many people think that teachers weren't doing their job or were lazy when I was killing myself,” “I’ve never been this stressed in my life, and I’ve lived through incredible trauma,” and “I haven’t slept through the night in over a year...I have not felt supported, safe, valued, or trusted at all this year...”

Increased Instability

Another major factor impacting teachers’ experiences during the pandemic was a significant increase in instability that stemmed from constant changes. This instability arose from changes to due COVID-19’s impact on schedule and changes from state guidance.

Changes due to COVID-19’s Impact on Schedule. One source of instability was the constant schedule changes due to the various instructional models. According to one respondent, “While I clearly knew my curriculum, it was somewhat like being a first-year teacher because every lesson and assessment had to be re-tooled in order to meet the

needs of both remote and in-person students. The stress was due to the ever-changing schedules and expectations.” Several other responses commented on similar schedule instability: “Schedules and expectations were widely different...;” “...the mass changes in schedule – remote was one schedule and X amount of classes. Then, all of a sudden hybrid — new amount of classes and time /class), and now full time — yet another massive change — means you literally CANNOT plan;” and “We have had to change courses about five different times this year. 1) Remote 2) Hybrid 3) Remote Plan B 4) Teaching students in-person and at home at the same time 5) All in person I have learned so much this year, but it has all been trial by fire!” The constant schedule changes also meant, as several responses noted, that teachers could never be sure what students would be online and what students would be in-person: “It has been exhausting, especially hybrid teaching with some in person and some online. Also, we were never quite sure who'd be in person and who'd be online.”

Changes due to State Guidance. Changing state educational agency guidance constituted another source of instability. For example, one respondent wrote, “I have been so overwhelmed with the lack of guidance from the state — but then having the state mandate and update requirements and set timelines when we were given no warning or assistance in the planning process...” Another response noted, “The SEA and public guidance have been so contradictory — we care about students' SEL and their stress, but we're still giving the state testing... Pulling the plug on 11th grade state testing just a few weeks beforehand is, if anything, MORE frustrating because we spent the year badgering 11th graders about it. We COULD have spent that time on more literature, more

Independent Reading, and less test prep...”

With all of the changes that the school year brought, teacher responses indicated that support whether it be from state guidance, professional development, etc. did not provide them with what they needed in the face of unprecedented circumstances. For example, one respondent commented, “Teachers were expected to completely pivot last year and continue to do so with all of the changes throughout the year. My school did not offer any professional development last spring to help us adjust to remote teaching. The offerings this fall were not what we needed.” According to the responses, teachers faced many ever-changing factors as they attempted to plan and respond to student needs throughout the year. The onslaught of constant change required much adaptation that required increase time and mental capacity.

A Minority of Semi-Positives

Out of the 49 total open responses, a minority — nine (18%) — of them referenced a somewhat positive aspect of teaching in the COVID-19-impacted circumstances, even if this unexpected positive was qualified in some way. Several teachers’ responses acknowledged the challenges that were different in nature from a pre-COVID year in teaching but indicated that they were able to manage some level of success in adapting to the challenges. For example, one respondent wrote, “Teaching is always stressful — just different stresses this year. I tried my best to keep the nonsense out of my work.” Another respondent commented, “The inconsistency was stressful, but I don’t believe remote learning was more or less stressful than previous years,” And others, such as the following two, noted overcoming challenges: “Different, challenging, and

stressful, but we handled it like the professionals we are,” and “It was very challenging at first, but I adapted and found ways to make it work well...”

A few responses with some positives also mentioned support from their districts specifically that aided them in some way. For example, one teacher wrote, “It was very different, of course, but I feel my district did a fantastic job given all the circumstances!” And another noted,

...the teaching itself wasn't too bad because we did have a ton of technical support and also back-up from administrators... The stress was not (in my case) from the teaching itself, but from the worry that I would get sick and die because of outrageously unsafe guidelines and suggestions...

These responses note the positive impact that administrative support had on the teaching experience while the latter one refers to the surrounding circumstances as the impetus for stress.

No responses expressed fully positive sentiments; however, some referenced individual district support as a mediating factor that assisted them in navigating teaching during the pandemic. While the nine responses comprising this semi-positive category were not enough to define full themes within the data, they do point to the varied nature of individual district's responses to the pandemic.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal that teachers were simultaneously tasked with addressing academic needs of students, the mental and social health consequences of the pandemic's isolation, figuring out how to navigate the ways the pandemic changed

school operating procedures, engaging students concurrently in different instructional models, managing new health and safety protocols, worrying about their own health and safety, and dealing with the frustration of not feeling heard or respected while they took on all of these tasks. Given the pre-pandemic landscape of teachers' experiences and views about the status of their own profession, it is no surprise that the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic complexified both teachers' daily responsibilities, introduced new challenges, increased stress, and heightened the complicated discussion around the value of teachers and the status of the profession (Marshall et al., 2020; Kraft et al., 2020; Horn et al., 2020).

Such findings extend the pre-pandemic concepts of demoralization and intensification in a multitude of ways. For example, many teacher responses' echoed Santoro's sources of demoralization with marked urgency. Responses commenting that teachers felt "replaceable," like "widgets," and that their safety and well-being did not matter augmented new depth to Santoro's category of teacher expendability in light of the health concerns that the pandemic posed. Furthermore, the immediate onslaught of multiple sources of demoralization that the pandemic caused coincided with the concurrent and pressing demand for teachers to adapt teaching to the radically different circumstances presented by the pandemic. This adaptation triggered intensification — a significant disequilibrium in the job demands, and subsequently, the stress that many teachers felt — with an unforeseen exigency.

This analysis of teachers' perceptions of their work during the 2020–2021 school year is critical to addressing longstanding issues within the profession that the pandemic

has exacerbated. Even the small handful of semi-positive responses still acknowledged the challenges of the pandemic-impacted school year but framed these challenges in a way that suggests teaching is always subject to stress, and the pandemic was just one more development that added to that stress. Understanding the specifics of the way that the pandemic further complicated layers of historical marginalization of teachers' voices and pre-existing factors that fueled teacher stress is the first step toward figuring out how to improve professional conditions for teachers. As society and the institution of public education move forward, simply ignoring the depth of the sentiment and intensification that teachers underwent during the most impacted COVID school year will add more layers to age-old problems instead of posing solutions. The various recent teacher strikes within the state in conjunction with persistent issues of teacher shortages within MA and across the country point to the need to better understand teachers' experiences and act accordingly, with mounting urgency, in a way that addresses teacher concerns and accounts for the increased demoralization and intensification (Golodryga et al., 2021; Moroney, 2022; Vaznis, 2022).

Implications

The complexity of teachers' work heightened by the pandemic demands that research, policy, and any other dimension related to education listen closely to teachers — to many different teachers — so that the evolving challenges they face better inform policy and research that points to a solution. Greenberg et al. (2017) asserts, "There is an urgent need to address our nation's teacher crisis. Teachers have a critical role in children's lives and teaching has become one of the most stressful occupations, with

alarming high rates of job satisfaction and turnover” (p. 9) — a statement that refers to the state of teacher attrition prior to the arrival of COVID-19.

The up-close, particularized, and detailed views that this study provides of how teachers’ experience their work day in day out in this post-COVID-arrival world is necessary to derive ways based on teachers’ experiences to attempt to mitigate the effects of increased stress, burnout, and demoralization in recent times. For example, the various mental, physical, and stress-related health concerns teachers report point to investigating the effects of measures that have reduced stress in other professions. With regard to teachers’ comments on the harmful and demoralizing effects of negative rhetoric in the media about teachers’ work, legitimate improvements in avoiding tokenization in the media and other high visibility outlets that feed public perception are necessary to eliminate old misperceptions, portray a more accurate picture of the complex work of teaching, and thus garner more support for what teachers do and what schools need to better meet the challenges that face them in current times. For instance, as many teacher responses note, the increase in student mental health and social emotional needs has overloaded the existing system. More resources, mental health professionals in schools, programming, and a system to ensure that students have more access to these resources will re-circulate the demands placed on teachers to other trained professionals.

While the anonymous feature of this survey was crucial to discerning honest teacher perspectives, as noted in the methods section, it also presents a main limitation of the study: the inability to follow up or further probe responses, specifically to inquire into what potential solutions, from a teacher’s perspective, might assist in mitigating the

effects of some of the components causing demoralization and stress. Future research might pursue this question, centering teachers' perspectives to provide potential factors that might participate in a solution. A few of the responses within the small subset of semi-positives suggested that personal resources, aspects of local context, etc. could serve as mediating factors for some of the challenges and stress. Follow up to discern more of these mediating factors might offer ways to improve working conditions for teachers.

Conclusion

Acknowledging the full scope of teachers' work — the moral dimension, the cognitive and emotional labor, the uncertainty, the physical and emotional demands, the balancing of multiple and simultaneous considerations, etc. — will allow more authentic teacher perspectives from the ground level to guide public discourse, policymaking, and other forums to better attend to this crisis. Greenberg et al. (2017) continues, “This escalating crisis” — again referring to pre-pandemic times — “is affecting students' educational outcomes, impacting teachers' health, and costing U.S. schools billions of dollars each year” (p. 9). This pre-pandemic crisis takes on a new level of urgency since the pandemic as reports of “catastrophic” (p. 1) shortages abound (Natanson, 2022) and the consequences of the pandemic-induced exhaustion and accompanying rhetoric settle.

APPENDIX 4-A: April 2021 Survey for Full-Time, Public-School Teachers In Massachusetts

Dear Massachusetts Public School Teacher,

Thank you SO much for your consideration of this survey. As a current, full time high school ELA teacher myself, I know how much you have going on and how little time there is to do it all; so I greatly appreciate the time you spend on this survey should you choose to take it. I am also a doctoral student, and my goal is to capture the all too often missing voices of public-school teachers about their work during the pandemic as well as their perception of the portrayal of teachers by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), the news and the media. Below is a little more information. Thank you so much again for your consideration.

WHO IS THIS SURVEY FOR?

-Public school teachers of any grade, subject or level in Massachusetts who are currently teaching this 2020–2021 school year.

WHAT IS THE FORMAT AND TIME REQUIREMENT?

- Approximately 10 minutes to complete (could be longer depending on length and detail of optional responses)
- There are 13 required multiple-choice questions; some questions are followed by an optional space to elaborate.
- Completely voluntary and anonymous
- You will not receive any direct benefits in exchange for your participation.

HOW WILL MY SURVEY RESPONSE BE USED?

- I am conducting a research study with Institution Review Board approval that compares the perception of teachers and their work in the news, media, and through DESE decisions with teachers' own experience of their work. I will be analyzing survey responses in this study and research article to support the latter part of that comparison. While the content of your responses will constitute the data that I code and review, the survey is completely anonymous and no information identifying individuals or school districts will be included. As a current, public school teacher myself as well as a doctoral student, I feel strongly about spotlighting the voices of teachers in research.
- If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or if you have any complaints or concerns and want to speak with someone independent of the research team, you may contact the Boston University Charles River Campus IRB at 617-358-6115 or at irb@bu.edu. The IRB Office webpage has information where you can learn more about being a participant in research, and you can also complete a Participant Feedback Survey.
- If you have any questions about the survey, please do not hesitate to contact the Principal Investigator for this research study, Erin Nerlino, Boston University Doctoral

Candidate, at enerlino@bu.edu. You may also contact Erin's faculty advisor, Christina Dobbs, EdD, at cdobbs@bu.edu.

1. By clicking the box below, I confirm that I am a public-school teacher in the state of Massachusetts that is currently teaching during the 2020–2021 school year.
2. School District (optional)
3. What region of Massachusetts is your school located in?
 - Western
 - Southeast
 - Central
 - Northern
 - Eastern
4. What grade, subject (if applicable), and level(s) (if applicable) do you teach?
5. How many years of teaching experience (including this year) do you have?
6. If you were to describe the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in three words, what would they be?
7. The following few questions ask you to describe your reaction(s), if you had any, to the decisions/statements that came out of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) this year. Each question below ask about a few of the major decisions. The memos detailing each decision can be found labeled by date in the folder linked below purely as a reference; it is NOT expected that you view them.
<https://drive.google.com/drive/u/2/folders/1XMgBt5yR-7ES2s5jWooVb7VhFWHbZ0XI>
 - 7a. Which of the following best describes your reaction to the statement indicating that it is DESE's expectation that teachers in remote school districts teach from their classrooms (8/21/2020)?
 - extremely negative
 - negative
 - no reaction
 - positive
 - extremely positive
 - 7b. Feel free to elaborate on your response to the previous question (optional).
 - 7c. Which of the following best describes your reaction to DESE's plans to continue with standardized testing during this school year (1/5/2021)?

- extremely negative
- negative
- no reaction
- positive
- extremely positive

7d. Feel free to elaborate on your response to the previous question (optional).

7e. Which of the following best describes your reaction to DESE's mandate that schools return to in-person learning by certain dates this spring (3/9/2021)?

- extremely negative
- negative
- no reaction
- positive
- extremely positive

7f. Feel free to elaborate on your response to the previous question (optional).

8. How did the decisions referenced in the previous questions (7a – f) impact, if at all, how you approach and/or view your work this year?

- extremely negatively impactful
- negatively impactful
- not impactful
- positively impactful
- extremely positive impactful

9. What level of support did you feel from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education this year as you navigated teaching during a pandemic?

- not supportive
- somewhat supportive
- very supportive

9a. Feel free to elaborate on your response to the previous question (optional).

10. Describe your overall perception of the portrayal of teachers in the news, media and public since last March and through the school reopening conversation as it continues to occur?

- gross mischaracterization of teachers
- somewhat of a mischaracterization of teachers

- no thoughts
- somewhat accurate characterization of teachers
- very accurate characterization of teachers

10a. Feel free to elaborate on your response to the previous question (optional).

11. Describe your reaction, if any, to the following statement: "The Baker-Polito Administration is dismayed that despite reasonable efforts to prioritize educator vaccinations, the teachers' unions continue to demand the Commonwealth take hundreds of thousands of vaccines away from the sickest, oldest and most vulnerable residents in Massachusetts and divert them to the unions' members, 95% of which are under age 65."

- extremely negative
- negative
- no reaction
- positive
- extremely positive

11a. Feel free to elaborate on your response to the previous question (optional).

12. How would you describe your experience teaching this year in comparison to your experience teaching prior to the pandemic? Check all that apply.

- extremely different
- somewhat different
- the same
- more stressful
- about the same level of stressful
- more challenging
- about the same level of challenging
- less challenging

12a. Feel free to elaborate on your response to the previous question (optional).

13. Are there any other comments you want to share regarding the work of teaching during the pandemic or the portrayal of teachers from DESE, the public or the media throughout the pandemic (optional)?

14. Type of school (optional).

- suburban
- urban
- rural
- other

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CHAPTER 5: ARTICLE TWO**PERCEPTIONS OF TEACHERS AND TEACHING: A DOCUMENT ANALYSIS
OF STATE POLICY MEMOS DURING COVID-19****Abstract**

This study uses document analysis to examine policy artifacts produced by state governance in the wake of COVID-19. The application of Cochran-Smith et al.'s (2009) images of knowledge, teachers and teaching, and teacher learning in conjunction with Jabbar et al.'s (2021) concept of economic imperialism serve as the framework to illuminate the ways that the policy documents communicate certain perceptions of teachers and the work of teaching. Findings include that conceptualizations of teachers as technicians persist within these policy documents as do images of the purpose and measure of teaching solely based on standardized testing. Such findings reveal a problematic gap between the policy level and classroom realities, exacerbated by the pandemic, that requires change to better support teachers in their work and students in their learning.

Keywords: education policy, perceptions of teaching, document analysis

Introduction

While previous literature has established the distance between policymaking forums and classroom realities as an enduring source of tension (Lortie, 1975; Cohn et al., 1993; Lefstein et al., 2014), the depth of the pandemic's effect on schools has highlighted the extent of the divide and its impact on the teaching profession. Research illuminates the complexity inherent in the work of teaching (Clark et al., 1986; Helsing, 2007); however, policymaking forums and other entities with decisional capacity that impact education continue to overlook the expertise of teachers and fail to capture the nuances of their work (Cohn et al., 1993; Ilisko et al., 2010). Consequently, the problem of teachers as recipients of educational policy that others create has remained for a century (Hargreaves et al., 2011; Cohn et al., 1993).

Prior to the pandemic, the accountability era that No Child Left Behind (NCLB) ushered in has increasingly limited the already scarce teacher voices in reform and policy conversations (Atkinson et al., 2008; Cochran-Smith et al., 2009). Jeong et al.'s (2018) study of global changes in school governance from 2000–2015 across 33 countries used cross-national data to analyze changes in educational decision-making responsibilities. The study found that teachers in the U.S. lost responsibility for professional matters in this time frame. Along with Greece, Belgium and Hungary, the U.S. showed the largest government gains in responsibility, indicating an increase in centralization of school governance. They also note that in most countries, governments and school leaders have gained authority while teachers have lost decision-making authority; and these changes have had a negative impact on teacher responsibility, particularly in regard to curriculum

and instruction. Growing centralization goes hand in hand with shrinking teacher responsibility and autonomy as well as attempts to teacher-proof schools and promote compliancy that may conflict with teachers' local knowledge of practice regarding what is best for student success (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009).

To this end, tension and conflict characterize teachers' role at the intersection of policy implementation and practice. As Ilisko et al. (2010) highlight, "Schools play the role of bureaucratic institutions, thus weakening the voices of teachers and making them perform the role of technicians who merely follow the state mandatory standards" (p. 51). These layers of bureaucracy within "the web of governance" (Elvira, 2020, p. 42) contribute to the "layers of decisions" (p. 42) and "bureaucratic control through accountability measures" (p. 153) that degrade teachers' moral connection to the work of teaching.

In combination with high levels of stress, a Gallup (2014) poll found that teachers were least likely out of twelve professions to indicate that their professional opinions matter. The experience of stress over extended periods of time and the lack of opportunities for influence translate into burn out — a loss of idealism and enthusiasm that leads to depersonalization, reduced personal accomplishment, and emotional exhaustion (Richards, 2012). Because teaching requires a delicate balance of physical, emotional, and cognitive work (Hargreaves, 1998, 2021), factors such as the accountability regime, lack of administrative support, cutbacks in time, and overloaded classrooms create extremely challenging conditions that surround teachers (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; Johnson, 2019).

As Richards describes, “The student performance expectations have increased, but the support and resources to support that goal have been reduced. The levels of stress for teachers across America have escalated” (p. 300). This stress is particularly frustrating as many teachers enter the profession with an enthusiastic commitment to make a difference in student lives and create meaningful purpose (Lortie, 1975; DeLong, 1987; Richards, 2012; Watt et al., 2012); therefore, the destruction of this commitment or vocational purpose verges on depressing as well as stressful. Since the pandemic has further complexified the demands and workload without increased support, the impact of COVID-19 has magnified these stressors for teachers.

The arrival of the pandemic, acting upon an already complicated landscape, worsened factors that negatively impact teacher well-being and the feeling that their professional voices have value. In a study of 1,876 primary and secondary educators in the U.S., Matthews and colleagues (2021) found that educators felt overwhelmingly “dissatisfied and ill-equipped” going into the 2021–2022 school year. Part of the concern stemmed from not trusting policymaking forums and governance to make informed decisions about health and safety as school buildings reopened for in-person learning. Eighty five percent of respondents expected negative and/or dangerous outcomes as a result of these uninformed decisions, 90% of respondents felt they would be infected with COVID-19 during the school year, and 91% of respondents were concerned they would bring it home with them to the detriment of their families. Another part of the concern stemmed from constantly changing circumstances; for example, 90% of the 1,876 survey respondents in Matthews et al.’s study expected that the teaching model of their school

would change throughout the school year, making planning – an already complicated endeavor – even more difficult.

These reports of teacher dissatisfaction and lack of perceived decisional-making capacity – on top of the already alarming reality of pre-pandemic dissatisfaction and attrition rates – raise serious concerns for worsening teacher working conditions. As Johnson et al. (2012) establish, teachers’ working conditions have a direct impact on teacher attrition, and ultimately, student achievement. In fact, the study found that favorable conditions of work for teachers predicted higher rates of student academic growth. Regardless of the true “end” to the pandemic, it changed the trajectory of the teaching profession and the education system’s history. The effects on teaching practice and the well-being of teachers are not simply forgotten. As such, dissecting its impact as it relates to teacher satisfaction, well-being, and decision-making capacity is necessary for charting a better course in the future.

In order to further dissect the relationship between education policy and teaching during the fraught circumstances of the pandemic, this study utilizes a document analysis (Bowen, 2009) methodology to analyze policy memos that the MA state educational agency (SEA) — the governing body of all public schools in the state — produced from the onset of the virus in March 2020 through the end of the following 2020–2021 school year. The following research question guides this study: How do the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) memos/guidance released during the pandemic portray teachers and the work of teaching?

Positionality

Before diving into the literature, it is important to provide my own positionality as a White female and the way that both my full-time teacher and doctoral candidate status shape the lens that I bring to this work. First, I am in my tenth-year teaching full-time high school English at a public, suburban, regional high school in MA. I taught during the 2020–2021 school year when the memos under examination were released. The K–12 classroom teacher part of my professional identity as a recipient of the policy within the memos under analysis is worth noting. Second, as a doctoral candidate with access to advisors, professors, critical friends, research, and other resources, my knowledge of and experience with the research process also impacts the systematic way I go about the work in this study with a theoretical and research-driven orientation.

Relevant Literature

The Pre-Pandemic Landscape

Even prior to the outset of the pandemic, increasingly centralized decision-making power in conjunction with the historical, factory model setup of schools and teachers' places within these schools have marginalized teachers' expertise and voice in matters that impact schools. As Rigby et al. (2016) note, "the educational system has become more complex, with greater prominence and prevalence of nonsystem actors and heavier federal influence" (p. 296). As centralization is correlated with notable decreases in teacher responsibility related to staffing, budgeting, curriculum, and instruction, such a trend threatens teachers' sense of autonomous professionalism. The first section of relevant literature further explores the already complicated landscape of teacher status,

policy, and portrayals that result from their historically marginalized position.

The Outdated View of Teachers as Technicians

In part, dismissal of teacher voices in policymaking forums relates to the persistent images of teachers as technicians that exist across policy, the media, and public opinion (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; Cohen, 2010). This problematic view purports that a systemic policy level determines how and what to teach; and teachers, without any thought or discretion, carry out pre-packaged bites of pedagogy and curriculum to meet pre-determined outcomes (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009). Because teaching a diverse set of students is an ever-evolving, non-static, “unforgivingly complex” (Cochran-Smith, 2003, p. 4) and dynamic endeavor, there are a myriad of reasons as to why this view causes issues: teachers must use experience and expertise to address the needs of the students in front of them and manage the many factors at play at any given time (Rigby et al., 2016); the way policy plays out in the classroom might not be the same way it was intended to play out (Schneider et al., 2014); and often times creators of policy are geographically and cognitively distant from classroom realities (Cohn et al., 1993) to name a few.

In addition to the portrayal of teachers as the enactors of other people’s decisions, the decisions themselves come from the perception of teaching as a transmission-based activity instead of intellectually complex work (Freire, 2017). The origins of this conception date back to the beginnings of public schooling and the mass education model that evolved based on a factory-like system (Lortie, 1975; Hargreaves, 2000). While many changes have since transformed the way teaching practice occurs, traces of this system still impact the physical egg crate structure of schools (Lortie, 1975; Johnson,

2019) and the perceptions of what teaching and learning is (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; Hargreaves, 2000).

Policy that evolves from this perception also tends to result in an oversimplification of teaching, further muddying the policy and practice waters. As Bulkley et al. (2017) note, social conceptions have important ties to the advocacy of policy; in other words, the portrayal of teachers in the news, media, and policy forums influences policy that ultimately moves forward. Policy, media, and public portrayals of teaching that are at odds with the reality of teaching put teachers at the crossroads of enacting top-down policy and reacting to what is in front of them on a daily basis (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; Fullan, 2001). As such, the following few sections explore the pervasive effects this problematic “teacher-as-technician” image has on education discourse and policy.

Educational Policy’s Portrayal of Teachers

Inextricably connected to the well-worn images of teachers and teaching in the news and public discourse, research contains certain prototypes of teachers and assumptions about the practice of teaching that heavily inform the creation of policy (Hargreaves, 2000; Cohn et al., 1993; Lefstein 2014). As Hargreaves (2000) asserts, “Images of and ideas about... the nature of teaching, linger on from other agendas and other times – remaining as real forces to be reckoned with in the imaginations and assumptions of policymakers, the public and many parts of the teaching profession” (p. 153). Cochran-Smith et al. (2009) observe this trend in NCLB related policy that “positions practitioners as the recipients of other people’s knowledge” (p. 11).

Throughout the history of American schooling, so many reforms come down the pike; but genuine change that results from these reforms has been elusive (Cuban, 1990, 2013).

Cuban suggests that part of the issue is the inability of reforms to account for schools as complex systems and teaching as complex work. This failure in turn leads to mismatched solutions, the expenditure of needless energy, and much despair (Cuban, 1990).

At the same time that the policy image of teachers in NCLB places sole responsibility for student learning on teachers' shoulders at the exclusion of other societal factors (Anyon, 1995), it also depicts teaching in a narrow and reductionist way. This dynamic is certainly not new to the NCLB era. As mentioned previously, teachers have always been on the receiving end of policy made in forums other than classrooms; however, since the beginning of the accountability regime in U.S. educational realms, both media and policy have furthered this view of teachers as technicians who carry out policy decisions "made by others who are far away from actual classrooms" (Buchanan, 2015, p. 702) – a view that coincides with tight control, regulation, and scrutiny of the work of teaching. Part of this view stems from the neoliberal privatization of social goods that rests on the assumption that competitive markets are more effective and efficient; therefore, the neoliberal vision of education pits the actors within a school against one another using standardized test scores and promotes meeting labor needs of global economic competition as the primary purpose of schooling (Au, 2007, 2011, 2016). Au et al. (2016) define neoliberalism as it applies to education as "economic individualism and market mechanisms as policy mechanisms...Because of its ideological and economic commitment to free markets, neoliberalism places high value of deregulation, private

competition, and the reduction of collective interests” (p. 28). These neo-liberal tendencies continue to grow in educational spheres and shortchange understandings of the complexity and uncertainty inherent in teachers’ work (Mockler, 2011).

While policymaking entities might view teachers as recipients of policy, teachers are the ones constantly interacting with students where the policy and curriculum play out. Rigby et al. (2016) denote that teachers are tasked with making sense of new ideas and reconciling them with their own sense of what is right, engaging with accountability measures, and considering the specific needs of the students in front of them. As Dreeben (1973) describes, teachers need a wide latitude for decision making as it is not possible to anticipate the way a lesson or policy plays out in practice – particularly in the business of dealing with human beings. This disconnect results in “overworked and underpaid teachers” who “have had to master and comply with centrally imposed learning standards, detailed curriculum targets and pervasive testing regimes – and they have seen their work become broken down and categorized into checklists of performance standards” (p. 152). Au (2011), among others, asserts more recently that such neoliberal principles attempt to quantify classroom teaching through high-stakes standardized testing and promote pre-packaged, scripted, corporate curricula.

Beyond the image of teachers as passive enactors of policy, another major disconnect exists between the broader purposes teachers hold for teaching that evolve from their experiences within classrooms of human beings and the more technical purposes and agendas of outsiders that evolve from pressures for academic outcomes that state mandates and national policy regulate. As Cohn et al. (1993) illuminate, “the

agendas and perspectives of the insiders and the outsiders are often quite different” (p. 28). Complicating matters is the infiltration of economic imperialism within education policy and research, “narrowing the lens through which policymakers have designed educational forms, influencing the normative aims of education, and limiting the types of research methods that inform policies” (Jabbar et al., 2021, p. 6). For example, the neoliberal education perspective prioritizes the main purpose of schooling as meeting the labor needs to compete in a global economic market at the expense of all other purposes (Au, 2011). Given the conflagration of issues regarding lack of teachers’ voices and influence in policy, outdated understandings of teaching, and a contentious educational landscape within the U.S., it stands to reason that high teacher attrition rates have perennially plagued the teaching profession.

Pre-Pandemic Teacher Attrition

The abovementioned pandemic factors — growing centralization directing even more responsibility and influence away from teachers; the problematic, reductionist view of teachers as technicians; and the outdated images of teaching and teachers circulating in the public, news, and policy forums – all play a part in the dismissal of teacher expertise and sub-par working conditions that contribute to intractably high teacher attrition rates (Jeong, 2018; Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; Cohn et al., 1993; Johnson, 2019). Such high attrition rates result in persistently looming threats of teacher shortages and continuous turnover (Newberry et al., 2017). Of the approximately 3.5 million teachers, roughly half a million teachers leave the profession each year (Simon et al., 2015). Estimates from the last 15 years approximate that 44% to 50% of teachers within their first five years quit the

profession (Ingersoll, 2018). Borman et al. (2008) cite that more qualified teachers with better training, more experience, and more skill tend to be lost to turnover with the greatest frequency. When quality teachers leave a school, they take acquired expertise as well as accumulated knowledge of students, school practices and curriculum with them, destabilizing that school's capacity and triggering considerable financial, organizational, and human capital costs (Simon & Johnson, 2015; Johnson, 2019). Since a teacher's effectiveness increases with number of years on the job, students who have a revolving door of new teachers consistently experience lower quality instruction (Ingersoll et al., 2018; Reeves & Lowenhaupt, 2016). Because the teacher is one of the most critical school-level variables influencing student achievement (Ingersoll, 1999; Rockoff, 2004; Hanushek, 1992), policy priorities should center on adequately addressing the U.S. teacher attrition issues. Part of addressing these issues involves updating and revising understandings of what teachers do in the classroom.

While the public, policymakers, and others have been quick to point out the issues with schools, often blaming teachers at the exclusion of all other factors for perceived student underperformance, only relatively recently have issues that plague the teaching profession and lead to high attrition rates become a topic of interest (Santoro, 2018; Johnson, 2019). The almost exclusive focus on individual teachers and their tests scores in the context of the accountability era assumes that teachers work in a vacuum; however, the environments and conditions that surround teachers constitute important pieces of the puzzle (Santoro, 2018; Johnson, 2019). Within these pieces, factors impacting high attrition rates include workload, stress, lack of personal/professional connection, lack of

professional opportunities for growth, problematic school cultures, physical isolation, and philosophical isolation to name a few (Newberry et al., 2017; Johnson, 2019; Harrison-Berg et al., 2005). In fact, Johnson et al. (2012) find that work context matters a great deal to teachers, and schools with better work environments show greater student achievement growth. For this study in particular, policy documents and the images they contain about teachers and teaching speak to the state context that surrounds teachers.

The Pandemic-Impacted Landscape

Given the already complexified history and status of the teaching profession, it is no surprise that the pandemic further complicated matters. To name just a few ways, it exacerbated existing problems, teacher frustration, dissatisfaction, perceived lack of influence and voice, and attrition rates as detailed in this section.

Teacher Professional Dissatisfaction and Attrition During COVID-19

Teaching since March 2020 through the present times has constituted a unique and tumultuous experience (Marshall et al., 2020). The long-lasting effects of the experience of teaching during COVID-19 will not disappear; and regardless of the disputed ending of the pandemic, it has permanently become part of the teaching profession's history. Thus far, information about COVID-19-induced teacher attrition has mostly come from news sources reporting drops in enrollment in undergraduate teacher preparation programs as well as teacher shortages across the country (Gecker, 2021; Walker, 2021; Bartlett, 2021; Goldberg, 2021). In one study, Dilberti et al. (2020) used the RAND American Teacher Panel to invite former public-school teachers to take a survey in December 2020. In order to tease out the impact of the pandemic on teacher

attrition, the authors compare 527 pre-pandemic leavers — teachers who left in the two years leading up to the pandemic — with 431 pandemic leavers — teachers who left after the onset of the pandemic in March 2020. Dilberti et al. assert, “Among the 248 teachers in our sample who taught during the pandemic and left of their own volition...almost half (44 percent) said that the COVID-19 pandemic was their main reason for leaving” (p. 5). The 56 percent cited reasons such as stress and disagreement with decision making at their schools. The report sums up the two-pronged issue succinctly: “The teacher leavers in our survey left for both COVID-19-specific reasons and because of longer-standing structural problems with the profession that the pandemic has exacerbated” (p. 15). Given the substantial toll teacher attrition takes on student achievement, daily school operations, collective organizational knowledge and climate, among other factors, making sense of the way the pandemic and pandemic-impacted policy affects teacher satisfaction and attrition rates is an urgent matter for the health, well-being, and efficacious functioning of schools and students.

As such, examining the assumptions within policy documents is work that is essential to addressing the policy and practice gap and ultimately improving the policymaking process to include teachers’ voices, increase student learning, and improve public education. To this end, this study focuses on the images of teachers and teaching within policy documents that the SEA released throughout the pandemic. By parsing out these images, this work intends to assess how policy frames teachers and the work of teaching — a task that is critical to better aligning policy with teachers’ experiences and ultimately decreasing high attrition rates, increasing teacher satisfaction, and improving

student achievement levels (Johnson et al., 2012).

Conceptual Framework

Two frameworks guide the analysis within this study: Cochran-Smith et al.'s (2006, 2009) images of knowledge, teachers and teaching, and teacher learning as well as Jabbar et al.'s (2021) concept of economic imperialism. Together, these two frameworks work in complement to elucidate the way that the DESE policy memos frame teachers and the work of teaching and derive the basis for these images. Cochran-Smith et al.'s images shed light on what the portrayals of teachers and teaching during the pandemic are whereas Jabbar et al.'s economic imperialism helps to illuminate where these images come from and why they exist.

Originally derived from their analysis of NCLB's conception of teachers and teaching, this study draws upon Cochran-Smith et al.'s (2006, 2009) images of knowledge, teachers and teaching, and teacher learning as a framework with a specific focus on the images of teachers and teaching. Both NCLB and its successor, Race to the Top, have empowered private interests — foundations, corporate leaders, professional consultants, for-profit institutions, etc. that run via business style market mechanisms — and exponentially increased the influence they have over public education and public education policy (Au et al., 2016). Despite occurring roughly two decades apart, policy resulting from the pandemic's impact on schools arguably takes a similar approach to teachers and teaching as did the policy that resulted from NCLB. Both pandemic and NCLB policy and rhetoric share striking similarities that are “flawed – linear, remarkably narrow, and based on a technical transmission model of teaching, learning and teacher

training” (p. 62). Comparable to the way that NCLB’s accountability regime created “exceedingly trying times for practitioners...who are addressing the concerns of policymakers differently and who persist in asking a different set of questions” (p. 34), the SEA’s policymaking and policy dissemination approach to teaching during the pandemic hold a fundamentally different viewpoint about the nature and purpose of teaching and learning than practitioners do, especially during the unprecedented circumstances of the pandemic.

I apply Cochran-Smith et al.’s (2006, 2009) use of the term images as “the central common conceptions that are symbolic of basic attitudes and orientations to learning” (p. 63) in this study. Their framework furnishes the following images and underlying assumptions of knowledge, teachers and teaching, and teacher learning:

- Images of knowledge – assumptions regarding the knowledge teachers need in order to teach

- Images of teachers and teaching – assumptions regarding what teachers do, what the practice of teaching entails, and the purpose of teaching

- Images of teacher learning – assumptions regarding what, how and from whom teachers learn and what supports and hinders their learning

Cochran-Smith et al. (2006, 2009) conclude from their analysis of these three main images within NCLB policy that it has a “potentially devastating impact...on American public education — and on both our understandings of the nature of teaching as an activity and a profession” (p. 61). Furthermore, their inquiry reveals the outdated view of knowledge as static and teaching as predominantly a transmission-based activity;

however, these images persist despite their outdatedness. Such images that inform policy then impact teachers' work and experiences teaching, widening the gap between the complex realities of teaching practice and policy approaches.

In concert with Cochran-Smith et al.'s (2006, 2009) framework, this study also draws upon Jabbar et al.'s (2021) economic imperialism — a framework that unearths the way that neoclassical economic logic and influence pervades beyond economics-related topics to explain all human social behavior, thought, decisions, and actions. The influence of economics in education exists in policies that support merit pay, school choice, standardized assessments, the purpose of school as solely economic to prepare students for the workforce over other Democratic aims, the value-added model of teacher effectiveness, and the public announcement of teacher ratings to name a few. As one example, the school choice movement and the introduction of choice-based charter schools are setup to compete with public-schools to attract students or they “go out of business.” Therefore, they are predicated on a business model that benefits from the failing public-schools narrative and infuse the ideas of managerial entrepreneurship and free-market competition into education (Au et al., 2016). Problematic consequences of this market-like institutional environment range widely depending on the type of charter school and include but are not limited to: heavy focus on scripted curriculum and no-excuses policies instead of broad, culturally inclusive curriculum (Golann, 2015), substantially higher teacher turnover rates than traditional public-schools (Stuit et al., 2012), increased segregation among the student population (Garcia et al., 2007), lack of adequate special education services or refusal of admissions of special education students

(Garda, 2012), and conflicting and statistically insignificant enhancement of student achievement based on test scores (Clark et al., 2015) among others.

Au (2011) corroborates the influence of economic imperialism as it plays out through the interrelationship between standardized tests as the end goal of learning and the decontextualization, objectification, and commoditization of education. This interrelationship frames education as a form of factory production. The problem with these influences is that they significantly narrowed curriculum to focus on test preparation and deskilled teachers (Au, 2011). A nationwide survey showed that 71% of school districts reported cutting at least one subject to increase time on high stakes testing subjects such as reading and math as a result of NCLB legislation (Renter et al., 2006). Furthermore, scripted curriculum geared toward teaching students the standardized test takes the form of teacher-centered pedagogy such as lectures, promoting teaching as a transmission-based practice. Au summarizes that “moving towards an efficient, means-end rationalized curriculum also greatly affected the relationships of teachers and students to the process of education: it dehumanized their relationship to teaching and students by alienating them from their own creativity and curiosity” (p. 28).

As Jabbar et al. (2021) note, economic imperialism is evident in a myriad of education research concepts such as neoliberalism, market-based reforms, and incentive-based reforms, emphasizing the individual over the collective and efficiency and cost-effectiveness over equity and other important matters. As a result of their review, the authors posit three elements of economic imperialism relevant to the education realm that provide guiding tenets for this study’s document analysis:

1) “Economics has...narrowed the lens through which policymakers have designed education reforms,...limiting the types of research methods that inform policies...By understanding this troubling colonization, policymakers can rethink their disciplinary lenses and approach decision making through alternate frameworks and models” (p. 6).

2) “...an overreliance on economic rationales for human behavior neglects other explanations...by acknowledging the narrow lens offered by economic models, researchers can seek out wider explanations to inform policy and practice” (p. 6).

3) “...a focus on economic outcomes of education have subjugated and sometimes neglected other significant aims of education...Economic imperialism captures key dimensions of how education policies become embraced, are enacted, implemented, and persist” (p. 6)

These elements assist in elucidating the origin of some of the portrayals of teachers and teaching within policy memos that have roots in economic framings of education. The authors note that this economic perspective “has likely led to an outsized influence of economists in education policy spaces as advisors, providers of expert testimony, and dominant presences in the news, media” (p. 6). Given the influence of economists within education policymaking spheres, it stands to reason that policy coming from the MA SEA with respect to COVID-19 may be too narrowly created through this single lens at the exclusion of other disciplinary lenses and expertise. For example, the authors suggest that “Qualitative analysis conducted using data such as interviews might offer insights into how policymakers and educators actually understand (or

misunderstand) economic logic when adopting certain economic assumptions...and how they weigh different sources and forms of evidence” (p. 6). To this end, I argue that COVID-19 policy from DESE, with its overemphasis on economics, comes at the expense of teacher expertise, leading to an incomplete and flawed portrayal of teachers and their work. This study further extends these theories because the exigency of the COVID-19 situation and the quite immediate impact the policies in the memos had on teachers’ health and well-being were more pressing than ever before. In this way, the pandemic forced the issue of lack of teacher voice in policies when these policies so directly affected teachers – the adults in most close contact with students at a time of heightened health and safety concerns.

Methods

Study Design Rationale

This article utilizes a document analysis (Bowen, 2009) methodology to analyze policy memos that the SEA produced from the onset of the virus in March 2020 through the end of the following 2020–2021 school year. This document analysis specifically examines the images of teachers and teaching embedded within these documents.

Document analysis is the investigation of social meanings inherent in texts to elucidate the ideas and philosophies that infuse texts, such as policy documents, with meaning (O’Connor, 2019). As O’Connor posits, document analysis serves as a means to examine the “underlying, socially constructed knowledge” that “informs the content and form of the language we use to communicate, both formally and informally” as well as critically analyze texts to “challenge the assumed, often biased or unjust assumptions” (p.

67) they contain. This particular method aligns with the goals of the study that involve uncovering images, portrayals, and perceptions of teachers and teaching that the SEA as a policymaking entity holds and uses to inform policy decisions. The policy memos produced during COVID provide samples of such images (Bowen, 2009). The SEA documents provide a stable way to access such images and perceptions straight from the source.

Furthermore, the personal, social, political, and historical contexts of documents play a key role in understanding the messages the documents contain (McCulloch, 2004). The various social, political, and historical context that surround the policy memos that the SEA produced are key to understanding the impact these documents have and the messages within them. As O'Connor (2019) asserts, document analysis involves "highlighting dominant, often unjust discourses which underpin governmental policy, media and other material around important issues in education, health and social equality. Such discourses are frequently invisible or well hidden within rhetorical and euphemistic language" (p. 68). To this end, discourses about teachers and the work of teaching and learning within the SEA policy documents are important to recognize as these documents have a profound impact on the work of teaching as well as the perceptions that affect larger educational discourses in the public and news.

Data Collection & Data Sources

This study draws upon DESE policy memos and information releases disseminated for school districts, educators, and families spanning from the initial school closures in March 2020 through July 2021 of the following 2020–2021 school year. I

chose these memos as the focus of this study's analysis as they constitute the main policy documents, mandates, and guidance for school districts that came from the SEA during the pandemic. I chose MA as the sole site primarily because of my own connection to living and teaching in the state. As such, my own positionality and experience as a full-time, active K–12 public-school teacher allows for a uniquely relevant lens to assist me in dissecting the assumptions about and images of teachers and teaching within the policy documents. Furthermore, I chose to focus on state-level versus federal-level policy documents as the state-level documents contained more specific guidance and details about what and how the process of physically reopening school buildings entailed.

I also chose the time frame from March 2020 through July 2021 of the following 2020–2021 school year as these months were the most relevant to the timing of the pandemic and captured the initial reaction when school buildings shuttered in March 2020 through the following, heavily pandemic-impacted school year. The 2020–2021 school year was important to chronicle as it contained the policy disseminated as school buildings reopened.

As a teacher during this time frame, I read, downloaded, and saved the memos as they came out. In order to ensure that I was compiling a complete set of memos that the SEA released, in April 2021 I cross referenced the documents I had saved with the list of documents released on the SEA's website. In July of 2021, I went back to the DESE website to double check the documents that had come out from April 2021 through July 2021. At that time, however, all of the documents had been deleted on the SEA's website. Therefore, I used Google to search for the opening phrase on each of the memos — “On

the Desktop” — as well as the SEA’s acronym, “DESE,” “COVID” and “DESE guidance.” Because many school districts re-shared these memos with students, parents, and families via their own websites, I was able to double check with reasonable confidence that I had digital downloads of many, if not all, of the memos from April 2020 through July 2021. In total, this study examines 33 documents released by DESE. Table 5-1 contains a list of the documents, the dates released, and the subject lines.

Table 5-1

Documents Reviewed

Date	Subject Line	Applicable Findings (if any)
3/26/2020	On the Desktop - Remote Learning Recommendations During COVID-19 School Closures	N/A – disregarded after the first round of coding (initial announcement about school building closure)
4/10/2020	On the Desktop - Legislation Enacted on MCAS, SOA Plans, and Regional School District Budgets	N/A – disregarded after the first round of coding
4/21/2020	On the Desktop - Schools to Remain Closed Through End of School Year	N/A – disregarded after the first round of coding (second announcement that school buildings will not reopen for the remainder of the school year)
4/24/2020	On the Desktop - Updated Remote Learning Guidance	-No findings surfaced
5/21/2020	On the Desktop - High School Graduation Guidelines from DPH/HHS to Help Prevent the Spread of COVID-19	N/A – disregarded after the first round of coding
6/05/2020	On the Desktop - Required Safety Supplies for Re-Opening Schools	N/A – disregarded after the first round of coding
6/10/2020	On the Desktop - Additional Guidance on Fall Reopening Plans	N/A – disregarded after the first round of coding (details on how districts should submit reopening plans)
6/25/2020	a. On the Desktop Memo	-Images of Teachers as Technicians and Teaching as Solely Technical

	b. Initial Fall School Reopening Guidance	Work → The Solely Economic Aims of Schooling -The Overemphasis on Standardized Testing
7/1/2020	On the Desktop - Comprehensive Summer School Guidance	-No findings surfaced
7/2/2020	a. On the Desktop - Classroom Diagrams and Parametric Dashboard Overview b. Related Slide Deck	-No findings surfaced
7/9/2020	On the Desktop – Comprehensive Special Education Guidance for the 2020-21 School Year	-The Overemphasis on Standardized Testing
7/15/2020	On the Desktop – Two-Step Process and Online Form/Template for Fall Reopening Plans	N/A – disregarded after the first round of coding
7/17/2020	On the Desktop – Protocol for Responding to COVID-19 Scenarios	N/A – disregarded after the first round of coding
7/20/2020	Fall Reopening Frequently Asked Questions	-The Overemphasis on Standardized Testing
7/22/2020	On the Desktop – Transportation and Facilities Guidance	N/A – disregarded after the first round of coding
7/24/2020	On the Desktop – Guidance on Courses Requiring Additional Safety Considerations and Remote Learning	N/A – disregarded after the first round of coding
7/27/2020	On the Desktop – Additional Staff Training Days this Fall	-No findings surfaced
8/03/2020	Creating Positive Learning Environments: Recommendations and Resources to Support the Social Emotional Well-being of Students, Staff, and Families	-The Overemphasis on Standardized Testing
8/04/2020	On the Desktop – Remote Learning Partner Information	N/A – disregarded after the first round of coding
8/11/2020	On the Desktop – Guidance for Districts and Schools on Interpreting DPH COVID-19 Metrics	N/A – disregarded after the first round of coding
8/18/2020	On the Desktop – Joint Guidance on Modified Sports Seasons for School Year 2020-2021	N/A – disregarded after the first round of coding
8/19/2020	On the Desktop – Joint Memo Clarifying Key Health and Safety Requirements for Schools	-No findings surfaced

8/20/2020	On the Desktop – Access to Mobile Testing	N/A – disregarded after the first round of coding
8/21/2020	On the Desktop – Teachers and Critical Support Staff in Remote Learning Districts, Vulnerable Students, Children of Teachers, Regional Calculations, and SOA Deadline	-Images of Teachers as Technicians and Teaching as Solely Technical Work → Emphasis on Supervision, Oversimplification and Standardization
1/5/2021	Assessment and Accountability Update	-The Overemphasis on Standardized Testing
2/23/2021	On the Desktop – Initial Information on Expanding In-Person Learning This Spring	-The Overemphasis on Standardized Testing -Lack of Acknowledgement of Teacher Safety and Well-Being Concerns
3/9/2021	a. On the Desktop – Guidance on In-Person Learning Requirements b. Accompanying Guidance Document	-The Overemphasis on Standardized Testing -Lack of Acknowledgement of Teacher Safety and Well-Being Concerns
4/27/2021	Guidance on In-Person Learning and Student Learning Time Requirements	-Images of Teachers as Technicians and Teaching as Solely Technical Work → Oversimplification and Standardization, Teachers as Replaceable and Low Skilled Technicians -The Overemphasis on Standardized Testing -Lack of Acknowledgement of Teacher Safety and Well-Being Concerns
5/27/2021	Updates to DESE COVID-19 Guidance	-Lack of Acknowledgement of Teacher Safety and Well-Being Concerns

Data Analysis

I started analyzing the data within the DESE policy memos by cataloging the date and topic of each memo into a table. I then proceeded with axial descriptive coding (Merriam et al., 2016) of each memo by using a code that described the content of various parts of each memo to gain a firm grasp of the content of each memo using

NVivo software. Axial codes in this first round included codes such as “standardized testing,” “monitorization,” and “lack of concern for teacher health” to name a few. This first round of coding was important to discern what memos would be relevant to this study. As these memos contained a wide range of information, regulations, and guidance for COVID-19 protocols as school buildings reopened, some were not germane to this work’s focus on images of teachers and teaching. For example, some of the memos, as noted in Table 5-1, were about protocols for sports, transportation, access to mobile testing, etc. In Table 5-1, documents with the third column label “NA – disregarded after the first round of coding” indicates that the memo was on a topic unrelated to teachers and teaching whereas the label “no findings surfaced” meant that the document was analyzed after the first round due to the potential it had to be relevant to the study; however, none of the three main findings ended up appearing in these documents.

Following the first round of open coding, I went through the relevant memos again creating common themes from the descriptive coding. For example, I grouped axial codes such as “teaching as occupying same space consistently” and “teaching as test preparation” in the common theme of “misunderstanding of what teaching entails.” After creating these common themes, I performed a third round of coding specifically using the conceptual framework involving Cochran-Smith et al.’s (2009) three images of knowledge, teachers and teaching, and teacher learning and Jabbar et al.’s (2021) economic imperialism. During this third round, I created analytic memos to help me work through the application of the framework-related codes (Miles et al., 2020). I applied the specific conceptual framework related codes in this third round in order to ensure that, if

necessary, I could detect other images potentially outside of the images that Cochran-Smith et al. put forth. For example, I wanted to leave space for positive images of teaching to surface; however, I did not end up finding any. At this point in the iterative data analysis process, I sent coded pieces of information from the documents and the codebook developed in the previous rounds to a coding partner who independently coded documents to create intercoder reliability. I defined consensus as agreement as to the application of what codes applied or agreement after talking through any discrepancies. While meeting to work through discrepancies, I sometimes fine-tuned codes to address the discrepancies, if there were any. Table 5-2 displays the initial steps with a piece of a policy document as an example.

Table 5-2

Coding Example

Data Excerpt	Coding Round
From DESE Memo (8/21/21): It is the Department’s expectation that teachers and critical support staff working in districts that have a remote learning model will report to their schools to work from the classrooms and educational spaces each day. Having teachers and critical support staff in the school will be beneficial to students, teachers, staff and administrators for several reasons, including, but not limited to:…It allows administrators to monitor	Round 1 (open descriptive coding): teachers of remote districts working in-person from schools, monitorization of level and amount of instruction, administrative monitoring, risking teacher health
	Round 2 (common themes based on descriptive coding): Accountability regime, surveillance, monitorization, regimented supervision, lack of trust, lack of professional treatment, images of teaching (misunderstanding of what teaching entails)
	Round 3 (applying framework-related codes/creating analytic memos): DESE released this memo three days before the start of the school year, indicating that teachers of remote districts would report to work even though students would not be present. The particular reason in this excerpt – “allowing[ing] administrators to monitor that level and amount of instruction students receive throughout the course of the school day” – ties into a

<p>the level and amount of instruction students receive throughout the course of the school day.</p>	<p>lack of professional trust in teachers to complete their job responsibilities without administrators surveilling them in-person. This emphasis on micromanagement and surveillance is in keeping with the strict monitorization, standardization and regimentation of the accountability regimes except in this situation, the stakes are even higher – risking teachers’ health by making them come in-person even though students are not in-person at a time when vaccines are not available. Additionally, the in-person surveillance misunderstands the task of teaching, relegating teachers to low-level employees who administrators simply need to watch sit at a computer screen in order to ensure they are working. Such a requirement vastly underestimates what quality teaching entails, oversimplifying the work to exclude various elements of emotional labor, support of class culture, etc.</p>
	<p>Round 4 (fine-tuning codes) Lack of professional trust and expertise Emphasis on need for supervision Strict monitorization Oversimplification of teaching practice</p>

Findings

This study set out to examine portrayals of teachers and teaching in policy memos that the SEA created during the pandemic. Using Cochran-Smith et al.’s (2009) images of knowledge, teachers and teaching, and teacher learning and Jabbar et al.’s (2021) framework of economic imperialism, the findings of this study include that the policy documents contained images of teachers-as-technicians and teaching as solely technical work; an overemphasis on standardized testing as a result of narrow, economic means and purposes of schooling; and a lack of acknowledgement of teacher safety and well-being.

Images of Teachers-as-Technicians and Teaching as Solely Technical Work

Emphasis on Supervision

One prominent portrayal of teachers throughout the memos consists of teachers-as-technicians or low status workers that require constant supervision versus teachers as professionals. A memo released on August 21, 2020, contains such images: “It is the Department’s expectation that teachers and critical support staff working in districts that have a remote learning model will report to their schools to work from the classrooms and educational spaces each day.” As described in these opening lines, this memo conveys DESE’s “expectation” that teachers whose schools are remote, meaning students were not attending school in-person, had to be teaching virtually from the physical school building. The memo continues with, “Having teachers and critical support staff in school will be beneficial to students, teachers, staff, and administrators for several reasons, including but not limited to:...” A conveyance of the tight control over teachers’ physical location during a pandemic that threatened individuals’ health and safety in conjunction with the indication that DESE knows what’s best for teachers themselves echoes back to the language of NCLB and accountability regimes (Ball, 1993; Cohn et al., 1993; Lefstein et al., 2014; Cochran-Smith et al., 2009). In reference to NCLB rhetoric and policy, Cochran-Smith et al. note, “the discourse of teacher deficits – fueled by increased monitoring and surveillance of daily practice — has never been more prevalent” (p. 73). In keeping with this observation about the underlying assumptions that accompany increased monitorization, while the SEA memo’s reasoning related to monitoring teachers is couched in terms that on the surface seem like benefits to students and

teachers, the takeaway is that teachers' work requires daily surveillance.

The same memo proceeds with a list of reasons as to why teachers in remote districts should teach from physical school buildings. Included in the list of reasons is the following bullet point: "It allows administrators to monitor the level and amount of instruction students receive throughout the course of the school day, ensuring a more consistent experience across classrooms and student cohorts." The emphasis on the need to regulate and "monitor" teachers' work down to the "level and amount" of instruction they provide to their students embeds assumptions of distrust. This underscoring of administrators needing to be able to surveil and measure amounts of instruction carries elements of Cochran-Smith et al.'s (2009) images of teachers as low-skilled workers who will not do their jobs unless closely surveilled in-person. Inherent in the requirement that teachers physically be in the building in order for administrators to monitor them is the notion that administrators need to check, from six feet away per distancing requirements, that teachers are actually teaching. These demeaning surveillance checks are simply intended to make sure teachers are working instead of constructing constructive and legitimate ways for administrators to join a virtual meeting of a class to make the observation more about authentic discussions regarding how to improve instruction. Furthermore, this reason, undergirded with the assumption that teachers will only teach when monitored at school, highlights a flawed and linear view of what teaching entails. Simply occupying the same physical space as teachers does not provide a comprehensive view of teaching practice (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009). Such reasoning also surfaces the economically imperialistic attempt to quantify the practice of teaching and motivate

teachers through threat of supervision. As previous literature has asserted, the complexity of the work of teaching, between the emotional and moral labor required and the many decisions necessary to address the diversity of students in a single classroom, cannot be quantified. Teachers need support to handle these complex demands versus threat of supervision (Johnson, 2019).

Oversimplification and Standardization

Two other reasons from the bulleted list of the same memo reference that “[the expectation] allows students to develop and maintain a level of familiarity with a classroom environment...and it provides more consistency for students...” Residing in these “benefits” are oversimplified suppositions about images of teaching. The reasoning that students will become familiar with several inches of screen space that show the walls of a classroom behind the teacher on their computer monumentally reduces the work it takes on the part of a teacher to make students feel comfortable in an educational space (Hargreaves, 2021; Curby et al., 2013). Furthermore, the reasoning that it “provides more consistency for students” drastically oversimplifies what “consistency” means by framing it in terms of a teacher simply showing up in the same space each day (Curby et al., 2013; Morgan et al., 2021). Such a narrow view of teaching undercuts the skill, emotional labor, and expertise teaching requires (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009).

Additionally, these reasons, in conjunction with the aforementioned bullet about surveillance, display the memo’s attempt to promote the standardization of teachers and teaching. Words and phrases such as “monitor,” “level and amount,” and “consistency” further the conceptualization of teachers as robots and promotes consistency across

educators — a consistency that requires administrator supervision. By portraying teachers and teaching this way, the policy memos engage facets of standardization and efficiency characteristic of economic imperialism. These facets directly contrast research that highlights differentiation (Tomlinson, 2008); local knowledge of practice (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009); diversity in student background, culture, and language (Ladson-Billings, 2014); and potential special education needs as necessary factors for teachers to account for in order to teach all students well (Rigby et al., 2016).

Moreover, a fourth bullet from the list in the same memo cites that the expectation that teachers of remote districts work from school buildings “allows teachers to collaborate more easily with colleagues” — a demonstration of DESE’s assumptions about what collaboration as one means of teacher learning looks like. Parallel to the way that the expectation oversimplified other aspects of the work of teaching, this bullet reveals a lack of understanding of the way teachers learn and what supports their learning (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, simply inserting teachers in classrooms that are in the same building grossly underestimates the conditions necessary to foster genuine teacher learning that allows teachers to teach under the trying circumstances of the pandemic-impacted 2020–2021 school year. In fact, much research has reiterated that the physical egg crate structure of schools does more to hinder collaboration than promote it (Lortie, 1975; Johnson, 2019). Relatedly, research has also established that collaboration has little to do with sharing the same physical space. Even when teachers do share physical spaces, superficial collaboration such as storytelling and experience swapping can ensue instead of deeper forms of interdependent collaboration that yield legitimate

changes to practice (Little, 1990). This bullet exemplifies Cochran-Smith et al.'s (2009) images of teacher learning, particularly how teachers learn through collaboration.

Additionally, much of the discussion in various memos about student mental health concerns posited the solution as simply having students return to school in-person. For example, in the 4/27/20 memo, the SEA cites “increasing reports of troubling student mental health trends” in their rationale for the prioritization of live instruction in December: “These requirements for live and synchronous instruction will support student engagement and mental health until students return to the classroom full-time.” In this excerpt, the SEA advocates for live instruction whether in-person or remote to support mental health; however, as the SEA notes itself, the increase in student mental health concerns increased substantially. This memo poses live instruction as a holdover for students with social emotional or mental health struggles. Students simply attending instruction in a live format vastly oversimplifies the complex endeavor that teachers have in observing, reporting to the necessary channels, and attending to student mental health concerns. In this way, this excerpt exemplifies an image of teaching that drastically misaligns with teachers’ everyday reality (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009). Furthermore, this underestimation of the work of teaching in this regard is not only troubling because of its reductionism, it also prevents real solutions from addressing the complex and urgent mental health needs of students in schools. Using mental health concerns as justification for policy while not appropriating sufficient resources or solutions pays lip service to a profound issue without taking action to address it.

The Solely Economic Aims of Schooling

While the framing of the return to school simultaneously oversimplifies the work of teaching, it also views schools as a means toward economic ends. In the 6/25/2020 memo announcing the SEA's guidance for the fall 2021 "reopening" of schools, it states, "We also recognize how disruptive school closures have been to families trying to maintain regular work schedules and manage household needs, including childcare, while also facilitating remote learning." Such a rationale for backing "reopening" plans that involve returning as many students and staff as possible in-person contain elements of economic imperialism through the "narrow lens" (Jabbar et al., 2021, p. 6) of an economic model that prioritizes school buildings as childcare facilities versus places where professional teaching and learning take place.

Teachers as Replaceable and Low-Skilled Technicians

Lastly, in the 4/27/21 memo addressing the mandate for schools to return to a fully in-person learning model, the SEA acknowledged that due to three feet distancing requirements limiting the number of students in classrooms, schools might require more staff to operate. The memo states, "Additionally, DESE continues to provide resources for districts and schools to hire additional staff to support an in-person return including: emergency license opportunities, MassHire Department of Career Services (MDCS) database partnership for substitute teachers, and the high school internship program." Inherent in these resources that support an in-person return are assumptions about what knowledge, or lack thereof, teachers need in order to teach (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009). It is unclear for what purpose the memos suggest substitute teachers who are not required

to go through the same licensure process as licensed teachers and high school interns would act; however, such options as fill-ins for teachers in order to facilitate an in-person return assume that teaching does not require specific skillsets, knowledge, and supervised experience with students, essentially de-professionalizing the work of teaching (Ingersoll, 2001).

The Overemphasis on Standardized Testing

The prioritization of standardized testing in Spring 2021 despite the many social emotional, mental health, and academic needs of students amidst the pandemic reflects the overreliance on student scores as the outcome of the work of teaching and the end goal for student learning — a testament to economically imperialistic-driven ends as the purpose of schooling (Jabbar et al., 2021). The January 5, 2021 DESE memo announced that the administration of the MA standardized testing in the spring would proceed: “The Department continues to believe the MCAS test is a crucial diagnostic tool to promote student success and educational equity...MCAS tests will give Massachusetts educators and families critical insight into academic losses...” In this excerpt, DESE posits standardized testing as a “crucial tool” that educators need to determine “academic losses” even though teachers have a range of formative and summative assessments to inform their teaching practice and gauge student mastery (Parkinson, 2009; Cochran-Smith et al., 2009). Not only does the term “academic losses” fail to accurately represent the complex, multifaceted, and ever-evolving student learning process by propagating a deficit narrative through the positioning of standardized testing as “essential” for “diagnostic purpose[s],” DESE also conceptualizes teachers as incapable to determining

student progress “reliably.”

In conjunction with painting MCAS as the only, narrow way to collect information about student progress, the SEA also invokes that it is necessary to determine post-secondary readiness. The memo also states, “the high school MCAS also affirms that students are prepared for college and careers.” The inherent assumptions are a) that without MCAS, there would be no way for teachers to determine college and career readiness and b) that the sole purpose of school is economic, social efficiency driven aim to prepare students for the workforce at the expense of other Democratic aims. As such, the focus on standardized testing above all other pressing matters, particularly during the pandemic, captures the influence of economic imperialism within the education sector (Jabbar et al., 2021). Parkinson (2009) reiterates the origins of this economically imperialistic focus as the NCLB driven accountability regime that “provides the structure for interpreting the value and effectiveness of the educational process,” which “has become subject to the fetishism of standardized test scores” (p. 46). The decision to continue with standardized testing is embedded with assumptions that during the unpredictability of the pandemic and its impact on schools, teachers should primarily be assuming their roles as technicians instead of making decisions using their expertise, local context, and the daily realities of the complexities of their classrooms at this chaotic time. Furthermore, the purpose of being back at school is to be able to continue with standardized testing to determine student knowledge as a static object and assess readiness to join the nation’s workforce.

Furthermore, as detailed in the previous section, the 6/25/2, 7/9/20, 7/20/20,

8/3/20, 2/23/21, 3/9/21, and 4/27/21 DESE memos cite concern for loss of instructional time and/or mental health as reasons to bring students back to school fully in-person despite health and safety risks; yet the administration of standardized testing causes more disruption, loss of instructional time, and student stress. In the 6/25/20 memo, for example, the SEA writes, “In-person school plays an equally important role in our ability to support students’ social-emotional needs, including their mental and physical health, and in mitigating the impacts of trauma.” The decision to spend time, energy, and resources facilitating the statewide standardized testing versus providing time for instruction, access to social emotional resources, etc. seems to contradict one of the stated reasons to return to in-person schooling despite health and safety risks related to the virus. Research prior to the pandemic indicates that standardized testing heightens student anxiety (Segool et al., 2013). The previously noted student mental health concerns cited as rationale for various mandates such as in-person learning acknowledge awareness of the urgent increase in mental health concerns. However, the decision to continue with standardized testing to add more stress to an incredibly chaotic and unpredictable school year seems to contradict these concerns for student mental health.

Lack of Acknowledgement of Teacher Safety & Well-Being Concerns

The 2/23/21, 3/9/21, 4/27/21, and 5/27/21 memos reference the success that schools within the state have had returning to in-person instruction; however, zero memos acknowledge safety and well-being concerns or COVID-19 infection rates. For example, throughout the memos that span the 2020–2021 school year, the SEA only makes reference to the way “schools throughout Massachusetts have been providing in-

person instruction to students using DESE’s guidance for over six months and have experienced first-hand the efficacy of these measures in significantly limiting in-school transmission” (2/23/21 memo). The same memo states, “We continue to see in-person instruction delivered safely across the Commonwealth, and many districts are already starting to bring more students back...” However, none of the memos mention statistics or information regarding the number of students, teachers, and staff that had become infected with COVID-19 to support that conclusion that “in-person instruction” was being “delivered safely.” Per reports documenting infection rates during the same school year through May 31, 2022, the statewide totals for staff were “55,421 out of an estimated 140,000” or 40 percent, while the total for students was “254,042, or 26.76 percent” (Vennoch, 2022). Failing to reference this information about the weekly cases while referring to the delivery of instruction as “saf[e]” suggests that the memos reveal a lack of acknowledge or concern for teacher safety and well-being (Geller, 2022; Watson, 2022; Cronin, 2022) and exemplifies the principle of economic imperialism coloring the narrow lens that arises from only focusing on certain information.

Reinforcing the lack of concern for teacher well-being and safety throughout the memos was the scant reference to vaccine developments or prioritization of vaccine eligibility for those in schools. In the same 2/23/2021 memo that announces the commissioner of SEA’s plans to pursue the authority to determine when hybrid and remote models no longer count for learning hours, the SEA wrote, “Specifically, the CDC...indicates that vaccines are not a prerequisite for returning to in-person learning even as they will provide an extra layer of protection for school staff.” This excerpt refers

to the vaccines as an “extra layer of protection for school staff” but deems them “not a prerequisite.” As the SEA indicated plans to push toward a full in-person learning model as the only model that satisfied learning hour requirements, the memos also indicated that the “protection” for school staff via the vaccine would not be coordinated with this push. In the 3/9/2021 memo, the SEA restates a similar sentiment: “Even with strong evidence that in-person school environments are safe with existing mitigating strategies, and while vacations are not a prerequisite for returning to in-person instruction, vaccination for educators and their vulnerable family members will provide additional confidence in returning to the classroom.” The 4/27/21 memo repeated the same excerpt starting from “while vaccinations...” and running to the end of the aforementioned excerpt. These excerpts again promoted school environments as “safe” without mention of the infection rates for students and staff while vaccines were touted as superfluous measures that “provide additional confidence” for educators. This phrasing posits teacher vaccinations as non-essential luxuries for the purposes of “confidence” instead of fundamental protections for personnel essential to functioning schools. This view feeds into the image of teachers as expendable, replaceable, low-status workers (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009).

Discussion

Outdated images of teachers and teaching have lingered in various facets of society – media, policy, and the public – for many decades (Hargreaves, 2000; Cohn et al., 1993; Johnson, 2019; Cohen, 2010). Despite the evolution of teaching practice, these images persist. The findings of this study reveal that the language and concepts within policy documents contain images of teachers as technicians, an overemphasis on

standardized testing, and a lack of concern for teacher well-being. SEA's policy documents not only still contain images of teachers and teaching that fit some of the older perceptions of teaching that Cochran-Smith et al. (2009) depict as a transmission-based activity, they persist even amidst chaotic and stressful circumstances of a global pandemic.

Roughly thirty years ago, Cochran-Smith et al. (2006) warned of the dangers that accompany the misrepresentative images of teachers and teaching as a result of NCLB. This study shows that just short of three decades later, these images are alive and well. Such inaccurate images play into the gap between perception and reality when it comes to the amount of uncertainty and complexity inherent in the practice of teaching. The extension of these images puts teachers in the position to receive policy versus have agency in co-constructing it. At a time when those with the most day-to-day contact about how the pandemic impacted students, teaching, and learning, policymaking forums needed a fine-grained picture from teachers of what was happening on the ground level. Teachers, more than policymakers, had the day-to-day experience to inform policy; and arguably more than even before, their expertise was critical to make informed policy decisions.

As Ball (1993) states, "Where are teachers in all this? Again, they are the objects of management relegated to the status of human resources; they do not participate, they are not included in the partnership, they are there to be managed" (p. 118). Positing teachers as workers that need to be "monitored" as one policy memo noted contributes to the idea that teachers "are there to be managed" (Ball, p. 118) instead of there to

participate in and engage with policymaking that affects their own professional experiences and the learning experiences of their students. Such a technical rational ideology plays out in these memos that the SEA makes while distant from the classroom and expects teachers — conceptualized as piece workers — to enact without question (Cohn et al., 1993). The persistence of these images raises questions about why they so intractably remain across decades. What would it take, if not the upheaval of the pandemic, to challenge normal operating procedure and better align images of teachers and teaching in policy in a way that acknowledges the complexity of teaching versus oversimplifies it?

Findings also suggest that economic imperialism pervade the documents. As Jabbar et al. (2021) assert, the overreliance on economic means and aims at the expense of others significantly narrows the sources and research consulted for information to inform policy as well as the policy itself that is ultimately enacted in schools. The analysis in this work extends previous research about standardized testing: policy memos not only continued to suggest standardized testing was the only way to measure student learning but also, during a crisis, policy asserts it is the only way to make sense of the impact of the chaos of the pandemic as it affected student learning. The memos refer to standardized testing as a necessary way to measure “academic losses” students have due to the pandemic. Circling back to Cochran-Smith et al.’s (2006) refutation, “the idea that knowledge is an object to be transmitted from outside experts to teachers, who then transmit it to students — with testing at the end to be sure there are no foul-ups in the transmission process — is completely out of keeping with how we understand learning

today” (p. 674). With this refutation in mind, the policy memo’s mandate that standardized testing is critical to diagnosing losses conveys that in times of fear, concern, and disarray, policy doubles down on testing as the only means to assess students.

This fetishization with standardized testing has the potential to exacerbate the deficit narrative about students instead of taking into account the monumental changes the pandemic has provoked. Utilizing the same pre-pandemic measure in pandemic times ignores an enormous, global mega-event and its significant ramifications. As such, “returning to normal” in this sense does not work; instead, it signals a refusal to accept the world has evolved. Returning to operating procedures and protocols similar to before the pandemic does not mean the pandemic did not occur. Perhaps a pre-pandemic measure is no longer relevant (and arguably had its flaws even in pre-pandemic times).

Moreover, attending to economic aims over other aims, including Democratic aims, can posit school and learning as a narrow process versus one that inspires lifelong learning and coincides with the tight regulation of teachers’ work. Cohn et al. (1993) note that the increase in state control is built around the metaphor of a machine for organizations and workers that has input and output systems in relation to cost-benefit analysis. Consequently, “the broader purposes and the interpersonal means that teachers formulate grow out of their experiences within classrooms filled with human beings” (p. 28) in contrast to policy’s valuation of standardized testing as a vehicle for assessing purpose and economic ends as the sole purpose. Considering the increase in student mental health concerns and chronic student absenteeism, this approach to school and learning no longer seems to fit the current day with estimates reporting that nearly one

third of Massachusetts students as chronically absent last school year (Buyinza, 2022; Huffaker, 2022). The pandemic presented an opportunity to re-envision the status quo of schools. It forced teachers and schools to shift daily operating procedures, meet student needs in new ways, and revise curriculum and instruction to fit vastly different circumstances. Even with this opportunity, however, much about the system went back to “normal,” including the way that policy conceptualizes teachers and teaching.

Implications

The findings of this study point toward several practical and research-oriented implications. First, from a practical perspective, feedback mechanisms that more organically embed teacher input, feedback, and expertise into policy creation and revision are important to closing the gap between policy and practice. These feedback mechanisms are always important but even more so when traversing unprecedented circumstances such as those that the pandemic presents. Even with much of school operations returning to a “new normal,” the profundity of the experience of teaching and learning in schools during the pandemic is not going away. Forums for teachers to provide insights into policy regarding the takeaways of the pandemic, how it shifted their perspective on learning and teaching practice, etc. are necessary to improve schools, provide space for reflection, and infuse policymaking practices with more authentic voices. Given the enormity of such an impactful, global event, it is now past time to heed new perspectives critical to proceeding after a crisis of such scale and re-envisioning and re-adapting the system beyond what is known. This re-envisioning should start with teachers instead of end with them.

Considering this call of re-envisioning schools, implications for practice might begin with asking teachers what ideas and visions they have for policymaking entities supporting them in their complex and ever-evolving work. Collecting feedback from many teacher voices might be messy, but it is necessary to prioritize their voices in the reconstruction of the relationship between policy and practice. Perhaps this reconstruction takes the form of an all teacher-comprised committee as an arm of the state educational agency. Perhaps it takes the form of SEA individuals completing required residencies in schools throughout the state to gain an on-the-ground understanding of the way current events and policy play out in the classroom.

In terms of future research, this study sets up questions about why these outdated images persist in policy documents. As such, research might inquire into an examination of the communication and other structures within state educational agencies that might perpetuate the existence of these images. The documents represent stable sources of information from the SEA; however, delving deeper into the rationale behind the use of certain language and concepts within the documents might provide clarity as to why they linger. Lastly, while the documents under analysis in this study represent the guidance from the SEA during the midst of the pandemic, future research might continue to analyze the images of teachers and teaching as well as the presence of economic imperialism in documents that have been produced since the relative return to new normal. As teachers, students, and schools move forward and policy continues to be developed, examination of the way policy frames teachers and teaching constitutes an essential task.

Conclusion

Finding ways for teachers' voices to better inform policy is of the utmost importance as teacher attrition rates increase and teacher satisfaction levels decrease (Matthews et al., 2021). The reopening of school buildings debate in the wake of COVID-19 has made clear the need to better listen to and understand the nuanced experiences of teachers, especially as teacher shortages affect the country, already high attrition rates increase, and reports of teacher stress and mental health throughout the 2020–2021 school year become more universal (Golodryga et al., 2021; Singer, 2020; Santoro, 2020).

Cochran-Smith et al. (2006) opine on the effect of the images within NCLB policy: “NCLB is changing how we, the educational community, the policy community, and the public, think about teachers and teaching” (p. 689). They further assert that “To improve student achievement and to attract and retain qualified teachers, there is an obvious need to unpack and critique the images of teachers and teaching that are creeping into the national psyche” (p. 691). As Cochran Smith et al. (2006) put it, the misperception of teachers and teaching is not just an injustice against teachers — an issue in its own right. It undoubtedly degrades the quality of the teaching force — a degradation that subsequently disrupts student achievement. In conjunction with student achievement, as student mental health concerns and chronic absenteeism has been on the rise since the pandemic — chronic absenteeism has doubled since 2020 — policy and educators need to work together more than ever to adapt schooling to current day (Buyinza, 2022; Huffaker, 2022). This endeavor cannot happen successfully without

teacher experience, local knowledge of practice, and day-to-day insight.

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CHAPTER 6: ARTICLE THREE**“BEYOND FRUSTRATED”: TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF STATE EDUCATIONAL AGENCY SUPPORT AND POLICIES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC****Abstract**

This study draws upon anonymous survey responses from 122 full-time, public-school teachers in a Northeastern U.S. state to examine their perceptions of the level of support and decisions made by the state educational agency (SEA) within their state as they navigated teaching during the pandemic. Findings indicate teachers' widespread perception of a stark lack of support from their SEA leading to teacher feelings that the SEA made circumstances worse and is out of touch with school and classroom realities. Teachers reported that these perceptions had an overwhelmingly negative impact on their teaching during the 2020–2021 school year. This study discusses implications for teacher demoralization and attrition at a time when teacher shortages and their negative consequences loom in the U.S.

Keywords: teacher status, educational policy, attrition, demoralization

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has immeasurably impacted nearly every aspect of schools from day-to-day operating procedures to the way students attend classes to curricular and instructional matters. In the early stages of the pandemic, while COVID-19 spread across the country, the large-scale, nationwide closure of schools in March 2020 forced educators, students, and families alike to adjust to emergency remote teaching with virtually no warning or preparation (Marshall et al., 2020; Hodges et al., 2020). As the 2019–2020 school year came to a close remotely, states began the process of reopening school buildings after initial COVID-19 related closures; and the predicament of how to reopen in the fall became a major topic of debate. This contentious debate continued throughout the rest of the 2020–2021 school year as school buildings went in and out of in-person, hybrid, and remote instructional models, and the public health crisis persisted. Due to the vital role schools play in society, this debate involved the opinions and attention of a wide swath of participants — politicians, policymakers, the news and media, parents, students, school districts, state education agencies, administrators, educators, etc. (Licon et al., 2020; Pawlewicz, 2020).

Caught squarely in the crossfire of the debate and on the receiving end of policy coming down from state governance were public school classroom teachers. Historically, this top-down dynamic is certainly not new for the teaching profession (Lortie, 1975; Cohn et al., 1993; Gratch, 2000). Even before the pandemic, discussions of accountability, teacher quality, tight regulation of teachers' work and sole blame for student underperformance (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009) in conjunction with crisis

mentality news coverage (Coe et al., 2018; Alhamdan et al., 2014; Shine, 2020) enmeshed teachers as common figures of public scrutiny (Lortie, 1975; Goldstein, 2014; Cohn et al., 1993; Cochran-Smith et al., 2009). Intersecting with this reality is the view of teachers as executors of policy that others create (Cohn et al., 1993; Cochran-Smith et al., 2009) — a view that situates teachers in a web of bureaucracy (Elvira, 2020) often at odds with their expertise and local knowledge of practice (Cochran-Smith et al., 2009). As Lefstein et al. (2014) note,

A frequent and unfortunate result of the Intensification of political and public involvement in educational deliberations has been the marginalization of teachers' participation. This outcome is doubly problematic: as the adults closest to the classrooms and schools, teachers possess critical knowledge and expertise about the issues under discussion, and furthermore, they are among the members of the public with the greatest and most direct stake in the policies developed. (p. 33)

The exclusion of teachers' voices from policy and decision-making forums positions teachers as technicians who simply transplant policy and actions created elsewhere into classrooms (Cohn et al., 1993; Cochran-Smith et al., 2009). Atkinson et al. (2008) explicate this notion of teachers as piece workers instead of professional decision makers, asserting that this view of teachers does not consider many important aspects of teaching practice and removes consciousness and creative intelligence from teachers' work.

Yet, while teachers continue to experience the effects of issues related to demoralization and lack of voice and decision-making capacity when it comes to issues

within the realms of education, research indicates that the teacher is one of the most critical school-level variables impacting student achievement (Ingersoll, 1999; Rockoff, 2004). Given the essential value and import teachers have on the health and success of students, schools, and society, this oversimplification causes problematic misperceptions of what the work of teaching entails; as a result, policy that impacts teaching stems from a misaligned perception of teaching to the detriment of students and the frustration of teachers.

With the added uncertainty teachers face due to the pandemic, the long-standing disconnect between teachers' realities and policymaking forums has heightened exponentially. While preliminary research investigating the impacts of COVID-19 on the teaching profession has established the emotional and physical toll that has occurred, more details with respect to the way that teachers experienced the work of teaching in conjunction with policy decisions is necessary. This survey data aims to engage in such work through the following research questions: 1) What perceptions did teachers have of the level of support they received from the state educational agency (SEA) throughout the pandemic? 2) What perceptions did teachers have of the decisions and policy the SEA implemented throughout the pandemic? 3) How did these perceptions impact teachers' experience teaching during the pandemic?

Relevant Literature

The Lack of Teachers' Voices in Educational Policy

While previous research has established the distance between policymaking forums and classroom realities as an enduring source of tension (Lortie, 1975; Cohn et

al., 1993; Lefstein et al., 2014), the depth of the pandemic's effect on schools has further highlighted the extent of the divide and its impact on the teaching profession. Yet, while literature reveals the gap between decision-making forums and classrooms on the ground level, it also shows that teachers who feel their voices matter and feel they have influence over decisions that impact them are less likely to leave the profession (Gyrko, 2012; Harrison Berg et al., 2005; Liu, 2007; Johnson, 2019). Beyond the advantageous, professional outcomes for teachers themselves, teachers' perspectives and influence on policy also positively enhance school improvement efforts and student success (Clarke, 2013; Reeves et al., 2016; Johnson, 2019).

Despite widely touted benefits related to reducing high teacher attrition rates and facilitating school improvement that make the case for the inclusion of teachers' voices (Dewey, 1916; Lefstein et al., 2014; Kumar et al., 2000), the problem of teachers as recipients of educational policy that others create has remained for a century (Hargreaves, 2000; Cohn et al., 1993; Kumar et al., 2000). In fact, studies found that most teachers do not feel decision or policy-making entities value their voices in discussions of educational matters (Markow et al., 2011) as these entities institute, revise, and then eliminate policies without consulting teachers (Hargreaves, 2000; Kumar et al. 2000).

Problematically, this lack of inclusion fails to capitalize on: firsthand experience, intimate insight into complex classroom realities, a direct view of the learning that occurs in classrooms, and expert understanding teachers have of local knowledge of practice (Lefstein et al., 2014; Cochran-Smith et al., 2009; Atkinson et al., 2008). As Chubb (1988) asserts, "...important educational decisions have increasingly been rendered by

people geographically and experientially removed from specific information about the classrooms and schools they intend to affect” (p. 15). This distance often results in disconnects between what policies intend and what they look like in action. Elvira’s (2020) phenomenological study corroborates that decisions occurring within educational arenas that impact the teaching profession often times do not come from individuals with teaching or education-related experience; therefore, teachers are the individuals “caught in the middle of our bureaucratic schooling system, the ones in the classroom juggling societal and political expectations while trying to help students reach their academic potential...” (p. 74).

Without the inclusion of teachers’ voices, it is no surprise that teachers’ firsthand knowledge of teaching and practical classroom realities often contrasts with the oversimplified, straightforward conceptions of teaching within policy discussions (MacDonald, 1986, 1988). Such contrasts, as they intersect with teachers’ positioning in the larger educational system, yield an “overdetermined and over-regulated situation of schoolteachers’ work” along with “the matrix of power relations in which they are enmeshed” (p. 106).

The Status of the Teaching Profession

The deep disconnect between the profound reality of teachers’ work and education policy’s perception of teachers’ work inevitably contribute to both outsiders’ and teachers’ complex views of the status of the teaching profession. Teachers tend to be drawn to the work of teaching for the psychic or intrinsic rewards of teaching related to the satisfaction that comes with helping students learn and enter the profession with the

hopes of enacting these purposes (Lortie, 1975; Cohn & Kottkamp, 1993; Santoro, 2011, 2018; Johnson, 2019). Yet, teachers' professional perceptions and experiences of their work once they enter the profession portray a complex picture characterized by high attrition rates and reports of dissatisfaction (Ingersoll, 1999, 2001, 2018; Borman et al., 2008; Simon et al., 2015).

Part of this dissatisfaction stems from teaching's complicated status as a profession. In his study of the teaching profession, Lortie (1975) described teaching as "special but shadowed" (p. 10). This phrase invokes the dichotomy between the moral importance of teachers' work in society and the relatively low status the profession receives (Cohn et al., 1993). In fact, debates over whether teaching constitutes a profession or a semi profession have existed for decades (Ingersoll et al., 2011). In their study of Florida public school teachers, Cohn et al. (1993) note that teachers feel "public regard for them has diminished drastically...The status decline has...demoralized a large number of teachers. When asked whether they would again choose teaching, many of our interviewees said they would look for something else with higher status and respect" (p. 162). Comparing the status of the teaching profession in other high performing countries such as Finland, Singapore, and Korea, the Gallup (2014) study notes,

Unfortunately, too many young people with the potential and motivation to be outstanding teachers don't go into the profession. It's hard to blame them, given that the profession has been vilified repeatedly in recent years. As New York Times columnist Charles M. Blow put it in 2012, 'Teachers have been so maligned in the national debate that it's hard to attract out best and our brightest

to see it as a viable and rewarding career choice...’ (p. 23)

More recently, The New Teacher Project (TNTP) (2013) confirmed this complexity within teachers’ perceptions of their own profession. The TNTP surveyed 206 teachers they deemed outstanding by seeking out teachers who had recently received awards and nominations. Containing both multiple-choice and open response questions on a wide range of topics including these teachers’ thoughts about the teaching profession in general, the survey found that teachers love their work with students but are consistently frustrated with issues such as bureaucratic annoyances, lack of career advancement opportunities, and poor working conditions among others. The most chosen factor that mattered to teachers during their career was “being able to help students develop intellectually and academically” (p. 30).

Outside of working with students, teachers also noted factors that disenfranchise them from the work they love. As the TNTP (2013) report states, “in short, these teachers love the work of teaching – but that seems to be the only part of their jobs they love” (p. 20). For example, “many respondents cited burnout as a major concern, and told us that teaching at an elite level can be physically and emotionally exhausting,” (p. 22) mentioning workload, lack of time, or exhaustion. In fact, 60% referenced not being able to see themselves sustaining the amount of time and energy over the long run. Liu et al. (2008) corroborate workload and insufficient time for planning and preparation as a major factor in teacher job dissatisfaction based on the 2000–2001 Teacher Follow Up Survey. In fact, Liu and colleagues conclude that “we’ll keep losing our best teachers until we treat them like true professionals” (p. 26). This pre-pandemic observation

becomes even more relevant in light of renewed division with regard to the U.S. education system. In essence, the pandemic has shed light on issues with a lack of teacher voice in decision-making forums, issues with problematic working conditions that surround teachers, and high levels of job-related stress that plagued the profession prior to the inception of COVID-19 and worsened during this unprecedented crisis. To this end, this article centers on capturing teachers' perceptions of policy throughout the pandemic. Unraveling the way teachers experience policy that the SEA sets forth – particularly during a crisis — allows for improvements and alignment between policy and practice in the future.

Conceptual Framework

This study employs Santoro's (2011, 2018) conceptual distinction between teacher burnout and demoralization. Whereas burnout locates the problem within an individual teacher, demoralization analyzes working conditions and the state of the profession, asserting that "burnout fails to account for situations where the conditions of teaching change so dramatically that the moral rewards, previously available in ever-challenging work, are now inaccessible" (2011, p. 3). As Santoro (2011) aptly explains, the burnout explanation makes a fundamental attribution error, "attributing too much to individuals' personal traits to explain their behavior and too little to the context in which the behavior takes place" (p. 7).

Central to Santoro's (2011) argument around demoralization is understanding teachers' valuation of the moral rewards of teaching. These rewards are present in the work of teaching when teachers engage in their work in a way that does right by their

students. In fact, without recognizing the import that the desire to do good work has for teachers, it is not possible to see the problem of demoralization and attrition clearly. Especially in the United States where low status and pay characterize the teaching profession, teachers choose the profession because they are attracted to the possibility of doing good work and exercising “their moral and ethical commitments to their practice and the students with whom they work” (2011, p. 4). However, as Santoro points out, other high-achieving countries have half the teacher attrition rates as the United States. To exacerbate the problem, in addition to the work itself contributing to demoralization, the outside perception of teaching that makes it “difficult to maintain a commitment to work that is historically underpaid as well as emotionally and intellectually demanding when outsiders seem to undervalue or denigrate it” (2018, p. 91). Despite Santoro’s identification of demoralization within the teaching profession initially occurring pre-pandemic, this point in particular about outsider denigration is increasingly important when examining the impact of pandemic teaching on teachers.

According to Santoro (2018), there are various sources of demoralization for experienced teachers. A few of these moral concerns applicable to this work include having to carry out policy that conflicts with teachers’ professional ethics or makes teachers feel as though they are adding to student distress, seeing themes of teachers as expendable laborers, realizing teacher expertise and voice is not solicited or valued, being on the receiving end of policy that does not consult practitioner voices, and bearing witness to colleagues leaving the profession.

Methods

Study Design Rationale

This survey seeks to provide a broader sense of teachers' experiences and perceptions of SEA policy that resulted from the pandemic. To this end, the survey methodology better avoids positioning research participants as spokespeople: "This representational/ethical issue...is one where qualitative surveys can shine" (Braun et al., 2020, p. 3). The 122 survey responses that constitute the data for this work are certainly not representative of the entire, full-time, public-school teacher population in MA; however, the high number of responses allows for a fuller scope of teacher sentiments on the classroom level. While prevailing misconception of the survey methodology in qualitative research is that researchers must pair surveys with interviews to achieve "adequate depth and richness" (Braun et al., 2020 p. 2), Braun et al. argue "that qualitative survey datasets can provide richness and depth, when viewed in their entirety, even if individual responses might themselves be brief" (p. 2), challenging the "unquestioned dominance of interviews in qualitative research" (p.2).

In addition to the benefits that a survey provided in capturing a broader scope of teacher sentiment with both multiple-choice questions that generated quantitative data and open response questions that generated qualitative data, online surveys can provide a completely anonymous space for respondents. While researchers partake in various efforts to preserve anonymity of participants involved in interviews and other face-to-face forms of data collection, the survey offers an increased level of anonymity critical to the nature of the data collected for this study. The survey's anonymity is also important in

order to collect the most honest responses possible and assuage potential participant hesitancy around providing identifying information — particularly because this study does address topics (i.e., views about the SEA) that participants might have concerns sharing freely about without backlash. The anonymity that the survey offers allows participants to feel a high level of protection and facilitates authentic data collection. As Braun et al. (2020) state, “Another advantage of survey-felt anonymity relates to topics where issues of ‘face’ and social desirability might strongly impact face-to-face data collection” (p. 5).

Beyond anonymity, the survey afforded participants control of decisional capacity over their survey responses and allowed them to complete it when possible. As Braun et al. (2020) further detail, “without the social pressure resulting from a researcher sitting opposite them, survey participants can choose how long they spend with the survey, as well as when, where and how they complete it” (p. 6). These convenience and flexibility pieces were extremely important to me because teachers at the time (and always) were under enormous stress dealing with unprecedented demands, scrutiny, and workload. As a full time, public-school teacher myself, I knew from my own situation as a teacher that the pandemic had already overloaded teachers; therefore, the survey offered the best option to collect as many teacher voices and experiences as possible in a way that respected the current situation and time demands teachers faced to the maximum extent possible.

Data Collection & Participants

The study draws data from the survey responses of full-time, public-school teachers in Massachusetts who taught during the 2020–2021 school year. This inclusion criteria for survey participants served to fulfil the purpose of this study — to illuminate teachers’ experiences and voices. In MA, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education serves as the governing body for all public-school districts (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2021).

The questions aimed to capture teachers’ reactions to policy from the SEA and experiences teaching during the pandemic. As such, I chose the content of most questions to capture teacher reactions to major policy decisions coming down from the state – decisions that would have the most widespread impact on teaching during the school year. Aside from demographic-focused questions, each of the multiple-choice parts of the abovementioned questions were required whereas the open response space to elaborate was optional. The multiple-choice questions produced percentages that gave a sense of how the larger sample was generally responding to the focus of each question; however, the vast majority of data collected and analyzed from the survey was qualitative in nature based on the optional open responses teachers submitted after the multiple-choice questions.

I used Google Forms to create the survey and circulated it in April 2021 by sending the link to full-time, active, public-school teachers that I knew; and as a form of snowball sampling (Merriam et al., 2016), requested that they send the survey link to anyone they knew as well that fit the inclusion criteria. I also posted it in a private

Facebook group of MA educators that requires approval by administrators and proof of educator status to join; therefore, this group was an instrumental way to reach the target population. As such, data collection methods for this survey used random purposeful sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) to draw a sample of teachers from the larger MA public-school teacher population. Before sending the survey out to teachers, I piloted it in a group of two university professors and two public school teachers to collect feedback about the survey's methodological soundness and usability. Based on the group's feedback, I added three specific policy decisions with links to the memos produced by the SEA that contained the policy decisions instead of just asking respondents to describe their reactions to policy in a general sense.

14 questions total comprised the survey as part of a larger project to examine teachers' experiences and perceptions of different entities throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. See Appendix A for the full survey. In terms of questions relevant to this particular study, the first question required participants to confirm they were public-school teachers in the state of MA and currently teaching during the 2020–2021 school year. Questions about respondents' self-identified demographic information spanned questions two through five and 14. Question six asked respondents to describe the SEA in three words and took the form of an open response question.

Question seven was prefaced with a statement asking participants to describe their reactions, if they had any, to several policy decisions that came out of DESE over the course of the year: the decision to require teachers in remote districts to work from schools (8/21/2020), the decision to continue with standardized testing during the year

(1/5/2021), and the decision to mandate schools to open for full in-person learning by certain dates in Spring 2021 (3/9/2021). In the preface to question seven, I provided a link to a Google Folder that had each of the policy decisions documented in the memo released by the SEA for reference. See Appendices B, C and D for the memos. I selected the three policy decisions I thought would have had the most impact on teachers' work this year. Each of the three policy decisions were listed in a separate question (required) asking for respondents to select the answer choice from the following scale listed via multiple-choice that best described their reaction: extremely negative, negative, no reaction, positive, extremely positive. Each of the multiple-choice questions were followed by an optional open response space where respondents could choose to elaborate on their required, multiple-choice answer.

Question eight asked about how the three decisions listed in question seven impacted the way respondents approached and/or viewed their work that year, if at all, with the same multiple-choice options as listed above. Question nine asked respondents to select a multiple-choice option that best describes the level of support they felt from the SEA as they navigated teaching during a pandemic from the following choices: not supportive, somewhat supportive, very supportive. The question also had an optional open response space for respondents to elaborate on their answer to the previous question.

122 teachers responded to the survey; and in total there were 423 open response submissions collected by the survey specifically from the four questions — questions six, seven, eight, and nine — referenced above that related to this survey. Table 6-1 describes

the breakdown of respondents' school type. Figure 6-1 contains the years of experience for the 122 survey respondents, ranging from 1 year to 35 years. Table 6-2 contains information about respondents' grade, subject area, and level (if applicable).

Table 6-1

Respondents' School Type

School Type	Percentage
Suburban	70
Urban	25
Rural	4.2
Other	0.8

Figure 6-1

Histogram of Respondents' Years of Teaching Experience

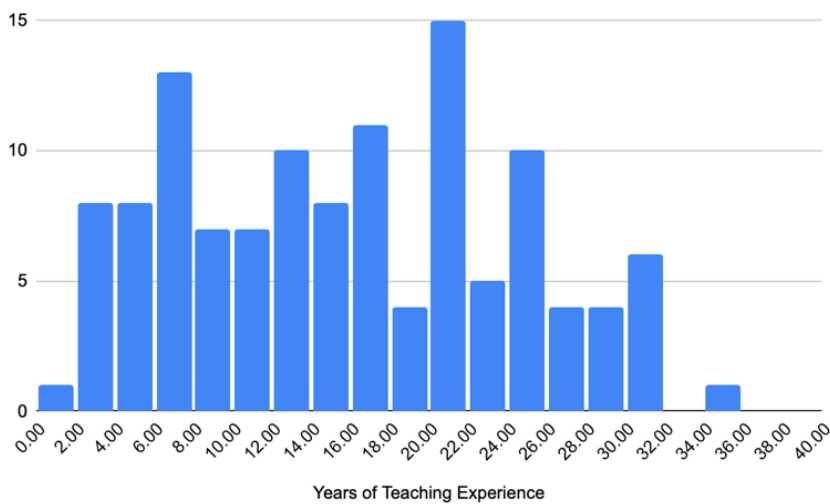


Table 6-2*Respondents' Grade, Subject Area & Level (if applicable)*

	Frequency	Subject Areas (if listed by respondent) *frequency of individual grade level or subject listed after if provided
Elementary	33	Kindergarten – 5, 1 st grade – 4, 2 nd grade – 3, 3 rd grade, 4 th grade – 2, 5 th grade – 2, 6 th grade – 2, Special Education – 5, History, ESL, Math – 2, Music
Middle	23	Math – 7, ELA – 3, Spanish, French, Science – 2, Civics – 2, History – 2, Special Education, ESL
Secondary	66	Special Education – 9, English – 15 (AP Lang – 4, AP Seminar – 1), Chemistry – 3 (AP – 1), Math – 2, History – 11 (AP Human Geography, AP U.S. History – 1), Physics – 2 (AP – 1), Science – 3, French, Music – 3, Health, Art, ESL, German, World Language – 2 (AP Latin – 1)

Data Analysis

The analysis of the quantitative results entailed examining the raw percentages derived from the five multiple-choice questions relevant to this study. Reviewing the quantitative results provided a broader sense of the scope of sentiments across the 122-teacher sample before I analyzed the optional qualitative responses.

I then reviewed the qualitative results derived from teachers submitting optional open responses elaborating on their multiple-choice selections. 79 teachers submitted optional open responses in response to question 7b, asking teachers reactions to DESE's statement that it is their expectation for teachers in remote school districts to work from their classrooms. 86 teachers submitted optional open responses in response to question 7c, a question asking teachers to describe their reactions to the continuation of standardized testing during the 2020–2021 school year. 83 teachers chose to submit an optional open response to question 7e, a question asking teachers to describe their

reactions to the SEA's mandates that schools return to fully in-person learning by certain dates in the spring. 53 teachers chose to submit optional open responses to question nine, a question asking teachers about the level of support they felt from the SEA as they navigated teaching during the pandemic.

While the coding process was iterative (Merriam et al., 2016), I conducted three rounds of coding for each open response except those in response to question six, which asked respondents to describe the SEA in three words. For this particular question, I grouped words expressing similar ideas together and tallied the number a word or phrase is used to describe DESE. I noted the frequency of individual words as well as groups of words expressing similar sentiments.

For the rest of the qualitative data, during the first round of open coding, I applied descriptive coding to the open response data (Miles et al., 2020). As part of the second round of coding, I grouped similar pieces of data together under slightly broader concept codes developed from the conceptual framework of demoralization (Miles et al., 2020). Table 6-3 contains the way that I operationalized the framework as codes to apply to the data. The combination of free codes and framework-related codes illuminated both demoralization related sentiments as well as new sentiments that the pandemic evoked within teachers. At this point in the coding process, I sent the codebook and data excerpts to my coding partner, who independently applied the codebook to the data excerpts. We then compared codes and reconciled discrepancies. The third round consisted of going through the newly grouped together pieces of data and refining both the codes as well as the data included as part of each code. Table 6-4 contains an example of this coding

process applied to an excerpt of data for clarification.

Table 6-3

Operationalization of Framework

Aspect of Santoro's (2018) Demoralization Framework	Operationalization as Data Code	Explanation
-Witnessing the rejection of teacher expertise and initiative	Policies/Actions as Out of Touch	data segments containing the idea that policy and actions from DESE reveal them as not in touch with sentiments/events/reality on the ground level of schools and classrooms
-Realizing the profession has been transformed in ways that make career longevity unsustainable and unrealistic	SEA Actions Resulting in Teacher Alienation	data segments containing the idea that DESE policies and actions led to teachers feeling less connected and more isolated
-Understanding that policies designed to support students render teachers as expendable laborers	Policies/Actions Dismissive of Teacher Health	data segments containing the idea that DESE policies and actions do not take into account or protect teacher health during COVID-19
-Witnessing the rejection of teacher expertise and initiative	Policies/Actions as Unnecessary	data segments containing the idea that DESE policies and actions were necessary and did not have a purpose/value
-Witnessing the rejection of teacher expertise and initiative -Complying with mandates that compromise teachers' professional ethics	Lack of SEA Support Worsened Circumstances	data segments containing teacher sentiments that DESE not providing sufficient support having a negative effect on an already tough situation
-Experiencing increased one directional communication about teaching that does not include the voices of practitioners -Witnessing the rejection of teacher expertise and initiative	Policies/Actions as Distrustful of Teachers as Professionals	data segments containing the idea that DESE policies/actions revealed that they do not see teachers as professionals but rather workers to be controlled
-Complying with mandates that compromise teachers' professional ethics -Witnessing the rejection of teacher expertise and initiative	Policies/Actions as Hypocritical	data segments containing the idea that DESE policies/actions were created in contradiction to other beliefs of policies

-Complying with mandates that compromise teachers’ professional ethics	Continuance w/ Standardized Testing as Contradictory	data segments containing the idea that the DESE mandate to continue with MCAS (MA state standardized testing) was in contrast with other messages they were putting forth
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Table 6-4

Coding Example

Data Excerpt	Coding Round
Mandates are not support. Why did DESE never consider involving teachers in creative thinking around learning models, pandemic teaching, whole-child considerations, and return to in-person learning? Instead, DESE double-downed on mandates again with no view to the context of this unimaginable year.	<p>Round 1 (open descriptive coding) I double-downed mandates versus support, lack of teacher involvement, DESE as out-of-touch</p>
	<p>Round 2 (grouping similarly labeled data together) I grouped this piece of data with another response such as “DESE did nothing to support schools, education, or students. Top-down decisions made by those that either spent little time in the “trenche” as they moved up in the system, and/or no time in the trenches in recent years are never about the work: their decisions are about politics, control, and money. DESE and the governor claimed to be concerned about the social/emotional and mental health of students, which is all about appearances. Educators and schools have been screaming about the rise of mental health issues and concerns in schools for years, begging for funding for more support staff— all of which fell on deaf ears.” Both the original excerpt and the abovementioned excerpt share sentiments related to DESE not being in touch with what occurs on the classroom level. The first response indicates that DESE had “no view to the context of this unimaginable year,” and the second response indicates that policy decisions came from those who spent little or no time in the classroom.</p>
	<p>Round 3 (refining codes) As these responses show, teachers felt they had specific knowledge of what was happening on the ground level of schools, yet this knowledge was not solicited as the state educational agency created policy, often creating a distance between policy and reality and leaving teachers with the feeling that their voices did not matter. These findings ring similarly to Cohn et al.’s (1993): “one theme that underlies much of the dissatisfaction teachers expressed was not being respected, listened to, or trusted...they believed their feelings and perspectives were often ignored or dismissed...” (p. 229).</p>

Findings

This study set out to examine teachers' perceptions of the level of support they received from state leadership and governance and the impact these perceptions had on teachers' experience teaching during the pandemic. Findings include that teachers overwhelmingly felt a lack of support from state leadership, teachers were frustrated with lack of concern for their health and safety, and teachers perceived that policy coming from the state governance negatively impacted their work during the pandemic.

Throughout the following sections, I use a maximal amount of data excerpts in support of the findings to a) put teacher voices front and center, b) underscore the scope of these sentiments, and c) express the profundity and commonality of many of these findings. In other words, many of these findings are not ones that several teachers mentioned. Rather, the urgency and depth of sentiment was present in the vast majority of teacher responses. Including a multitude of excerpts from all these teachers' responses was a way for me to capture the authenticity of the data.

Overall Perceptions of DESE & Impact of Policy Decisions on Teachers' Work

This section details findings related to teachers' reactions to state leadership throughout the pandemic. Table 6-5 contains the most common responses to question six on the survey that asked respondents to provide three words to describe DESE.

Table 6-5*Most Common Words Used to Describe the SEA*

Word	Frequency
Out-of-touch	32
Bureaucratic	9
Hypocritical	7
Unrealistic	7
Disconnected	7

“Out-of-touch” was the most common word across teachers’ responses. The frequency of this word group suggests that teachers felt that policy making entities were not tuned into the way the pandemic impacted teaching on the ground level. Furthermore, Table 6-6 contains the most common themes across responses to question six. The most common groups of words were “out-of-touch” followed by “unsupportive.” Words in the “out-of-touch” group such as “misinformed,” “removed,” and “disconnected” reiterate a gap between state policymakers and teachers carrying out the policy. This gap reflects Santoro’s (2018) assertion that one way communication about teaching that does not include teachers’ voices increases demoralization among teachers. It is also worth noting that last theme listed in Table 6-6 contains positive words that occurred within the responses; however, because there were comparatively so few positive descriptors, no common themes appeared beyond them being positive.

Table 6-6*Most Common Themes from Word Descriptions of the SEA*

Theme	Examples of Words Included	Total Frequency
Out-of-Touch	Out-of-touch, misinformed, unrealistic, tone-deaf, clueless, removed, disconnected, etc.	80
Unsupportive	Unsupportive, unhelpful, uncooperative, ineffective, etc.	67
Actively Harmful	Antagonizing, malicious, dangerous, unsafe, vindictive, disrespectful, hostile, adversarial, etc.	37
Controlling	Dictatorial, micromanaging, close-minded, dismissive, authoritarian, overbearing, etc.	10
Positive Descriptions	Deliberate, tenacious, assured, doing their best, competent, encouraging, professional, etc.	9

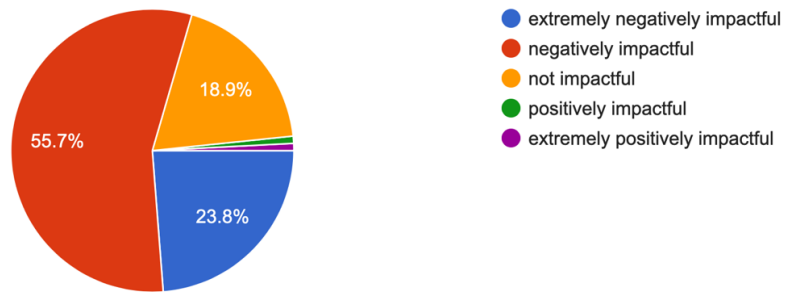
In conjunction with the word descriptors, question eight, a required multiple-choice question that asked teachers about how several of DESE’s decisions over the course of the year impacted the way they approached or viewed their work framed the way teachers more specifically viewed policy developed from the SEA. While subsequent sections go into more detail about those decisions and teachers’ responses, the following data paints a broader picture of the impact these decisions had on the work of teaching. 23.8% of respondents said, “extremely negatively impactful,” 55.7% said “negatively impactful,” 18.9% said “not impactful,” 0.8% said “positive,” and 0.8% said “extremely positively impactful.” Figure 6-2 serves as a visual representation of this data.

Figure 6-2

Visual Representation of Responses to Question 8

8. How did the decisions referenced in the previous questions (7a - f) impact, if at all, how you approach and/or view your work this year?

122 responses



Level of Support from DESE

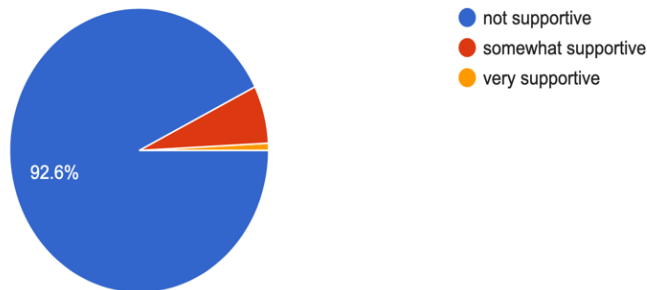
In response to question nine, a required multiple-choice question that asked the level of support teachers felt from the SEA this year as they navigated teaching during the pandemic, 92.6% of respondents said, “not supportive,” 6.6% said “somewhat supportive,” and 0.8% said “very supportive.” Figure 6-3 contains a visual representation of these results.

Figure 6-3

Visual Representation of Responses to Question 9

9. What level of support did you feel from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education this year as you navigated teaching during a pandemic?

122 responses



53 out of the total 122 respondents (43%) chose to submit an open response to elaborate on their multiple-choice answers to question nine. Findings from these open responses include that a lack of support worsened teachers' circumstances, and teachers perceived policies as out of touch and alienating to the point that some considered leaving the profession.

Lack of Support Made Circumstances Worse

Various teachers mentioned that not only did they not feel supported by the SEA, but they also felt that the SEA was acting in a way that worsened circumstances already complexified by the pandemic. As one respondent put it, "Is counter supportive an option? I almost felt as though DESE worked AGAINST educators this year and furthered a perception that teachers were lazy people who don't want to work." Another teacher wrote, "Districts were left to find ways to support educators in SPITE of all the ridiculous directives. It wasn't easy." Other teachers responded: "DESE has made a difficult job even worse over the year;" "They provided NO support and only caused more stress..." "Greenville (pseudonym) has been incredibly negatively impacted by DESE, school staff has been villainized, and we have been forced to figure this out without any support from the state..." and "DESE bad mouthed teachers and didn't support us at all!" In conjunction with 92.6% of responses describing DESE as "not supportive," these open responses illustrate a sentiment among teachers many felt they were not only working against the challenges the pandemic presented but their own state educational agency.

Other teachers' responses indicated they perceived a lack of consideration within

SEA policy. For example, one respondent wrote, “I felt that decisions were made with blatant disregard for the workload and pressure placed on teachers and administrators.”

Yet another echoed,

DESE had an opportunity to support teachers during a vulnerable, complex and challenging time; instead, they chose to make teachers frustrated, and make decisions not grounded in the reality of schools, students and teaching. They made things so much worse than they had to be this year. Most of the teachers I know are giving all of themselves physically, emotionally and cognitively this year; and instead of supporting them, they release rhetoric and decisions that devalue them.

Several responses also noted that one particular way that the SEA worsened circumstances was with the constantly changing mandates. One respondent wrote, “Rules are constantly changing with not much rationale...” while another corroborated, “Constantly changing goal posts during an already chaotic time for all is disheartening and anger-inducing.” Responses indicated that these changes throughout the year caused chaos and increased the amount of work for teachers to constantly adapt: “At first they left decisions up to the district. I supported that. Then they became authoritarian and usurped the districts who had created plans that were working for their needs.” Still other responses commented on the chaos: “I felt that DESE was driving these mandates without understanding and assisting the reasonable planning process...,” and “DESE literally ONLY put forth roadblocks with their late and ham-handed communication... Once DESE changed the requirements, it made it impossible to maintain peace in the community.” The amount of planning required for schools and teachers already inherent

in navigating teaching during the pandemic increased as DESE changed courses of action.

Out-of-Touch Policies and Actions

A second commonality included various observations that DESE's policies and actions were out-of-touch with classroom realities. For example, one response detailed, "DESE did not seem to actively look at what was actually going on in schools; they decided to just make changes without taking everything into account." A second response exemplified the same point: "...I will say that the fact that they continue to be fully remote while insisting that schools resume in full rises to a new level of "out-of-touch" and infuriatingly irrelevant."

Relatedly, several responses commented on the lack of teachers' perspectives included in the policies. For instance, several responses respectively stated, "No one from DESE asked our opinion," "DESE should consult a wide variety of teachers regarding their policies," and "I don't feel the profession is respected. DESE makes sweeping mandates without consulting ACTUAL teachers' input. They are completely out-of-touch and tone deaf." Building upon this out-of-touch sentiment, still other responses reflected the space between those making decisions and those enacting the decisions on the ground: "DESE did nothing to support schools, education, or students. Top-down decisions made by those that either spent little time in the "trenche" as they moved up in the system, and/or no time in the trenches in recent years are never about the work..." and "Mandates are not support. Why did DESE never consider involving teachers in creative thinking around learning models, pandemic teaching...? Instead, DESE double-

downed on mandates again with no view to the context of this unimaginable year.”

As these responses show, teachers felt they had specific knowledge of what was happening on the ground level of schools, yet this knowledge was not solicited as the SEA created policy, often creating a distance between policy and reality and leaving teachers with the feeling that their voices did not matter. This distance mirrors the rejection of teacher knowledge and expertise – one of the sources of demoralization identified by Santoro (2018).

Alienation

In addition to depicting some of the causes of frustration from the lack of support teachers perceived, survey responses also articulated some of the resulting effects, including feelings of alienation. One teacher stated that “DESE’s decisions feel punitive, rather than supportive.” Two responses respectively noted a divisive split between teachers and DESE policymakers: “From the beginning, it felt like they were setting up an “us vs. them” dynamic between DESE and teachers. It was weird and off putting;” and “DESE very much contributed to the “us vs. the” feeling the public has about teachers. We needed a leader who had our backs, but instead we were thrown under the bus at every turn.”

Several other responses identified one source of the alienation as stemming from perceived political motives: “I teach because I enjoy & gain satisfaction from teaching & working with high school kids supporting their learning. I don’t care about DESE or what DESE thinks, says or does. DESE is a bureaucratic, politically agenda driven corrupt entity.”

Another set of responses expressed that the alienation invaded their feelings toward their work of teaching. For example, “I still love my students and appreciate them. I enjoy the content I get to study and present and share with them. But I’m being taken advantage of, as are all other teachers, including passionate and positive ones like myself,” and “I used to love going to work. I loved teaching. The work and stress of this year has made me dread going to work. I’m not the only dedicated teacher who is feeling abused and beaten up this year.” Such responses exemplify aspects of demoralization, particularly teachers feeling that they lost the ability to engage in good work due to policy mandates and the rejection of teacher expertise.

Leaving/Concern for the Profession

In conjunction with feelings of alienation, many responses expressed teachers’ plans to discontinue teaching or observations that many teachers might potentially leave teaching after this year. Table 6-7 demonstrates some of these responses.

Table 6-7

Survey Responses Expressing Desire to Leave Teaching

For the first time in 15 years, I’m not sure I’ll continue in this profession. Why should I?
People will leave the profession in droves if we continue to devalue and disrespect teachers.
I’m exhausted, feel devalued, and will be leaving the profession.
It has helped sway me to early retirement.
This year has driven me out of education. I will not be returning to the classroom next year after 6 years teaching and 2 teaching AP.
They cannot be surprised at a large turnover this year. I have another option, and I am seriously considering retiring as soon as something opens in that option.
Beyond frustrated...thinking of leaving teaching all together to go back to industry.

I've never considered leaving my career until this year.
Due to the lack of support, I am leaving K–12 education. I accepted a new position next year in higher education. I was't planning on leaving, but this year was so demoralizing.
As a result of these constantly changing expectations placed upon schools by DESE mandates, I have decided to retire after this school year. I received extensive support in navigating teaching from my district' central and building administration but none from DESE.
It will be very difficult to recover from the emotional damage this year has caused. It has changed how I feel about being a teacher. I know we have no value in our communities to many beyond being free childcare. I spent so much of my personal time and my own money to make this year work and have gotten nothing in return but disrespect and increasing demands. It will make it hard to forget what our community leaders have said about us and our worth. Teachers will not be able to stick it out when there are other fields we can work in instead.
I look forward to the summer. I am so burned out that I will not be teaching this summer for the 1 st time in 16 years. I just can't do it. More focus should have been placed on the difficulty and obstacles that students were able to overcome during this pandemic. Not enough praise and acknowledgement of what they have done has been offered. I acknowledge and praise them all the time. The media should seek some positive news and accomplishments rather than focus on the negative. I keep hearing they will be behind – well we just adjust and make it work...DESE should be ashamed of themselves.
I am saddened that so many people feel that they can comment on what teachers should and should't do...I would't be surprised if there is a teacher shortage. Why would people want to enter a profession that is constantly bashed AND underpaid?
This is going to lead to an increase in teacher mental health issues. And I don't know what to do with my life now. But at least there's MCAS and parents can ignore their kids again. Oh, and my school is offering a one hour Zoom on mindfulness. So, it's all fine.
This year was extremely deflating, and it made me really torn over whether I think that the teaching profession will ever see better days.

Within these responses, teachers convey feelings of being disrespected, devalued, deflated, and demoralized. Others reference the “emotional damage” and burnout resulting from the year leading to early retirement, change of career, or questions about whether to stay in teaching. Such questions reflect various sources of demoralization that

Santoro (2018) identifies such as witnessing colleagues leave the profession, realizing that they are expendable, and recognizing that longevity in the profession is no longer sustainable.

Reactions to Certain Key DESE Decisions

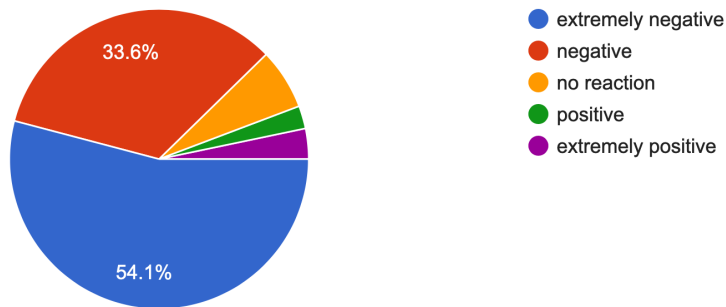
The SEA's Expectation that Teachers of Remote Districts Work from School

In response to question 7a, a question that asked teachers about their reactions to DESE's expectation that teachers in remote school districts teach from their schools, 54.1% of respondents answered, "extremely negative," 33.6% said "negative," 6.6% said "no reaction," 2.5% said positive, and 3.3% said "extremely positive." Figure 6-4 serves as a visual representation of this data. 79 out of the total 122 respondents (65.8%) submitted an optional open response in the space provided for teachers to elaborate on their multiple-choice answers to question 7a. Common themes emerged included that the perception that this expectation showed a disregard for teacher health, came across as unnecessary, and revealed a lack of respect for teachers and professionals.

Figure 6-4*Visual Representation of Responses to Question 7a*

7a. Which of the following best describes your reaction to the statement indicating that it is DESE's expectation that teachers in remote school districts teach from their classrooms (8/21/2020)?

122 responses



Disregard for Teacher Health. Various open ended survey responses consisted of respondents' perceived dismay at the disregard for teacher health in this decision. As one respondent put it, "It makes no sense to endanger teachers by bringing them into the buildings together only to teach students who are remote...." Another respondent commented, "What benefit is there to this except they don't view our lives as worthwhile? They want total control but meanwhile [the educational commissioner] sits at home with his corporate pals and dictates teachers die."

Other responses voiced similar concerns such as "I was worried about safety and didn't feel like my safety was being prioritized;" "Disregard for teacher safety was a slap in the face, and the decision was given from a remote office???" and "...The only benefit I would be getting would be to sit alone in my classroom in front of a screen, which is exactly what I have at home. Additionally, in school there are shared spaces (restrooms, planning areas) that then posed a higher risk of COVID transmission."

Still others pointed out specific issues such as the decision not taking “into account communities with high transmission” or “the many schools with unaddressed ventilation problems” in addition to the risk of teachers being “exposed to COVID-19 from others in the building.” Such responses highlighting the lack of concern for teacher well-being in inadequate physical conditions in conjunction with the thread of COVID-19 correspond to Santoro’s (2018) source of demoralization that teachers are expendable.

Unnecessary. Various responses noted the unnecessary nature of this mandate if students were not going to be in the building. For example, respondents respectively wrote, “It’s a pandemic! No need to teach from empty buildings and putting educators at risk,” “No need to be in the building if you can do it from home,” and “no need — indifferent to teacher health concerns.” Another response commented, “There is absolutely no reason that teachers would need to teach from their classroom if teaching remotely...ESPECIALLY when DESE office is closed and working remotely, as well as most of the state/country/world! If the work can be done from home, there is no reason, other than control, for having people come to an empty building to teach!”

Others commented on how it was especially unnecessary considering unfavorable building conditions. One respondent said, “Waste of time and energy to teach in an empty classroom with unreliable internet...” Another noted, “It was completely unnecessary given that there were few resources in buildings teachers could use that they don’t have at home AND considering most of us were mandated to empty our classrooms at the end of SY 19-20. In some instances, it also asked employees from green communities to come to red (or vice versa), exposing them unnecessarily...” Still another commented,

“...buildings are not well ventilated. Mostly I was enraged because it is putting teachers and staff at risk unnecessarily.”

Perceptions of the expendability of teachers’ health and well-being for little reward with no students in the school building struck teachers as particularly demoralizing, especially considering those making the decision were still remote themselves. DESE’s willingness to risk exposing teachers to COVID-19 in conjunction with their distance from the reality of building conditions contributed to a pervasive sense of disheartenment.

Lack of Trust/View of Teachers as Professionals. Perhaps the most common response to this mandate was the implication teachers perceived that they were not professionals who could be trusted to do their work without supervision. Table 6-8 contains some of such responses.

Table 6-8

Responses Commenting on Lack of Trust

This was purely a power-grab. There are no reasons in favor of this demand (except trying to control and infantilize teachers), and many reasons against this demand (lack of internet, shared/contaminated facilities, wasteful/environmentally unfriendly commutes). This demand was a sign of things to come, i.e., a statement that DESE hates, mistrusts, and resents teachers. A truly backward attitude from the organization that is supposed to be working for us and our families and children.
This action presented a perception that teachers lack the professional ability to operate without being overseen by a direct onsite supervisor...
There is literally no reason to take this risk other than mistrust...
DESE should trust teaching professionals to do what is best for them, their students, and their districts.
Other businesses respect their workers enough to let them work from home. DESE does not. It made me feel that they felt like they needed to babysit me to make sure I do my job.

<p>This decision, which came out a few days before schools started, felt like a slap in the face. It was a decision about surveillance and micromanaging teachers that set the tone for an awful year with respect to the relationship between teachers and DESE. They had an opportunity to inspire and collaborate with teachers as everyone planned to embark on an extremely complicated school year. Instead, they took the approach of absurdity that was out-of-touch with conditions of school buildings, valid health concerns, etc.</p>
<p>Most other professions were trusted to be professionals and teach from home. It appeared to send the message that we could not be trusted to do our jobs from home</p>
<p>I'm professional, but not to them.</p>
<p>...The mandate made me feel like I couldn't be trusted to do my job which is both ridiculous and insulting.</p>
<p>They do not think of teachers as professionals but as workers who need to be watched.</p>
<p>Why? DESE doesn't trust highly educated and dedicated professionals to do their jobs? Maybe if administration did theirs and did pop-ins to video lessons, they could have reported to DESE that we were actually WORKING.</p>
<p>If my husband can be trusted to do his job from home while working remotely, why can't teachers be treated just as professionally?</p>
<p>This order perpetuated gender stereotypes that female employees cannot be trusted to work independently. This is a female dominated profession and to be given a directive like that when other remote workers were allowed to work from home was insulting.</p>
<p>This mandate assumed a stance that teachers are not working if they are not at school, dismissing all the hours and work teachers already do outside of contract hours. It also suggested that teachers cannot be trusted to account for their own work</p>
<p>This was only to exert power and unnecessarily monitor teachers; it showed the true lack of trust that they have for teachers to do their jobs without an administrator there to watch them.</p>

Within their responses, teachers raise issues of power, gender, control, and resentment toward teachers. Many responses noted that this “expectation” released by the SEA indicated a sense of “mistrust.” Other responses expanded on the mistrust by pointing out that other fields did not face the same lack of respect and were encouraged to work from home. Additionally, comments about “surveillance,” “micromanag[ement],” and “supervision” reveal the way teachers felt that this decision not only degraded their work but fundamentally failed to recognize teacher labor that occurs “outside of contract

hours” in order for classrooms and schools to run properly. These comments align with Santoro’s (2018) identification of the treatment of teachers as expendable and the rejection of teacher expertise and initiative as sources of demoralization.

Reactions to DESE’S Decision to Continue with Standardized Testing

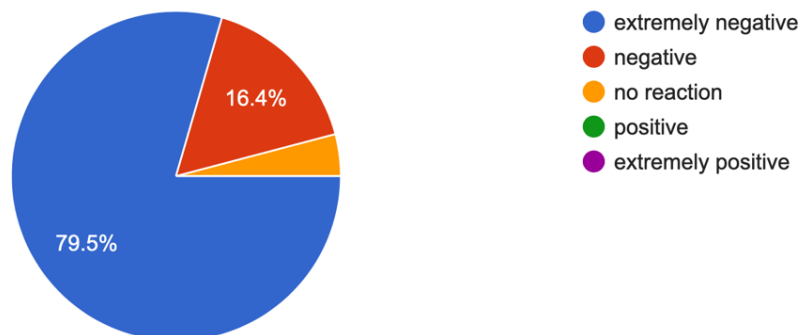
In response to question 7c, a required multiple-choice question that asked teachers about their reactions to DESE’s plans to continue with standardized testing during this school year, 79.5% of respondents said, “extremely negative,” 16.4% said “negative,” 4.1% said “no reaction,” and 0% said “positive” or “extremely positive.” Figure 6-5 contains a visual representation of this data. 86 out of the total 122 respondents (70.5%) submitted an open response to elaborate on their multiple-choice answers to question 7c that raised mental health concerns resulting from this decision, the loss of instructional time, and the contradicting policy messages that revealed the SEA’s distance from the classroom.

Figure 6-5

Visual Representation of Responses to Question 7c

7c. Which of the following best describes your reaction to DESE's plans to continue with standardized testing during this school year (1/5/2021)?

122 responses



Mental Health Concerns. Responses reacting to the decision to continue with standardized testing included concern for the negative impact that testing could have on student mental health. Many responses focused on standardized testing being an added stress that students did not need at the moment. Table 6-9 contains some of these responses.

Table 6-9

Reactions of Concern about Student Mental Health

With all the social and emotional needs of the students as well as all the changing transitions brought about by this pandemic, standardized testing should be the LAST thing on DESE’s agenda if they truly cared about students.
Our students have been living through a pandemic. There seem to be far more important things to focus on rather than standardized testing.
While standardized testing does not take place at my grade level, I can imagine and the immense pressure and stress it places on students and teachers in an already stressful situation.
I have nothing against these tests in general, but kids are juggling enough this year as is.
I teach 10 th grade, a grade that takes ELA tests. My students are stressed, anxiety ridden, and extremely tired from the strains of this year. They are living through a pandemic – how can we possibly think that taking standardized tests (that have been shown to be racist and classist) will be helpful in any way this year?
Students in a “normal” school year have so much stress, anxiety, and pressure to perform well on these tests. Now after over a year of their whole view on how they receive an education being flipped around and changes constantly happening along with the added stress and anxiety over the pandemic...they are still expected to take an exam that is just adding more stress to their plates.
So many of our students are barely holding on, this year has taken a huge toll on their emotional, physical and mental well-being. The tests would not only be another stressor, but I doubt the results would even be valid given the type of year we had.
...If mental health (and science) is really the driving factor in their response, then holding high-stakes standardized tests — which are incredibly stressful — is a ridiculous expectation.
My students, and my own children, have been through enough stress and pressure this year without this added anxiety. I have students who cry from the pressure of these tests during "normal" years, let alone this year when they've suffered losses of loved ones, housing and food insecurities, and other traumas. And to think that these tests can be administered to my remote students at home with any fidelity is laughable.

I do not feel that students are underprepared for standardized testing as a result of virtual school; however, it feels awfully unfair to expect students—many of whom have lost family members and/or financial security due to the ongoing pandemic—to perform at a level of performance typical to those students.
Children of all ages have been through enough.
Do they seriously think this is what kids need right now??? Or what their teachers want?!
The kids are stressed enough. Let them be.
There is no need to stress the students out further this year. We should be focusing on teaching, not testing.
...The kids are completely stressed out, and we are unprepared to conduct these tests. This is a money grabbing tactic by DESE and Pearson as well as grandstanding to show what a great job they have done during a pandemic! It's all PR for parents.
I feel that students have experienced more than enough trauma this year and believe it is nothing short of cruel to subject them to standardized testing. There is no useful data to be gained through this cruelty.
While I understand the need for scores, this year there are already enough disturbances to student schedules without standardized testing. Students are already experiencing social-emotional issues without additional test pressures as well as disruption to schedules.

Some responses commented on the fact that standardized testing would not provide any useful information this year, making the mental health toll for students taking the tests useless too. For example, one respondent wrote, “I don’t feel that DESE is being transparent about this decision. I truly cannot fathom why students need to be tested AGAIN (it’s not like other diagnostic tests aren’t happening...) during this stressful year.” Another wrote, “Standardized tests do not tell educators any new information, and they cause unnecessary anxiety for all. A child is much more than a number or a test score.” Still another wrote, “...The test results are not going to show us anything that teachers don’t already know. It’s a way to cause further harm and stress to students and teachers.” As this last response captures, teachers felt they were doing students a great disservice this year by prioritizing academics and test preparation at the expense of mental and social well-being. Adding to student distress comprises one of Santoro’s (2018) most

detrimental sources of demoralization for teachers. Interacting with students on a daily basis gave teachers a sense of student academic and social emotional status. This information was in conflict with the standardized testing mandate – one that teachers themselves had to carry out. Enacting a decision that teachers found harmful to students – in this case in the form of standardized testing – caused many teachers moral injury.

Loss of Instructional Time. The second most common sentiment among respondents' reactions was lamenting the loss of instructional time that comes with multiple days of standardized testing. For example, one teacher wrote, "With instruction time being at a premium, it seemed incongruous to use it for testing." Others similarly noted, "I have nothing against these tests in general, but kids are juggling enough this year as is taken time out of class for standardized testing is not productive for students," "There is no purpose to standardized testing except missing even MORE learning time," "It's misplaced time after a year of lost time," and "I mean, are you kidding? We are wasting needed time on useless standardized testing." Still others took on a slightly more urgent tone by stating, "I'd rather the precious time we have together this year NOT be taken up by testing..." "We need every day to teach since remote learning is more difficult," and "Time should be spent on instruction and social emotional learning to minimize the trauma response from such a chaotic year." As these responses suggest, standardized testing came at the expense of "needed," "precious time" that teachers preferred to spend on addressing components of SEL.

Others referenced the disruptive nature of state testing for no payoff as a relevant measurement tool. One respondent wrote, "It is disruptive and doesn't measure

achievement,” another wrote “Not efficient use of time because we have lost so much ground this year for them to waste time on a test. This data will not inform my instruction. The district benchmark will be a fairer reflection of student progress and provide actionable data for me and the school,” and still another wrote, “Students are under enough stress, and we should be spending this time teaching and supporting them. The results will not be surprising; students from the wealthier districts will do better, those from the lower SES districts that felt the brunt of the pandemic will have scores that reflect the strain on their families, their lack of adequate technology, and their lack of adequate Internet connections. I am not looking forward to losing time with the students to MCAS when there are so many more important things to do.”

Furthermore, some respondents commented on the loss of instructional time as well as the loss of time to connect with students as particularly harmful and disruptive to schedules. For example, “...My issue is that we JUST got the students back in-person and their needs are not only academic. They need to socialize and be engaged in discussion with their peers and teachers i.e., having human interactions. This is eating up limited time with them...” In addition to adding to student distress by enacting state policy, this decision rejects teachers’ expert knowledge of what students need at the moment (Santoro, 2018).

Contradictory, Out-of-Touch Messages. Another common theme among responses pointed out the contradictory nature of DESE’s use of concern for students’ mental health as a reason to push for an in-person return to school (discussed further in the next section); however, having students complete standardized testing did not seem to

support their mental health. Table 6-10 contains some of these responses.

Table 6-10

Responses Noting the Contradictory Messaging within Standardized Testing Decision

Supposedly the rush back is for mental health reasons (that they don't care about during school shootings or police violence) yet MCAS is being forced on kids with growing trauma? There's no reason unless they are legitimate sociopaths.
This declaration by DESE made it clear to me that the mental health of students is not at the center of their decision making, despite what they say.
DESE's insistence that we prep students for MCAS during a global pandemic is cruel...Don't do this while telling me that we have to get kids back into classrooms for their emotional wellbeing. Total hypocrisy.
The claim to care about student social emotional well-being yet the decision to persist with the useless, logistical nightmare of testing during which students will spend the time in schools not talking to others, stressed about a test, and not progressing their learning at all is extremely hypocritical.
If they proclaim to care about students' mental health, why are they forcing students to endure testing anxiety?
The stated concern over students' levels of stress and concern over their wellbeing (one of the main reasons we were told we have to get kids back in the building, vax or no vax) is completely negated by having us spend the entire year prepping for MCAS.
If the push to make all students return to school is truly about their emotional state and well-being, the first thing we do upon their return should NOT be to give them a standardized test. On what planet does that even make sense? And as far as needing to know "where kids are at," academically - why can't teachers' knowledge of these students and their years of experience be trusted to help find the knowledge gaps and fill them? Who is that data for besides their teachers? Follow the money and you'll see - it's a thinly veiled grab to justify more standardized testing and line the pockets of Pearson.
Using student mental health to justify 100 percent in person teaching and testing is disingenuous, destructive to morale and harmful to student mental health.
DESE and the governor claimed to be concerned about the social/emotional and mental health of students, which is all about appearances. Educators and schools have been screaming about the rise of mental health issues and concerns in schools for years, begging for funding for more support staff - all of which fell on deaf ears. But, when it was convenient...,they all of a sudden care?...

According to these responses, teachers took issue with DESE's perceived co-opting of student mental health concerns as justification for bringing teachers and

students back to physical school buildings despite the increased risk to COVID-19 exposure while causing students to undergo stressful state testing. As one response notes, teacher concerns for student social emotional well-being and mental health existed prior to the pandemic; however, when it served as a reason that fit the SEA's agenda, they suddenly invoked these concerns as important. At the same time that mental health was being used to justify full in-person reopening of schools, decisions to continue with standardized testing seemed to be at odds with teacher observation regarding what was best for students. This disconnect between what teachers experience regarding what is best for students and SEA decisions circles back to the common theme — policymaking forums' distance from classrooms — that pervaded responses to both this question as well as others in the study.

According to one respondent, “I can't imagine that a single person pushing for this has ever taught in a classroom in their career. It sounds so short-sighted.” Another respondent described the decision as “clueless to our student and teacher needs.” Responses also referenced that standardized testing was not aligned with the adaptations teachers in the classroom had made to address the unique challenges of the year. For example, “We completely revamped how we teach and assess and requiring standardized testing is not in line with that.” Still others referenced the decision being out-of-touch with the reality of what was going on with students and education in a larger sense. As one example, one respondent described it as, “blind to the reality of a global pandemic. It assumes a deficit model...rather than re-imagining what education really means at this time. It prioritizes standards/benchmarks that existed before the pandemic rather than a

focus on supporting children to flourish...?” The response continued, “This mandate made the priority not about the child but rather about meeting arbitrary benchmarks without regard to the real and urgent non-academic needs of our students.”

Decision to Mandate Full In-Person Learning by Certain Dates

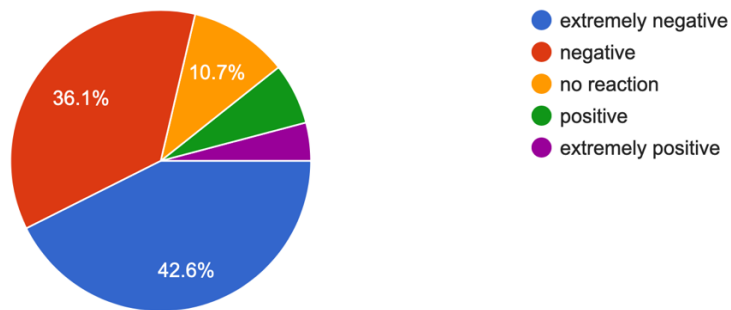
In response to question 7e, a required multiple-choice question that asked teachers about their reactions to DESE’s mandate that districts return to full in-person learning by certain dates, 42.6% of respondents said, “extremely negative,” 36.1% said “negative,” 10.7% said “no reaction,” 6.6% said “positive,” and 4.1% said “extremely positive.” Figure 6-6 serves as a visual representation of these data. 83 out of the total 122 respondents (68%) chose to submit an open response in the space provided for teachers to elaborate on their multiple-choice answers to question 7e. Major common themes centered around safety concerns.

Figure 6-6

Visual Representation of Responses to Question 7e

7e. Which of the following best describes your reaction to DESE's mandate that schools return to in person learning by certain dates this spring (3/9/2021)?

122 responses



Safety Concerns. Concerns for health and safety that a fully in-person return of students to school buildings presented comprised the majority of responses. Several responses commented specifically about concerns for the vulnerability of the younger age groups as infection rates within younger people were on the rise. For example, one response stated, “Another knee-jerk reaction. Numbers of COVID infections have been increasing in younger people...,” and another mentioned, “Arbitrary dates while variants rise, children are being hospitalized, and vaccines are impossible to come by...” Still others stated, “DESE made this decision when outbreaks at my school were highest. We were hybrid all year and it was working as well as it could. It seems senseless to make this decision as things were worsening;” “Massachusetts is still a high-risk state, and students are one of the highest transmission age groups;” and “Happy to have students back but fearful of covid for students and those not vaccinated.”

Other responses focused on the fact that teacher vaccination eligibility was not a consideration prior to mandating the full in-person return dates, sending the message that teacher health and safety was not valued. In fact, when the return dates were announced, teachers were not yet eligible for the vaccine; and even after they did become eligible, appointments were difficult to procure. Table 6-11 demonstrates responses about this particular matter.

Table 6-11

Responses Regarding Return Mandates Without Teacher Vaccine Eligibility

<p>*From the perspective of a pregnant teacher during a pandemic* While I believe the best place for students to learn is in the brick-and-mortar school setting, welcoming a full in-person return without the opportunity to be fully vaccinated before students' arrival and with a lack of space to properly accommodate students and their needs presents overwhelming feelings of anxiety.</p>
<p>Without teachers and students being fully vaccinated, it doesn't make sense.</p>
<p>Teachers were not yet vaccinated. That was out of our hands. They made it incredibly clear how little they value our actual lives. There was no rollout to help us... We are not valued. Our lives don't matter.</p>
<p>There was not enough time given to get all teachers fully vaccinated before the students were back in school.</p>
<p>Unfathomably cruel to do when the state barely prioritized teachers for vaccines, then criticized them for it.</p>
<p>My district has been a hotspot since the beginning. Teachers should have been allowed to be fully vaccinated first before putting our own families at risk.</p>
<p>...A thoughtful plan with contingencies should have been developed in July and the decision that the pandemic was basic over before vaccinations were available is and was uncalled for..</p>
<p>The approach was poor. I understand that they wanted to make sure no one lollygagged until the summer for a reset next year, but they didn't assuage fears of virus concerns when no one was vaccinated, and cases weren't exactly bottoming out at the time. Felt like bully tactics.</p>
<p>Massachusetts as a state failed its teachers because had teachers been able to access the vaccine prior to full in-person mandate, this would be less of an issue.</p>
<p>Complete abuse of power, especially when their own meetings were 6-feet apart. No push to vaccinate teachers either. The decision should be left to school committees and board of health.</p>
<p>All teachers should have had the opportunity to be vaccinated before the requirement.</p>
<p>The fact that this happened a week BEFORE President Biden mandated our vaccines (and 2 weeks before Governor Baker deigned to let it happen) demonstrated how political this was. The fact that there was no communication to high schools about number of minutes/COVID precautions until at least today (4/27) meant that this was impossible to plan for.</p>
<p>I truly do believe students NEED to be back in the building and I have always supported getting them there. It was less the push to get them back in school and more the way it was done – with threats from Commissioner Riley (working remotely from his home) and without ensuring teachers had access to vaccines – AND then doubling down and saying teachers were taking vaccines away from the most vulnerable population? It speaks volumes about the level of respect given to teachers. Clearly, very little.</p>

As these responses demonstrate, the SEA mandated in-person return dates with no thought about facilitating teachers' vaccinations — an action that would have gone a long way to communicating to teachers they are valued and assuaging concerns about risking their health as well as their family's health. Teachers described pushing for the in-person return date prior to making teachers eligible for vaccines not to mention making an honest effort to ensure they could fully receive them as “unfathomably cruel” and “bully tactics.”

Another concern related to safety was the inability of schools to facilitate a full in-person return without jeopardizing protocols for distancing. As one respondent put it, “Most schools and classrooms do not have the space to allow for full classes with CDC distances.” Another stated, “I am in favor of in person learning of safety protocols can be met. It is questionable whether they are being met, however.”

Discussion

This study examined teacher perceptions of the SEA's level of support, decisions, and subsequent impact on teacher's work throughout the pandemic using Santoro's (2011, 2018) demoralization as a framework to identify the profundity of the relationship between teachers and SEA policy, particularly in a time of crisis. Findings demonstrated teachers' extreme frustration with what they perceived as the SEA's out-of-touch and unsupportive policy mandates, dismissive stance toward teacher health, rejection of teacher voice and experience, and insistence on pursuing standardized testing. Per the findings, the lack of support and the decisions made during the pandemic exacerbated teachers' feelings of demoralization (Santoro, 2018) at a time when the pandemic has

demanded that teachers reinvent everything from curriculum, instructions, daily routines, etc. while attending to various logistical, academic, and social emotional needs of students via a variety of instructional models.

Although from a different time period, whether in reference to pressure, workload, or generally navigating a complicated situation, these responses echo Cohn et al.'s (1993) findings from their interview and survey-based study of teachers in Dade County Florida who expressed that when challenging circumstances occurred, teachers felt blamed and devalued by policy. The findings in this current study regarding the perception of policy as out-of-touch echo back to Cohn et al.'s (1993) observation that those making educational related decisions are often experientially and geographically removed from classrooms with renewed urgency. Correlating with Cohn et al.'s findings, "one theme that underlies much of the dissatisfaction teachers expressed was not being respected, listened to, or trusted...they believed their feelings and perspectives were often ignored or dismissed..." (p. 229). Similar to Cohn et al.'s analysis roughly three decades ago, increasing state control of schools and teachers positions teachers as low status or piece workers meant to carry out the policies and not use their own expertise and knowledge to create them.

Moreover, as demonstrated by teachers' reactions to the decision to continue with standardized testing and their concern for the impact it would have on student mental health reaffirms Cohn et al.'s (1993) observation that "the broader purposes and the interpersonal means that teachers formulate grow out of their experiences within classrooms filled with human beings" versus "the narrower goals...of pressures for

academic outcomes” exerted by “state mandates and national policy” reveal that “the agendas and perspectives of the insiders and outsiders are often quite different” (p. 28).

While research has established the multitude of reasons as to why the inclusion of teachers’ voices in policy is essential (Lefstein et al., 2014; Hargreaves, 2011), findings of this study reveal a persistent disconnect between policymaking forums and teachers’ classroom realities through the context of an ongoing pandemic crisis. Teachers who responded to this study’s survey described their state educational agency most commonly as out-of-touch. Sentiments of frustration at the lack of value placed on teachers’ physical and emotional well-being, widespread demoralization, expendability, and reports of teachers considering leaving demand a revision of the way policy discourse conceptualizes teachers and the work of teaching.

Many of these themes reflect teachers’ perception of the SEA’s view of teachers as technicians or low status workers meant solely to carry out policy others create (Cohn et al., 1993; Cochran-Smith et al., 2009). As Ball (1993) posits, “Where are teachers in all this? Again, they are the objects of management relegated to the status of human resources; they do not participate, they are not included in the partnership, they are there to be managed” (p. 118).

As Atkinson et al. (2008) note, teaching is intellectually complex work that requires both foundational knowledge as well as the exercising of professional judgment, especially when what happens on the ground changes so much on a daily basis. Policy should respond in support of teachers’ efforts to exercise professional judgment to ever evolving circumstances on the ground versus act as a top-down, outdated mechanism that

add to the commotion and stress versus help to solve it. As such, the detailed nature of the findings in this study point to several implications for research and practice to take up in service of rehabilitating the relationship between state SEAs and other policymaking forums and teachers. As the overwhelming number of responses labeling the SEA as out-of-touch demands, there is a need for a better mechanism for two-way communication and policy that is responsive versus technocratic and hierarchical. Such a need points to the benefit of more interaction between policymakers, policy forums, and teachers as the adults in school buildings. The old system of these entities being separate no longer makes sense, and future research might investigate the efficacy of implementing more processes for policymaking forums to have extended information gathering periods with teachers and in schools to bridge the gap between policy and practice. Therefore, future research might inquire into the efficacy of ways to redesign communication channels between active teachers on the ground-level and policymaking forums.

Limitations

While the design of this study aimed to capture a wider swath of teacher voices via the survey methodology, it does come with limitations. First, this study seeks to capture a snapshot of teachers' reactions to SEA level policy throughout the pandemic in one state and does not seek to provide generalizable results (Guba, 1994). Second, the inability to ask follow-up questions based on teachers' responses also presents a limitation; however, the combination of quantitative results provided by the multiple-choice questions of the survey and qualitative data provided by the open response questions of the data serve to provide both a broader and more zoomed in sense of

teacher sentiments.

Conclusion

It is not an understatement to say that teacher attrition and dissatisfaction has reached “crisis levels” (Natanson, 2022, para. 2) as individual state and districts report shortages of hundreds and thousands. Such a crisis demands that society as a whole change the way we listen to and value the work of teachers. Ultimately, students suffer without qualified, dedicated teachers (Rockoff, 2004). Therefore, empowering versus devaluing teachers is critical to the success of the nation’s students.

APPENDIX 5-A: APRIL 2021 SURVEY FOR FULL-TIME, PUBLIC-SCHOOL TEACHERS IN MASSACHUSETTS

Dear Massachusetts Public School Teacher,

Thank you SO much for your consideration of this survey. As a current, full time high school ELA teacher myself, I know how much you have going on and how little time there is to do it all; so I greatly appreciate the time you spend on this survey should you choose to take it. I am also a doctoral student, and my goal is to capture the all too often missing voices of public-school teachers about their work during the pandemic as well as their perception of the portrayal of teachers by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), the news and the media. Below is a little more information. Thank you so much again for your consideration.

WHO IS THIS SURVEY FOR?

-Public school teachers of any grade, subject or level in Massachusetts who are currently teaching this 2020–2021 school year.

WHAT IS THE FORMAT AND TIME REQUIREMENT?

- Approximately 10 minutes to complete (could be longer depending on length and detail of optional responses)
- There are 13 required multiple-choice questions; some questions are followed by an optional space to elaborate.
- Completely voluntary and anonymous
- You will not receive any direct benefits in exchange for your participation.

HOW WILL MY SURVEY RESPONSE BE USED?

- I am conducting a research study with Institution Review Board approval that compares the perception of teachers and their work in the news, media, and through DESE decisions with teachers' own experience of their work. I will be analyzing survey responses in this study and research article to support the latter part of that comparison. While the content of your responses will constitute the data that I code and review, the survey is completely anonymous and no information identifying individuals or school districts will be included. As a current, public school teacher myself as well as a doctoral student, I feel strongly about spotlighting the voices of teachers in research.
- If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or if you have any complaints or concerns and want to speak with someone independent of the research team, you may contact the Boston University Charles River Campus IRB at 617-358-6115 or at irb@bu.edu. The IRB Office webpage has information where you can learn more about being a participant in research, and you can also complete a Participant Feedback Survey.
- If you have any questions about the survey, please do not hesitate to contact the Principal Investigator for this research study, Erin Nerlino, Boston University Doctoral

Candidate, at enerlino@bu.edu. You may also contact Erin's faculty advisor, Christina Dobbs, EdD, at cdobbs@bu.edu.

15. By clicking the box below, I confirm that I am a public-school teacher in the state of Massachusetts that is currently teaching during the 2020–2021 school year.

16. School District (optional)

17. What region of Massachusetts is your school located in?

- Western
- Southeast
- Central
- Northern
- Eastern

18. What grade, subject (if applicable), and level(s) (if applicable) do you teach?

19. How many years of teaching experience (including this year) do you have?

20. If you were to describe the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in three words, what would they be?

21. The following few questions ask you to describe your reaction(s), if you had any, to the decisions/statements that came out of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) this year. Each question below ask about a few of the major decisions. The memos detailing each decision can be found labeled by date in the folder linked below purely as a reference; it is NOT expected that you view them.

<https://drive.google.com/drive/u/2/folders/1XMgBt5yR-7ES2s5jWooVb7VhFWHbZ0XI>

7a. Which of the following best describes your reaction to the statement indicating that it is DESE's expectation that teachers in remote school districts teach from their classrooms (8/21/2020)?

- extremely negative
- negative
- no reaction
- positive
- extremely positive

7b. Feel free to elaborate on your response to the previous question (optional).

7c. Which of the following best describes your reaction to DESE's plans to continue with standardized testing during this school year (1/5/2021)?

- extremely negative
- negative
- no reaction
- positive
- extremely positive

7d. Feel free to elaborate on your response to the previous question (optional).

7e. Which of the following best describes your reaction to DESE's mandate that schools return to in-person learning by certain dates this spring (3/9/2021)?

- extremely negative
- negative
- no reaction
- positive
- extremely positive

7f. Feel free to elaborate on your response to the previous question (optional).

22. How did the decisions referenced in the previous questions (7a - f) impact, if at all, how you approach and/or view your work this year?

- extremely negatively impactful
- negatively impactful
- not impactful
- positively impactful
- extremely positive impactful

23. What level of support did you feel from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education this year as you navigated teaching during a pandemic?

- not supportive
- somewhat supportive
- very supportive

9a. Feel free to elaborate on your response to the previous question (optional).

24. Describe your overall perception of the portrayal of teachers in the news, media and public since last March and through the school reopening conversation as it continues to occur?

- gross mischaracterization of teachers
- somewhat of a mischaracterization of teachers

- no thoughts
- somewhat accurate characterization of teachers
- very accurate characterization of teachers

10a. Feel free to elaborate on your response to the previous question (optional).

25. Describe your reaction, if any, to the following statement: "The Baker-Polito Administration is dismayed that despite reasonable efforts to prioritize educator vaccinations, the teachers' unions continue to demand the Commonwealth take hundreds of thousands of vaccines away from the sickest, oldest and most vulnerable residents in Massachusetts and divert them to the unions' members, 95% of which are under age 65."

- extremely negative
- negative
- no reaction
- positive
- extremely positive

11a. Feel free to elaborate on your response to the previous question (optional).

26. How would you describe your experience teaching this year in comparison to your experience teaching prior to the pandemic? Check all that apply.

- extremely different
- somewhat different
- the same
- more stressful
- about the same level of stressful
- more challenging
- about the same level of challenging
- less challenging

12a. Feel free to elaborate on your response to the previous question (optional).

27. Are there any other comments you want to share regarding the work of teaching during the pandemic or the portrayal of teachers from DESE, the public or the media throughout the pandemic (optional)?

28. Type of school (optional).

- suburban
- urban
- rural
- other

APPENDIX 5-B: 8/21/2020 DESE MEMO FOR SURVEY

*News from Commissioner Jeffrey C. Riley & the
MA Department of Elementary and Secondary
Education*

On the Desktop - August 21, 2020**Teachers and Critical Support Staff in Remote Learning Districts, Vulnerable Students, Children of Teachers, Regional Calculations, and SOA Deadline**

Dear Superintendents, Charter School Leaders, and Assistant Superintendents,

I would like to update you on several topics:

1. Teachers and Critical Support Staff in Remote Learning Districts

It is the Department's expectation that teachers and critical support staff working in districts that have a remote learning model will report to their schools to work from the classrooms and educational spaces each day. Having teachers and critical support staff in the school will be beneficial to students, teachers, staff, and administrators for several reasons, including, but not limited to:

- It allows students to develop and maintain a level of familiarity with a classroom environment, which will be beneficial when students transition back to in-person instruction.
- It provides more consistency for students, which is especially important for some students, including some students with disabilities.
- It allows the teacher to have access to a broad range of instructional materials that may not be available in each teacher's home, allowing the teacher to provide differentiated modes of instruction.
- It assures that the teacher will have reliable internet access and quicker access to technical support and/or backup devices, when necessary.
- It allows teachers to collaborate more easily with colleagues.
- It allows administrators to provide better support for teachers, where they are able to more readily observe instruction and provide real-time feedback and coaching.
- It allows administrators to monitor the level and amount of instruction students receive throughout the course of the school day, ensuring a more consistent experience across classrooms and student cohorts.

- It allows school teams to more quickly problem solve challenges, such as allocating a substitute for an absent teacher, quickly assigning additional support for a class or individual student, and resolving technology issues.
- It provides teachers with dedicated workspace in which to carry out their work duties, which will support equitable working environments for educators.

2. **In-Person Instruction for Vulnerable Students**

If a district receives a red designation for a high average daily case rate in the [Department of Public Health's weekly update](#), the decision to continue to provide in-person instruction to vulnerable students (including those with disabilities, English learners, and students who have not engaged with remote learning) needs to be made at the local level. Solely receiving a red designation does not in any way automatically mean that all in-person services have to be discontinued. In fact, DESE recommends that districts continue to provide as much in-person instruction as possible to vulnerable students using the key safety protocols outlined in our [reopening guidance](#) (*download*).

3. **Children of Teachers**

Recognizing the critical need districts are facing to staff their schools this fall, and to provide support to teachers, I am making the following recommendations:

- (i) Our guidance has previously indicated that districts that have adopted a hybrid or remote learning model should prioritize high-needs students for full-time, in-person learning. I recommend these districts also further prioritize children of teachers for full-time, in-person instruction when feasible. Since the models will vary by district, districts will decide locally what constitutes full-time instruction for these students.
- (ii) I am also recommending that districts that are providing remote instruction allow teachers who are reporting to their schools to provide instruction to bring their own children to school with them for child care purposes, if feasible.

More detailed information will be forthcoming.

4. **Regional Calculations**

The Department of Public Health (DPH) recently began releasing a [weekly, color-coded health metric](#) for all municipalities in the Commonwealth. The majority of school districts align directly with a municipality on the DPH weekly report. However, there are many districts that serve students from multiple municipalities (e.g. regional school districts, charter schools, and vocational districts).

In an effort to assist all districts and schools in aligning with the DPH weekly report, DESE has assigned all school districts a “key municipality” (the city you should reference) that should be used to determine their alignment to the DPH health metric. [The “key municipality” in the attached file \(download\)](#) was derived by selecting the municipality where the greatest percentage of enrolled students in the district reside. While the DPH weekly report will change depending on the course of the virus, the assigned key municipality will remain constant for the 2020–21 school year (i.e. districts should look to this municipality for reference throughout the school year). If you have any questions about this item, please email Associate Commissioner Rob Curtin at Robert.C.Curtin@mass.gov.

5. New SOA Plan Deadline

To allow districts to focus on reopening plans and delivery of robust instruction, consistent with [St. 2020, Ch. 56, § 9](#), I am extending the deadline for school districts and charter schools to submit Student Opportunity Act (SOA) plans. The new deadline is **Friday, January 15, 2021**. We thank those who have already submitted their SOA plans. There will be opportunities to amend the SOA plans if necessary. Current guidance on SOA plans is at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/commissioner/spec-advisories/soa.html>, and guidance specific to charter schools is at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/acct.html?section=soa-plan-temp>.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey C. Riley
Commissioner

APPENDIX 5-C: 1/5/2021 DESE MEMO FOR SURVEY

***Massachusetts Department of
Elementary and Secondary Education***

Jeffrey C. Riley
Commissioner

MEMORANDUM

To: Superintendents, Charter School Leaders, Collaborative Directors, and Leaders of Approved Special Education Schools
From: Jeffrey C. Riley, Commissioner
Date: January 5, 2021
Subject: 2021 Assessment and Accountability Update

As students return to classes this week, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) remains committed to supporting school and district leaders who are managing the challenges of teaching and learning during the pandemic. The return from winter break marks the start of testing windows for federal and state-mandated student assessments. Administering these assessments, including the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) and the ACCESS language proficiency test for English learners, can be logistically complex even in ordinary times. Administering these assessments this year is understandably a concern for local communities.

The sudden shift to remote learning last spring, and the continuation of hybrid/remote learning this school year has likely led to significant learning loss for students around the country. The extent of the learning loss in the Commonwealth is not yet known.

The Department continues to believe the MCAS test is a crucial diagnostic tool to promote student success and educational equity and we remain committed to administering the assessment this spring, while recognizing the need for adjustments and flexibility.

A national study released last month by [McKinsey & Co.](#) estimates the shift to remote learning in spring 2020 set back all students' academic progress by months. The study predicts learning losses will escalate as students remain in remote/hybrid models this academic year. The magnitude of this potential impact demands that we accurately and fairly assess the level of student learning this school year.

The MCAS tests will give Massachusetts educators and families critical insight into academic losses that need to be addressed this spring and summer, and data on which students and districts have been most impacted by the disruptions in schooling. Administering the MCAS will make it possible to reliably assess students' progress in relation to curriculum standards.

Besides serving this essential diagnostic purpose, the high school MCAS also affirms that students are prepared for college and careers, in addition to providing access to college scholarships.

The Department will take the following steps to modify testing this spring:

- **Modify the Competency Determination for the Class of 2021:** The make-up MCAS administration window for 12th graders scheduled to open on January 14th will be postponed. I will recommend to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) that the competency determination (CD) requirement be modified in English language arts and mathematics for students in the Class of 2021 who have not yet earned their CD.¹ The recommended modification would allow students to receive their CD by passing an approved course and demonstrating competency in that subject in lieu of a qualifying MCAS score. Seniors who still want to take the tests may take them later this school year. Members of the class of 2021 will have opportunities to receive additional academic support this spring and summer.
- **Shortened MCAS testing time for Grades 3–8:** The Department will significantly reduce testing time for students in grades 3–8 through a session sampling approach, in which each student will take only a portion of each MCAS assessment in each subject. This modified MCAS administration will preserve the validity and reliability of the test at the school, district, and state levels. When combined with other data points, this approach will provide meaningful diagnostic data at the individual student level.
- **Accountability relief:** I will not name or recommend to the Board any new underperforming or chronically underperforming districts or schools in the upcoming school year. The Department will also consider any available flexibilities provided by the U.S. Department of Education.
- **Extending ACCESS testing window:** ACCESS testing for English language proficiency is key to strengthening education programs for English learners. As previously announced, the Department is extending the testing window for ACCESS, which normally concludes in February, until May 20, 2021.
- **MCAS Biology test:** The Department has provided school districts flexibility on scheduling the high school biology MCAS test. Schools may offer the biology MCAS to first-time 9th graders in June, instead of or in addition to offering it in February.

These testing flexibilities announced today are one part of the Department's broader goals to support districts and schools in the second half of the current school year, during the summer, and into next school year. In the coming weeks, the Department will release additional information, including preliminary plans and resources to support districts and schools in addressing student learning loss.

###

¹ In spring 2020, the Board modified the science CD requirement for the classes of 2020–2023.

APPENDIX 5-D: 3/9/2021 DESE MEMO FOR SURVEY

*News from Commissioner Jeffrey C. Riley & the
MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education*

On the Desktop - March 9, 2021

Guidance on In-Person Learning Requirements

Dear Superintendents, Charter School Leaders, and Leaders of Collaboratives,

On March 5, 2021, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adopted amendments to the Student Learning Time regulations on an emergency basis. These amendments provide me with the authority to determine when hybrid and remote models will no longer count toward meeting the required student learning time hours. 603 CMR 27.08(2)(d). Consistent with these amendments, and following consultation with medical experts and state health officials, I am exercising that authority as follows:

- **Elementary school phase (grades K–5):** For **elementary schools**, hybrid and remote learning models will no longer count towards meeting the required student learning time hours as of **Monday, April 5, 2021**. As a result, districts and schools are required to shift their learning model for **elementary school** grade levels to full-time, in-person instruction five days per week effective **Monday, April 5, 2021**.
- **Middle school phase (grades 6–8):** For **middle schools**, hybrid and remote learning models will no longer count towards meeting the required student learning time hours as of **Wednesday, April 28, 2021**. As a result, districts and schools will be required to shift their learning model for **middle school** grade levels to full-time, in-person instruction five days per week, effective **Wednesday, April 28, 2021**.

- **High school phase (grades 9–12):** We will announce the details and timing of the high school phase of the plan in April. Districts will be provided with at least two weeks in advance of the date for high school students to return to full-time, in-person instruction, but should start making such plans now.

Accompanying this message is a guidance document that provides detailed information to support districts in the transition to full in-person learning.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey C. Riley
Commissioner

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CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

This chapter reflects on the research of the three studies included in this dissertation. The first section reviews the aims and main findings of each study. The second section discusses limitations of the studies. The third section analyzes the findings together as a whole. Finally, the last section recaps future directions for research and practice.

Summary of Findings

As a whole, these three studies aim to capture teachers' experiences of their work during the pandemic in comparison to policy's conceptualizations of teaching during the pandemic. The study in chapter four aimed to capture teachers' experiences of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic and the ways that the pandemic impacted teachers' professional demands and responsibilities. Findings include that in comparison to teaching prior to the pandemic, teachers described teaching during the pandemic as extremely different, more stressful, and more challenging. As such, the pandemic contributed to sources of demoralization and greatly intensified teachers' work by increasing workload and stress and heightening instability on a consistent basis. The study in chapter five set out to examine portrayals of teachers and teaching in policy memos that the SEA created during the pandemic. Using Cochran-Smith et al.'s (2009) images of knowledge, teachers and teaching, and teacher learning and Jabbar et al.'s (2021) framework of economic imperialism, the findings of this study include that the policy documents contained images of teachers-as-technicians and teaching as solely technical work; an overemphasis on standardized testing as a result of narrow, economic

means and purposes of schooling; and a lack of acknowledgement of teacher safety and well-being.

Lastly, the study in chapter six set out to examine teachers' perceptions of the level of support they received from state leadership and governance and the impact these perceptions had on teachers' experience teaching during the pandemic. Findings include that teachers overwhelmingly felt a lack of support from state leadership, teachers were frustrated with lack of concern for their health and safety, and teachers perceived that policy coming from the state governance negatively impacted their work during the pandemic.

Limitations

The studies within this dissertation had several limitations, starting geographically with the fact that all data collected and analyzed was from MA. While containing the data and analysis to one state allowed for a deeper look into teachers' reactions within the state in conjunction with policy documents from the state, teachers' experiences might differ in other states as well as the images within other state policy documents. Second, while article one and three express the benefits of using a survey methodology for the purposes of this work, the inability to follow up on teachers' responses constitutes another limitation of the study. Lastly, while it is beyond the scope of article two and this dissertation to dig deeper into the SEA's construction of these policy memos and rationale behind their use of certain images and language, the use of documents limits the analysis to what was stated in the SEA memos and does not get at the intentions of the institution creating the memos.

Reflecting on the Three Studies

Reflecting on the studies all together, article one revealed the way that teachers' experienced changes in the professional demands of their work during the pandemic. These changes increased demoralization and intensification. As one teacher response put it, "I've cried so much this year. We teachers have been made to do three times the work that we're used to doing while being criticized for not wanting to work in unsafe conditions." In contrast to the complexified demands of teaching that teachers articulated in article one, article two surfaced images of teachers as low status workers that policy memos released by the SEA during the pandemic contain. These images greatly oversimplified the work of teaching while the teachers' responses in article one demonstrated the uncertainty teachers navigated and the immense stress they endured to deal with the complex challenges the pandemic produced. The tension between teachers' experiences – juggling multiplying complexities, increased student academic, social, and emotional needs, etc. – and the depiction of teaching in policy memos – as work that required surveillance and monitorization down to the minute – plainly shows the significant gap between policy and practice. This gap has existed for centuries; however, the urgency added by the pandemic created a demoralization that has arguably never been seen before. As one teacher wrote, "I am replaceable if I die or choose to protect myself..."

Whereas article one and two exposed the discrepancy between teachers' experiences of their work during the pandemic and policy's conception of their work, article three details teachers' reactions to the policy decisions within the memos. One of

the main findings of article three documented teachers' reactions to the 08/21/2020 policy memo that stated the SEA's expectation that teachers in remote school districts teach from their classrooms. 87.7% of respondents indicated that their reaction to this expectation was "extremely negative" or "negative." As one teacher wrote, "What benefit is there to this except they don't view our lives as worthwhile? They want total control..." Another wrote, "This was only to exert power and unnecessarily monitor teachers; it shows the true lack of trust that they have for teachers to do their jobs without an administrator there to watch them." These teacher responses from article three echo the analysis in article two that examines policy's tight surveillance and control of teachers work and physical location.

Another main finding of article three delineated teachers' reactions to the SEA's decision in the 01/05/2021 memo to continue with standardized testing. 95.% of respondents indicated their reaction to this decision was "extremely negative" or "negative." Analysis of the policy memos in article two that announced this decision surfaced evidence of economic imperialism that posited testing as the only way to diagnose "academic losses" and gauge student readiness for the workforce. Teachers in article three expressed concerns for student mental health as articulated by one teacher: "...students have experienced more than enough trauma this year and believe it is nothing short of cruel to subject them to standardized testing." Teacher responses also noted concern for a loss of instructional time and the lack of validity that testing results would have at the time. As one teacher put it, "I can't imagine that a single person pushing for this has ever taught in a classroom in their career." This response, emanating from the

teacher's work with students day in and day out, highlighted the distance between policy and practice.

Furthermore, article three chronicled teachers' reactions to the SEA decision in the 03/09/2021 memo that mandated schools return to fully in-person learning by certain dates in the spring of 2021. 78.7% of respondents had an "extremely negative" or "negative" reaction, noting safety concerns and the fact that the SEA did not coordinate this return with any type of vaccine eligibility for teachers. As article two showed, the SEA policy memos framed vaccine eligibility as an extra layer of protection that was non-essential for teachers. Teachers' reactions consisted of "...they made it incredibly clear how little they value our actual lives. There was no rollout to help us...we are not valued. Our lives don't matter." Other teacher open responses indicated that teachers agreed that in-person learning should be a priority but to not coordinate that effort while protecting teachers demonstrated just how expendable teachers were in the eyes of policymakers.

Lastly, article three depicted that teachers' most common descriptor of the SEA was "out-of-touch." The actual word "out-of-touch" occurred with the most frequency. Additionally, when words were grouped together by common theme, the theme "out-of-touch" was also the most popular. To a related end, 92.6% of respondents chose "not supportive" as their answer to a survey question asking the level of support they felt from the SEA as they navigated teaching during the pandemic. Considering the drastic one-sidedness of these responses, it is far past time to re-construct the way that policy and practice interact – not with superficial measures that tokenize a few teacher voices but

with legitimate, profound changes to the policy structures. See the “Future Directions” section below.

The fading of the immediate intensity and exigency of the pandemic does not mean that teachers do not still remember their experiences and perception of treatment during the crisis. This global mega-event has pulled back the curtains to the way that policy conceptualizes teaching. Studies one and three in this dissertation quoted teachers perceiving themselves as expendable in the eyes of policymakers. As one teacher wrote, “It will be very difficult to recover from the emotional damage this year has caused. It has changed how I feel about being a teacher. I know we have no value...” These sentiments expressed by teachers do not go away just because COVID-19 infection rates have decreased, and mask mandates have been repealed. And the consequences, as national shortages show (Marsh, 2023; Schmitt et al., 2022) and teacher responses in these studies corroborate — “I’m exhausted, feel devalued, and will be leaving the profession” — are significant. As one teacher responded, “This year was extremely deflating, and it made me really torn over whether I think that the teaching profession will ever see better days.” Prioritizing hope is paramount to the health of the profession, and consequently, the achievement and well-being of students.

Future Directions

As mentioned above, the combination of studies in this dissertation points to the need to re-construct the relationship between policy and practice within the educational realm. This process should start with asking teachers — many teachers — what ideas they have for a system that better supports their work and circulates their local knowledge

of practice and experience. The feasibility of this starting point, while generally the opposite of the way much top-down policy is enacted, might be messy; however, as an educational community, it is time to not settle for simply “returning to normal.” It is time to acknowledge the lasting impact of the pandemic and adapt and re-envision schooling in a way that accounts for the experience educators had and reflects the changing priorities and times. As such, future research might inquire into what this re-envisioning looks like and assess the potential of various solutions — teacher representatives from each school composing an arm of each state educational agency or set residency requirements for policymakers to spend in schools throughout the state with sufficient time to get a day-to-day picture of classroom realities.

In coordination with the priorities of implementing new mechanisms for practice to inform policy, future research might also take up the work of analyzing policymaking institutions to include audits of structures that might lend themselves to perpetuate negative, oversimplified images of teachers and teaching. The persistence of these images raises questions about the forces that keep them in place. Investigating such forces directly through research might yield more success in dismantling them.

APPENDIX A: April 2021 Survey for Full-Time, Public-School Teachers in Massachusetts

Dear Massachusetts Public School Teacher,

Thank you SO much for your consideration of this survey. As a current, full time high school ELA teacher myself, I know how much you have going on and how little time there is to do it all; so I greatly appreciate the time you spend on this survey should you choose to take it. I am also a doctoral student, and my goal is to capture the all too often missing voices of public-school teachers about their work during the pandemic as well as their perception of the portrayal of teachers by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), the news and the media. Below is a little more information. Thank you so much again for your consideration.

WHO IS THIS SURVEY FOR?

-Public school teachers of any grade, subject or level in Massachusetts who are currently teaching this 2020–2021 school year.

WHAT IS THE FORMAT AND TIME REQUIREMENT?

- Approximately 10 minutes to complete (could be longer depending on length and detail of optional responses)
- There are 13 required multiple-choice questions; some questions are followed by an optional space to elaborate.
- Completely voluntary and anonymous
- You will not receive any direct benefits in exchange for your participation.

HOW WILL MY SURVEY RESPONSE BE USED?

- I am conducting a research study with Institution Review Board approval that compares the perception of teachers and their work in the news, media, and through DESE decisions with teachers' own experience of their work. I will be analyzing survey responses in this study and research article to support the latter part of that comparison. While the content of your responses will constitute the data that I code and review, the survey is completely anonymous and no information identifying individuals or school districts will be included. As a current, public school teacher myself as well as a doctoral student, I feel strongly about spotlighting the voices of teachers in research.
- If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, or if you have any complaints or concerns and want to speak with someone independent of the research team, you may contact the Boston University Charles River Campus IRB at 617-358-6115 or at irb@bu.edu. The IRB Office webpage has information where you can learn more about being a participant in research, and you can also complete a Participant Feedback Survey.
- If you have any questions about the survey, please do not hesitate to contact the Principal Investigator for this research study, Erin Nerlino, Boston University Doctoral

Candidate, at enerlino@bu.edu. You may also contact Erin's faculty advisor, Christina Dobbs, EdD, at cdobbs@bu.edu.

29. By clicking the box below, I confirm that I am a public-school teacher in the state of Massachusetts that is currently teaching during the 2020–2021 school year.

30. School District (optional)

31. What region of Massachusetts is your school located in?

- Western
- Southeast
- Central
- Northern
- Eastern

32. What grade, subject (if applicable), and level(s) (if applicable) do you teach?

33. How many years of teaching experience (including this year) do you have?

34. If you were to describe the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in three words, what would they be?

35. The following few questions ask you to describe your reaction(s), if you had any, to the decisions/statements that came out of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) this year. Each question below ask about a few of the major decisions. The memos detailing each decision can be found labeled by date in the folder linked below purely as a reference; it is NOT expected that you view them.

<https://drive.google.com/drive/u/2/folders/1XMgBt5yR-7ES2s5jWooVb7VhFWHbZ0XI>

7a. Which of the following best describes your reaction to the statement indicating that it is DESE's expectation that teachers in remote school districts teach from their classrooms (8/21/2020)?

- extremely negative
- negative
- no reaction
- positive
- extremely positive

7b. Feel free to elaborate on your response to the previous question (optional).

7c. Which of the following best describes your reaction to DESE's plans to continue with standardized testing during this school year (1/5/2021)?

- extremely negative
- negative
- no reaction
- positive
- extremely positive

7d. Feel free to elaborate on your response to the previous question (optional).

7e. Which of the following best describes your reaction to DESE's mandate that schools return to in-person learning by certain dates this spring (3/9/2021)?

- extremely negative
- negative
- no reaction
- positive
- extremely positive

7f. Feel free to elaborate on your response to the previous question (optional).

36. How did the decisions referenced in the previous questions (7a – f) impact, if at all, how you approach and/or view your work this year?

- extremely negatively impactful
- negatively impactful
- not impactful
- positively impactful
- extremely positive impactful

37. What level of support did you feel from the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education this year as you navigated teaching during a pandemic?

- not supportive
- somewhat supportive
- very supportive

9a. Feel free to elaborate on your response to the previous question (optional).

38. Describe your overall perception of the portrayal of teachers in the news, media and public since last March and through the school reopening conversation as it continues to occur?

- gross mischaracterization of teachers
- somewhat of a mischaracterization of teachers

- no thoughts
- somewhat accurate characterization of teachers
- very accurate characterization of teachers

10a. Feel free to elaborate on your response to the previous question (optional).

39. Describe your reaction, if any, to the following statement: "The Baker-Polito Administration is dismayed that despite reasonable efforts to prioritize educator vaccinations, the teachers' unions continue to demand the Commonwealth take hundreds of thousands of vaccines away from the sickest, oldest and most vulnerable residents in Massachusetts and divert them to the unions' members, 95% of which are under age 65."

- extremely negative
- negative
- no reaction
- positive
- extremely positive

11a. Feel free to elaborate on your response to the previous question (optional).

40. How would you describe your experience teaching this year in comparison to your experience teaching prior to the pandemic? Check all that apply.

- extremely different
- somewhat different
- the same
- more stressful
- about the same level of stressful
- more challenging
- about the same level of challenging
- less challenging

12a. Feel free to elaborate on your response to the previous question (optional).

41. Are there any other comments you want to share regarding the work of teaching during the pandemic or the portrayal of teachers from DESE, the public or the media throughout the pandemic (optional)?

42. Type of school (optional).

- suburban
- urban
- rural
- other

APPENDIX B: 8/21/2020 DESE Memo for Survey



*News from Commissioner Jeffrey C. Riley & the
MA Department of Elementary and Secondary
Education*

On the Desktop - August 21, 2020

Teachers and Critical Support Staff in Remote Learning Districts, Vulnerable Students, Children of Teachers, Regional Calculations, and SOA Deadline

Dear Superintendents, Charter School Leaders, and Assistant Superintendents,

I would like to update you on several topics:

2. Teachers and Critical Support Staff in Remote Learning Districts

It is the Department's expectation that teachers and critical support staff working in districts that have a remote learning model will report to their schools to work from the classrooms and educational spaces each day. Having teachers and critical support staff in the school will be beneficial to students, teachers, staff, and administrators for several reasons, including, but not limited to:

- It allows students to develop and maintain a level of familiarity with a classroom environment, which will be beneficial when students transition back to in-person instruction.
- It provides more consistency for students, which is especially important for some students, including some students with disabilities.
- It allows the teacher to have access to a broad range of instructional materials that may not be available in each teacher's home, allowing the teacher to provide differentiated modes of instruction.
- It assures that the teacher will have reliable internet access and quicker access to technical support and/or backup devices, when necessary.
- It allows teachers to collaborate more easily with colleagues.
- It allows administrators to provide better support for teachers, where they are able to more readily observe instruction and provide real-time feedback and coaching.

- It allows administrators to monitor the level and amount of instruction students receive throughout the course of the school day, ensuring a more consistent experience across classrooms and student cohorts.
- It allows school teams to more quickly problem solve challenges, such as allocating a substitute for an absent teacher, quickly assigning additional support for a class or individual student, and resolving technology issues.
- It provides teachers with dedicated workspace in which to carry out their work duties, which will support equitable working environments for educators.

3. **In-Person Instruction for Vulnerable Students**

If a district receives a red designation for a high average daily case rate in the [Department of Public Health's weekly update](#), the decision to continue to provide in-person instruction to vulnerable students (including those with disabilities, English learners, and students who have not engaged with remote learning) needs to be made at the local level. Solely receiving a red designation does not in any way automatically mean that all in-person services have to be discontinued. In fact, DESE recommends that districts continue to provide as much in-person instruction as possible to vulnerable students using the key safety protocols outlined in our [reopening guidance](#) (*download*).

4. **Children of Teachers**

Recognizing the critical need districts are facing to staff their schools this fall, and to provide support to teachers, I am making the following recommendations:

- (i) Our guidance has previously indicated that districts that have adopted a hybrid or remote learning model should prioritize high-needs students for full-time, in-person learning. I recommend these districts also further prioritize children of teachers for full-time, in-person instruction when feasible. Since the models will vary by district, districts will decide locally what constitutes full-time instruction for these students.
- (ii) I am also recommending that districts that are providing remote instruction allow teachers who are reporting to their schools to provide instruction to bring their own children to school with them for child care purposes, if feasible.

More detailed information will be forthcoming.

5. **Regional Calculations**

The Department of Public Health (DPH) recently began releasing a [weekly, color-coded health metric](#) for all municipalities in the Commonwealth. The majority of school districts align directly with a municipality on the DPH weekly report. However, there are many districts that serve students from multiple

municipalities (e.g. regional school districts, charter schools, and vocational districts).

In an effort to assist all districts and schools in aligning with the DPH weekly report, DESE has assigned all school districts a “key municipality” (the city you should reference) that should be used to determine their alignment to the DPH health metric. [The “key municipality” in the attached file](#) (*download*) was derived by selecting the municipality where the greatest percentage of enrolled students in the district reside. While the DPH weekly report will change depending on the course of the virus, the assigned key municipality will remain constant for the 2020-21 school year (i.e. districts should look to this municipality for reference throughout the school year). If you have any questions about this item, please email Associate Commissioner Rob Curtin at Robert.C.Curtin@mass.gov.

6. New SOA Plan Deadline

To allow districts to focus on reopening plans and delivery of robust instruction, consistent with [St. 2020, Ch. 56, § 9](#), I am extending the deadline for school districts and charter schools to submit Student Opportunity Act (SOA) plans. The new deadline is **Friday, January 15, 2021**. We thank those who have already submitted their SOA plans. There will be opportunities to amend the SOA plans if necessary. Current guidance on SOA plans is at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/commissioner/spec-advisories/soa.html>, and guidance specific to charter schools is at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/charter/acct.html?section=soa-plan-temp>.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey C. Riley
Commissioner

APPENDIX C: 01/05/2021: DESE Memo for Survey



Jeffrey C. Riley
Commissioner

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

MEMORANDUM

To: Superintendents, Charter School Leaders, Collaborative Directors, and Leaders of Approved Special Education Schools
From: Jeffrey C. Riley, Commissioner
Date: January 5, 2021
Subject: 2021 Assessment and Accountability Update

As students return to classes this week, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (Department) remains committed to supporting school and district leaders who are managing the challenges of teaching and learning during the pandemic. The return from winter break marks the start of testing windows for federal and state-mandated student assessments. Administering these assessments, including the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) and the ACCESS language proficiency test for English learners, can be logistically complex even in ordinary times. Administering these assessments this year is understandably a concern for local communities.

The sudden shift to remote learning last spring, and the continuation of hybrid/remote learning this school year has likely led to significant learning loss for students around the country. The extent of the learning loss in the Commonwealth is not yet known.

The Department continues to believe the MCAS test is a crucial diagnostic tool to promote student success and educational equity and we remain committed to administering the assessment this spring, while recognizing the need for adjustments and flexibility.

A national study released last month by [McKinsey & Co.](#) estimates the shift to remote learning in spring 2020 set back all students' academic progress by months. The study

predicts learning losses will escalate as students remain in remote/hybrid models this academic year. The magnitude of this potential impact demands that we accurately and fairly assess the level of student learning this school year.

The MCAS tests will give Massachusetts educators and families critical insight into academic losses that need to be addressed this spring and summer, and data on which students and districts have been most impacted by the disruptions in schooling. Administering the MCAS will make it possible to reliably assess students' progress in relation to curriculum standards.

Besides serving this essential diagnostic purpose, the high school MCAS also affirms that students are prepared for college and careers, in addition to providing access to college scholarships.

The Department will take the following steps to modify testing this spring:

- **Modify the Competency Determination for the Class of 2021:** The make-up MCAS administration window for 12th graders scheduled to open on January 14th will be postponed. I will recommend to the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (Board) that the competency determination (CD) requirement be modified in English language arts and mathematics for students in the Class of 2021 who have not yet earned their CD.¹ The recommended modification would allow students to receive their CD by passing an approved course and demonstrating competency in that subject in lieu of a qualifying MCAS score. Seniors who still want to take the tests may take them later this school year. Members of the class of 2021 will have opportunities to receive additional academic support this spring and summer.
- **Shortened MCAS testing time for Grades 3–8:** The Department will significantly reduce testing time for students in grades 3–8 through a session sampling approach, in which each student will take only a portion of each MCAS assessment in each subject. This modified MCAS administration will preserve the validity and reliability of the test at the school, district, and state levels. When combined with other data points, this approach will provide meaningful diagnostic data at the individual student level.
- **Accountability relief:** I will not name or recommend to the Board any new underperforming or chronically underperforming districts or schools in the upcoming school year. The Department will also consider any available flexibilities provided by the U.S. Department of Education.
- **Extending ACCESS testing window:** ACCESS testing for English language proficiency is key to strengthening education programs for English learners. As previously announced, the Department is extending the testing window for ACCESS, which normally concludes in February, until May 20, 2021.

- **MCAS Biology test:** The Department has provided school districts flexibility on scheduling the high school biology MCAS test. Schools may offer the biology MCAS to first-time 9th graders in June, instead of or in addition to offering it in February.

These testing flexibilities announced today are one part of the Department's broader goals to support districts and schools in the second half of the current school year, during the summer, and into next school year. In the coming weeks, the Department will release additional information, including preliminary plans and resources to support districts and schools in addressing student learning loss.

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¹ In spring 2020, the Board modified the science CD requirement for the classes of 2020–2023.

APPENDIX D: 03/09/2021 DESE Memo for Survey

*News from Commissioner Jeffrey C. Riley & the
MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education*

On the Desktop - March 9, 2021

Guidance on In-Person Learning Requirements

Dear Superintendents, Charter School Leaders, and Leaders of Collaboratives,

On March 5, 2021, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adopted amendments to the Student Learning Time regulations on an emergency basis. These amendments provide me with the authority to determine when hybrid and remote models will no longer count toward meeting the required student learning time hours. 603 CMR 27.08(2)(d). Consistent with these amendments, and following consultation with medical experts and state health officials, I am exercising that authority as follows:

- **Elementary school phase (grades K–5):** For **elementary schools**, hybrid and remote learning models will no longer count towards meeting the required student learning time hours as of **Monday, April 5, 2021**. As a result, districts and schools are required to shift their learning model for **elementary school** grade levels to full-time, in-person instruction five days per week effective **Monday, April 5, 2021**.
- **Middle school phase (grades 6–8):** For **middle schools**, hybrid and remote learning models will no longer count towards meeting the required student learning time hours as of **Wednesday, April 28, 2021**. As a result, districts and schools will be required to shift their learning model for **middle school** grade levels to full-time, in-person instruction five days per week, effective **Wednesday, April 28, 2021**.
- **High school phase (grades 9–12):** We will announce the details and timing of the high school phase of the plan in April. Districts will be provided with at least two

weeks in advance of the date for high school students to return to full-time, in-person instruction, but should start making such plans now.

Accompanying this message is a guidance document that provides detailed information to support districts in the transition to full in-person learning.

Sincerely,

Jeffrey C. Riley
Commissioner

APPENDIX E: Statement from the Office of Charlie Baker Regarding Teacher Vaccine Eligibility

Read the full statement from Tim Buckley, a senior advisor for Governor Charlie Baker:

“The Baker-Polito Administration is dismayed that despite reasonable efforts to prioritize educator vaccinations, the teachers’ unions continue to demand the Commonwealth take hundreds of thousands of vaccines away from the sickest, oldest and most vulnerable residents in Massachusetts and divert them to the unions’ members, 95% of which are under age 65. Building an entirely new, exclusive, teacher-only, school by school distribution system would make Massachusetts’ vaccination system slower, less equitable and far more complicated. The Administration implores the unions to do the math: the state only gets 150,000 first doses every week. There are about one million eligible residents comprised of educators, older adults and people with serious health conditions. Diverting hundreds of thousands of vaccines to an exclusive, teacher-only distribution system would deny the most vulnerable and the most disproportionately impacted residents hundreds of thousands of vaccines. The Baker-Polito Administration does not support diverting hundreds of thousands of vaccines away from the populations most likely to suffer serious illness and most likely to lose their lives to COVID.”

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CURRICULUM VITAE

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EDUCATION

Boston University, Wheelock College; Boston, MA (August 2023)
Ed.D. in Curriculum & Teaching, English Education specialization

Boston College, Lynch School of Education; Chestnut Hill, MA (August 2015)
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Boston College, College of Arts and Sciences; Chestnut Hill, MA (May 2013)
Bachelor of Arts in English, Secondary Education
Recipient of the Secondary Education Award (given to the student in the Morrissey College of Arts and Sciences who has completed the Secondary Education Program and has achieved distinguished success as a student teacher)

HIGH SCHOOL TEACHING EXPERIENCE

- *Named Massachusetts State Teacher of the Year Semifinalist 2024
- *Professional License, 8–12 English teacher in Massachusetts – 470122 (10 years);
- *Supervisor/Director license for English 8–12

English Teacher: King Philip Regional HS; Wrentham, MA (09/2013–current)

Curriculum and Teaching

- Taught a variety of secondary English classes (11 standard level, 11 Honors, AP Language & Composition, 10 standard level, 12 Honors)
- Revised and created 11th grade standard level curriculum that incorporated a complimentary approach between fiction and nonfiction based on changes to the Massachusetts ELA State frameworks
- Collaborated with two other AP Language teachers to adjust 2017–2018 curriculum units based on breakdown and analysis of 2016–17 College Board release of AP data, implemented adjustments on teacher level during 2017–2018 school year
- Organized, led and collaborated with other 12th grade Honors level teachers in the revision of 12th grade curriculum at the request of ELA Department Chairperson. Revisions included scaffolding curriculum based on a backwards design of skills to ensure student acquisition of composition skills including: organization, depth of analysis, use of rhetorical strategies, and conscious awareness of academic voice
- Collaborated and created Common Course Assessments for 10th grade standard level, 11th grade standard level, 11th grade Honors level, 11th grade AP Language, and 12th grade Honors level to ensure equity of student learning and student acquisition of skills across the department

-Proposed and developed pilot course with one other teacher for students seeking employment directly after high school graduation

-Proposed, developed and taught a new Honors English elective that focuses on issues of social justice

Advisor Roles & Related Projects

-Appointed as mentor to new teacher during the 2017–2018, 2018–2019, & 2021–2022 school year, responsible for overseeing development of teacher, addressing pedagogical and management issues, attending monthly school-wide mentor meetings, having daily check-ins with mentee on order to guide through a myriad of first-year educator issues

-Appointed as founding advisor of People of Prosperity – the first club specifically for students of color at the school that works to serve the needs of these students, promote them in leadership opportunities, and support their academic and social success in a predominantly White school

-Conducted an anti-harassment bystander intervention training with five students as both a school-wide effort to reduce harassment and will be presenting this program at the Connections Conference 2023

-Gave the keynote address at the MIAA/MSAA DEI Symposium on May 5, 2023, with four student bystander trainers about the anti-harassment bystander intervention training

COLLEGE TEACHING & SUPERVISING EXPERIENCE

Online Facilitator for Classroom Assessment CT556; Boston University (Summer 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022)

-Facilitated master's students' understanding of the design, implementation, and review of formative and summative assessments; graded student work; monitored discussion forums; met with students regarding progress

Teaching Fellow for Introduction to Education ED110; Boston University (Fall 2019, Spring 2020)

-Led discussion sections of students to deepen understanding of course content, explore various topics in education (social justice, classroom management, democracy, etc.); supervised and observed students at field placement at local Boston Public School; graded student papers and inquiry projects

Online Facilitator for Historical Literacy SO566; Boston University (Fall 2021)

-Facilitated master's students' understanding of the significance of historical literacy across curriculum areas; graded student work; monitored discussion forums; met with students regarding progress

Full Practicum Student Teacher Supervisor; Boston University (Spring 2020)

-Observed two full time student teaching placements at two Boston area schools to ensure completion of licensure program; mentored student teachers in lesson delivery, classroom management, and professional standards; completed paperwork and process for MA CAP system

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Research Assistant; Boston University, Advisor – Dr. Christine Leider (Fall 2019)

-Collected data related to 2018 state EL percentage, state certification requirements for ESL, bilingual education and SEI licenses, and state professional teaching standards for all fifty states

PUBLICATIONS

Leider, C.M., Colombo, M.W., & **Nerlino, E.** (2021). Decentralization, teacher quality, and the education of English learners: Do state education agencies effectively prepare teachers of ELs? *Educational Policy Analysis Archives*, 29(100), 1–44.
<https://epaa.asu.edu/index.php/epaa/article/view/5279>

Nerlino, E. (2023). ‘Annoying but helpful...’: Action research examining secondary students’ active reading of assigned texts. *Educational Action Research*, X(X), X–X.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/09650792.2023.2209609>.

Nerlino, E. (2023). ‘A powerful synergy’: The benefits and challenges of completing a doctoral program part-time while teaching full-time. *Studies in Graduate and Postdoctoral Education*. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SGPE-08-2022-0053>

Nerlino, E. (2020). A Theoretical Grounding of Teacher Leadership. *Journal of Professional Capital and Community*, 5(2), 1–25.
<https://www.emerald.com/insight/content/doi/10.1108/JPCC-12-2019-0034/full/html>

Nerlino, E. (2023). From heroes to scapegoats: Teacher perceptions of the media and public’s portrayal of teachers during COVID-19. *The Educational Forum*.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/00131725.2023.2169874>

Nerlino, E. (2023). Making curriculum matter to students. *Educational Leadership*, 80(5), 68–72. <https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/making-curriculum-matter-to-students>.

Nerlino, E. (2022). Navigating ‘the chaos’: Teacher considerations while adapting curriculum and instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 22(4), 433–447. <https://doi.org/10.1108/QRJ-02-2022-0026>

Nerlino, E. (2020). Using Roxane Gay’s “Peculiar Benefits” Essay on Privilege. *English Journal*, 110(2), 95–97.

Nerlino, E. (2022). Shared philosophies, conflict and critical reflection: Developing productive teacher collaboration. *Journal of Practitioner Research*, 7(2), 1–22.
<https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/jpr/vol7/iss2/3/>

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

Nerlino, E. (May 2023). *An autoethnographic examination of challenges and experiences from the first decade of a teacher's career*. Presented at the annual meeting of the American Education Research Association. Virtual.

Nerlino, E. (May 2023). *Perceptions of teachers and teaching: A document analysis of state policy memos during COVID-19*. Presented at the annual meeting of the American Education Research Association. Virtual.

Nerlino, E. (April 2022). *"Beyond frustrated": Teacher perceptions of state educational agency support and policies during COVID-19*. Presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association. San Diego.

Nerlino, E. (April 2022). *Navigating the "chaos": Teacher considerations while adapting curriculum and instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic*. Presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association. San Diego.

Nerlino, E., Leider, C.M., & Colombo, M. (May 2020). *State Certification: Are secondary content teachers prepared to teach ELs?* Presentation to be presented at the annual meeting of the Massachusetts Educators of English Language Learners. Framingham, MA. (conference cancelled).**

Leider, C.M., **Nerlino, E.** (April 2021). *Do State Education Agencies Hold Teachers Accountable for Meeting the Needs of Multilingual Learners?* Presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association. Virtual.

Martinelle, R., Funk, L., Foye, B., **Nerlino, E.** *Towards a Culturally Competent Pedagogy of Teacher Education: Tensions in Teaching International Pre-Service Teachers*. Presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association. Virtual.

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