

4-2022

## Teaching in the Pandemic: New Teachers' Perceptions

Marlene Correia

Gia Renaud

Follow this and additional works at: [https://vc.bridgew.edu/br\\_rev](https://vc.bridgew.edu/br_rev)

---

### Recommended Citation

Correia, Marlene and Renaud, Gia (2022). Teaching in the Pandemic: New Teachers' Perceptions.

*Bridgewater Review*, 40(1), 32-34.

Available at: [https://vc.bridgew.edu/br\\_rev/vol40/iss1/10](https://vc.bridgew.edu/br_rev/vol40/iss1/10)

This item is available as part of Virtual Commons, the open-access institutional repository of Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts.

---

# Teaching in the Pandemic: New Teachers' Perceptions

Marlene Correia and Gia Renaud

## Introduction

What impact will this pandemic have on our new teachers? That's the burning question on the minds of administrators and teacher preparation faculty. It's a critical question because the education landscape already contends with many challenges. Increasing numbers of students with special needs, English learners, low performing schools, teacher shortages, and lack of diversity in the teaching force are just some of the factors that make retaining dynamic, highly trained, and diverse teachers more necessary than ever (Reitman and Karge 2017).

Even before the pandemic, researchers predicted that teacher shortages would continue to grow in the coming years (Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond 2017). New teachers typically have an adjustment period of at least two years, but the pandemic has thrust these novice educators into complex teaching scenarios that even veteran teachers find difficult to manage. Several factors have been associated with new teacher attrition rates, such as teacher support systems and positive working conditions. As education prep faculty and researchers, we wanted to know what were the novice teachers' experiences with learning to teach during unprecedented times, and how did this impact their outlook on education as a profession?

A survey, designed by the authors, was developed to capture information from first- and second-year educators who taught during the 2019–2020 and/or 2020–2021 academic years. The survey consisted of 37 questions aimed at gathering their perceptions in three areas: supports, challenges, and the impact on their future careers after teaching

during the pandemic. The survey was distributed widely, but the response rate was smaller than we hoped (n=26). This return rate was not surprising, as we could speculate that this was “one more thing” on the plates of new teachers. However, the data collected still provided valuable insight. All of the respondents to the survey were teaching in a public-school setting and all were in a grade from pre-k through six. Twelve respondents reported being in urban districts, 10 in the suburbs, and four in rural communities. All of the new teachers experienced teaching



*Image 1: A collaboration between a recent graduate, Caitlin Guimond (right), and her mentor, Joyce Direito (left). Joyce Direito graduated from BSU. (Photo Credit: Joyce Direito and Caitlin Guimond).*

fully remote and/or some combination of remote and face-to-face instruction. Fourteen of them indicated they had some prior experience with remote teaching during their student teaching experience. The others had no experience with this model. The remainder of this essay describes the common themes expressed by the new teachers in the survey data.

## Relationships Matter

Relationships matter. Whether it's a formal or informal relationship, it has an impact on retention. Effective induction support and mentoring programs are necessary tools impacting new teacher retention, which in turn supports student success (Carver-Thomas and Darling-Hammond 2017; Long 2010; Ponds 2020). During a pandemic, this support system proves valuable. Orientation sessions typically are held at the beginning of each year where new faculty join veteran staff who can make them feel welcome as part of the district community. Covid-19 impacted these vital first impression sessions by either canceling or transforming them to virtual settings. Out of the 26 respondents to our survey, only 12 indicated participating in an orientation, with three of these being held remotely. In addition, only 16 of the 26 new teachers were assigned a formal mentor by their district. Of those that were assigned a mentor, the majority (13) reported this experience as being valuable to them during the pandemic. Those that were not assigned a mentor sought out their own through grade level colleagues, family members in education, or prior professors.

Many educators reported that their mentors helped with online teaching. One teacher commented, “My mentor was my co-teacher during hybrid learning. I felt confident in my teaching because I had her support through everything.” Mentors were also a source of emotional support. Another teacher shared, “It was wonderful to talk to

---

someone daily about my concerns and questions.” And sometimes the mentors simply provided confidence. One respondent expressed, “When it came to curriculum, scope, and sequence, my mentor provided me with spreadsheets and sent me on my way to develop my own lesson plans. I appreciated her trust in my abilities as a teacher.”

of the year. This gave us insight on new technologies and allowed us to explore them before testing them with students.” One teacher commented, “We have a new program for English Language Arts, and because it was brand new, we received multiple formal trainings on it. During this, we were able to be trained on how to use the

(Google Meets or Zoom). They were also concerned about pedagogical practices and teaching strategies online. One teacher commented that they wish they knew, “How to pace and reteach in a synchronous setting with 20 students in person and 18 online with many on Individualized Education Plans (IEP’s) and Accommodation (504) plans.” Out of the 26 respondents, nine mentioned wishing they knew more about classroom and behavior management while in person and teaching students online. However, they recognized that some of their veteran colleagues needed more training with tech tools. One respondent stated, “Not everyone knew how to navigate and use these programs (Google Meets and Classroom), although it was not a concern for me.” While PD proved to be a support, it was also a challenge in that 15 of the 26 respondents reported not getting any adequate training of any type prior to the start of school.

---

## Teacher retention and burnout continue to be real concerns. Burnout isn’t just about stress, it can also be attributed to loneliness and isolation.

---

However, even those who had supportive mentors felt the impact of the pandemic, noting that even their mentors had a sense of “newness” to them because everything they were being asked to do was nothing like they had ever done before. They understood that their mentors could “only do so much while trying to survive it (Covid teaching) themselves.” It became imperative that the mentoring was mutual. One respondent summed it up perfectly by stating, “This year was too difficult to feel fully benefitted.”

### Professional Development is Essential

With the onset of Covid-19, districts turned their attention to planning professional development (PD) for their staff that centered around the use of remote platforms for learning and teaching like Google Meets and Zoom. Some new teachers on the survey reported that the additional days at the start of the school year just for PD was invaluable. One claimed, “We did seminars/refreshers on frequently used programs in the district at the beginning

online version of the program, which prepped us for the virtual learning portion of pandemic teaching.” Similar comments were made by others who felt PD assisted them in prepping for accessing the curriculum online, and one respondent referred to meeting with her colleagues for a “crash course” on how to use the math programs online. In some cases, PD consisted of collaborative planning time for staff. A teacher shared, “The school was very helpful in allowing all remote teachers planning time with each other to brainstorm ideas of how we would do specific things.” This proved to be a significant source of support for new teachers who were afforded that opportunity. In fact, 22 out of the 26 respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were supported by other teachers in comparison to only 18 feeling this way about administrators.

What we found interesting was that these new teacher respondents were more concerned about PD on the curriculum (online versions of materials being used in the classroom) and less about the online teaching platforms

### Emotional Resiliency is Key

According to Aguilar, “Recognizing the power of emotions and cultivating emotional resilience can help schools retain teachers” (24). In fact, Aguilar (2018) noted that building emotional resiliency can be more complex than building pedagogical knowledge and skills. This spotlight on emotions could not be more applicable than in this time of pandemic teaching. A common theme that emerged from our data was that new teachers built their own emotional resiliency during this experience. They recognized that it was a unique first-year teaching situation and many of them embraced it. Several described themselves as “stronger,” “more flexible,” and “passionate.” They were openly vulnerable in front of their students. An educator shared, “This is my first class, and I am proud of them. With all the challenges we have gone through, we have really grown together as a class.” They commented about the patience students had with them as they “stumbled through

---

New teachers typically have an adjustment period of at least two years, but the pandemic has thrust these novice educators into complex teaching scenarios that even veteran teachers find difficult to manage.

---

new technology.” And just when they thought they would simply “shut down,” they pushed that much harder for the students.

Veteran educators also contributed to building the emotional resiliency of their newest colleagues by listening and collaborating. At least one respondent reported that the district environment, with a divide between teachers/union and administrators about how to handle the crisis, made them “navigate through negative attitudes and ensure I did not take on their emotions.” This comment reminded us that new teachers are handling emotions around teaching, managing relationships, proving accountability, and maneuvering systems like union and administrative negotiations, all on top of a raging pandemic that threatened their own health and that of their students.

This comment by a respondent left us feeling hopeful for the emotional resiliency of new teachers in a pandemic:

I never want to let a little of my fear of teaching in a pandemic go. What I mean by that is the sense of being new and willing to try and learn new things. I want to always be flexible without it rocking my world because that is what helped me the most; just being okay with change!

## Outlook Towards the Profession

Teacher retention has always been relevant, but is especially so now, given the pandemic and the uncertain times. Before the pandemic, one-third of teachers left the profession in the first five years (Callahan 2016). The pandemic has added to already strained teacher workloads. Teacher retention and burnout continue to be real concerns. Burnout isn’t just about stress, it can also be attributed to loneliness and isolation (Aguilar 2018).

In our study, 72% of the teachers we surveyed planned on staying in the profession, 20% were unsure, and 8% planned on leaving. One teacher who was unsure that she wanted to return made the following comment:

I have realized that being a teacher means that you are alone. What I mean by that is I am unsupported by administration and the world around you has turned against teachers since some parents had to be teachers on their own. I believe that there will be a teacher shortage in a few years in response to how teachers have been treated during Covid.

Another teacher commented that it was just “not what they thought it would be.”

However, many had a positive outlook with comments such as, “It made me

realize how much we can do remotely,” and “I think if I can get through this, I can get through anything!” These are the teachers that will lead us to the next chapter where remote learning will surely have a place in our public education.

New teachers enter the profession optimistic and eager to begin their careers. The pandemic has presented new challenges, but the ambition of new teachers is still inspiring. An optimistic teacher from our survey commented, “Every year coming up will (hopefully) be easier!” It is evident that to retain teachers during the pandemic, relationship building and professional development are more important than ever. Developing emotional resilience is a key skill for new teachers to persevere in the profession. As teacher educators, we need to continue to prepare teacher candidates for the unusual challenges that are ahead. Overall, the passion of our new teachers continues to inspire us as teacher educators.



*Marlene Correia is Assistant Professor in the Department of Elementary and Early Childhood Education.*



*Gia Renaud is Associate Professor in the Department of Elementary and Early Childhood Education.*