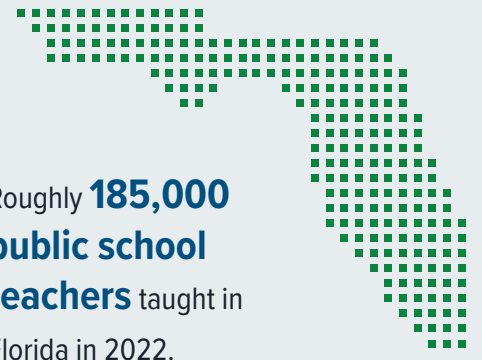


Teacher Perceptions on How to (Re)build School Community Well-Being in the Aftermath of COVID-19



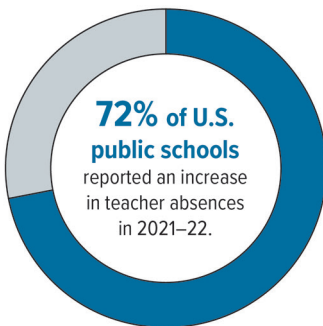
Educator well-being—and working in a school environment that nurtures well-being—is critical to engaging students and supporting their emotional needs and academic success.¹ In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic placed a unique and intense set of stressors on educators; it contributed to disruptions in individual and schoolwide educator well-being. There is evidence that demonstrates a sharp increase in educator retirements and resignations, likely prompted by these stressors. Listening to teachers and acting on their lived experiences is key to creating a supportive school environment.

Roughly **185,000** public school teachers taught in Florida in 2022.

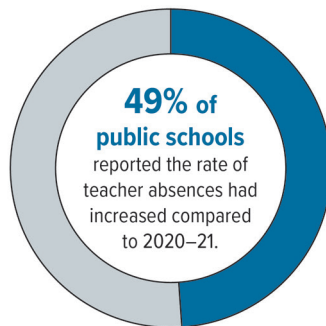


CRITICAL TEACHER ABSENCES DURING COVID-19

Compared to a typical school year before the COVID-19 pandemic



During the 2021–22 school year



Across the state in 2021, teaching position vacancies reached **4,961** and increased to **6,006** in 2022.

Nearly all public schools (99%) reported challenges in obtaining substitute teachers to cover these increased absences. Schools reported relying on administrators (74%), nonteaching staff (71%), and other teachers on their preparation period (68%) to cover classes.²



Miami-Dade County has **344** vacancies as of September 2022.

¹ RAND Corporation. (2022). *Restoring teacher and principal well-being is an essential step for rebuilding schools: Findings from the State of the American Teachers and State of the American Principal surveys* (RR-A1108-4). https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1108-4.html

² National Center for Education Statistics. (2022). *School responses to COVID-19*. <https://ies.ed.gov/schoolsurvey/>; Sachs, S. (2022, September 21). Florida teacher vacancies down to 4,442, according to FDOE. *WFLA.com*. <https://www.wfla.com/news/education/florida-teacher-vacancies-down-to-4442-according-to-fdoe/>

School culture and climate comprise one key factor to retaining teachers. Although many statistics highlight postpandemic educator shortages³ and challenges for teachers, students, and families returning to school, very little is known about what teachers are experiencing. Understanding what teachers are going through is essential to uncovering areas of need and developing solutions to address those needs.

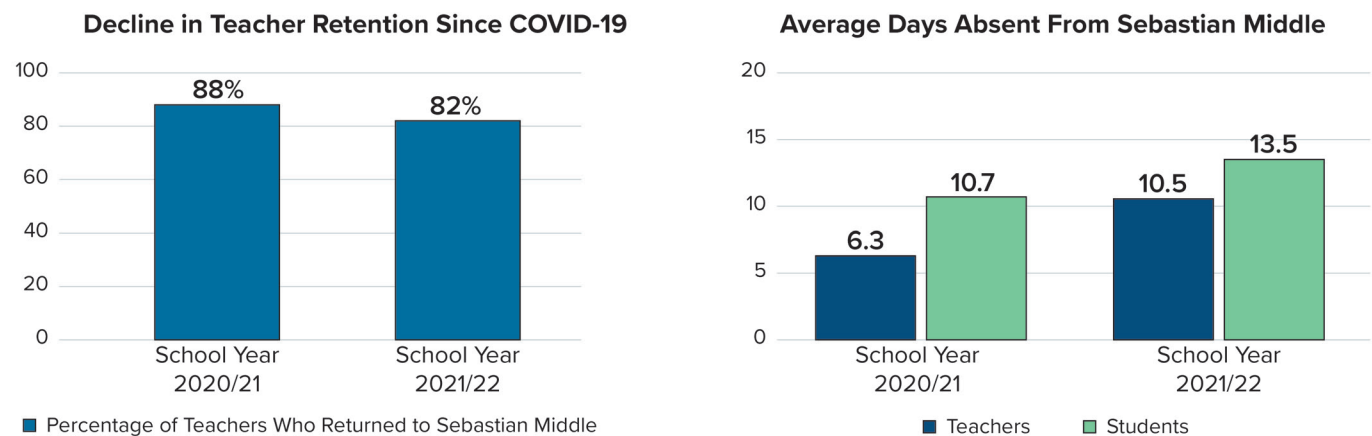
The Miami–Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) research–practice partnership (RPP)⁴ conducted a pilot study to understand individual educator experiences; the RPP recognized that school and district leaders must listen to and understand educators’ needs in the postpandemic environment. The study, piloted in a single middle school, gathered information about middle school teachers’ perceptions of challenges related to COVID-19 disruptions. The findings are based on an analysis of qualitative data from focus groups and one-on-one interviews with seven teachers⁵ at Sebastian Middle School.⁶

Overview of District and School-Level Student Enrollment Characteristics, 2021–22

Students	Latino	African American	White	Low-Income	Special Education	English Learners
Miami-Dade County Public Schools	73%	19%	6%	73%	25%	17%
Sebastian Middle School	97%	1%	2%	73%	18%	18%

RELEVANT FINDINGS

Mirroring national trends, teacher and student absences in the middle school increased on average annually by 4 days since prior to the pandemic for teachers and 3 days for students.



³ Berkshire, J. C. (2022, February 21). Why teachers are dropping out. *The Nation*. <https://www.thenation.com/article/society/teachers-covid-culture-wars/>; Steiner, E.D., & Woo, A. (2021). *Job-related stress threatens the teacher supply: Key findings from the 2021 State of the U.S. Teacher survey* (RR-A1108-1). RAND Corporation. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1108-1.html

⁴ The M-DCPS RPP is a collaboration between Miami–Dade County Public Schools and the University of Miami (Florida).

⁵ 16% African American, 34% Latino, and 50% non-Hispanic White; of those, 67% were female and 33% male.

⁶ Sebastian Middle is a pseudonym for the M-DCPS middle school selected for this study.

Teacher perspectives converged on challenges to and recommendations for improving the school environment and home–school involvement in ways that can increase student and teacher well-being. Four key teacher perceptions relate to areas of great influence within Sebastian Middle: school environment, student well-being, teacher well-being, and home-school involvement. The key findings are listed along with representative verbatim quotes from teachers.



School Environment

1. Changes to school leadership during COVID-19 disruptions presented a challenge for teachers in the development and follow-through of academic and behavioral expectations for students.

“This past year was a little challenging: We had two new administrators at the same time, and it was very hard, because you know, there was no continuity from the year before to this year. Everything was kind of dismantled, and it’s just a different style of administration. It was hard for all of us.”



Home-School Involvement

2. Teachers identified challenges with parent communication and parent–child communication that impacted student engagement with home learning during COVID-19 disruptions.

“Even sometimes trying to make contact with parents, it was very, very difficult because... the kids are home alone. Parents are at work. So, when you call them at work, they’re like, ‘Hey, I’m not at home, you know? I’m going to try to get in touch with them, to see if they could log in.’ Then, even when they got in touch with the students to log in, they still weren’t logging in.”



Student Well-Being

3. The impacts on student well-being identified by teachers included challenges with (re)socialization and behavior and mental health support needs that affected student engagement.

There “was a platform where [students] had the opportunity to kind of speak their mind. Okay, whatever they were going through there, [they] were able to express it. It was like a no-judgment zone...my kids, like, they opened up, you know, like things that [they] were telling you, like, oh my God. I mean, I’m not a counselor, but how do I, you know, help this kid that you can see? I need to help you know.”



Teacher Well-Being

4. Teachers identified another major challenge: They believe expectations of teachers increased without additional support. They said the loss of teachers and staff contributed to an increase in responsibility for remaining teachers.

“The math department [had] a lot of losses...It had an impact on the teachers themselves as far as stress. [For example] all of a sudden the amount of kids that [teachers were] responsible for...IEPs, you know, almost doubled, and you don’t want to be picking up the slack and somebody else’s IEP in the middle of the year. It’s kind of a stressful situation.”