AN EXPLORATORY CASE STUDY OF EDUCATORS' EXPERIENCES WITH COVID-19: COMPASSION FATIGUE AS AN UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCE OF A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

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Abstract

This exploratory qualitative case study analyzed educator perceptions and experiences with compassion fatigue during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The researcher explored educators' experiences during the COVID-19 Pandemic, educator responsibilities during the pandemic, to what extent educators experienced compassion fatigue, and educator perceptions of what was needed to support them from these experiences. In this study, 15 general education teachers and five administrators were interviewed utilizing semi-structured interview protocols with data analyzed utilizing NVivo. It was found that secondary traumatic stress (STS) or compassion fatigue (CF) were experienced by participants and can have a major role to play in educators' well-being and effectiveness. The pandemic compounded the difficulties educators faced on a daily basis. The findings also revealed that educators experienced a lack of work-life balance, decline in health, and new professional challenges during the pandemic. As a result, educators felt helpless, apathetic, and emotionally and physically exhausted. Therefore, the findings indicate that participants in this study experienced elements of compassion fatigue during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

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APPROVAL PAGE

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AN EXPLORATORY CASE STUDY OF EDUCATORS' EXPERIENCES

WITH COVID-19: COMPASSION FATIGUE

AS AN UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCE OF A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

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Dedication

My dissertation is dedicated to my central team of support. My parents, Daniel and Barbara, are my unwavering foundation. Daniel and Barbara are my cornerstones, who instilled in me the many blessings of faith, love, and service. My father helped foster a driven work-ethic that caries me daily. He taught me to "never give up and never stop trying," even when life may seem impossible at times. My mother was a servant leader and a public servant through her incredible example as a Lutheran Elementary School teacher for over 20 years. She was selfless in all the ways she supported her family and students, and she is my role model for everything that an educator should be. My mother was faithful and fearless in her battle with cancer that took her from our family too soon. However, she remains my compass on my continuous journey as an educational leader. My parents instilled the steadfast foundation of my Christian faith and values that are my guiding principles in everyday life. I personally and professionally strive to live by this Bible verse that "each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms" (1 Peter 4:10). I am proud and humbled to serve others as an educator, just as my mother did.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND IDENTIFICATION OF THE TOPIC

The education profession can be stressful in terms of meeting the demands of administrators and parents while supporting students' needs. The COVID-19 Global Pandemic, which took place during the 2019-2020, 2020-2021, and 2021-2022 academic school years brought new complexities to the education profession. The COVID-19 Pandemic was designated a Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) that spanned from January 2020 through May 2023 (CDC, 2023; World Health Organization, 2024). The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) was a global outbreak of an infectious disease, which resulted in over a million deaths in the United States and over two million deaths in Europe (CDC, 2023; World Health Organization, 2024). During this time period, educators experienced their own personal trauma of living in the United States through a pandemic, supporting students through their experience with trauma, and with limited in-person contact between school staff and students (Nadeem, Shernoff, Coccaro, & Stokes-Tyler, 2022). Educators had to navigate the unavoidable uncertainty of the pandemic while continuing to teach and offer support for their students as they also processed their own lived experiences.

Even before the pandemic, education had become an increasingly demanding profession with a predicted educator shortage with a need for 316,000 new educators each year by 2025 (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). In 2017, the American Association of Employment in Education (AAEE) indicated that 69% of surveyed school districts in America reported that they struggle to find candidates to fill vacant positions (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond & Carver-Thomas, 2019). It is believed an educator shortage will continue as the profession is "associated with high levels of stress stemming from various factors, including discipline issues,

uninterested students, constant change in the classroom, overpopulated class sizes, too much paperwork, low salaries, parental conflicts, and unsupportive administration" (Hupe & Stevenson, 2019, p. 369). Clearly, educators are feeling the stress of the profession due to the increasing demands of the job and people are electing to exit the education profession early (Farmer, 2020).

The rise of the COVID-19 Pandemic was an unprecedented time for educators that deserves further attention to truly understand educators' lived experiences during this critical incident. Educators are known to be highly empathetic caregivers and their own mental health may have been impacted at the same time that their own students have experienced trauma. The research supports that students share their difficult experiences with their teachers as "children often disclose trauma to teachers, which can lead teachers to feelings of helplessness, frustration, and ultimately to compassion fatigue" (Hupe & Stevenson, 2019, p. 366). Since the pandemic was a time of heightened stress and trauma within society, it is important to understand educator perceptions and experiences during this time and how it connects with their professional role and daily life. In order to best support educators, it is important to understand what they went through during the pandemic, any ongoing consequences that continue from the pandemic, and how districts can best support teachers after the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Rationale

In a time when there has been a growing educator shortage, an unprecedented global pandemic, and increased awareness of societal mental health concerns; it is important to understand educator well-being. Educational leaders can best help their staff by prioritizing policies and processes that support educator mental health. In this way, educators may feel more

equipped and encouraged to better assist their students when their own struggles are acknowledged and supported in their professional roles.

It seems likely that the unprecedented time of the COVID-19 Global Pandemic may have challenged educator mental health. This is important to understand because in other helping professions such as nursing, "healthcare organizations and the professional nursing workforce are weakened when nurses experience compassion fatigue or burnout" (Henson, 2020, p. 77). The reduction in the nursing workforce may be a result of compassion fatigue from "nurses' responses of either emotional distancing to turn off their own feelings, or feeling helpless and angry as they watch patients go through trauma or devastating illness" (Mottaghi, Poursheikhali, & Shameli, 2020, p. 495). Given that helping professions have experience with compassion fatigue, it would be beneficial to understand if educators, another helping role and human-service field, came to experience compassion fatigue during the global pandemic.

During the pandemic, educators first experienced virtual teaching with little time for training or transitioning to this modality, teachers moved to hybrid learning during an unknown time of COVID-19 risk, and supported students as they transitioned back to in-person learning while teaching with facemasks and COVID safety protocols. Educators and students were required to wear facemasks in their return to in-person learning and keep six feet social distancing (CSDE, 2020). Eventually in Connecticut, wearing facemasks became optional in school in the Spring of 2022 even though COVID-19 was still prevalent (Rondinone, 2022). The call for teachers to be working face-to-face during the pandemic exemplified their place as human-service workers as "teaching as a profession is focused on providing care to students, thus placing educators in a human-service role" (Ziaian-Ghafari & Berg, 2019, p. 38). Therefore, it is important to understand whether educators are experiencing compassion fatigue and how it

may impact their work-life. Historically, research has not been concerned with the role of educators and compassion fatigue, because educators have been traditionally excluded from the category of frontline or human-service workers. However, due to the critical relationships that educators form with their students especially during a time of crisis such as the COVID-19 Pandemic, it would be beneficial to understand if educators experienced compassion fatigue as a by-product of working during this time of crisis.

Statement of the Problem

Given that educators and students could be experiencing stress and trauma from the recent global pandemic, it is important to understand if compassion fatigue was experienced by educators in the educational setting. Henson (2020) found that compassion fatigue occurs from losing one's compassion as a result from encountering suffering and trauma. On a daily basis, "teachers must balance interpersonal demands as they strive to adapt instruction, curriculum, and assessment to meet the diverse needs of their students" (Ziaian-Ghafari & Berg, 2019, p. 34). When teachers cannot balance all the expectations of the profession, it may create compassion fatigue (Ziaian-Ghafari & Berg, 2019). This is especially important to consider within a high stress time period such as the global pandemic. This study allows educational leaders and educators to better understand compassion fatigue through educators' lived experiences.

Significance of the Study

The benefit of this research study is that it explored the extent to which general education educators (those who teach the core content areas) and administrators have experienced compassion fatigue given their role as frontline workers during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Educators are a professional group of individuals who must be made aware of their experience with secondary traumatic stress and understanding of compassion fatigue in order to attract and

retain more educators in the teaching profession. For the purpose of this study, secondary traumatic stress is the behavioral or emotional response from being made aware, the desire to help, or the action of supporting someone who has experienced trauma (Figley, 1995). Farmer (2020) mentions that educators are known to be exposed to multiple student traumas while working through their own stress, which can make the role even more burdensome and challenging than just delivering curriculum. Therefore, this research adds to the limited research regarding educators and whether they are experiencing compassion fatigue individually and as a profession.

Definition of Key Terms

1. *Burnout*: Identified by Herbert Freudenberger in 1974, in which it “occurs following exposure to constant occupational stress over time” (Henson, 2020, p. 77). The attributes of burnout “include progressive development, feelings of exhaustion, cynicism, and hopelessness” (Henson, 2020, p. 79).
2. *Compassion Fatigue*: Compassion fatigue is used interchangeably with Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS) and it is “associated with the cost of caring for others in emotional pain” (Figley, 1995, p. 9). Additionally, compassion fatigue can be articulated as the “direct result of exposure to client suffering and complicated by a lack of support in the workplace and at home” (Radey & Figley, 2007, p. 207). The defining attributes of compassion fatigue include a sudden onset, emotional and physical exhaustion, apathy, helplessness, desensitization to patients and families, and depersonalization (Henson, 2020).

3. *Compassion Satisfaction*: This is the “sense of fulfillment derived from seeing clients suffer less and watching them transform from the role of victim to survivor” (Radey & Figley, 2007, p. 208).
4. *COVID*-19 *Pandemic*: COVID-19 is known as the 2019 coronavirus disease, which is caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus (CDC, 2023). It is a contagious virus that caused over one million deaths in the United States (CDC, 2023). The World Health Organization announced a “Public Health Emergency of International Concern (PHEIC) on 30 January 2020 and to characterize the outbreak as a pandemic on 11 March 2020” (World Health Organization, 2024). The end of the federal COVID-19 Public Health Emergency was announced on May 11, 2023 (CDC, 2023).
5. *Ethic of Care Theory*: Nel Noddings’ (1984) Ethic of Care Theory describes that “the one-caring desires the well-being of the cared-for and acts (or abstains from acting—makes an internal act of commitment) to promote that well-being” (p. 24). The one-caring experiences engrossment, motivational displacement, and a response from the cared-for (Noddings, 1984).
6. *Secondary Trauma*: This takes place when a person is revealed to harmful or worrisome incidents experienced by another person (Gentry, Baranowsky, & Dunning, 2002). This exposure can be simply from observation, witnessing the emotional retelling of traumatic stories, and reenactment of traumatic events (Gentry et al., 2002; Whitfield & Kanter, 2014).
7. *Secondary Traumatic Stress* (STS): It is “the natural consequent behaviors and emotions resulting from knowing about a traumatizing event experienced by a

significant other—the stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person" (Figley, 1995, p. 7).

Overview of the Study

This dissertation is comprised of five comprehensive chapters. The first chapter begins with an introduction of the COVID-19 Pandemic and challenges that it presented to educators as well as the rationale for this study. Chapter one discusses why this research is significant and outlines the research questions to be explored. Chapter two consists of the literature review and grounds this study with the theoretical framework of the topic. Chapter two explores secondary trauma, burnout and compassion fatigue, COVID-19 and stress, educator empathy, the roots of compassion fatigue research in connection to the field of education, and the Ethic of Care Theory in relation to important educator care-based interactions. Chapter three discusses the methodology, research design, study context, participants, data collection, data analysis, researcher positionality, trustworthiness, and a timeline for the study. It highlights the study context of a large urban school district and educator participants from two middle schools. Chapter three presents the process of data collection through a demographic questionnaire, teacher and administrator interviews, and a researcher journal. In chapter three, the data analysis is conducted through a constant comparative method and First and Second Cycle Coding. Chapter four highlights the findings of this study in order to respond to the research questions. Direct quotations from participant transcripts are utilized to emphasize how participants managed their professional experiences during the COVID-19 Pandemic and how those experiences reveal indicators of compassion fatigue. Chapter five expands on the findings and conclusion of this study in regard to the research questions and implications on the field of education for school districts. Furthermore, chapter five addresses the recommendations to

support school districts and the direction for future research on compassion fatigue within the field of education.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this exploratory qualitative case study:

1. What were educators' experiences during the COVID-19 Pandemic?
2. How have educators' responsibilities changed with the COVID-19 Pandemic?
3. To what extent did educators experience compassion fatigue since the most active periods of the COVID-19 Pandemic?
4. What are educators' perceptions of what is needed to support them as professionals based on their COVID-19 Pandemic experiences?

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

When considering the complexity and future of the education profession, it is important to consider all factors connected to the health and well-being of educators. Understanding second hand trauma and compassion fatigue, and appropriately addressing these may help prevent educators from leaving the profession. Carla Joinson (1992) first conceptualized compassion fatigue as a rare form of burnout for caregivers. Compassion fatigue is an emotionally crushing response that caregivers experience. Compassion fatigue (CF) is often referred to interchangeably with Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS), and it is defined as a person's emotional and physical responses "from knowing about a traumatizing event experienced by a significant other—the stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person" (Figley, 1995, p. 7). Many educators have the personality and ability of genuinely expressing care for hundreds of students who have experienced trauma over their professional career.

In general, "teachers are at risk for experiencing secondary traumatic stress when they are exposed to traumatized children" (Hupe & Stevenson, 2019, p. 367). This may be an unavoidable result for educators as "more than 10 million American children annually experience trauma" (Hupe & Stevenson, 2019, p. 367). To make matters worse, the recent COVID-19 Global Pandemic created more trauma in a variety of ways as "the economic pressures of the pandemic also increase risk for interpersonal violence, neglect, food insecurities, and distress for children and caregivers" (NCTSN, 2021, p. 1). Educators shouldered this distress during virtual teaching and learning, moves to hybrid instruction, and eventually in the hesitant transition back to in-person learning. In this respect, educators were the frontline workers supporting a large

population of students who had experienced trauma from the COVID-19 Global Pandemic. This is not entirely new territory as “teachers are also often front-line workers when it comes to encounters with child abuse” (Hupe & Stevenson, 2019, p. 378). However, teacher encounters with children exposed to abuse and trauma likely grew during the global pandemic due to the increase of stressful family environments and situations (NCTSN, 2021). It is important to examine secondary trauma first, because compassion fatigue is a form of secondary trauma in which directly hearing about another person’s traumatic incident and interacting with a person’s emotional pain and wanting to help that suffering person in need (Figley, 1995; Killian 2008; Whitfield & Kanter, 2014).

Secondary Trauma

In order to understand compassion fatigue, one must understand secondary trauma. In essence, “secondary trauma occurs when one is exposed to extreme events directly experienced by another” (Gentry, Baranowsky, & Dunning, 2002, p. 124). This exposure can be simply from observation, witnessing the emotional retelling of traumatic stories, or the reenactment of traumatic events (Gentry et al., 2002; Whitfield & Kanter, 2014). Another term associated with secondary trauma is vicarious trauma, in which internal personal changes occur to the individual helping through interacting empathetically with a traumatized person, which can cause cognitive shifts in the helper’s own feelings of trust, control, and esteem (NCTSN, 2016). In other words, “secondary or vicarious traumatization records the deleterious effects of being in harm’s way as an act of compassion” (Stamm, 2002, p. 107). Overall, hearing traumatic experiences of another can emotionally impact one who serves in a helping professional role, to the point where their day-to-day job performance and quality of life declines (NCTSN, 2016).

In contrast, compassion satisfaction happens when "the helper's motivation to help is shaped, in part, by the satisfaction derived from the work of helping others. The satisfaction, labeled here as compassion satisfaction, plays a vital role in the equation of human services" (Stamm, 2002, p. 107). Put another way, compassion satisfaction can be defined as the "sense of fulfillment derived from seeing clients suffer less and watching them transform from the role of victim to survivor" (Radey & Figley, 2007, p. 208). When the helper feels they are making a meaningful contribution to aid in the trauma experiences of another, it may result in experiencing compassion satisfaction (NCTSN, 2016). This shows that there are rewards associated with secondary trauma and the work that goes into supporting the trauma experiences of another, thus compassion satisfaction can protect against developing compassion fatigue (Levkovich & Gada, 2020). However, the stress a person encounters from secondary traumatic stress comes from being "overwhelmed by this secondary exposure to trauma" (Gentry et al., 2002, p. 124). When a person is overwhelmed by the secondary trauma of another, they are at-risk of experiencing compassion fatigue where they may encounter feelings of apathy, helplessness, emotional and physical exhaustion, desensitization, and depersonalization (Henson, 2020).

Educators and Secondary Trauma. According to the NCTSN (2016), 50% of individuals working with children, such as educators, are in jeopardy of experiencing secondary traumatic stress. In regard to the American population, within a person's lifespan, about 60% of men and 51% of women have encountered a traumatic event (Bride, 2007). Additionally, this same study found, almost 20% of men and 12% of women have experienced three or more traumatic events (Bride, 2007). This shows that more than half of the United States population will at some point experience trauma within their lives. As a result, this also makes experiencing secondary trauma likely. Furthermore, at least 20% of children in school suffer a mental health

illness or face a substance abuse concern, which are characterized as at-risk concerns (Atkins & Rodger, 2016). This shows that children are bringing their personal concerns with them into school.

The mental health needs of students increase the complexity and demand of the education profession. As it is "research has identified that 12% of new teachers leave the profession before completing their first year, 28% by the end of three years, and 41% by their fifth year" (Atkins & Rodger, 2016, p. 94). Educators are in a unique position in that "the expectations placed on beginning teachers are identical to those placed on very experienced teachers, a situation unheard of in other professions" (Atkins & Rodger, 2016, p. 94). This means that all teachers need to be prepared and provided with resources to support themselves and their students. New teachers need to be just as prepared as veteran teachers to deal with the challenges of the school year. A study on preservice teachers by Atkins and Rodger (2016) found that preservice teachers were surprised at the quantity and pervasiveness of students with mental health needs in their classrooms. This exemplifies the need for educators to be explicitly taught and presented with skills and resources for working with a range of student personal challenges.

Miller and Flint-Stipp (2019) found that preservice teachers encounter secondary trauma through instances of students' personal narratives, building relationships with students, misunderstanding what constitutes as trauma, and not incorporating self-care into their own lives. Essentially, the same relationship building that fosters successful teaching when combined with "secondary trauma, is a product of the teacher-student relationship that serves as the foundation to teaching" (Miller & Flint-Stipp, 2019, p. 29). The teacher-student relationship is established to support effective teaching in order to facilitate academic and social emotional student growth in the classroom setting. As helping professionals, educators are on the frontline as they aid in

school crises, community disasters, and support students who carry their trauma and stress into school (Hydon, Wong, Langley, Stein, & Kataoka, 2015). Additionally, Miller and Flint-Stipp (2019) also found that preservice teachers had difficulty when their personal trauma was compounded by the secondary trauma encountered within their field setting. While this was found for people not yet teaching full-time it showed that personal hardships of educators can intensify secondary trauma and create more challenging situations than normal with only student reported difficulties. Similarly, Gentry et al., (2002) found that people who have experienced trauma are often the ones trying to help others through their difficult or challenging situations, because of their history or background. This is true for many educators as they go into teaching to help those from similar experiences, which can lead educators to supporting struggling learners, helping to develop students' character, and seeking to make a real difference in society (Rutten & Badiali, 2020).

In summary, "secondary traumatic stress wears teachers out—physically, emotionally, and mentally—and it is especially damaging when individuals feel unsupported in demanding environments" (Miller & Flint-Stipp, 2019, p. 39). And when educators feel worn out, they may push aside their own emotional needs (Hydon et al., 2015). This is why educators must be aware of the characteristics of secondary trauma that they may encounter and recognize the impact it may have on one's emotional well-being. Tehrani's (2007) study of 430 care workers that support traumatized individuals, found that "changes to more personal beliefs such as a loss of meaning to life, feelings of being worthless, feeling that there was something wrong with you and feeling that you may not recover from your exposure were experienced by around a fifth of carers" (p. 337). This is an alarming statistic given the extent to which educators work heavily with students who have experienced trauma.

Burnout and Compassion Fatigue

It is important to note the difference between burnout and compassion fatigue as educators may experience both of these. Burnout and compassion fatigue overlap, but there are major differences between the two. Burnout was identified by Herbert Freudenberger in 1974, in which burnout is defined as it "occurs following exposure to constant occupational stress over time" (Henson, 2020, p. 77). The attributes of burnout "include progressive development, feelings of exhaustion, cynicism, and hopelessness" (Henson, 2020, p. 79). These are all experienced as a result from the workplace.

A major dimension of burnout is cynicism in which people "take a cold, distant attitude toward work and the people on the job" (Maslach & Leiter, 1997, p. 18). This cynicism generates because, "people feel it may be safer to be indifferent, especially when the future is uncertain, or to assume things won't work out rather than get their hopes up" (Maslach & Leiter, 1997, p. 18). Additionally with burnout, there are "subtle changes in personality, perspective, values, and behavior. Over time, the imbalance of workplace demands and available resources increase along with the feeling reality does not match the ideal" (Henson 2020, p. 79). In this way, burnout is the result from considerable elongated stress and hopelessness over time. Six sources of burnout have been identified and can be summarized as "1). work overload, 2). lack of control, 3). insufficient reward, 4). breakdown in community, 5). absence of fairness, and 6). conflicting values" (Maslach & Leiter, 1997, p. 38). These are all work or job specific components that foster burnout within a person, because of environmental organizational characteristics "as organizations seem to be testing the theory that people can work flat-out forever" (Maslach & Leiter, 1997, p. 39). Therefore, the origin of burnout comes from the workplace environment where the human element of work is not considered (Maslach & Leiter, 1997).

Burnout and compassion fatigue share the common attribute of emotional exhaustion. In relation to burnout, as a person's "emotional resources are depleted, workers feel they are no longer able to give of themselves at a psychological level" (Maslach & Jackson, 1981, p. 99). As a result, "the burn-out candidate finds it just too difficult to hold in feelings. He cries too easily, the slightest pressure makes him feel overburdened and he yells and screams" (Freudenberger, 1974, p. 160). In this respect, anger is an emotional cornerstone of burnout and the feeling of exhaustion within burnout is a result of job stress and job demands (Maslach & Leiter, 1997).

Experiencing stress over a long period of time is a major characteristic in burnout while in comparison, compassion fatigue is characterized by a more sudden onset on an individual exposed to a trauma that becomes overwhelming (Henson, 2020). In regard to compassion fatigue, Carla Joinson first used the term in 1992 when mentioning nurses who experience burnout (Figley, 1995). Whereas with secondary traumatic stress or compassion fatigue, it arrives quickly within a person while "there is a sense of helplessness and confusion, and a sense of isolation from supporters; the symptoms are often disconnected from real causes" (Figley, 1995, p. 12). The origins of compassion fatigue can be thought of as "professionals who listen to clients' stories of fear, pain, and suffering may feel similar fear, pain, and suffering because they care" (Figley, 1995, p. 1). Therefore, the origins of compassion fatigue comes from caring greatly while supporting another person experiencing a difficult time, which may or may not be work related. The emotional exhaustion is presented differently in compassion fatigue where "caregivers may feel the need to hide their emotions from clients, which can lead to emotional exhaustion" (Henson, 2020, p. 78). In this way, people experiencing compassion fatigue try to operate as everything is fine, until it is not.

Finally, it is important to note the antecedents of both burnout and compassion fatigue. The antecedents of burnout consist of primarily three indicators such as (a) a person with a goal-oriented mindset, (b) intense workload, and (c) a poor work environment (Henson, 2020). In comparison, the antecedents of compassion fatigue include any of the following (a) exposure to secondary trauma, (b) having a relationship with a person who experienced trauma, and (c) a feeling of ineffectiveness (Henson, 2020). The required factors that need to exist with burnout and compassion fatigue are vastly different despite that on the surface they may appear to be very similar. However, burnout is a direct experience while compassion fatigue results from secondary trauma. In the end, compassion fatigue presents characteristics such as a sudden onset, irritability, decreased productivity, declined performance, callousness, an emotionally overwhelmed state, poor judgement, emotional and physical exhaustion, apathy, fatigue, helplessness, perceived failure, desensitization to others, and depersonalization (Henson, 2020; Mottaghi, Poursheikhali, & Shameli, 2020). This is starkly different from burnout as previously described.

COVID-19 Pandemic and Stress

The COVID-19 Pandemic was a challenging time in society, and it created collective trauma through a widespread health crisis (Crosby, Howell, & Thomas, 2020). In fact, in a large scale study during the COVID-19 Pandemic of 1,876 primary and secondary educators in the United States, Matthews, Streit, and Smith (2020) found that “92% of educators are anxious about teaching, and 84% worry they are risking their lives by working during the 2020-2021 school year” (p. 17). This conveys that educators were afraid for their lives during the pandemic. The collective trauma grew as nearly 1.5 billion students faced academic disruption with 189 countries closing schools due to the COVID-19 Pandemic (Pradeepkumar, Antony, Issac, &

Thirumoorthy, 2021). In regard to the United States' education system during the pandemic, Correa and First (2021) mention,

> At least 124,00 public and private schools closed at the end of 2019-2020 school year, affecting more than 55.1 million K-12 students. In the 2020-2021 school year, some school districts in large cities have transitioned to remote learning for the entire school year, while others have adopted a hybrid learning model. (p. 3)

These large and out of school shutdowns and school changes can create trauma where "an individual has become overwhelmed by stress to the degree that their physical, mental, emotional, or social wellbeing has been compromised" (Crosby et al., 2020, p. 1). During the pandemic everyone including teachers were facing stress. Kyriacou (2001) categorizes teacher stress as "the experience by a teacher of unpleasant, negative emotions, such as anger, tension, frustration, or depression, resulting from some aspect of work as a teacher" (p. 28). The many changes to teachers working during the pandemic brought on stress that was present due to the circumstances from the COVID-19 Pandemic and the uncertainty it brought within society. This was the case as "teachers had a higher level of stress during fall 2020 due to lack of administrative support, anxiety communication with parents, COVID-19 anxiety, and anxiety teaching during a pandemic" (Pressley & Ha, 2022, p. 62). Teachers were tasked with supporting more at-risk students, in fact, "researchers found that approximately one-third of children who were quarantined or socially-isolated developed post-traumatic stress disorder" (Crosby et al., 2020, p. 2). This resulted in a large percentage of children who were then bringing these experiences with them into schools and their interactions with school staff. Furthermore, the COVID-19 virus became a global pandemic resulting in over 1.1 million deaths in the United States (CDC, 2023). The collective trauma from the COVID-19 Pandemic is powerful, because

this kind of trauma “creates a mutual injury to our view of the world, challenging our notions about safety, our ability to control our own circumstances, and the human experience” (Crosby et al., 2020, p. 2). This lack of control can create personal stress which then might result into other mental health challenges. In some instances, while examining the second wave of the pandemic from a Canadian teacher study conducted by Sokal, Trudel, and Babb (2021) they found teachers mentioning,

> I think this week alone we have had 3 people go on stress leave. You just get the emails that say ‘this person is going on leave and we wish them all the best!’ And it’s like—Come on! We all know what is going on. (p. 6)

Canadian educators found it necessary to take leave in order to regain control during COVID-19. This was true for novice and experienced teachers who found it necessary to take leaves of absence from their teaching role (Sokal et al., 2021). These teachers were fortunate to have stress leave as this is not commonplace in the United States nor in Connecticut, the site of this research study. Teachers were not immune from the potential stress that the global pandemic brought.

COVID-19 Educator Anxiety and Depression. As already depicted, teachers encountered mental health obstacles during the COVID-19 pandemic (Pressley & Ha, 2022). This is important because “teacher well-being plays a critical role in constructing a supportive and effective learning environment” (Chan, Sharkey, Lawrie, Arch, & Nylund-Gibson, 2021, p. 534). While keeping this in mind, a study that took place within India that analyzed anxiety and depression among college professors during the COVID-19 Pandemic found that more than half of the professors experienced anxiety and depression (Pradeepkumar et al., 2021). This may be attributed to added job demands, safety concerns, stress of new job responsibilities, personal conflict, supporting students, financial issues, and household duties (Pradeepkumar et al., 2021).

Similarly, a study within the United States analyzed the mental health of school staff during the pandemic, and Correa and First (2021) "found that 45% of school staff indicated moderate to severe depression and 81.8% of school staff indicated moderate to severe anxiety" (p. 13). Correa and First (2021) further described that "student distress had a positive association with school staff anxiety and school staff depression" (p. 13). They also found that during the pandemic school staff reported students exhibiting signs of unhappiness, fear, anger, inattention, and peer conflict (Correa & First, 2021). Another United States study by Matthews et al. (2020), during the pandemic found that out of a two-week COVID period teachers noted that "their mental health was not good for 7.6 days and their physical health was not good for 5.0 days" (p. 14). The COVID-19 Pandemic was a time of heightened levels of stress and anxiety, which may have negatively affected the overall mental health of educators.

Additionally, within a study of elementary school teachers in the United States during the pandemic, Chan et al. (2021) found that 50% of teachers felt emotionally exhausted, 59% encountered heavy task stress, and 51% felt unclear in their professional roles. Chan et al. (2021) summarized that "consistent with reports concerning teachers' well-being during the pandemic, teachers in this study experienced impaired professional health" (p. 541). Chan et al. (2021) highlight "the importance of reducing workload and role ambiguity to promote teacher psychological health at all times and particularly through the COVID-19 educational context" (p. 542). This shows that educators need a fair workload and clearly defined roles in times of crisis such as the COVID-19 Pandemic to minimize educator stress and exhaustion. This is reiterated by Sokal et al. (2021) who conducted a study among Canadian teachers during the pandemic where a teacher mentioned, "The ambiguity leads to multiple interpretations…It is creating a degree of insanity and everyone is worried" (p. 6). Teachers wanted to have more direction,

clarity, and structure in the procedures and resources coming from the schools. Teachers in Canada during the pandemic continued to mention, “But overall, it’s very hard doing a job when we have very little control over what goes on” (Sokal et al., 2021, p. 6). This shows that the COVID-19 Pandemic created a situation where teachers were feeling helpless and confused about the ways to best perform their roles.

COVID-19 and Educator Lack of Support. Many educators during the COVID-19 Pandemic felt a lack of support from their local government and school district administration. Sokal et al. (2021) found that Canadian teachers during the second wave of the pandemic felt unsupported and shouldered extra work. One teacher shared, “It’s still the expectations that you should be doing everything and you should be doing more, and we can’t—we don’t have the resources” (Sokal et al., 2021, p. 6). This shows that educators in this Canadian study felt that there were unrealistic expectations being placed on them. Sokal et al. (2021) also found during the second wave of the pandemic that, “Teacher pressure is too high to deal with, and administrators aren’t committed to recognizing that we are still in crisis and learning and pressures are different than normal” (p. 4). Canadian educators also identified that “there is a lot of toxic positivity being pushed by admin making teachers more stressed without actually dealing with real issues” (Sokal et al., 2021, p. 4). Toxic positivity can increase teacher stress, because administrative leaders focus on making everything seem fine. This created a disconnect between teachers lived experiences and what they were being told. Public and student safety was a priority, but educators in the Sokal et al. (2021) study stated, “Our health and safety aren’t concerns to administration. I do not feel supported by the division and my admin to take care of my mental health and physical health during this time” (p. 4). It seemed as though making the system work was more important than supporting the educators who were actually making the

system function. Additionally, Sokal et al. (2021) found that teachers felt a lack of support in communication by the local government and Department of Education during the second wave of the pandemic, indicating "I constantly feel like I am in the dark" (p. 6). The multiple changes regarding pandemic knowledge continued with poor communication was frustrating to educators. This was a time in society where there were many unknowns and teachers were feeling the uncertainty.

Furthermore, Pressley and Ha (2022) studied 311 American teachers from across 16 states during Fall 2020 of the pandemic found that "teachers with low administrative support in schools showed lower engagement efficacy in online teaching during COVID-19 and higher stress levels" (p. 71). This shows that administrative support is directly linked with effective teacher instruction during the pandemic. Teachers have an actual need to feel supported from their administrator leadership (Pressley & Ha, 2022). In fact, from Pressley and Ha's (2022) global pandemic study revealed the need that "school administrators worldwide should find time to support teachers with words of encouragement on teaching, student engagement, and instructional innovation during a trying time" (p. 73). This was an important finding, which shows that especially during times of crisis including a global pandemic, educators need validation and support from leadership to combat stress, understand their responsibilities, and remain confident in their teaching abilities.

Moreover, educators' feelings of a lack of support may come from a place of lack of trust in their district and district leadership. Matthews et al. (2020) study of 1,876 educators during the pandemic found that "only 14% of teachers believe that appropriate safety protocols will be in place at the start of the school (2020-2021) year" (p. 9). Another aspect of teachers' feelings about safety protocols, "85% expect negative and/or dangerous consequences from their

districts' health and safety protocols" (Matthews et al., 2020, p. 2). Educators lacked confidence in the established safety measures and were concerned with the precautions their districts were providing them. Overall, educators lacked a feeling of safety from their school districts. This might be attributed to the fact that many teachers were high risk in the Matthews et al. (2020) study; "Almost 50% consider themselves to be part of a high-risk population" (p. 2). In regard to district leadership, Matthews et al. (2020) found that educators teaching during the pandemic believed that "only 27% feel they can trust their district's superintendent. Many believe their superintendents lack empathy and will avoid conflict-ridden situations" (p. 2). From this statistic, educators are reinforcing that their district leadership may lack understanding and may not have comprehensively be able to engage in tough decisions surrounding the global pandemic.

Empathy

Many educators have a caring nature and disposition, which is why they usually enter the teaching field—to make a difference for students. However, "teaching is inherently relational and student distress can evoke an innate desire to comfort and care for children, which can lead to secondary trauma" (Miller & Flint-Stipp, 2019, p. 40). It is within the daily work of educators to comfort students who may be going through personal difficulties. In fact, "teachers who work with children who have experienced traumatic events are susceptible to secondary traumatic stress. Teachers who are empathetic, compassionate, and hardworking are the most vulnerable" (Sharp Donahoo, Siegrist, & Garrett-Wright, 2018, p. 442). Empathy can be defined as "an important ability that matches an individual with the emotions and thoughts of others…perceiving the world of the clients, as if it is one's own world" (Mottaghi et al., 2020, p. 495). Empathy is an extremely important factor, because "empathy is the tool that many service providers use to establish a relationship" (Gentry et al., 2002, p. 127). This makes empathy a

focal point in the field of education in order to build connections with students. However, those who have empathy as a career component need to be protected because "overtime, working in continuously emotionally charged situations, this empathy can become overtaxed and exhausted even when the professional is diligently maintaining self-care skills" (Gentry et al., 2002, p. 127). As a result, "the emotional burden of working with students affected by trauma is often carried home, which compromises teachers' well-being" (Miller & Flint-Stipp, 2019, p. 40). Therefore, empathetic educators are specifically at-risk of experiencing compassion fatigue (Cordaro, 2020). Figley (1995) explains this best when stating, "those who have enormous capacity for feeling and expressing empathy tend to be more at risk of compassion stress" (p. 1). In regard to the field of education and what educators experience, Fowler (2015) states,

> Harsh times, adverse experiences, disasters, other traumas, and loss—these are a part of life. When children hurt, they don't check their tragic experiences at the door. Because many of us are emotionally available to our learners, students often bring their stories to us. Competent, caring, and concerned, we bear witness to the suffering of our students. Because we are human, we may also bear the burden. (p. 31)

This may resonate with educators everywhere who want to see all their students be successful in all areas of school, which includes social, emotional, and academic success. This can be increasingly difficult for educators when they encounter students' facing personal, family, or societal hardships.

Educators are compassionate professionals as compassion is defined as acting with empathy and feeling sorrow for suffering individuals (Stamm, 2002). Educators need to be aware of this in order to protect themselves and lower their exposer to increased vulnerabilities. Levkovich and Gada (2020) findings show educators experienced compassion fatigue due to

being empathetic as the educator participants "discussed their strong desire to help these children, their feelings of empathy and emotional vulnerability, and their sense of helplessness because they did not know the right way to help" (p. 100). Educator empathy can be a risk factor for compassion fatigue especially when educators experience empathy and feelings of powerlessness or that the next course of action is unclear. In this way, feelings of insecurity can lead to distress (Levkovich & Gada, 2020).

Educator Empathy and COVID-19. During the pandemic stress can be seen in educational professionals. Specifically, among higher education professors, caring for distressed students was a major reason for faculty stress that was heightened during the pandemic (Cordaro, 2020). In truth, "mental health challenges are increasing among students and many higher education institutions encourage close relationship building between students and faculty to improve student connection and belonging" (Lindecker & Cramer, 2021, p. 15). This is similar to initiatives in K-12 education where there is an effort to improve student mental health through establishing stronger student-teacher relationships. Moreover, Lindecker and Cramer (2021) illustrate the turbulence and stress of the pandemic years by stating,

> The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic and the wide-spread disruption it has caused, particularly in education due to an immediate transition from face-to-face classrooms to online learning for most K-12 and traditional universities, has been extremely challenging. Many traditional instructors were neither prepared nor trained in online education or in working with students through trauma and life disruption, making understanding the relationship between self-disclosure, personal trauma, compassion fatigue, and online learning even more relevant. (p. 151)

There were so many elements to the trauma and stress of the Covid-19 Pandemic that it was hard to identify one particular source. Due to this complexity, "a new occupational hazard for empathetic instructors is likely to emerge as a result of exposure to student stressors and adversity" (Cordaro, 2020, p. 18). This occupational hazard becomes compassion fatigue among empathetic educators. Empathy is a great quality to have as an educator, but it has been a catalyst for compassion fatigue including the symptoms leading to a "disconnection with others, hopelessness, and emotional and physical exhaustion" (Ziaian-Ghafari & Berg, 2019, p. 37). It is important to identity and support the most caring educators before their personal strength of caring has turned into feelings of despair. During the COVID-19 Pandemic, educators in the remote setting were relied upon as unqualified counselors, which may lead to compassion fatigue (Lindecker & Cramer, 2021). Educators were stepping into new roles that they were not prepared or trained for, which put them at-risk of experiencing compassion fatigue.

Additionally, just as empathetic educators need protection, empathy can be a source of resilience. For instance, it has been found that in regard to special education middle school teachers, "empathy toward their students or a particular student with dire needs constituted their resolve to ongoing employment" (Hoffman, Palladino, & Barnett, 2007, p. 19). Empathy can drive and support educators just as much as it can deplete educators emotional and physical health. Therefore, teacher empathy needs to be closely monitored in order to determine which direction teachers are gravitating towards, especially during times of crisis.

The Roots of Compassion Fatigue

Historically, compassion fatigue has been seen to impact occupations such as social workers, counselors, psychologists, nurses, and first responders (Tehrani, 2007). However, educators should be incorporated in the human-service community that experiences compassion fatigue because, "teaching as a profession is focused on providing care to students, thus placing

educators in a human-services role" (Ziaian-Ghafari & Berg, 2019, p. 38). Additionally, Atkins and Rodger (2016) describe,

> More than ever, teachers are on the front lines of mental health, and their roles are changing as they are increasingly called upon to take their place supporting the mental health of their students. This is a role for which they feel inadequately prepared. (p. 95)

Teachers have no choice, but to support their students including student background and personal experiences being brought into the classroom. Fowler (2015) mentions that "teaching is a helping profession" (p. 30). In this capacity, students sharing personal experiences is an important element in the classroom as "teachers are often the first outside of family members to learn about student trauma and feel its effects" (Miller & Flint-Stipp, 2019, p. 30). Feeling these effects occurs from working in schools, because "teachers are not immune to human emotions" (Fowler, 2015, p. 31). This places educators in the role of frontline service providers who are the receivers of the most immediate student information. Additionally, "general classroom teachers are expected to balance the tremendous professional responsibilities of being an educator for a wide range of individual and group instructional needs in order to establish a level of emotional and social support that creates a positive learning environment" (Ziaian-Ghafari & Berg, 2019, p. 33). As human-service providers, educators need to form relationships with their students to ensure they can create a safe and welcoming classroom setting for their students. Personal teacher-student relationships come with tremendous pressure in order to serve the needs of others.

As previously shared, educators are expected to develop relationships with students, families, and staff to support the needs of a school community. Educators are like other human service providers, because they are noted for the relationships between caregivers or teachers,

and their patients or students (Ziaian-Ghafari & Berg, 2019). In forming relationships, educators often go above and beyond for their students. Hupe and Stevenson (2019) found that "compassion fatigue is common among professionals who advocate for victimized children, and it is argued that it may be an inevitable outcome when working with traumatized youth" (p. 367). Educators are professional advocates as mandated reporters and they support their students through numerous times of hardships, similarly to that of a caregiver. When advocating for others becomes too overwhelming, educators may feel like their efforts are a pointless attempt to solve societal inequities and challenges. This exposes educators to compassion fatigue possibilities. Overall, "to experience compassion fatigue, the person first must perceive a relationship with the patient or client. The person experiencing compassion fatigue must have the ability to recognize and comprehend what the patient or client is feeling" (Henson, 2020, p. 80). In essence, the most effective educators know that their success is built on forming positive relationships and knowing the needs or feelings of their students. As such, in recognizing students' needs, educators must adjust their instruction and make sure the learning environment is truly conducive for all student comfortability, growth, and development.

Human-Service Providers During COVID-19. Educators can additionally be seen as human-service providers during the COVID-19 Pandemic as they were on the frontline of supporting students, families, and their school communities. Pressley and Ha's (2022) study of educators in the United States during the global pandemic reiterated the frontline educator role when stating:

> Throughout the pandemic, teachers become frontline workers providing instruction in several different formats. Even with different approaches to reopening schools, teachers worldwide were asked to move instruction virtually, incorporate new technology into

> their teaching, and incorporate new protocols to reduce the spread of COVID-19 with limited to no vaccine available to students and teachers, depending on their location. Additionally, with COVID-19 being a new and mutating virus, teachers faced the reality of catching COVID-19 or spreading it to loved ones once teachers returned to either hybrid or in-person instruction. (p. 73)

This illustrates that amount of adjustments educators had to make to support student learning while facing the fear of potentially falling ill to COVID-19. There was also a risk of spreading illness to family members with the return to in-person learning. Due to the severity of educators being on the frontline in many different ways, Pressley and Ha (2021) noted that "schools and districts can support teachers feeling high anxiety by providing options such as telehealth, additional counseling, or mental health days. Providing more support and resources may help reduce teacher stress while teaching during COVID-19" (p. 73). While these were important recommendations, it is unknown the extent to which they were implemented. Educators being frontline works need mental health support to process their traumatic experiences and stress.

Loss of Control and Job Performance

When individuals are experiencing compassion fatigue there is a sense of losing control in their abilities and a subsequent decline in job performance. The loss of professional control can present itself as psychological distress among educators. Ziaian-Ghafari and Berg (2019) found that "notable elements of compassion fatigue emerged in participants' discussions regarding the challenges with inclusion, personal investment in meeting students' needs, and limited resources to support success" (p. 48). These elements created an uncontrollable feeling for educators within the study. For example, teachers often compromise between their work and personal life, which creates psychological distress (Ziaian-Ghafari & Berg, 2019). In this respect, professionals that fail to detach from a difficult situation can experience additional stress

(Campbell, 2007). Levkovich and Gada (2020) reiterated this in their findings of compassion fatigue among preschool teachers where it was identified that educators "noted that their job does not end when the preschool day is over, thus increasing their sense of being overloaded and overwhelmed" (p. 106). Overwork combined with stress can bring about compassion fatigue through educators being overly involved which could prompt their sense of emotional fatigue (Levkovich & Gada, 2020). In essence, a loss of control from educators could come from them trying "to go above and beyond by investing many hours of their own time" (Levkovich & Gada, 2020, p. 106). Many educators try to make a difference through extra planning, communication, and worrying; and educators could become lost in those efforts without realizing the emotional impact it can have on one's mental state. On the other hand, "depersonalization from clients likely reduces helping professionals' ability and willingness to contribute significant and sincere work" (Hupe & Stevenson, 2019, p. 368). This means that educators need to be able to detach from their work, but remain invested enough to effectively perform their job responsibilities and produce positive student growth. If educators continually fail to detach from their work experiences, they may encounter themselves being "a little less patient, snarky, or angry, and frustrated" (Fowler, 2015, p. 31). Therefore, educators need to watch their feelings of anger and frustration toward their duties, school community, and students. Levkovich and Gada (2020) support the idea that lack of work separation can cause compassion fatigue when stating that "teachers describe their difficulty in separating preschool from home, which does not allow them time off work" (p. 100). When there is no real time-off from work it can create more exhaustion and fatigue. Therefore, educators need to make it a point to give themselves time to truly recharge and rest in order to limit the risk of compassion fatigue.

Educator Role Confusion. Levkovich and Gada (2020), found that preschool teachers in Israel experienced compassion fatigue working in trauma situations in which they had to operate on varying tasks, which led to teachers' feeling overwhelmed and confused in their work role. This can be caused when teachers know about student trauma or they themselves are surrounded by trauma situations where their varying duties include maintaining school routines, managing students, supporting staff, contacting parents, and communicating with outside supports like psychologists or other support personnel (Levkovich & Gada, 2020). This highlights the many roles of teachers and that when educators have too many responsibilities and are knowledgeable about student trauma; educators can experience role confusion, which can lead to compassion fatigue. Put another way, compassion fatigue can occur when educators feel a discrepancy between the role they originally desired and having to support all the other demands of the job (Levkovich & Gada, 2020).

Hupe and Stevenson (2019) found that "teachers' compassion fatigue predicted negative attitudes toward reporting suspected child abuse" (p. 378). This shows that compassion fatigue can negatively impact the extent to which teachers execute their mandated roles. "Compassion fatigue also predicted teachers' job efficacy cynicism, or in other words, beliefs that nothing good would come out of making a report of suspected child abuse" (Hupe & Stevenson, 2019, p. 378-379). This exemplified one-way educators can feel defeated even if their efforts include reporting abuse. Miller and Flint-Stipp (2019) found that preservice teachers felt guilty for ignoring students' needs as they gained more information about students on a personal level. Hupe and Stevenson (2019) significantly noted that "not only does compassion fatigue have implications for the mental health and well-being of teachers, but we have discovered that it also has direct implications for the well-being of children teachers are required by law to protect" (p.

379). In the study from Hupe and Stevenson (2019), compassion fatigue has negatively affected the way educators are making decisions and whether they perform their required and essential duties. This is supported in the Levkovich and Gada (2020) study where it was indicated that educators' felt they had no training in working with traumatized children, which increased educator insecurity and educator overall role confusion. This lack of training in supporting traumatized children fostered educators' compassion fatigue because they were constantly questioning their decisions (Levkovich & Gada, 2020). As such, Levkovich and Gada (2020) found that educators felt they had "no one to guide them and certainly no one to help them deal with their personal difficulties. They expressed feelings of helplessness, frustration, and anger toward the system for not giving them the support they need" (p. 103-104). In this sense there was educator loss of control and role confusion, because educators were not getting the support they needed in times of high student trauma and crisis.

Furthermore, Lindecker and Cramer (2021) found that young females in higher education had the highest compassion fatigue scores. This could be attributed to that they "may feel more pressure to engage in a counselor-like role, taking more personal responsibility with 'making it right' for the student…For untenured and women faculty this approach may help them secure future teaching opportunities" (Lindecker & Cramer, 2021, p. 151). This shows that female higher educators are placing themselves in jeopardy of experiencing compassion fatigue in order to potentially acquire future employment. This seems unfair to female educators as Lindecker and Cramer (2021) defend "the disproportionate impact of emotional labor on women" (p. 151). Female educators are disproportionally taking on emotional labor, because "women faculty are viewed as more approachable, empathetic and nurturing" (Lindecker & Cramer, 2021, p. 151). This is an unfortunate role for female educators to be in as their energy and attention is drawn

away from teaching, and toward student emotional well-being support, sometimes detrimentally to themselves and their careers be they in higher education or educators experience within the K-12 setting.

Educator Physical Responses. The loss of control in job performance from compassion fatigue can result in some negative physical responses. Hydon et al. (2015) suggest that physical responses such as "having low energy or feeling fatigue in the classroom; having an upset stomach or nausea; having breathing difficulties; difficulty sleeping because of constant worry about a student" (p. 324) can be attributed to compassion fatigue. This shows that compassion fatigue or secondary traumatic stress can manifest itself in more than just emotional difficulties. The notion of a physical response from educators who experience compassion fatigue is supported by Levkovich and Gada (2020) who found that "teachers reported feeling shaky, helpless, uncertain, and panicked upon receiving news of a traumatic incident relevant to one of the children" (p. 100). This is important, because emotional and physical exhaustion is a major attribute of compassion fatigue. Levkovich and Gada (2020) go on to say that teachers "described physical responses such as trembling, crying, and sweating" (p. 100). An overall feeling of educator uncertainty can portray a wide range of physical responses associated with experiencing compassion fatigue.

In regard to the time of COVID-19, the feeling of a loss of control was resulting in physical responses in educators because "teachers are grappling with the collective impact of COVID-19, much like their students" (Crosby et al., 2020, p. 4). Due to this, educators are experiencing a physical response as they navigate and process information being presented to them from their students and school communities. Educator's physical responses were negative during COVID-19 as shown through Matthews et al. (2020) large scale study from the Fall of

2020 which stated that among educators “79% indicate they had only ‘fair,’ if not ‘poor,’ sleep over the past two weeks” (p. 13). Clearly, educators were feeling uneasy and high levels of stress teaching in the time of COVID-19 (Matthews et al., 2020). These feelings of stress may negatively influence educators’ sleep quality. Due to the COVID-19 unknowns, personal fears, decline in mental and physical health, educators indicated that “74% of respondents feel less enthusiastic about their jobs now compared to when they first started teaching” (Matthews et al., 2020, p. 15). Currently, there is a worse outlook on the teaching profession, educators have been feeling less positive about teaching, and there is an increase in teachers likely to leave the education profession (Steiner & Woo, 2021).

Ethic of Care Theory

Nel Noddings’ (1984) Ethic of Care Theory describes that “the one-caring desires the well-being of the cared-for and acts (or abstains from acting—makes an internal act of commitment) to promote that well-being” (p. 24). The foundational highlight within the Ethic of Care Theory is centered on relationships. In order to understand care ethics, one must understand the dynamic of a caring relationship within an ethic of care approach. For example, to be considered caring, one must experience engrossment where “the one-caring is sufficiently engrossed in the other to listen to him and to take pleasure or pain in what he recounts” (Noddings, 1984, p. 19). Secondly, to be caring, one must experience motivational displacement where the one-caring places their energy in the service of someone else where their vulnerability is amplified (Noddings, 1984). Lastly, the Ethic of Care Theory emphasizes that the acknowledgment of the cared-for finalizes a caring connection between the one-caring and the cared-for (Noddings, 2012). Educators, as caring individuals engage in these types of interactions with students in order to develop meaningful relationships. Educators care for their

students and "there is a cost to caring. Workers exposed to the stories of distressed and traumatized people often describe personal experiences similar to those of their clients" (Tehrani, 2007, p. 325). Care based interactions can be emotionally exhausting as educators naturally become engrossed or invested in their students' lives. Since teachers see their students every day, they cannot help but to become immersed into their students' troubles, problems, or hardships.

As in the Ethic of Care Theory, compassion fatigue has an engrossment and vulnerability component where "an individual observing another person experiences emotional responses parallel to that person's actual or anticipated emotions" (Figley, 1995, p. 9). Therefore, when considering compassion fatigue there is very much engrossment in another person and motivational displacement where one's energy is being directed toward the one in pain and suffering. In this way, compassion fatigue fits nicely with Noddings' Ethic of Care Theory.

Conclusion

In conclusion, teaching during the global pandemic was difficult because there was a "need for teachers to be continuously aware and attentive to students' difficulties even in the presence of a teacher's own emotional challenges" (Ziaian-Ghafari & Berg, 2019, p. 46). This was a tough task to manage and it is often overlooked when regarding teachers' experiences. As a result of the pandemic, teachers and higher education professors are thrown into a helping role, which could be detrimental (Cordaro, 2020). "Due to the nature of the COVID-19, some faculty may exhibit a psychological vulnerability toward developing compassion fatigue by bearing witness to students who are distressed, struggling with mental health, or experiencing trauma in their lives" (Cordaro, 2020, p. 19). These challenges were already taking place in education, but the global pandemic compounded what was already an emotionally demanding and stressful profession (Pressley & Ha, 2022). Many educators are caring individuals and thus they cannot avoid but to take into account their students thoughts and experiences. Teachers must make

instructional adjustments and navigate complex conversations within the school setting based on their relationships with students.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The primary focus of this exploratory qualitative case study was to understand educators' experiences during the COVID-19 Pandemic and the extent to which they have experienced compassion fatigue from their experiences during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The researcher also explored how educator responsibilities changed with the COVID-19 Pandemic and sought to understand teacher and administrator perceptions of ways to support teachers based on their global pandemic experiences.

Research Design

An exploratory case study design was used in this qualitative research study. Qualitative research is the interpretation of everyday life through procedures and conditions which are used to understand and organize reality (Holliday, 2016). In continuation, "qualitative research is a mode of inquiry that centralizes the complexity and subjectivity of lived experience and values these aspects of human *being* and meaning making through methodological means" (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 5). Qualitative case study allows for "the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances" (Stake, 1995, p. xi). Furthermore, an exploratory case study design was chosen as it is "best suited to qualitative research methods that allow for in-depth analysis of complex and layered issues and flexible enough to account for highly open-ended research questions, data collection protocols, and analyses" (Butin, 2010, p. 80). Additionally, exploratory designs are best applied to new events and uncertain times (Butin, 2010). This applies directly to educators working through the COVID-19 Global Pandemic and exploring a research topic such as compassion fatigue that has not been thoroughly researched with general educators as the targeted population. This

qualitative exploratory case study addressed the following research questions regarding educators:

1. What were educators' experiences during the COVID-19 Pandemic?
2. How have educators' responsibilities changed with the COVID-19 Pandemic?
3. To what extent did educators experience compassion fatigue since the most active periods of the COVID-19 Pandemic?
4. What are educators' perceptions of what is needed to support them as professionals based on their COVID-19 Pandemic experiences?

Study Context

The study was conducted among two middle schools in a large urban school district in the Northeast. Within this large urban school district, the Northport School District (pseudonym), there is racial diversity and there are broad ranges of socio-economic disparities. The two chosen middle schools were Pinebrook Middle School and Cedar Hill Middle School. Pinebrook has roughly 1,100 students with a demographic student population reported as 64.4% Hispanic/Latino, 21.9% Caucasian, 5.3% African American, and 4.7% Asian (CSDE, 2023). Also, Pinebrook has 54.3% of students eligible for free and reduced meals, 29.6% are English Language Learners, 17.2% are chronically absent students, and it has a 11.8% suspension/expulsion rate (CSDE, 2023). In comparison, Cedar Hill has roughly 1,000 students with a demographic student population reported as 66.9% Hispanic/Latino, 20.1% Caucasian, 7.7% African American, and 2.8% Asian (CSDE, 2023). Additionally, Cedar Hill has 55.9% of student eligible for free and reduced meals, 41.5% are English Language Learners, 17.9% are chronically absent students, and it has a 20.7% suspension/expulsion rate (CSDE, 2023). These statistical descriptions help display the diversity and complexity of the two middle schools.

Teacher and administrator participants were only selected from two of the three middle schools within the urban school district. One magnet middle school was excluded as educators may have a different experience working there compared to the other two more traditional middle school environments. The magnet school has approximately 750 students and students enrolled in the magnet school through a lottery system that opens in the Fall of every school year. It follows a magnet school model with designated themed academies within the school, whereas the other two middle schools have an identified cluster model within the school where students are placed. A particular case in this qualitative exploratory case study is defined as “a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context. The case is, in effect, your unit of analysis. Studies may be of just one case or of several” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2020, p. 24). For this study, a case was defined by each participant teacher and administrator that was interviewed based on their willingness to answer the semi-structured interview questions. There were many cases or a collection of cases in this study, which are referred to as a collective case (Stake, 1995). Multiple cases are preferred and needed to illustrate a phenomenon with precise explanation (Stake, 1995).

Participants

For the purpose of this study, each educator such as a teacher or administrator, represented a case. Purposive sampling and application of criterion-based case selection was utilized in this qualitative exploratory case study design (Patton, 2015). All content area teachers at each of the two middle schools were asked to participate until a total of 15 teachers (Table 1) volunteered to participate in the study.

Table 1

Participant Teacher Demographics

Pseudonym	Years in Education	Content Area	Grade Level	School Name	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity
Barbara	29	Math	7th	Pinebrook	Female	Caucasian
Chloe	25	ELA	6th	Pinebrook	Female	Caucasian
Frank	25	S. S.	8th	Pinebrook	Male	Caucasian
Kim	23	Math	6th	Pinebrook	Female	Caucasian
Tom	21	Math	6th	Pinebrook	Male	Caucasian
Mary	20	Science	6th	Pinebrook	Female	Caucasian
Paul	16	S. S.	6th	Cedar Hill	Male	Caucasian
Ian	11	S. S.	8th	Cedar Hill	Male	Caucasian
Albert	9	S. S.	7th	Pinebrook	Male	Caucasian
Nancy	9	Science	7th	Pinebrook	Female	Asian
Gavin	7	S. S.	7th	Pinebrook	Male	Caucasian
Oliver	6	ELA	7th	Pinebrook	Male	Caucasian
Wilma	6	Math	7th	Cedar Hill	Female	Caucasian
Emma	5	Science	7th	Cedar Hill	Female	Caucasian
Vivian	5	ELA	6th	Cedar Hill	Female	Caucasian

The teacher educators were selected from strictly general education teachers in core content disciplines such as English Language Arts (ELA), Social Studies (S. S.), Science, or Math. The middle school teacher educators were recruited from their experience as having taught as a core

content teacher during all three years of the global pandemic, which was classified as having worked during the 2019-2020, 2020-2021, and 2021-2022 academic school years.

All administrators at each of the two middle schools were asked to participate until a total of five administrators (Table 2) volunteered to participate. There were a total of six administrators working at both middle schools. The administrators were recruited from their experience as having worked as an administrator during all three years of the global pandemic, which was classified as having worked during the 2019-2020, 2020-2021, and 2021-2022 academic school years. Two Principals and three Assistant Principals (AP) volunteered to participate in the study.

Table 2

Participant Administrator Demographics

Pseudonym	Years in Education	Content Area	Grade Level	School Name	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity
Zoey	31	AP	6, 7, 8	Pinebrook	Female	Hispanic/Latino
Hannah	26	AP	6, 7, 8	Cedar Hill	Female	Caucasian
Lori	20	Principal	6, 7, 8	Cedar Hill	Female	Caucasian
Sofia	19	AP	6, 7, 8	Cedar Hill	Female	Hispanic/Latino
Robert	18	Principal	6, 7, 8	Pinebrook	Male	Caucasian

An overall total of 20 participants was a desired number of participants as “multiple cases offer the researcher an even deeper understanding of the process and outcomes of cases” (Miles et al., 2020, p. 26). All of the participants were questioned on how they are doing in the 2022-2023 school year following their pandemic teaching experiences. In following best practices in qualitative research, the researcher obtained permission to conduct the study from the

Superintendent (Appendix A), building principals (Appendix B), and individual participant permission through signed consent (Appendix C). The identity of the school district, middle schools, and all participants have been safeguarded and remain strictly confidential through the use of pseudonyms.

Data Collection

The qualitative data that were collected in this study included teacher interviews, administrator interviews, and a researcher journal (Table 3). These data sources were selected,

Table 3

Research Questions with Data Sources

Research Questions	Data Sources		
	Teacher Interviews	Administrator Interviews	Researcher Journal
R. Q. 1: What were educators' experiences during the COVID-19 Pandemic?	X	X	X
R. Q. 2: How have educators' responsibilities changed with the COVID-19 Pandemic?	X	X	X
R. Q. 3: To what extent did educators experience compassion fatigue since the most active periods of the COVID-19 Pandemic?	X	X	X
R. Q. 4: What are educators' perceptions of what is needed to support them as professionals based on their COVID-19 Pandemic experiences?	X	X	X

because they best supported answering the qualitative research questions. A data matrix outlines the research questions with individual interview protocol questions as seen in Table 4. The data

Table 4

Data Matrix for Interview Questions

Research Question	Teacher Interview Protocol Questions	Administrator Interview Protocol Questions
1. What were educators' experiences during the COVID-19 Pandemic?	1, 3, 5, 8, 9	1, 3, 5, 8, 9
2. How have educators' responsibilities changed with the COVID-19 Pandemic?	2, 6, 7	2, 6, 7
3. To what extent did educators experience compassion fatigue since the most active periods of the COVID-19 Pandemic?	10, 11, 12, 13, 14	10, 11, 12, 13, 14
4. What are educators' perceptions of what is needed to support them as professionals based on their COVID-19 Pandemic experiences?	4, 15, 16	4, 15, 16

sources for this study were used to achieve triangulation. Triangulation occurs in acquiring multiple sources of information to support the validity of the study where "the use of multiple sources of evidence in case studies allows an investigator to address a broader range of historical and behavioral issues" (Yin, 2009, p. 115). For this reason, multiple data sources were utilized in this qualitative exploratory case study.

Teacher and Administrator Demographic Questionnaire

A demographic questionnaire (Appendix D) was utilized to gather participant personal experience related to demographics and teaching experience. This data collection tool added to the overall richness of the data (Geertz, 1973). The information gathered in the demographic questionnaire included the participant's name (for researcher purpose only), gender,

race/ethnicity, highest level of education, teaching experience, administrative experience, educator role during the 2019-2022 school years, and current position during the 2022-2023 school year. The demographic questionnaire was completed before each educator interview was conducted. The demographic questionnaire helped to ensure that all educators that were interviewed had worked through the entirety of the COVID-19 Global Pandemic and were still currently working within the two selected middle schools.

Teacher and Administrator Interviews

Once Western Connecticut State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was received, in-person interviews were conducted for approximately 60-90 minutes. The semi-structured interview protocol was specific for the teacher interviews (Appendix E) and the administrator interviews (Appendix F). A data matrix was utilized to match each semi-structured interview question with a larger research question for educator and administrator interviews to ensure data fidelity to the study. All the interviews were digitally recorded for later transcription, which were verbatim for quality analysis.

Researcher Journal

In qualitative research, the researcher must recognize and reflect on their values and biases that might influence or interfere with the study (Krefting, 1991). In the execution of qualitative research, "the researcher is a participant, not merely an observer. The investigator, then, must analyze himself or herself in the context of the research" (Krefting, 1991, p. 218). A reflective researcher journal allows the opportunity to engage in this kind of personal analysis. The researcher journal "reflects the researchers' thoughts, feelings, ideas, and hypotheses generated by contact with informants" (Krefting, 1991, p. 218). By utilizing the researcher journal, the researcher was able to reference it as an ongoing source of data during the data

collection, data analysis, researcher thought process, and composing reflective questions throughout the study. The researcher journal served as a place to document questions in order to ask of the dissertation chair throughout the writing and consultation process.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data presents a richness that uncovers complexity with thick descriptions from real experiences (Miles et al., 2020). In order to gain rich data (Geertz, 1973) from this qualitative study, data were collected from a total of 20 educators. The educator demographic questionnaire also added to the richness of the gathered data. Due to the richness of data, a constant comparative method was used in this research study (Boeije, 2002; Miles et al., 2020). A constant comparative method allows for deeper analysis as it compels "the analyst to consider much diversity in the data. By diversity we mean that each incident is compared with other incidents, or with properties of a category, in terms of as many similarities and differences as possible" (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 114). It is then in which an occurrence, event, or participant can be categorized into a particular and distinct class (Miles et al., 2020). It is important to remember that "the process of qualitative research continuously interact and build off one another in cyclical fashion" (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 2). Through this continuous process, I was able to uncover findings about the real and lived experiences of educators at Pinebrook and Cedar Hill Middle School, and their encounters with compassion fatigue during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The anticipated codes were discovered through interaction and thorough understanding of the theoretical framework (Table 5). The additional codes were identified through data analysis using the qualitative data analysis software known as NVivo.

Table 5

Data Analysis: Anticipated and Emergent Codes

Anticipated Codes	Emergent Codes
Anxiety	Compassion Satisfaction
Compassion Fatigue	Educator Apathy
Exhaustion	Educator Health
Fear	Educator New Roles
Helplessness	Educator Time
Hybrid Teaching	Isolation
Remote Teaching	Leadership Learning Curve
Secondary Trauma	Lack of Support
Stress	Office Hours
Student Relationships	Student Behaviors
Technology	Student Responsibilities
Work-Life Balance	Technology Learning Curve
	Wanting to Quit

As such, the researcher utilized deductive coding where "these processes involve reading the data and looking for something specific" (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 265). The research also utilized inductive coding where the "coding stays as close to the data as possible" (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 265). Both of these approaches were implemented in order to identify important and significant themes within the twenty transcripts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A codebook was created and revised throughout the coding process and during analysis for confirmability

(Ravitch & Carl, 2021). The inductive codes was utilized because, "the repetition of an aspect of experience that was already mentioned in other passages takes on weight and calls attention to itself" (Seidman, 2019, p. 135). In addition to anticipated codes from the literature, the researcher paid close attention to look for codes that emerged as the data were read, interpreted, and compared to the other transcripts. The qualitative data were interpreted through codes that were rigorously analyzed to ensure that codes emerged organically and naturally to develop critical themes.

By recording the transcripts and then transcribing them verbatim for analysis purposes ensured accuracy. Also, "by preserving the words of the participants, researchers have their original data. If something is not clear in a transcript, the researchers can return to the source and check for accuracy" (Seidman, 2019, p. 123). This ensured that the researcher was thorough in their qualitative data analysis. Specifically, the content analysis of transcripts were analyzed through First Cycle and Second Cycle coding (Miles et al., 2020). This type of coding was important to ensure that the data was reviewed multiple times to develop a comprehensive understanding of the emerging themes or categories. Furthermore, triangulation was used "to minimize misperception and the invalidity of our conclusions" (Stake, 1995, p. 134). Misinterpretation was firmly eliminated through the confirmation of findings and themes from multiple data sources.

Teacher and Administrator Demographic Questionnaire

The researcher created an educator demographic questionnaire that was utilized to support the richness of the data (Geertz, 1973). The data were displayed in Table 1 to show the comprehensive picture of all 20 participants in the study. These data helped to support the findings in Chapter 4 and conclusions made in Chapter 5.

Teacher and Administrator Interviews

The educator interviews were recorded and transcribed into the software program known as NVivo. NVivo was utilized while "handwritten field notes, along with audio or video recordings, [were] converted into analyzable text, which then [was] condensed, displayed, and used to draw and verify conclusions" (Miles et al., 2020, p. 40). The NVivo software program allowed transcripts to be fully analyzed and compared. The NVivo software also allowed each participant transcript, all codes, and coded references to be tracked into one database. As such, the NVivo program created important organization in the thorough coding process.

The researcher wrote memos while reading transcripts for the first time to lay a foundation for coding. With this process, the researcher followed the recommendations of Miles et al. (2020) to "stop whatever else you are doing and write the memo. Don't worry about prose elegance or even grammar. Include your musings of all sorts, even the fuzzy and foggy ones" (p. 90). This allowed for thoughts to emerge as they come naturally to the mind. In general, "memos are about ideas. Simply summarizing or recounting data examples is not enough" (Miles et al., 2020, p. 91). The use of memos promoted organic ideas as the data were interacted with and closely interpreted. Next, the First Cycle coding utilized Concept Codes where it was important to "assign meso- or macrolevels of meaning to data or to data analytic work in progress" (Miles et al., 2020, p. 66). This was an essential component as the data were organized together to illustrate bigger picture ideas (Miles et al., 2020). For example, "a concept suggests an idea rather than an object or observable behavior" (Miles et al., 2020, p. 66). Concept Codes allowed the researcher to form pockets of thought that encompass multiple data points. Additionally, in the First Cycle coding the researcher applied Emotion Coding, which "is particularly appropriate for studies that explore intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions"

(Miles et al., 2020, p. 67). In a qualitative study focused on exploring compassion fatigue, it was critically important to capture the raw and direct feelings of teachers during a unique time period in the field of education, such as the COVID-19 Global Pandemic. Finally, the First Cycle coding employed Subcoding, which was "appropriate when code entries will later require more extensive indexing, categorizing" (Miles et al., 2020, p. 72). The Subcoding was essential to ensure that concepts are not becoming too broad as interrelationships form (Miles et al., 2020).

Furthermore, the Second Cycle coding consisted of Pattern Coding, which was a means to place the multiple sets of codes into categories and themes (Miles et al., 2020). This was an important step as "it helps the research elaborate a cognitive network—an evolving, more integrated schema for understanding local incidents and interactions" (Miles et al., 2020, p. 79). The Pattern Coding helped to condense the data across cases and making it more centralized for the researcher. This condensed data created an optimal setting for cross-case analysis within other similar cases (Miles et al., 2020).

Researcher Journal

According to Ravitch and Carl (2021), "a research journal is a place to record your thoughts, questions, struggles, ideas, excitements, and experiences with the process of learning about and engaging in various aspects of research" (p. 116). This reflective researcher journal was utilized for data analysis purposes. The journal was used for new understandings through reading, looking for ideas that connect to themes, and determining questions to ask the dissertation chair. Ortlipp (2008) suggests that "keeping and using reflective research journals can make the messiness of the research process visible to the researcher" (p. 704). It brought more clarity throughout the research process with incorporation of self-reflection and developing frameworks when contemplating about big ideas (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). Overall, "research

journals are useful both for in-the-moment reflection and meaning-making and for charting ideas, thoughts, emotions, and concerns over time" (Ravitch & Carl, 2021, p. 116). The discoveries from journal analysis created continual insight and directions to follow with guidance from my dissertation chair. The researcher journal was used prior to the dissertation proposal and remained a valuable resource through each chapter that was written until the dissertation was finalized.

Researcher Positionality

The researcher is a doctoral candidate in the Doctor of Education in Instructional Leadership program at Western Connecticut State University. He earned a Bachelor of Arts Degree at Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia, PA majoring in History and Political Science. He earned a Master of Science in Counseling at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, MD as part of the inaugural School Counseling Fellows Program. Additionally, the researcher completed academic coursework germane to this study in Counseling Theory and Practice, Group Counseling/Group Experience, Counseling Adolescents, Child/Youth with Exceptionalities, Research and Evaluation in Counseling, Quantitative Methods Applied to Educational Research, Qualitative Methods Applied to Educational Research, Quantitative and Qualitative Methods Applied to Educational Research, Educational Research Designs, Learning-Cognition and Teaching, and Topics in Curriculum and Instruction. Professionally, the researcher has been a school counselor for 13 years in both the middle school and high school settings. As a school counselor he has spent the majority of his time working in urban school settings that were underfunded with limited resources. He also worked throughout the entire COVID-19 Global Pandemic including the transition from distance learning to in-person learning settings across the three school years, which included 2019-2022. Furthermore, the

researcher has experience working in an urban educational non-profit setting that supported at-risk adolescents and at the Johns Hopkins Hospital as a counselor providing support to students' academic, personal/social, and emotional needs.

Trustworthiness

The researcher maintained credibility through transcription of interviews verbatim to verify answers, code-recode procedure, and the use of triangulation. Credibility was also maintained through my researcher journal where reflexivity took place. Within the researcher journal, I recorded my thoughts, initial interview reactions, intellectual curiosities, and meta-cognitive contemplations that were necessary to work through my research. The researcher maintained transparency where data "interpretation requires acute awareness of the data, concentration, and openness to subtle undercurrents of social life" (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002, p. 31). The use of interview protocols illustrated transparency in which the "interview questions [were] carefully cross-referenced to the study's research question" (Anfara et al., 2002, p. 31). The interview protocols are shared within the study appendices. This study established transferability as "the case (or cases) explored needs to be useful to others in similar situations" (Toma, 2011, p. 272). This case study was extensively detailed to ensure other locations with similar populations could benefit and learn from the findings. The researcher established transferability through the thick description and purposive sampling (Geertz, 1973; Patton, 2015). For example, the researcher made an abundant effort to support transferability in which to "provide only the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316). Additionally, this research study established dependability where "the researcher continually [searched] for evidence that [challenged] his or her

conclusions" (Toma, 2011, p. 274). Dependability was maintained through the review of coding and conversations with the dissertation chair about data analysis. Lastly, this research study had confirmability in which the "findings should reflect the participants and inquiry itself and not a fabrication from the biases or prejudices of the research" (Toma, 2011, p. 274). Confirmability was maintained through triangulation of multiple sources or cases and through the researcher practicing reflexivity. This is an important step because, "as the study unfolds and particular pieces of information come to light, steps should be taken to validate each against at least one other source (for example, a second interview)" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 283). This was thoroughly completed as 20 interviews were conducted and cross-checked against each other.

Since, the researcher is the main instrument in qualitative research, the researcher avoided biases through triangulation where data findings were continually cross-checked and compared to each other as multiple sources, which decreases the likelihood of falsification (Krefting, 1991). Continually, the researcher addressed personal bias by maintaining a reflective journal where the researcher analyzed feelings and reflections from the ongoing findings and thought process (Yin, 2011). The researcher engaged meaningfully with his dissertation chair for thorough reflection. Furthermore, a data matrix was used "to ensure that the right questions [were] asked, at least questions that [addressed] the study's main questions" (Anfara et al., 2002, p. 31). The data matrix allowed for transparency and clarity to the alignment of research questions with interview questions.

Dissertation Timeline

This study took place beginning in the Fall of 2022 with an anticipated end date of Summer 2024 (Table 6). Data collection and analysis began in the Spring of 2023 and continued

through the Summer of 2023. The dissertation was written during Fall of 2023 through Spring of 2024, with an anticipated defense in the Summer of 2024.

Table 6

Dissertation and IRB Timeline

Fall 2022	Dissertation Proposal Defense/Submit to IRB/Write Chapter 2
Spring 2023	Data Collection/Write and Revise Chapter 2
Summer 2023	Data Analysis/Write Chapter 3
Fall 2024	Data Analysis/Write Chapter 4
Spring 2024	Revise Chapters 1-4
Summer 2024	Write and Revise Chapter 5/Dissertation Defense

Limitations

A limitation of this study was that the selected school district was from a large urban district in the Northeast. The global pandemic may have presented different experiences and challenges in urban districts in comparison to other wealthy, suburban, or rural school districts in the Northeast. The Northport School District has a diverse student population, high population of students on free and reduced lunch, and a large number of English Language Learners. School districts with different student demographic information may present different findings. This study also only evaluated educators' experiences during the global pandemic. It did not take into account educators' experiences outside the scope of the pandemic. Educators' experiences with compassion fatigue may look different during other periods of time or not during times of heightened crisis.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative case study was to understand educators' experiences during the COVID-19 Pandemic, which included the 2019-2020, 2020-2021, and 2021-2022 school years. This study was concerned with the extent to which participants may have experienced compassion fatigue because of their lived experiences. The ways that educator responsibilities changed and educators were supported as professionals based on their COVID-19 Pandemic experiences were also explored. The research that was completed is presented within this results chapter. The larger themes presented in this research study include Educator Pandemic Fears, Educator Pandemic Personal Experiences, Educator Professional Stressors during the Pandemic, Student Related Issues During the COVID-19 Pandemic, and Educator Pandemic Compassion Fatigue. Each of these themes is presented in this chapter. The data analyzed in this chapter provided the basis for the recommendations made in Chapter 5. Understanding educators' experiences with compassion fatigue, also known as secondary traumatic stress, is important given the nature of their work.

Compassion fatigue, secondary traumatic stress, or vicarious trauma all have the potential to be present in schools because this can be experienced by educators through their being subjected to difficult incidents or traumatic situations shared by their students (Gentry et al., 2002). For example, research has shown that witnessing the act of retelling a traumatic incident can cause a person to experience secondary traumatic stress (Gentry et al., 2002; Whitfield & Kanter, 2014). This research supports the likely occurrence of secondary stress for teachers, as there are over 10 million American children who experience trauma on a yearly basis (Hupe & Stevenson, 2019). Many of these children share personal and trauma based information with

their teachers and administrators. From this and the shouldering of students' troubles, compassion fatigue can have a personal and sudden onset on an educators' feelings of emotional and physical exhaustion, apathy, helplessness, desensitization to students and families, and depersonalization to students (Henson, 2020). The stressors of the COVID-19 Pandemic on top of the nature of teachers' work can negatively impact educators in the multiple ways as described here.

Educator Pandemic Fears

Fear of the Unknown

At the start of the COVID-19 Global Pandemic, there was public fear and uncertainty surrounding the information coming out about the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) as an infectious disease. In January of 2020, COVID-19 was identified as a Public Health Emergency of International Concern by the World Health Organization. Moreover, public concerns continued to rise as the virus outbreak was categorized as a Global Pandemic on March 11th, 2020, which resulted in the closure of organizations, including schools (World Health Organization, 2024). Much like the general public, educators were faced with much uncertainty and fear during the COVID-19 Global Pandemic. There was conflicting information coming out about COVID-19 that made it difficult to determine what the future was going to bring to the field of education (Nagler, Vogel, Gollust, Rothman, Fowler, & Yzer, 2020). Feelings regarding COVID-19 apprehension can be seen when Mary Turner, a sixth grade Science teacher stated, "at the beginning, it was just scary. Like the pandemic was just scary" (Mary). The unknown aspects of the Global Pandemic created concerns, because nothing like this had happened before in anyone's lifetime. Barbara Cook, a seventh grade Math teacher, expressed a fear of dying when commenting,

> I know, I'm not the only one, but I went and made sure my Will, my last Will and Testament was all set. I mean, because we really thought we were going to die. I thought we're going to get sick and maybe, possibly die. I mean, that's what the stress level was. (Barbara Cook)

The extent of this fear is important to understand during the Spring 2020 initial lockdown, because educators were not just thinking about teaching their students and performing their traditional roles. Instead, educators were also faced with the greatest fear, which was the possibility of dying due to a new and life-threatening virus that was rapidly spreading globally.

The general public, as well as educators, watched and had access to daily COVID-19 death totals. Knowledge of the increasing death totals seemed unavoidable as television news stations, social media, and traditional print media continuously broadcasted daily numbers of world death counts from the COVID-19 Pandemic. In 2020, the virus was responsible for a worldwide mortality estimate of over three million deaths (World Health Organization, 2023). It was terrifying to see the number of people in the world dying from something that was new and causing the world to shutdown daily life and working routines, including basic human contact, overall living conditions, and travel. Several administrators suggested a level of disbelief with having to process the increase of COVID-19 deaths. Zoey Olsen, an Assistant Principal shared,

> I remember thinking, I was talking to my best friend, who was an educator in Florida, and we were on the US website, and it said 24 people died. And we were like…I'm like, "Okay, well, what's the big deal?" And then we started watching it [death totals], and watching it, and watching that number grow. "It's over a million. Oh my God, like what?" You know, we would watch that number and I would keep seeing it increase and just be

> like, “How is this happening? How?” I just hope no one ever has to experience anything like that in their lifetime ever again. (Zoey Olsen)

The initial concerns with COVID-19 rapidly grew as the lockdown was extended and death tolls rose. This was important, because educators were faced with real life-threatening dangers and the seriousness of the COVID-19 virus at the same time that the nature of their work changed as the lockdown was extended, and online virtual learning and teaching became the norm. Frank Winter, an eighth grade Social Studies teacher shared,

> You're worried about people, you're watching the news. People are dying, people are getting sick, and you're wondering, you know, “Is that going to be you? Is it going to be your parents? Is that going to be your kids [students]? Your kids' [students’] parents?” I mean, so not only are you trying to teach, but you're trying to let them [students] know, that you're there. And I don't know, I'm a tangible guy. I like when people [students] are in front of me. It was a shift. (Frank Winter)

The quote from Frank Winter highlights the competing stressors that teachers experienced. This was important, because the COVID-19 Pandemic made educators question not only their personal and family safety, but also the safety of their students and students’ families. In the United States, about 550,000 people died before the vaccine was created and the vaccine prevented an estimated 140,000 COVID-19 deaths (Gupta, Cantor, Simon, Bento, Wing, & Whaley, 2021). The realistic fear of potential death from COVID-19 brought educators a consistent lack of stability and uncertainty of the impact it was going to have on the students that they were working with every day.

COVID-19 Guidelines and Vaccine Process

Throughout the 2019-2020, 2020-2021, and 2021-2022 school years; the COVID-19 health and safety protocols were updated as information about the virus and vaccines became available. Some of the safety protocols for educators in the State of Connecticut during the Fall of 2020 return to school in-person hybrid learning period included six feet social distancing, classroom floor markings for social distancing, frequent handwashing, mask and face coverings of the nose and mouth, coughing etiquette, disinfection of surfaces, and classroom desk shields (CSDE, 2020). There were also safety guidelines and instructions for what constituted a close contact with a COVID-19 positive person, when and how to contact trace, 10-day quarantining periods, and COVID-19 testing after exposure (Perkins, 2021). However, participants in this study did not return to in-person hybrid learning until the Spring of 2021 based on school district decisions regarding safety. Even in the Spring of 2021, this created strain and demanded continuous attention from educators to keep up with the latest protocols and to maintain their daily personal and professional routines. This can be best shown by Mary Turner, sixth grade Science teacher who stated,

> I had three little kids. And they [Government officials] kept the news, and the information about what was safe, and what was dangerous, kept changing anyway. So, I was afraid, sort of for myself and my family. And different members of my family, were following different guidelines, and some of them weren't following any guidelines. (Mary Turner)

The ongoing changes regarding the facts of COVID-19 was notable for educators because it was unclear on what were the best safety measures during the pandemic, what were the newest safety updates, and to whom teachers should be listening to when there were at times conflicting

beliefs. Educators were being pulled in many different directions from the information they were receiving about COVID-19, and this brought about feelings of uncertainty and confusion. The feelings of uncertainty and confusion continued as educators finally had the opportunity to receive their COVID-19 vaccinations. Educators were considered vital citizens and were with other first responders including civil servants to be prioritized for vaccination. Paul Fox, sixth grade Social Studies teacher recalled,

> I remember when the vaccine came out, and teachers had like one of the first shots at it, right? Just going down into that cafeteria, to get it, it was like out of a movie. It felt really surreal. Like, just this, this doesn't seem like it's actually happening in our life. It's something that we're watching. (Paul Fox)

Educators were considered frontline workers, which speaks to the important role educators play in society. The opportunity to receive vaccines earlier than most other professions was in order for students to be back in the classroom with a return to learning safely as soon as possible. While educators were privileged to get their vaccine first, they had the added pressure of being in-person with students when there were still many unknowns being in close proximity to others, and many school aged children were not immediately able to receive vaccines when they became available.

COVID-19 and Teaching Practices

The COVID-19 Pandemic required a government initiated lockdown period where people stayed home in order to prevent the virus from spreading and in an attempt to lessen deaths. Educators were first asked to teach remotely where they taught online virtually. In this study, teachers were online teaching for the Spring and Fall of 2020. In Spring of 2021, educators taught in a smaller hybrid rotating student cohort model with mandatory masks while state

COVID protocols were in place to prevent large groupings of students and lessen the spread of the virus. Within all the different phases of teaching during the pandemic, which included remote teaching, hybrid teaching, and return to in-person learning without COVID protocols in place and mask optional. More than half of the participants were afraid of getting sick from COVID-19. This fear challenged educator instructional teaching practices with the return to in-person learning. Barbara Cook, a seventh grade Math teacher, had fear of getting sick from COVID-19 and it changed her personal commitment to strong instructional practices. She shared, “I think you're more worried about getting sick than making sure they're [students] learning in some ways. And making sure they [students] are, I mean, you tried. But you know, it was a lot. I think it was overwhelming” (Barbara). This statement speaks to a real concern about this period and educator competing concerns, when instruction is supposed to be the number one goal of schools. Within this pandemic time period, the importance of instruction seemed less crucial than educators’ desire to remain healthy. These were conflicting realities that seemed incongruent for many educators to experience about their work. Similarly, Kim Mason, a sixth grade Math teacher, was concerned about health and safety during the in-person hybrid teaching period in the Spring of 2021,

> I remember the kids were allowed to eat in the room, they brought their breakfast to the room [classroom]. I was not happy with that—with them having their mask off eating. I was fearful. I was fearful, because, I think COVID made me fearful of being in crowds. I have to say that. I would not go to stores when they were crowded…But them [students] being able to take their mask off to eat; I actually waited outside the classroom and wouldn’t go in until they were done. (Kim Mason)

Despite the fact that safety protocols were in place to maintain educator health, this is another example of how the return to school was causing educator distress. The COVID-19 Pandemic created a situation that made the teaching role look and feel different. Teachers experienced concern about their own health during the COVID-19 Pandemic, which altered their standard level of engagement with students. The return to in-person teaching even with COVID-19 protocols in place like social distancing and everyone masking did not ease teachers' fears. Instead, an unintended consequence of teachers' fear of catching the COVID-19 virus was that it changed their level of student engagement and their commitment to instructional delivery.

Educator Pandemic Personal Experiences

Educator Work-Life Balance

During the COVID-19 shutdown period in the Spring of 2020, local stores, businesses, fitness centers, restaurants, daycares, and schools were closed. As educators were transitioning to remote teaching in the Spring of 2020, many other organizations including businesses and many daycares were closed. In fact, only one-third of daycares were open in Connecticut to support essential employees in their return to work (Latina, 2020; Stuart, 2020). This meant that educators were home teaching fully remotely while their young children also remained home and needed to complete their schooling. This created a situation where it was harder for educators to balance all of life's responsibilities such as parenting with no access to childcare, teaching remotely, and sharing in homework spaces with family. This challenge was exemplified by Tom Brown, a sixth grade Math teacher, who stated,

> Stress level definitely for me went up [during the COVID-19 Shutdown]. I was in a house teaching with three of my own kids, one of which wasn't in school. So, trying to teach courses, make sure that my two children that at the time were in school, stayed focused

> on their studies. Maintain a child that was not entertained by anybody or watched by anybody, put the stress levels through the roof. And having a unique situation where my partner [wife] was also teaching at the same exact time, really limited a lot of the things that we could do. (Tom Brown)

This stress from the new expectation created by the COVID-19 Pandemic of working from home, while balancing remote teaching demands, and dealing with life responsibilities was experienced by multiple participants. This is critical to understand, because the COVID-19 Pandemic created an environment where there was a lack of separation between home-life and work-life. Educators were still responsible for their online teaching role while also attending to their own childcare needs with sometimes having two working parents in the home. Having to balance these roles led to educators being unable to have dedicated focus to their instruction at the level normal for in school work. Additionally, educator working hours and personal boundaries were also blurred with a lack of separation between home-life and work-life during the online teaching periods, which included the fully remote and hybrid learning periods. In these instances, teachers were working beyond contract hours and into the evening in order to plan and increase student engagement. There were examples of educators trying to help students whenever the students put forth effort including after the school day ended. This can be seen from Oliver Zelmer, a seventh grade ELA teacher during the fully remote period, who mentioned,

> I think those ones [online student interactions] definitely weighed on me a little bit more than those conversations do when we're like in the classroom. Again, because it really was that there was no separation between work and home life. So, it definitely, having those conversations and knowing that there's a kid out there that trusts you enough to

like, want to talk about those kinds of things [personal emotions]. And then at the same time, they're like failing your class. And then, it's like, you finished dinner, and you open up the laptop, and let me look through each document [Google Doc]. Maybe this kid happens to be like trying, and like they might be stuck and sometimes that would happen. And those, it's like a blessing and a curse, because you're like happy that they were on [working on their Google Doc], but then you start thinking every, every day, “Okay, are they going to expect me to be on? If I don't go on, if I don't help this kid, are they going to think that I'm letting them down? Are they going to revert back to whatever, wherever they started and lose all this progress that we've made?” So that was definitely, there's a lot of weight to that. (Oliver Zelmer)

During the fully remote period many educators did whatever they could to encourage student academic engagement. Teachers also felt personal responsibility towards students as depicted by Mr. Zelmer’s quote. This is impactful because educators put extra pressure on themselves to follow-up on their students’ progress. This created an unhealthy work-life balance where educators were not separating their personal-life from their working-life. This added stress created a situation where educators felt a heightened sense of exhaustion. In fact, the majority of participants both teachers and administrators felt that they had a lack of boundaries between home-life and working-life during the remote or hybrid teaching periods. Additionally, all five administrators felt that they had poor work-life balance during the remote or hybrid learning periods. In regard to the hybrid learning period, Robert Jones, Principal mentioned,

We said there was boundaries, but there was no boundaries. Because it was 10:30pm at night and you got the phone call, like, “Okay, we got to contact trace. We got to call these kids [students] now, so that they don't show up to school tomorrow.” (Robert Jones)

Especially for administrators, there was no turning off the expectation to work, because of the seriousness of the COVID-19 Pandemic. As in-person learning resumed, administrators were expected to manage contact tracing to ensure students would stay home and not expose other students to the COVID-19 virus. These tasks were completed at night when information was received leading to less time for administrators to rest during the pandemic. Educators found themselves in a situation where there was limited time to recharge and disconnect from work, which created more personal stress and exhaustion.

Educator Mental Stress

The majority of participants (Albert, Barbara, Chloe, Emma, Frank, Hannah, Ian, Zoey, Lori, Mary, Nancy, Oliver, Paul, Robert, Sofia, Tom, and Wilma) experienced mental stress during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The mental stress occurred in part because many educators were worried about their students' well-being. Educators witnessed and understood what their students were going through, and educators genuinely worried about them. They also could personally relate to them during this unique homebound time period and questioned how students were doing. Emma Lewis, a seventh grade Science teacher stated,

> There were quite a few times where it was just like kind of hit you. Like take your breath and you're like, "These students have no control, over their own lives right now and they're stuck in one room. All day, every day on a computer, looking for like any kind of connection." And then, you're like, if you thought too deep, you're like, "I don't know, this could go down a very dark path with how they find that connection." (Emma Lewis)

Educators could relate to feelings of isolation and a lack of control during the COVID-19 Pandemic and experienced mental stress when thinking about their students. The constant overthinking and worrying fostered mental stress during the global pandemic for educators.

Teachers worried about students feeling isolated and being able to find human connection during the remote learning periods, which added to educator mental stress.

Educators also experienced mental stress when thinking about their own childhood experiences and how it related to students. Robert Jones, Principal, personally knew what it was like growing up with limited resources and the difficulties that came with it. During the pandemic, many families lost jobs and could not afford food. Robert recalled,

> Because personally, I grew up, with a single mom on welfare, and so, I understand what it's like, to not have anything, right. So, you know, that all made sense to me. Like, I went to school with whatever we got at Goodwill, and there was plenty of nights my only meal, was the meal that I had at school. And so, watching that unfold for other kids was tough and emotional. (Robert Jones)

The added burden of knowing what students were going through took a stressful toll on educators. Educators were seeing other families struggle firsthand from the effects of the pandemic and "there is a cost to caring" (Figley, 1995, p. 1). This significant mental and emotional cost was compassion stress for educators (Figley, 1995). There was a real emotional and mental strain that educators experienced during the pandemic in making connections, thinking, and worrying about their students.

Educator Health

Sleep Loss. For educators, the COVID-19 Pandemic was a time period of heightened stress from personal fear, pressure of constantly working, lack of work-life boundaries, and worrying about student well-being. This resulted in some educators experiencing negative impacts on their personal physical health. Administrators were tasked with a range of problems during remote learning including teacher technology questions, solving hybrid learning safe

classroom setup, contact tracing, and organizing school traffic flow during the returned to in-person learning with masks. This led administrators such as Sofia Redmond and Robert Jones to experience sleep loss during the pandemic. Sofia Redmond, Assistant Principal commented,

> I lost sleep over some of the things. I literally would be up at night trying to think of like, "How can we make this better?" Like you know, as a previous school counselor, I'm always thinking of like kids' social, emotional, and the behaviors, and I'm like, "How do we tackle this?" (Sofia Redmond)

During all phases of the global pandemic, administrators were problem solvers dealing with teacher and student related issues. The sleep loss is notable for educators during this period, because in relation to secondary traumatic stress sleep loss can create more irritability, anger, and difficulty concentrating (Figley, 1995). This was a time period where educators were pushed beyond their normal career expectations to solve never before seen problems, and it exposed them to vulnerabilities of secondary traumatic stress.

Health Considerations. The COVID-19 Pandemic had an unexpected side effect of increased time spent on the computer. Educators were working longer hours, creating virtual lessons, having increased screentime, attending virtual meetings, and emailing more frequently. People in general were going outside less and spending more time on their digital devices. The "stay at home to save lives" COVID-19 motto generated an environment where people were relying on their devices in order to interact with other people. Due to this increase and demand of screentime, Frank Winter and Lori Ingram experienced considerable eyesight decline. Lori Ingram, Principal, commented,

> I can't use my regular glasses anymore. So, I was a person who was always aided by glasses. I can no longer just use regular glasses looking at the computer, because all I did

> was stare at computer screens. So now, I have to wear contacts and readers to look at a computer. So that is legit. My eyesight is worse, from sitting on the doggone computer all of the hours of the day. It was just, the physical. I think the physical came from more of like the mental exhaustion. (Lori Ingram)

The increased demand and need to be constantly working on computers during the COVID-19 Pandemic for educators brought about a negative impact on their eyesight. This is noteworthy because as educators experienced emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion from working during the pandemic, and it produced other physical problems that exacerbated their overall feelings of well-being. It was not just feeling tired or feeling emotionally drained, there were other physical implications to educators' overall well-being that made the job more difficult.

Other Health Considerations. The impact of stress during the COVID-19 Pandemic manifested other health considerations as well. Stress can cause the human body to react in a number of different ways. During the 2021-2022 school year with the return to in-person learning with mask wearing, some educators felt an increase in stress due to increased and unforeseen student behavioral issues. Dealing with unanticipated student behaviors led to educator's experiencing new physical health concerns. Vivian Ulrich, a sixth grade ELA teacher disclosed,

> I experienced a lot of stress, just to be personal with it. I have had to get crowns from cracked teeth, because I'm unconsciously like clenching, because I don't realize, while I'm working or thinking through stuff, I'm like stressed. I was kept up at the night, you know, thinking about okay, "What am I going to do on my next day, because this was the problem that happened today? So, what am I going to do next?" I had a lot of hair loss

> during it from stress, per you know, seeing the dermatologist and talking about it. (Vivian Ulrich)

This shows another example of how educator health was on the decline as a result from the high stress inducing environment that teachers had to navigate during the pandemic. Educators needed to address complex student behavioral scenarios, which in some instances led to cracked teeth and hair loss from stress. Overall, these added pressures of trying to help students through turbulent times and personal health factors contributed to educators feeling additional stress as professionals during the pandemic.

Social Isolation

Social isolation was a component of the COVID-19 Pandemic, because people were not allowed to physically be with other people outside of their immediate family. The United States government ordered people to remain in their homes during the shutdown period (Moreland, Herlihy, Tynan, Sunshine, McCord, & Hilton, 2020). As a result, educators stayed home and worked remotely. However, during the hybrid learning phase, educators remained in their assigned classroom and attended virtual staff meetings while logging on from their isolated classrooms. There was an expectation during the hybrid learning phase to feel more normal, but half of the students were being taught online and half were wearing masks in the classroom. For educators, there were no longer in-person or real face-to-face interactions during the hybrid learning period. Even teacher interaction during prep and lunch periods were subjected to being coordinated virtually, if you wanted to see a colleague. However, this did not make things any easier as the majority of participants in this study experienced feelings of isolation as an educator during the global pandemic. This can be seen when Emma Lewis, a seventh grade Science teacher commented,

> It was difficult to kind of like feel connected to anyone at the time [hybrid learning]. You couldn't really see anyone. And even the people I would see every day, have lunch with, like spend every prep period with, we'd try and like meet online afterwards [when students left for half day]. But after a while, it's just like, we're just going to sit here in silence [on the computer in a virtual meeting], while we're both kind of looking at each other. It's like there's nothing else to really say, even though it's like, if we were in person, there'd be so much more to do. So, it's kind of just like, finding that connection again, was hard. (Emma Lewis)

This is essential to recognize because teachers were starting to feel disconnected from one another. Teaching is a field built on human interactions and personal relationships. Teachers foster relationships with one another to help move their students through difficult content and the teachers in this study meet together often as Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to solve problems of practice. The COVID-19 Pandemic created feelings of disruption to the professional connections that teachers once had and desired from the lack of educator in-person interaction. Social isolation can further be seen among educators as a result of their personal masking beliefs. When wearing the mask became optional in the Spring of 2022, it created division among teachers. Tom Brown, a sixth grade Math teacher expressed,

> You sort of started to feel isolated. I know that when I was wearing it (the mask), there were other people who are like, "Oh this is stupid, why are you still wearing the mask?" Which puts a pressure on you. It's a peer pressure. You know, here you are a 40-50 something year old professional. And people are questioning your decisions whether to wear a mask or not, and you start to question it yourself. "Am I being stupid about this?" And at the end of the day, I mean my whole thing always came back to, "I'm not taking

> anything [sickness] home to my three kids." It wasn't necessarily about me; it was about them. I didn't want to be the bridge that potentially brought something home. (Tom Brown)

Not only were educators confined and isolated within their solitary classrooms during the pandemic, but they experienced further isolation from their differing viewpoints on wearing a mask when it became optional to wear one. Compassion fatigue can be experienced when people feel a disconnection to others (Ziaian-Ghafari & Berg, 2019). This is important because educators were losing connection to their colleagues during the COVID-19 Pandemic in a variety of ways. Teachers' community of support was at times getting smaller when they really needed unity and connection to overcome the new challenges of the pandemic.

Educator Job Change

During the global pandemic school years (2020-2023), educators experienced a poor work-life balance, increased emotional distress, a decline in physical health, and social isolation. Due to these personal experiences and others, some educators were contemplating leaving the profession all together. In fact, the majority of participants in this study had moments within the 2019-2020, 2020-2021, and 2021-2022 school years where they thought about quitting the education profession, because teaching and leading were too much to manage. Zoey Olsen, an Assistant Principal, decided on electing for a role change due to the daunting demands of being a Principal during the pandemic and went back to being an Assistant Principal. Zoey stated,

> Tremendous, tremendous stress levels. So much so that when the opportunity presented itself for me to take on the Assistant Principal position here [Pinebrook]…opportunities such as, you know this, did not, don't present themselves all the time. So, I had, I took the

> opportunity and just, I feel much better about somebody else. The Principal is ultimately, the punching bag, right? I'm like a mini punching bag now. (Zoey Olsen)

This is important as it is rare for any professional to take a career step backwards. Educators wondered if they could stay or if they needed a new educational role with less pressure. The pandemic also brought about teacher turnover as teachers stepped down from their positions. Wilma Quinn, a seventh grade Math teacher, decided to quit the teaching profession due to the impact of working during the pandemic. Wilma commented,

> And I actually kind of decided at the beginning of the school year that this is going to be my last year in the profession [2022-2023 school year]…but I like told my parents in January that I kind of, I knew that this would be my last year in Northport. But as the years gone on, I'm kind of like, “I think I'm just done.” And so quickly, they [my parents] were like, “Good. We're so proud of you.” And I was like, “What?” And they were like, “You are not the same person that you were before entering the field.” And I was like, “In what way?” And they're like [parents], “You just don't have the same upbeat, you know, energy about yourself that you used to carry.” And they were mainly within those three years. They were like, “You know, that definitely took a toll on you in a way that you probably don't even realize, but as your parents watching you go through it, was super hard.” And my mom was, you know, she didn't want to ask too many questions. But then afterwards, she said, “You know, thank you for opening up.” Because then I talked about last year and yeah, “I guess, I didn't really talk to you guys too much, because I didn't want you to be afraid for my safety and for what I was going through, I didn't want you to be stressed out about it.” (Wilma Quinn)

This is meaningful, because the pandemic made some teachers realize that the teaching profession was not worth risking their mental and physical health. In a profession where there was already a teacher shortage, working in the global pandemic made teachers question their chosen career within the educational field. The majority of educators in this study were second guessing their chosen career path as a result of working as an educator throughout the global pandemic.

Educator Professional Stressors

Leadership Learning Curve

In the Spring of 2020, the field of education was forced to shift to a remote learning format due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. Administrators and teachers had to step away from what they knew and work fully remote in a brand new virtual format. This was groundbreaking, because school districts never had to adjust to online learning nor had administrators needed to lead their staff in a virtual setting before. All five administrators (Hannah, Zoey, Lori, Robert, and Sofia) experienced a significant leadership learning curve during the remote teaching period. They all had to understand what it looked like for teachers to effectively teach remotely, and while also addressing problems they were not prepared to solve. Robert Jones, Principal expressed,

> Leading an educational organization during a global pandemic was something completely foreign to all of us. And I know for me, it just felt as if you were disassembling all the things you believed education was, and trying to reassemble it in a way that you at least felt was effective. So, for everything that we're trained and taught and knew, maybe that pedagogical approach doesn't apply anymore, any longer. Or maybe, I don't know, the

> way the curriculum flowed is no longer effective in any way, shape, or form. So, it was a lot about relearning what we felt that it was to be able to teach. (Robert Jones)

Administrators are confident instructional leaders who were previously secure in their knowledge base, but during the pandemic it placed them in a situation where they were much less comfortable. They could not rely on pedagogical practices as they once did as remote instruction was a new challenge and setting. This is noteworthy because administrators had to relearn what it was to do their job, which put them in an intimidating situation. Additionally, administrators had no one with experience to lean on as this was a new paradigm for all educators. Sofia Redmond, Assistant Principal stated,

> And I think part of it came with like a lot of unknowing. So, it was like, "What do we do?" And no one really had answers, which I think added to the stress, where your typical daily situations, you could at least go to somebody who can guide you with as far as what to do next. In this situation, we didn't have anybody. So, we were kind of making it up as we were going along. Which is scary, when we're talking about children's lives, like educational futures that are at risk. (Sofia Redmond)

This demonstrates that administrators were worried about the unknown with remote teaching and the magnitude of education on their students. Administrators were expected to be the experts, yet no one was an expert in the remote teaching format at the K-12 level in the United States. Therefore, administrators were under the added stress of figuring out remote learning in real time, supporting teachers, and building a sound academic experience for students.

Remote Teaching Challenges

Technology Learning Curve. The global pandemic forced teachers to learn new technology because instruction went fully online. Teachers were given a variety of new software

resources to learn which included Google Classroom, Google Meets, Screencastify, Pear Deck, Nearpod, Edpuzzle, Jamboard, Desmos, Kami, and TalkingPoints just to name a few. The majority of teacher participants (Albert, Barbara, Emma, Frank, Ian, Kim, Mary, Paul, Tom, and Vivian) in this study expressed challenges adapting to the new software and teaching modality that was required to be used during remote instruction. The difficulty in adapting to new technology during the remote learning phase included learning new programs, prioritizing a plethora of resources, recording videos, and teaching students digital tools and skills. Teacher participants such as Albert, Barbara, Kim, and Mary had trouble navigating digital teaching tools and creating new lessons. Barbara, a seventh grade Math teacher mentioned,

> I felt like I spent a lot of time trying to figure out the lessons, like in the beginning [remote phase] and videotaping. And then I would watch it and if I made a mistake, I did it [recorded] over again. So, it was like, you know, I'm sure we make the same kind of little mistakes when we teach and we don't realize it, but I said, "I can't put it up [post the video] like that." So, I would, you know, redo stuff, because I didn't really know how to edit, because I just didn't know how. So, I would just redo the whole thing [video recording] over again. It was a lot of work. (Barbara Cook)

Teachers were highly critical of themselves during the remote learning phase and the quality of lesson they were putting forward to their students. Teachers were doing "double" the work as they had to get used to their own online lessons and in some cases aimed for perfection. This created an increase in more work and made teachers more tired in preparing for the next lesson. Teachers were self-critical of their recorded online lessons as it was being viewed by students, parents/guardians, and administrators. Frank Winter, an eighth grade Social Studies teacher shared his struggles regarding social media potentially violating his sense of self,

> And our first phase, which was absolute remote, was weird. Like, I didn't want to have my voice on anything, I don't want my face on anything. I was afraid that the kids [students] would take my face and, and put it elsewhere, and cut and paste, right. I was so insecure about the whole process. (Frank Winter)

This highlights that teachers not only struggled with the technology aspect of remote learning, but they also experienced fear in putting themselves online for students to view. A few teachers did not trust the process of online learning, which added to their apprehension during a time period where there was a great deal of trepidation already. This complicated their ability to be effective educational practitioners, which they typically felt secure in before the pandemic and the shift to remote learning.

Office Hours. During the remote learning and hybrid learning phase, teachers held designated virtual office hours for the first time in their profession. Prior to teaching in the pandemic, teachers had built in prep periods, collaborative planning time (CPT), time for professional learning communities (PLCs), and scheduled lunch time. They also worked with students during regular teaching times. A big shift in the pandemic was virtual office hours, and it was a time for teachers to provide instructional support for their students. However, the teachers' office hours during the pandemic became much more than just instructional support for students. The office hours were a time for teachers to build relationships with students and for students to find personalized human connection during their home isolation. The majority of teacher participants (Barbara, Emma, Gavin, Ian, Kim, Mary, Vivian, and Wilma) found virtual office hours a time to develop student connections during the global pandemic. Gavin Perry, a seventh grade Social Studies teacher stated, "My office hours was less of homework help and more of just like, let's hang out, play video games together, or just talk. A lot of kids joined just

to talk" (Gavin). Students needed an outlet to socialize, which was something they were missing from remote learning and office hours became that opportunity. In some instances, office hours made for longer days as teachers tried to support their students. Barbara Cook, a seventh grade Math teacher expressed,

> I didn't mind keeping the office hours. I mean, it made for a long day and sometimes they were supposed to end, but I felt like if some kids needed time, I would stay on for a while. Because the day would end then, but I would stay on with them as the other teachers did too. And talk and just interact with kids, because I think they needed that. So that was where I felt like I got to know those kids. (Barbara Cook)

Teachers were working past their contract hours during the remote learning phase to engage with their students beyond scheduled office hours to support students' social and emotional health. Teachers understood the emotional need that students had and went above and beyond to be present for them. Ian Kelly, an eighth grade Social Studies teacher confirmed this when stating,

> I would say the best emotional support was office hours, because it was the only time where you were able to connect with kids on more of a one-on-one [basis] without the pressures of you know, doing the lesson or having the whole class, or something like that. (Ian Kelly)

Teachers were providing emotional support for students in a time of a heightened crisis and a public health emergency. Educators' role was more than just instruction during the pandemic. The role went beyond a normal work day in order to be there for students and provide a space where students could feel safe in an unsafe world that the global pandemic created.

Hybrid Challenges

In the Spring of 2021, the Northport School District transitioned to a hybrid learning model where students were assigned into one of two cohort groups that each attended school in-person two different days a week, and every Wednesday was a home virtual learning day for all students. When one of the cohort group of students were home, they were learning remotely online. This was the first transition back to in-person learning during the COVID-19 Pandemic for this district. Staff and students were required to wear facemasks, recommended to use face shields, utilized large desk shields, and recommended to have six feet social distancing (CSDE, 2020). Nearly half of teacher participants (Barbara, Chloe, Frank, Ian, Nancy, Paul, and Vivian) felt like hybrid instruction was essentially the same as remote learning where they were teaching to the computer screen. Nancy Adams, a seventh grade Science teacher shared,

> I still felt like I was tethered to my computer, and I still had to teach obviously in front of my computer so that the kids at home can see what I'm doing. So, I still felt like it was all remote teaching, even though I had kids in front of me. The kids, I thought, the easiest for me to do, to teach, was for them to [all] log onto Google [Meet]. So, it was like they were all remote. (Nancy Adams)

This shows how dual instruction during the pandemic was not ideal or effective. Teachers had to manage the best that they could and many realized that teaching to the computer screen was still easiest during hybrid learning. Teachers had to figure out ways to get through their day with the least amount of extra stress. This meant that student relationships suffered as hybrid instruction was completely masked in a sterile environment and taught primarily through a computer screen. Conversely, another group of five teacher participants (Gavin, Kim, Mary, Oliver, and Tom)

found that they focused primarily on students in the classroom during hybrid learning. Oliver Zelmer, a seventh grade ELA teacher stated,

> I stopped worrying about the kids on the computer screen. And that my priority was the kids who are in my room. I think it's just natural. The faces are there. You can have little conversations. There's not this fear of unmuting and everyone hearing whatever conversation you have full blast. And it literally became to the point where I would do my lesson. And then when it was work time, it would be me chatting with the kids who are in the desks, them asking little questions, and me spending more time on their work, just because it was easier to do. And it felt like I could get most like a utilitarian, I can get more out of these kids, these like 10 kids that are in my room than I possibly can out of those other like 12 kids who are on that screen. And I think that it did shift my priority away from the kids who were at home, and more to the kids who were in the classroom. (Oliver Zelmer)

This confirms that even for teachers who had a different experience with hybrid learning, that dual instruction was not effective. Teacher-student relationships were disconnected as students at home were instructionally neglected during hybrid learning by the second group of teacher participants. Teachers had to operate in a way that made sense to them, and some teachers could only focus on those actual students in front of them while some teachers preferred teaching to the computer screen and having the students in the classroom also on their computers. Although hybrid learning was meant to bring teachers and students back together, it ultimately created division in forming some of the student connections based on how teachers decided to teach their classes. Additionally, there was not a uniform style of instruction as teachers had to do what made them feel comfortable during the hybrid learning phase.

Educator New Role

Counseling. In order to minimize the spread of the virus, the global pandemic created an environment full of isolation and people were looking for ways to find human connection again. Students were no exception as they looked to their administrators and teachers for stability and safety. This naturally placed educators in a counseling role where students were sharing more information with them than they typically would. All five administrators (Hannah, Zoey, Lori, Robert, and Sofia) described feeling more like counselors and that they were handling more personal issues of families during the global pandemic school years. Zoey Olsen, an Assistant Principal shared,

> I also felt that I was not an instructional leader. I felt more like I was a social worker, or a counselor, or a mental health provider for many of our kids, adults, and students and families. As best as I could, you know, but I'm not a professional. So that kind of burden really weighs on you. (Zoey Olsen)

This highlights that administrators were taking on a lot more than they were used to handling and in a new context, and they were a relied upon emotional support person for their school community. Administrators were feeling the emotional burden of this new counseling role, which put added pressure and duties on them. Administrators were taken out of their comfort zone because they are not trained mental health providers. More than half of the teacher participants (Emma, Gavin, Ian, Kim Mary, Paul, Vivian, and Wilma) described feeling like they were undertaking more of a counseling role during the pandemic school years. Gavin, a seventh grade Social Studies teacher mentioned,

> I had more kids come to me with their own social problems ever, in those three years than before. A lot of kids coming to me with relationship problems, with their siblings, with

> other teachers. Just drama in general. And they came to me as an outlet, someone as a trusted adult. (Gavin Perry)

Teachers were the first to hear troubling information from their students during the pandemic school years at a rate that would not have been typical before the pandemic. Students were often home alone and had no one with whom to share information. Teachers were really frontline workers processing sensitive information from their students and deciding what actions that they as adults needed to take.

Educator Safety

During the 2021-2022 school year when students returned to full in-person learning with masks, some educators felt unsafe in their school environment. Students had been out of physical school for a year and a half, and students had forgotten how to behave in a traditional school setting. These were middle school students with unresolved emotional needs, who were feeling a lack of human connection, and they channeled their frustrated and aggravated energy into others within the school building. Three administrators (Hannah, Lori, and Sofia) all felt unsafe working in their school during that third pandemic school year. Hannah Noto, an Assistant Principal stated,

> Coming back after the pandemic [2021-2022 school year], that was stressful again, because it kind of, you know, it just, my stress level just increased, because of the [student] behaviors. It was just, every day, it was like walking into the ER [emergency room], you know, you'd have student crisis, you'd have fights, you'd have, you know, all kinds of things going on. (Hannah Noto)

Hannah highlights that the level of stress from feeling constantly needing to address student problems was the equivalent to working in an emergency room, even for administrators who are

used to solving school problems. Lori Ingram, a Principal echoed this feeling when she expressed,

> We legit asked for the entire cabinet [central office] to come help us, because I don't get nervous. Like kids, I don't care how tall or big, like whatever. I felt unsafe. Their behavior was so bad. And we did, we could not think of anything else to do. We had 1400 ISS [In-School Suspension] and OSS's [Out-of-School Suspensions]. We had, I mean, we [utilized] restorative circles, we did everything, they [students] did not know how to communicate effectively with one another to deal with their emotions that they felt, to live up to the rigors now that we're expecting from them. (Lori Ingram)

This is vital to note because administrators were losing control of their schools during the 2021-2022 school year. The school climate is exceptionally troublesome when the Principal feels unsafe from the out of control student behaviors. Administrators were dealing with a record breaking number of fights and student crises during the 2021-2022 school year. Nearly half of the teacher participants (Barbara, Emma, Frank, Mary, Nancy, Tom, and Wilma) felt unsafe during the 2021-2022 school year due to student behaviors and the loosened COVID protocols. Emma Lewis, a seventh grade Science teacher stated,

> Physically and mentally being in the school I did not feel safe at all. That was the first time, I was like, I could get physically hurt here. But that wasn't COVID related in the way, that's like the sickness, but like the situation of COVID that led to that. It's kind of the scariest part. It wasn't even the sickness itself. It's the society that we came out of afterwards. (Emma Lewis)

Teachers felt that students did not know how to effectively deal with their own stress and coping with their own problems and emotions as they entered the 2021-2022 school year. In extreme

example, teachers were receiving death threats from students for assigning low grades on assignments and assessments. This was the first time that teachers in the Northport School District felt like their physical safety was in jeopardy from student retaliation. Teachers had to process the threat of physical harm from students and go on teaching the same students who threatened their lives. Teachers' primary focus of instruction was once again becoming secondary to teacher safety as educators tried to carry out their professional duties in 2021-2022 school year.

Student Related Issues During the Pandemic

Student Fear and Depression

There was a general fear of getting sick during the COVID-19 Pandemic because the dangers of the virus were still very unknown. Parents, guardians, and educators had their own fear of getting sick with COVID-19 and students were not immune to this fear either. Students were seeing their family members getting sick from COVID-19, heard about their friends' families becoming sick, and some students even witnessed family members die from the virus. Several educator participants (Barbara, Chloe, Kim, Nancy, and Oliver) discussed students being afraid of COVID-19. Chloe Smith, a sixth grade ELA teacher commented about a student, "He [student] was very stressed out and he was so worried that his mother was going to die. And I remember being on the phone with him and he was crying" (Chloe). Teachers heard firsthand accounts from their students as they processed their fear of family members being sick of this deadly and unprecedented virus. Chloe Smith went on to further share her student interaction,

> Everything was so unknown at that point, that I couldn't tell this kid [student] that his mother wasn't going to die. I didn't know, but I just kept saying, "Okay, just you know, keep bringing her fluids." I tried to tell him you know, to just, you know, "Make sure if

> she needs anything just, you know, give her what she needs, that's all you can do right now. (Chloe Smith)

As this quote shows, educators were supporting their students through traumatic and scary situations that the COVID-19 Pandemic brought forward. Educators had to remain strong and bravely took on this emotional burden from their students. This highlights the fact that educators were dealing with more than what they were used to in terms of levels of support for students as there was an increase in student fear and anxiousness from the world climate. Additionally, for single parent families teachers became a trusted adult to give advice to children caring for a sick parent or guardian. Some teacher participants (Albert, Emma, Frank, and Oliver) discussed the depression that students were feeling during the pandemic. In regard to the remote learning period, Oliver Zelmer, a seventh grade ELA teacher mentioned,

> There were a few students in particular that definitely talked a lot about how they only really lived in their bedroom. Where they didn't go out. They didn't go anywhere. And that was where, it was what they did. They woke up in their bed. They lived their day in the bed, and then they went to bed. And a lot of kids [students] talked about being depressed. I had a couple of kids talked about how, they didn't think life was worth living anymore. (Oliver Zelmer)

This quote speaks to the extremes that some students experienced. This caused teachers to carry the weight of students' disclosures about their depression and living conditions during the pandemic. It was a time of heightened isolation and students did not have a lot of personal freedom. Educators were a primary outlet for students to share their feelings and this had a heavy impact on teachers. This continues to show the ways educators were extremely valuable frontline workers who were trying to implement a brand new remote learning environment and weigh how

to address and cope with comments from students who thought they could not go on living anymore. This made teachers vulnerable to additional stress that could impact their own personal mental health and teaching performance. Even though teachers encountered a variety of alarming student comments, none of the educator participants disclosed an increase in their mandated reporting responsibilities. This may have been a result of their own heightened mental stress and exhaustion during the pandemic.

Student Home Experiences

Limited Resources. The pandemic was time of scarce resources due to household economic uncertainty. Many parents and guardians lost their jobs due to business closures during the shutdown period of the COVID-19 Pandemic. This meant that families in the United States could no longer afford to pay rent, buy groceries, and had limited access to technology. Families of the Northport School District had to go to specific school sites for food distribution services in order to feed their children and they were also given Wi-Fi vouchers to afford internet during the remote and hybrid learning periods. Some educators even held outdoor classes for parents on Saturdays in order for parents to learn how student computer platforms such as Google Classroom, Google Meet, PowerSchool, and other programs that teachers were using for remote learning. Despite all of these strategies to support families, teachers still encountered students who struggled with their lack of resources throughout the pandemic. Several teachers participants (Albert, Barbara, Paul, Oliver, and Vivian) experienced students struggling with limited technology resources. Albert Dixon, a seventh grade Social Studies teacher commented,

> It's tough, because I have one student, this girl, she's really hard worker, outstanding. I ended up meeting her in-person for hybrid. She was a great kid [student], and her Wi-Fi was just awful at home and she would always break up, she would always disconnect.

> But she always gave me 110% effort. So, you know, I always try to cut her breaks, because she's playing the hand she was dealt and she just had bad Wi-Fi at home, but she was top notch student. (Albert Dixon)

This is critical as it showed teachers that even the best students were struggling at home with unstable or unreliable resources. It helps put into perspective the range of issues students dealt with for teachers and helped them become more understanding of student academic performance due to uncontrollable circumstances. Paul Fox, a sixth grade Social Studies teacher echoed these challenges when stating,

> I remember, it must have been in January [Winter 2021]. I had a kid that was an ESL student, who was outside in class one day in the morning, 7:30am in the morning. And I asked why they were outside. And they said, they didn't have Wi-Fi. So, they were literally at their neighbor's house sitting on their neighbor's porch to get Wi-Fi to come to school. So that's like eye opening, you got to really think about what's important in life. And this kid is working so hard to make sure she is making class on time. And what all these families were going through, not having that, not having food, not having all the things they need. (Paul Fox)

This highlights some of the inequities that came with high needs schools and what it took to be successful for students during the remote learning phase of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Teachers witnessed many student disparities as teachers taught their virtual classes. It was difficult for teachers to see their students struggling to find creative ways to attend school, even if that meant attending virtually outside in the middle of winter. These occurrences reinforced the real human side of teaching during the pandemic and what was most important in teacher-student

interactions, which was compassion and understanding as there were many obstacles students had to overcome.

Increased Student Responsibilities. As many parents and guardians lost their jobs and needed to find additional employment during the pandemic, it placed more responsibilities at home on students. Many students were left home alone as families had to work multiple jobs to afford the basic necessities during the pandemic. This meant that older siblings were providing childcare to their younger siblings since parents were often not home or busy working from home during the pandemic. Several educator participants (Ian, Zoey, Kim, Mary, and Vivian) noted the increase in student responsibilities at home. Vivian Ulrich, a sixth grade ELA teacher stated,

> So, a lot of them [students], because they were home even though they were in school [they] had to shoulder the household responsibilities while they were home. So, they [students] had to take care of their siblings. We had kids [students] sitting in the meets [virtual classes] in sixth grade with their baby sister on their lap, because they had to watch them while mom was doing something else. (Vivian Ulrich)

This highlights the life complexities that middle school students were dealing with as they attended virtual classes. During remote learning, teachers saw their eleven year old students become primary caregivers for their siblings as there was no formal childcare. This is an example that showed that life priorities during the pandemic school years were conflicting with school time and expectations. Teachers had to encounter and process new student learning hardships in real time such as childcare that were usually limited before the COVID-19 Pandemic. Witnessing these new student hardships placed more mental strain on teachers as they worked to teach their content and keep their students engaged. Zoey Olsen, an Assistant Principal shared her views,

> I think, the pandemic also set like a tone for the lack of priority it was for kids [students] to be in school. I think it was more about parents struggling to survive, that school kind of came, you know, third or fourth on the priority list for a lot of our families. Especially at the younger ages, I think they [families] struggled with even just basic childcare. (Zoey Olsen)

The global pandemic was definitely a time of physical and emotional survival for all families. This is important to understand in the context of educators, because they had to accommodate all of life's pressures and support students through the new stressors children had at home while also being students.

Student Behavior and Physical Aggression

Throughout the pandemic school years, students in this district remained home between remote and hybrid learning for a year and a half. In the Northport School District, students remained in the hybrid learning phase through the Spring of 2021, which further exacerbated the time students were independent at home. This meant that students in this district had more limited social interactions and when they did interact, it included social distancing with a required mask for safety. Needless to say, students were not utilizing or developing their social skills as they normally had in the past. As a result, when students returned to fully in-person learning in the Northport School District during the 2021-2022 school year, students exhibited physical aggression as a main form of their self-expression. The majority of educator participants (Emma, Frank, Hannah, Ian, Lori, Mary, Nancy, Paul, Sofia, Tom, Vivian, and Wilma) in this study referenced the alarming amount of student fights and physical violence that occurred during the 2021-2022 school year. Furthermore, all three administrators (Hannah, Lori, and

Sofia) at Cedar Hill Middle School made comments about scary gang looking student fights and riots during the return to full in-person learning. Sofia Redmond, an Assistant Principal shared,

> It was sheer pandemonium. It was the craziest year I've ever worked in my entire life. I mean, we thought kids were going to be sad, that they were going to display their anxiety through sadness and seclusion and isolation. And no, it was physical aggression, to a degree I'd never seen before. I mean, we were averaging two to three fights a day. And they were big fights. It wasn't even little scuffles with kids, they were brawling, and it started probably day three in the cafeteria, and I was like, "What is this place?" It was rough. (Sofia Redmond)

Stemming from the lost time in socialization and social development, students did not know how to resolve conflict and it took a tremendous toll on educators. Educators did not feel safe and were very much on edge waiting for the next student fight to take place. This meant that administrators did not act as instructional leaders, instead they felt more like anxious security guards on high alert. Teachers felt the stress from student violence as well. Tom Brown, a sixth grade Math teacher remarked, "I didn't feel like I was teaching a course, as much as I was trying to get through 40 minutes without having a student have a fight with another student" (Tom Brown). As Tom points out, teachers did not feel like they were teachers during the return to in-person learning. They felt that this was not the profession that they had initially gone into and it had become something else. There was a major feeling of disconnect between the teaching profession and what the job was now, which further complicated what teachers endured due to the COVID-19 Pandemic. When reflecting on the student behavior during the 2021-2022 school year, Frank Winter, an eighth grade Social Studies teacher commented,

> We were so SEL [Social Emotional Learning] orientated that we gave the rules away, we gave the expectations away because we wanted to make sure they were safe. And I think we created an unsafe environment, because we were so, "Let them [students] be them." The problem is that they're 12-13 year old kids who have been locked up in a house for six months, eight months. And they just, when they got here, they just sprung. They just, they [students] were crazy. (Frank Winter)

Based on utilizing more SEL practices, educators thought they were setting students up for success on their return to in-person learning. Common sense suggested students would need more SEL approaches and soft direction as they transitioned back to school. However, students really needed more structure, routine, and clearer behavioral expectations. The school climate actually became more dangerous with a loosened school structure where some students felt free to negatively behave as they pleased. As a result, staff felt unsafe in their adjustment back to traditional school life which had a negative impact on their ability to implement instruction.

Educator Compassion Fatigue

Helplessness

During the COVID-19 Pandemic, people experienced less personal control due to the virus requiring society to shut down in order to protect people's health. This included limitations on things such as social gatherings, freedom to travel, and a sense of feeling safe in regard to one's health. Additionally, the pandemic fostered an approach to life that required caution and at times fostered feelings of helplessness. Educators were no exception, because their helplessness was exacerbated from feeling like they were not able to support their students to the extent that teachers felt students needed during the pandemic. Many students were experiencing isolation, depression, food insecurity, and stress in the home. This created feelings of teachers being

overwhelmed, defeated, and frozen in a time when they needed to be strong for their students. The majority of educator participants and all administrators (Barbara, Frank, Hannah, Ian, Kim, Zoey, Lori, Mary, Oliver, Paul, Robert, Sofia, Vivian, and Wilma) in this study felt helpless in regard to being able to assist their students. Particularly during the 2021-2022 school year when students returned to full in-person learning, educators felt powerless in regard to correcting and managing student behavior. Sofia Redmond, an Assistant Principal mentioned,

> I don't know, if I could help. Like definitely, we had a day where we had about 52 kids stampede up three flights of stairs and actually step on children and push them down flights of stairs while they trampled all the way through the third floor. From the first floor all the way through the third floor, recording [with phones] the whole thing. And I actually cried in front of, I've never cried, and I cried mostly because out of anger. It wasn't even out of, well, some of it was sadness too, because I couldn't believe the lack of empathy to be able to do that. And I was just, I felt helpless. (Sofia Redmond)

This helplessness led to educational leaders not feeling effective during the 2021-2022 school year. Some administrators did not know where to turn, or how to cope, and faced student behavioral challenges with disbelief. When building leaders feel ineffective that can have a negative impact on teacher morale and confidence. Similarly, teacher participants experienced feelings of helplessness during the 2021-2022 school year. Ian Kelly, an eighth grade Social Studies teacher stated,

> But I felt or at least my perspective was, I felt like it fell on our shoulders to rehabilitate these kids back to the educational setting. And so, what you know, that was a very overwhelming task, because it was so many fires [student challenges] and redirections and conversations, and things that required so much energy. (Ian Kelly)

This is vital information because teachers were feeling that their efforts and energy to support students transition back to school in the 2021-2022 school year was ineffective. It became too large of a task and unfortunately many educators gave up. Some educators stopped putting in the effort to intervene, because ultimately, they felt their efforts were not supported. More than half of teacher participants (Barbara, Emma, Frank, Gavin, Ian, Kim, Mary, Oliver, Paul, Tom, Vivian, and Wilma) felt unsupported by administration in terms of enforcing consistent student discipline and expectations within the 2021-2022 school year. Kim Mason, a sixth grade Math teacher mentioned, “And I think they [students] felt empowered, because there was really no consequences from administration for their behaviors when they got back [2021-2022] school year, other than we'll talk” (Kim). This is noteworthy because teachers felt that the third year of the global pandemic became very student-centered, but in a negative way. Teacher perception was that this allowed students to define the school rules and teachers ultimately had limited authority and value. This created an environment where teachers felt defeated and alone in upholding behavioral expectations.

Emotional Exhaustion

Educators had many new experiences during the COVID-19 Pandemic that teaching became draining and it was difficult to process everything. For example, educators dealt with many changes in their roles such as moving their curriculum and teaching online, maintaining office hours, dual instruction with hybrid learning, teaching with facemasks, following ever changing COVID protocols, and attending to their own health and personal concerns. During the pandemic, educators also dealt with seeing into their students’ homes through virtual instruction, which included supporting students with low motivation and depression, and hearing traumatic stories from students. Continually, administrators and teachers faced escalated negative student

behaviors and physical aggression as students transitioned back to school during the 2021-2022 school year. Due to all of these circumstances, educators were drained and emotionally exhausted from teaching during the COVID-19 Pandemic. More than half of the participants (Barbara, Emma, Frank, Gavin, Ian, Zoey, Kim, Mary, Oliver, Robert, Tom, and Wilma) in this study experienced emotional exhaustion during the three school years of the COVID-19 Pandemic. In terms of providing direct emotional support to students, Wilma Quinn, a seventh grade Math teacher shared,

> I'm going to fight for you (student). Let's talk it through together. Let's get this done." Which then also, again, takes a toll on my ability to support myself and be there to make sure that I'm okay and checking-in with myself. (Wilma Quinn)

This is a critical statement as it show cases educators' own lack of boundaries and how this facilitated them becoming victims from their emotional connection to their students (Figley, 1995). Therefore, educators were less able to take care of themselves because their supportive energy was spent on their students. Teachers' emotional stability declined through common student interactions during the global pandemic. Overall, there was a larger collective feeling of emotional exhaustion among participants than in regular teaching experiences. Mary Turner, a sixth grade Science teacher stated, "I think I feel like I've been exhausted for several years now" (Mary). Educators were not able to recharge or reset between the start of the pandemic and through the 2021-2022 school year. This has led many educators to question their longevity in the field of education. Their passion and commitment to the teaching field has declined, and teachers spoke of limiting their time working outside of contract hours due to the emotional toll from the pandemic.

Educator Apathy

The COVID-19 pandemic required educators to overcome a plethora of obstacles. The need to overcome countless professional changes and learning new teaching platforms made educators less likely to be flexible and less willing to tackle newly presented issues. For administrators, this included a lack of flexibility to support the medical accommodations of teachers in need. Three out of five administrator (Zoey, Robert, and Sofia) participants encountered apathy toward their teachers. Sofia Redmond, an Assistant Principal stated,

> Some teachers didn't have to stay in school, until the end of the day. If their period, if they had the last period off, they could leave. I had moments of not understanding that accommodation at all, because you were just in a building the whole day with people. But they were able to leave. (Sofia Redmond)

As this demonstrates, administrators did not fully want to support teachers' Human Resources approved accommodations and needs during the pandemic. This type of interaction made teachers feel unsupported by their administration and district leaders. Intentional or not, a feeling that administrators just wanted to get their job done and did not care about the cost it had on teachers' mental and physical health was harmful to participants. This negatively impacted administrator relationships with their teachers and ultimately the trust that was needed to effectively operate a school in a turbulent time. Furthermore, more than half of teacher participants (Albert, Emma, Frank, Gavin, Ian, Kim, Mary, Nancy, Paul, Tom, and Wilma) had apathy toward their students during the pandemic. Teachers received many questions regarding the personal decisions they made during the pandemic and teachers at times responded harshly to their students. For example, Paul Fox, sixth grade Social Studies teacher commented,

> Kids [students] asked me, "Why I was still wearing mine [facemask]?" So, I was just honest, "I have a little one at home. And that little one goes to older people [grandparents]." So, that was my whole reason for wearing it. But I think they just…and I remember coming off, really one time, too harsh on a kid [student] because they asked me that question. And I was like, well, they're just curious too. Even if they are coming off, saying it a little more intense than I think they are. They're just curious. They wanted to know why, and I remember, I still remember that too. I should have been a little bit softer in how I responded. (Paul Fox)

Teachers were tired of defending their personal choices, which were questioned because facemasks became a national polarizing topic of discussion. Simple things like this with the stress of the time in turn fractured teacher-student relationships as teachers projected their own frustrations onto their students. This loss of teacher-student connection was detrimental in time when people were craving safety and normalcy in their lives.

Compassion Fatigue

Educators were in a dire state during the pandemic, because their personal fear of catching COVID-19 to the variety of difficult educator experiences including remote teaching, technology challenges, hybrid teaching, social isolation, decline in physical health, wanting to quit the profession, and an increase in aggressive student behaviors. Educators saw firsthand more student poverty as well as volatile and unsafe home environments through remote teaching and online learning than they were previously aware of with typical teaching. In this way, educators experienced an increase in student problems through students sharing personal and worrisome firsthand information with them, which allowed educators to encounter secondary traumatic stress and the effects of compassion fatigue. During the pandemic, educators carried

the added burden of personal and sensitive student information that students disclosed for their own well-being. As a result, four out of five administrators (Zoey, Lori, Robert, and Sofia) and the majority of teacher participants (Barbara, Chloe, Emma, Frank, Gavin, Ian, Kim, Mary, Oliver, Tom, Vivian, and Wilma) in this study, the time of the COVID-19 Pandemic, expressed feeling the impact of compassion fatigue. This was manifest as personal strain and stress of educators wanting to do more in order to help a suffering person (Figley, 1995). This is largely due to the fact that educators felt the need to be overly caring for their students while teachers also having their own pandemic challenges did not know what else they could do to support students through personal hardship or crisis that was presented during the global pandemic. Zoey Olsen, an Assistant Principal mentioned,

> I think for me, it became like every instance of that [student trauma] almost felt like it was personal, like it was happening to me. And not really knowing how you can, "How do you help families like that, right?" Your hands are tied, as to what you can do to help them. So, it was, it was just an awful, awful time. (Zoey Olsen)

Educators were personally impacted by the trauma happening to others around them. This resulted in the support person or educator in this instance experiencing secondary trauma as well. This is important to understand because educators' empathy had deteriorated and their own mental health and well-being were in decline. Educators were trying to survive instead of thriving as educational professionals in the time of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Additionally, when reflecting on the idea of experiencing compassion fatigue, Oliver Zelmer, a seventh grade ELA teacher stated,

> I definitely felt that [compassion fatigue] pretty heavily. The feeling like I've got to solve all of these [student] problems, and that definitely led me to just, losing sleep, not being

able to really focus on my own life. And my own experiences outside of school. (Oliver Zelmer)

The burden of feeling the need to support students is important to recognize about teachers during the pandemic, because this created a situation in which teachers were not able to seek the self-care that they desperately needed. Teachers were mainly focused on student concerns while teachers neglected their own needs, which damaged their personal well-being. To this end, educators cannot perform their duties as effectively as they could if they were functioning with all their fully charged capabilities in the classroom.

Compassion Satisfaction. Educators were faced with a lot of turmoil and unprecedented stress during the pandemic. This included helping students and families in need, which was personally rewarding but also difficult. In fact, compassion satisfaction is when a person feels content seeing another person overcome their current state of suffering (Radey & Figley, 2007), which is the opposite of compassion fatigue. In this study, four educator participants (Frank, Ian, Lori, and Tom) referenced feeling the relief of compassion satisfaction during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Ian Kelly, an eighth grade Social Studies teacher stated,

> On the flip side, when you know the student is in a good place. That does bring you know, the opposite right, brings joy. It brings a sense of accomplishment, a sense of, you know, a sense of peace. (Ian Kelly)

This is important because educators are faced with many obstacles and challenges every day in their schools and classrooms. The pandemic created a heightened time of stress and highlighted the real often hidden challenges that students encounter in their daily lives. However, educators expanded their care and concern for their students despite the pandemic challenges. There were small wins and victories that kept educators doing what they love, that show even in a time of a

world altering global pandemic, educators were determined public servants who found comfort in teaching and helping others. Some educators found hope in the belief that reaching students through social-emotional support mattered.

New Educator Perspectives

Student Relationships. The global pandemic enhanced understanding on the importance of teacher-student relationships. Educators learned more than ever about their students during the remote teaching period. They witnessed the condition of students' housing, including the amount of people they were living with, the inadequate work space, and the limited resources the students had. Several educators (Gavin, Ian, Oliver, and Paul) realized that they needed to be more understanding and mindful of what their students were going through. Paul Fox, a sixth grade Social Studies teacher mentioned,

> It was, I think an eye opening experience for me professionally and personally, on how I treat people [students] and how I talk to people, and how I just think about what at least people have to go through on a day-to-day basis. And what I can do for those people, too. (Paul Fox)

This is important to understand because the global pandemic showed teachers the actual adversities that students face even from a witness viewpoint that could not be ignored. In this way, it brought to light how it is crucial for teachers to see things from their students' perspective in order to successfully teach and reach them on a human level. The pandemic emphasized the need for a more whole-person approach to educating students.

Educator Time and Voice. The global pandemic allowed educators some flexibility in how they were steering and delivering their curriculum and content. Educators taught from home virtually, attended virtual building meetings, and had some autonomy over which content to

prioritize in their class as the curriculum transitioned to an online format. In this study, four administrators (Robert, Zoey, Sofia and Hannah) and six teacher participants (Albert, Barbara, Ian, Oliver, Vivian, and Wilma) emphasized wanting more time to collaborate and continue as autonomous professionals, which the pandemic time period unexpectedly permitted as a positive benefit. Albert Dixon, a seventh grade Social Studies teacher commented,

> Give us more time to plan, more time to collaborate, make it a little bit less data driven, and let us be a little more creative. So that we can, you know, make learning a little bit more fun. I get data is very important to drive instruction, but we still got to, you know, make it more engaging. (Albert Dixon)

This viewpoint is important because educators experienced the opportunity to be trusted as highly educated professionals and to use their instructional time wisely. The field of education is often dictated by rigid schedules and Board of Education approved curriculum, but educators expressed a desire to use their voice and freedom to decide the best learning experiences for their students as the expert in the classroom. This was reinforced when Vivian Ulrich, a sixth grade ELA teacher stated,

> I think it [the pandemic] showed us, especially with curriculum, a lot of stuff we were doing wasn't necessary, wasn't needed, wasn't helping [students] learn. And we cut a lot of it out during COVID. We were given the freedom to kind of pick and choose what we needed to focus on to still address the standards and the priorities that kids needed at grade-level. But I think that COVID helped us do that. (Vivian Ulrich)

Educators were initially praised as heroes for their frontline public service during the pandemic. Now, educators want that appreciation to continue and be able to autonomously identify the educational needs of their own students. In an effort to support teachers and keep them in the

field of education, it is important to rely on their expertise and years of education and training. This can go a long way in ensuring educators are key stakeholders and have an authentic voice in a profession that they passionately and optimistically entered at the start of their career.

Summary of the Findings

The findings from this qualitative study suggest that educators had a strong fear of the COVID-19 virus, which in turn made the return to in-person academic instruction and engaging with students secondary to their own desire to remain healthy and safe during this phase of the pandemic. The findings also suggest that educators experienced a poor work-life balance during the pandemic with an increase in mental stress from worrying about students that resulted in educator health decline and teachers questioning their chosen career path within the field of education. Additionally, the findings highlight that educators had to overcome new remote and hybrid teaching challenges, while being heavily relied upon by students for emotional support. At times, educators felt physically unsafe from escalated student negative school behaviors as they encountered an increase in student fights and physical aggression that was compounded by limited student behavioral expectations when their school district returned to full in-person learning. Furthermore, the findings revealed that educators supported students through traumatic pandemic situations and witnessed expanded student responsibilities that emphasized the importance of educator compassion. The findings in this study indicate that educators felt the impact of compassion fatigue through experiencing elements of helplessness, emotional exhaustion, educator apathy toward students, and administrator apathy toward teachers. The findings additionally support that some educators experienced compassion satisfaction, recognized the importance of student-relationships, and a whole-person approach to educating

students. Lastly, some educators advocated for having more ongoing voice in selecting and teaching curriculum to support the best learning experiences for their students.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this exploratory qualitative case study was to understand educators' experiences during the COVID-19 Pandemic and the extent to which they may have experienced compassion fatigue as by-product of their COVID-19 teaching experiences. The researcher explored if there were educator responsibility changes with the COVID-19 Pandemic and educator perceptions of their stress and the support needed as professionals based on their COVID-19 experiences. The COVID-19 Global Pandemic brought about many changes and challenges to the teaching profession that educators had not dealt with previously. This included a mandatory government shutdown period due to the pandemic, which was a Public Health Emergency of International Concern, with a transition to remote teaching, a hybrid learning phase, and transitioning back to in-person learning with COVID-19 protocol mandates in place, COVID was still feared with significant public duress during this last time period. Educators had to navigate through all of this societal uncertainty, including learning a new virtual teaching format, educating their students while being exposed to traumatic student situations, and managing their own health and personal pandemic concerns.

During the pandemic school years 2019-2022, there were many increased burdens placed on educators that negatively impacted their mental and physical health. This study explored the complexities of general educator and school administrator experiences in an urban school district in the Northeast to develop a deeper understanding of how compassion fatigue was an unintended consequence of the Global COVID-19 Pandemic. Previously, compassion fatigue has been primarily explored through studying nursing, mental health providers, first responders, and

special educator experiences (Campbell, 2007; Donahoo et al., 2018; Mottaghi et al., 2020). However, inadequate attention has been given to general educators and school administrators in regard to their own professional experiences with compassion fatigue and this research contributes to the literature on compassion fatigue and secondary traumatic stress.

Discussion of Findings

In order to showcase the ways that the findings support and address the research questions, each research question is presented with information that answers the question.

Research Question 1: What were educators' experiences during the COVID-19 Pandemic? Educators had a variety of experiences throughout the COVID-19 Pandemic school years (2019-2022). Educators experienced fear of the unknown brought about by the COVID-19 virus and even fear of death due to the virus and the unpredictable world climate. There was also a sense of surrealness with educators as one of the first group of professionals to receive their COVID-19 vaccinations. The fear of COVID-19 created conflicting realities and competing interests as some educators were more concerned about remaining healthy during the hybrid learning phase than instructing their students, which is an educator's professional duty. For some educators, academic instruction was no longer the focal point as their own health became their priority. Also, the majority of participants in this study experienced mental stress during the pandemic as from worrying about their students and processing what was going on for their students in their homes. Educators witnessed firsthand the effects of the pandemic on students and families as they saw into student homes through their virtual classrooms. The high level of educator stress during the pandemic can be confirmed from the Matthew et al., (2020) large scale study. My work expands on this research as it adds to the literature that educator mental stress was tied to educators' own worry about their students.

Additionally, findings from this study suggest that educator health was on the decline during the pandemic. Administrators in this study experienced sleep loss from working late, worrying about their school, brainstorming ways to solve new pandemic related educational challenges, and being stretched beyond their normal career obligations. This experience with sleep loss facilitated educators to be vulnerable to compassion fatigue (Figley, 1995). Educators in this study also experienced eyesight decline from increased long hours of screentime and which resulted in them needing new glasses prescriptions. Some educators even experienced hair loss, weight gain, and cracked teeth due to the increased stress of this turbulent time period. The decline in educator health required participants to seek specific professional medical support. Another finding from this study reveals that the majority of participants experienced social isolation, whether this was from being ordered to remain at home during the shutdown period or from the loss of educator professional connections. Even as teachers transitioned to hybrid learning inside their school building, they were required to remain alone in their classroom and instructed to not interact with colleagues in-person. They also engaged with students who wore masks, which felt like an additional barrier to meaningful engagement. When people feel a disconnection with others it can lead to feeling elements of compassion fatigue (Figley, 1995; Ziaian-Ghafari & Berg, 2019). Educators in the Northport School District were craving human connection.

Furthermore, findings suggest that educators experienced challenging student related issues during the pandemic. Educators witnessed students experiencing their own fear and depression and felt ill-prepared to handle those situations. In many instances, educators were the primary outlet for student disclosures and it had a heavy impact on teacher stress and mental health. Despite these student disclosures, it did not result in an increase in educator initiated

mandated reporting. This finding is reinforced by Hupe and Stevenson (2019) who found experiencing compassion fatigue can negatively impact teachers carrying out their mandated roles. Lastly, during the pandemic educators witnessed firsthand student home experiences and challenges. Teachers highlighted the inequities of working for a high needs school district during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Students had limited resources, needed Wi-Fi vouchers, and visited schools that functioned as food distribution sites. Some students even resorted to attending their remote virtual classes outside in the middle of winter in order to gain access to their neighbor's Wi-Fi. This reinforced the human side of teaching and provided educators with new perspectives on student obstacles. Also, several educators in this study noted an increase in student responsibilities at home. During the remote teaching period, educators saw students attending their virtual classes while watching their baby siblings. Life priorities during the pandemic were conflicting with school expectations and many families operated in survival mode. Administrators saw education become much less of a priority to families who needed to prioritize their employment, food, and childcare needs. In this way, there was a societal shift away from the importance of education within this urban district as students experienced new home stressors and parent appointed duties during the pandemic.

Research Question 2: How have educators' responsibilities changed with the COVID-19 Pandemic? Educators' responsibilities changed during the pandemic school years. In fact, all five administrators and the majority of educator participants noted having poor work-life balance during the remote and hybrid learning periods of the pandemic. This poor work-life balance for administrators was attributed to having to contact trace and when information was received to contact families at night to prevent the spread of the virus, which created an endless workday. For some teachers, they were balancing their own children at home while also teaching

from home. Teachers felt extra pressure to follow-up on their students' progress during the remote learning phase, which created an unhealthy work-life balance where there was limited separation between teachers' personal-lives and work-lives. Additionally, all five administrators experienced a leadership learning curve during the pandemic. Administrators had to figure out remote learning in real-time in order to support their teachers, students, and school community. They had the new task to relearn their job and could not rely on existing pedagogical practices as remote instruction was a new setting. Remote teaching was also a new paradigm for all teachers and there was a lack of knowledge on the remote teaching format at the K-12 level. Moreover, the majority of teacher participants in this study experienced a technology learning curve as teaching transitioned to virtual instruction. Teachers' responsibilities now included learning new programs, sorting through resources, video recording their teaching lessons, and helping students learn new digital skills. Teachers were self-critical of their recorded videos and some recorded them multiple times, which created additional work. Teachers also had to learn how to be comfortable putting their face and voice online with this digital shift for teaching.

Another finding of this study identified that teacher participants had the new responsibility of maintaining online office hours. This was a designated time to provide instructional support, but the majority of participants found it to be a time to create student connections. Office hours became a setting to provide emotional support for students and where students shared what they were going through during the pandemic. In this way, most of the teachers and all administrators in this study felt more like counselors, which placed a heavy burden on them and they felt out of their comfort zone. This highlights that educators experienced some role-confusion just as teachers did in Levkovich and Gada's (2020) study. This finding is also similar to Lindecker and Cramer's (2021) study where educators teaching

online felt unprepared to support students' mental health needs through the turbulence of the pandemic. This study shows that the new counseling-like role placed educator participants in a position to potentially experience compassion fatigue as they were not equipped with the appropriate training and skills to navigate the traumatic student disclosures found in the Northport School District. Furthermore, educators in this study faced the new responsibility and challenge of hybrid instruction in which educators taught students both in-person with a mask and virtually online at the same time. The results show that the majority of teachers found that hybrid learning and dual instruction was not effective. Teachers mentioned that they were only teaching to the computer screen or simply neglecting the students who were attending at home online. In either case, one set of students lost out on robust instruction. There was no uniform style of instruction and teachers chose what made them feel the most comfortable.

Lastly, the majority of participants mentioned an increase of alarming student fights. An administrator mentioned that Cedar Hill Middle School was averaging two to three fights a day during the 2021-2022 school year. Teachers and administrators no longer felt like teachers or instructional leaders, but more like security guards trying to get through an entire course without a student fight. The Northport School District had remained in hybrid learning through the entire Spring of 2021, which was longer than most school districts. This exacerbated students' limited ability to develop the social skills needed to function within a traditional school setting. As students finally transitioned back to full in-person learning in the Fall of 2021, students' anxiety presented itself in the form of physical aggression as a primary outlet.

Research Question 3: To what extent did educators experience compassion fatigue since the most active periods of the COVID-19 Pandemic? All administrators and the majority of teacher participants mentioned feelings of helplessness to the extent that educators

could not support students in a way that students needed during the pandemic. Feelings of helplessness is a characteristic highly associated with compassion fatigue (Figley, 1995; Henson, 2020; Levkovich & Gada, 2020) Educators felt a sense of ineffectiveness during the 2021-2022 school year as student behaviors, including fights and riots escalated. The administrators' helplessness resulted in some of them physically crying in front of staff from sadness and reaching out directly to the central office for additional support. Similarly, as teachers experienced feelings of ineffectiveness, the majority of teacher participants felt unsupported by administration when they intervened on student behavioral concerns. Pressley and Ha (2022) mentioned that teacher stress during the pandemic can increase with a lack of administrator support. Therefore, educators were at higher risk of experiencing compassion fatigue with higher stress levels from feelings around a lack of support and helplessness. Furthermore, the majority of participants in this study identified feelings of emotional exhaustion, which is a major attribute of compassion fatigue (Henson, 2020). This emotional exhaustion was a result of educator participants providing direct emotional support to their students during the pandemic. One teacher participant mentioned that this lack of boundary took a toll on their "ability to support their own self." As a result, the educators in this study became compromised from their emotional connections to their students and their committed willingness to "fight" for their students' well-being.

In addition, there was a heightened feeling of emotional exhaustion from participants, and they eventually exhibited apathy, which is another attribute of compassion fatigue (Henson, 2020). In fact, three administrators experienced feelings of apathy toward their teachers. Administrators expressed a feeling that teachers needed to "get their job done" and move on from their pandemic fear. Administrators looked down upon teachers taking their medically

approved accommodations during the pandemic. This kind of negative interaction created a lack of support and trust among teachers. Similarly, the majority of teachers expressed some apathy toward their students during the pandemic. Teachers responded harshly to students, because teachers were tired of defending their mask wearing positions. Teachers were already shouldering a heavy burden of going back to work in a pandemic earlier than many professions, including that supporting students increased teachers' emotional stress, and dealing with ever changing pandemic protocols fostered apathy and frustration toward their students. A conclusion can be made that educators were overly burdened for such a long period of time during the pandemic school years that eventually a lack of concern was shown due to their overextended personal thoughts and feelings.

Lastly, educators absorbed an increase in student problems, because students shared firsthand pandemic traumatic experiences, which fostered educators feeling the effects of compassion fatigue. Specially, four out of five administrators and the majority of teacher participants expressed feeling the impact of compassion fatigue from their experience working during the COVID-19 Pandemic school years. Educators felt as if they were impacted by the trauma happening to students around them. In this way, educators were acting with high empathy where they were perceiving the world of the student as their own and felt secondary trauma responses (Mottaghi et al., 2020). One administrator noted that she felt as if the student trauma was actually happening to her. This creates a process where the educator can feel traumatized and helpless (Figley, 1995). This coincides with Nel Noddings' Ethic of Care Theory where the carer (educator) recognizes what the cared-for (student) was going through (Noddings, 2012). As a result, the majority of educators in this study were focusing on student troubles during the pandemic and neglected their own needs, which damaged their well-being and allowed

participants to experience compassion fatigue. On the other hand, findings of this study also show that four educators used happiness to propel their disturbing student encounters into a positive state of mind, because the educators felt good about helping students. This feeling is known as compassion satisfaction where some educators in this study found joy in helping their students to triumph over their suffering (Radey & Figley, 2007). Some educators were able to hold onto their joy and identified their accomplishment in helping those suffering students and found their desired peace.

Research Question 4: What are educators' perceptions of what is needed to support them as professionals based on their COVID-19 Pandemic experiences? The majority of educator participants thought about leaving the education profession because of their experiences during COVID. Participants expressed that they could not remain in education if the job were to continue to be as difficult as it had been during the global pandemic. This was due to the fact that there was tremendous stress, lack of boundaries surrounding the work day, increased negative student behaviors, and lack of support from supervisors which included administrators and central office administration. One administrator participant decided to leave her Principal position and moved into an Assistant Principal role where she was not responsible for all of the school responsibilities. She found that the Principal stress was too high and not worth sacrificing her mental health. It is rare to see a professional take a step backward in their career in any profession. Additionally, one teacher participant with six years of experience decided to quit the teaching profession altogether. The teacher noticed that she lost her positive energy and was not the same person anymore as a teacher working through the pandemic. The emotional toll from the profession was too much and she decided that it was not sustainable. A conclusion can be

that educators desired a more manageable workload, reasonable expectations that allowed them rest once the school day ended, and that they can maintain their sense of self in the profession.

Additionally, some educators within the study mentioned needing more time to collaborate with their colleagues in a more creative and less data-driven manner. Educators disclosed wanting to make their instruction more engaging for students and needing more planning time with colleagues to develop their ideas. Moreover, some educators within the study expressed wanting to have more voice and autonomy for prioritizing the curriculum and choosing the best learning experiences for their students. The pandemic allowed some educators freedom as the curriculum was being transitioned to the remote learning format and they could decide what fit the format the best for their students, teachers desired that this continue. A conclusion can be made that this kind of freedom was refreshing for educators to have more autonomy over their content and being trusted to make those decisions as educated professionals. Lastly, as remote learning brought more exposure to students' personal lives, educators gained a deeper understanding of their students, learning more about their students' home lives, and student personal challenges. In this way, educators needed to take more of a whole-person approach to teaching that demanded assignment flexibility and a student-centered approach to their instruction. Therefore, educators saw the need for a holistic teaching perspective to support their students' overall well-being.

Implications for School Districts

Compassion fatigue can impact educators who are empathetic and who directly work with traumatized students (Hupe & Stevenson, 2019). Based on this study, the following recommendations are provided to support educators.

Recommendation 1

Educators need enhanced professional development focused on compassion fatigue. This is terminology that many educators are not familiar with and educators require information to keep them informed and protected when supporting students who have experienced trauma. The professional development can help recognize the indicators of compassion fatigue, which can help them combat it. Additionally, speaking honestly about compassion fatigue can destigmatize it when the effects are felt from school staff.

Recommendation 2

School districts and building leaders can help teachers understand and identify when they need to refer students to support staff who can intervene on concerning student disclosures. This will help limit how much time teachers are hearing traumatic information. Teachers should be able to identify where and when they may find assistance from pupil support personnel.

Recommendation 3

School districts and building leaders can promote educator self-care and a healthy work-life balance within their school building. This can include setting an expectation to work the agreed upon contract hours, administrators “guarding” planning and team-time to foster realistic work expectations and develop professional development on time management and professional boundaries. This can minimize educators feeling overextended and depleted by their daily work. Educator well-being and longevity in the education field needs to be protected.

Recommendation 4

School districts and building leaders can promote a mental health fair and local resources for the larger school district community. District leaders need to partner with mental health

agencies and local resources to support a 360 surrounding community that prioritizes healthy living.

Recommendation 5

School districts and building leaders need to provide ongoing technology training to support teachers as they are working with new digital platforms. The pandemic fostered an environment where education technology tools were ever-changing. Building leaders should prioritize the digital platforms that they are using and ensuring teachers can operate them as intended.

Recommendation 6

In order to support administrators, central office needs to have an open line of communication to ensure administrators have an avenue of support. Administrators in this study felt isolated in times of high need during the pandemic. Administrators need to be able to communicate with central office when needed without fear of retribution or other negative consequences.

Suggestions for Further Research

Previous research suggests that compassion fatigue has an impact on nurses, mental health providers, the social service field, and on special educators (Campbell, 2007; Donahoo et al., 2018; Mottaghi et al., 2020). This qualitative research study adds to the literature that compassion fatigue can have a direct impact on general educators and administrators. It explored educators' experiences with compassion fatigue in an urban school district during the COVID-19 Pandemic. It would be interesting to explore educator pandemic experiences with compassion fatigue during the pandemic in wealthy, suburban, or rural school districts. These other settings may offer different challenges and perspectives not seen within an urban school district. Also, it

would be interesting to interview teachers and administrators on their experience with compassion fatigue at the elementary and high school level. Teachers and administrators in other school levels may have different perspectives than middle level educators. Additionally, another area of research could survey and interview students on their pandemic experiences and see how it impacted them in school. This would help explore the student perspective to fully understand the real obstacles and challenges they faced during the turbulent pandemic time period. Furthermore, research could examine parent perspectives during the global pandemic and what they experienced while interacting with their child and school. The parent perspective could give new insight as a different school stakeholder during times of crisis.

Conclusion

This exploratory qualitative case study was used to examine general educators' and administrators' experiences with compassion fatigue from an urban school district in the Northeast during the COVID-19 Pandemic. Educators had a variety of experiences with regard to their educator COVID-19 Pandemic fears, personal experiences, professional stressors, student related issues, and experiences with educator-based compassion fatigue. To this point, educators discussed the uncertain times of the pandemic, a lack of work-life boundaries, a decline in their health from stress, social isolation, a desire to leave the profession, a technology learning curve, hybrid challenges, safety concerns, and connections to student trauma. As a result, educators at times felt helpless, ineffective, apathetic, and emotionally and physically exhausted. Therefore, it is clear that teachers and administrators did experience elements of compassion fatigue during the COVID-19 Pandemic. In order for school districts to protect their teachers and administrators and to prevent educators from leaving the field of education, school districts should address the possibilities of educators experiencing compassion fatigue. Educators are public servants,

frontline workers, helping, and caring professionals. School districts should prioritize an ethic of care and work-life balance for their educators in order to sustain a healthy, positive, and optimistic educator workforce.

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Appendix A

Permission Form - Superintendent

Study Title: An Exploratory Case Study of Educators' Experiences with COVID-19: Compassion Fatigue as an Unintended Consequence of a Global Pandemic

Principal Investigator: Peter J. Dittmar
Doctoral Candidate, Western Connecticut State University

This form describes a research study that Peter J. Dittmar, principal investigator from Western Connecticut State University, is conducting to understand the perceptions and experiences of educators and administrators who worked all three years during the COVID-19 Global Pandemic. I am writing to request your approval to conduct this research study in the Danbury Public School District.

The study involves interviews with educators and administrators who worked during the COVID-19 Global Pandemic. This study seeks to interview approximately 30 educators, both teachers and administrators. Each volunteer/participant will be interviewed one time for approximately 60-90 minutes. Participants who volunteer will also complete a brief demographic questionnaire. The interviews will occur outside of the school day and no costs will be incurred by your district, school, or the individual participants. Raw data will be maintained for five years and then destroyed, with only the Principal Investigator and his advisor having access to the data.

All participant communications will be kept strictly confidential. Only the Principal Investigator and his advisor will have access to the raw data and only summarized data will be presented at meetings and in publications. Pseudonyms will be used for the school district, schools, and individual participants. Additionally, there are no foreseeable risks for participants nor is there any compensation for participation.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. One is free not to participate or to withdraw at any time, for any reason, without penalty. If you have any concerns, you can contact the Institutional Review Board at IRB@wcsu.edu.

For more information about this research, contact Peter J. Dittmar at 203-648-2558 or dittmar001@wcsu.edu, or his dissertation chair, Dr. Tricia J. Stewart, at 585-455-5603 (Cell) or stewartt@wcsu.edu.

If you agree to allow your district to participate in this study, please sign a copy of this form and return it to me via email. Thank you for your consideration.

__________________________________ _______________
Superintendent's Signature Date

__________________________________ _______________
Witness Date

Appendix B

Permission Form - Principal

Study Title: An Exploratory Case Study of Educators' Experiences with COVID-19: Compassion Fatigue as an Unintended Consequence of a Global Pandemic

Principal Investigator: Peter J. Dittmar
Doctoral Candidate, Western Connecticut State University

This form describes a research study that Peter J. Dittmar, principal investigator from Western Connecticut State University, is conducting to understand the perceptions and experiences of educators and administrators who worked all three years during the COVID-19 Global Pandemic. I am writing to request your approval to conduct this research study in your school within the Danbury Public Schools.

The study involves interviews with educators and administrators who worked during the COVID-19 Global Pandemic. This study seeks to interview approximately 30 educators, both teachers and administrators. Each volunteer/participant will be interviewed one time for approximately 60-90 minutes. Participants who volunteer will also complete a brief demographic questionnaire. The interviews will occur outside of the school day and no costs will be incurred by your district, school, or the individual participants. Raw data will be maintained for five years and then destroyed, with only the Principal Investigator and his advisor having access to the data.

All participant communications will be kept strictly confidential. Only the Principal Investigator and his advisor will have access to the raw data and only summarized data will be presented at meetings and in publications. Pseudonyms will be used for the school district, schools, and individual participants. Additionally, there are no foreseeable risks for participants nor is there any compensation for participation.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. One is free not to participate or to withdraw at any time, for any reason, without penalty. If you have any concerns, you can contact the Institutional Review Board at IRB@wcsu.edu.

For more information about this research, contact Peter J. Dittmar at 203-648-2558 or dittmar001@wcsu.edu, or his dissertation chair, Dr. Tricia J. Stewart, at 585-455-5603 (Cell) or stewartt@wcsu.edu.

If you agree to allow your school to participate in this study, please sign a copy of this form and return it to me via email. Thank you for your consideration.

______________________________ ______________
Principal's Signature Date

______________________________ ______________
Witness Date

Appendix C

Interview Consent Form

Study Title: An Exploratory Case Study of Educators' Experiences with COVID-19: Compassion Fatigue as an Unintended Consequence of a Global Pandemic

Principal Investigator: Peter J. Dittmar
Doctoral Candidate, Western Connecticut State University

This form describes a research study that Peter J. Dittmar, principal investigator from Western Connecticut State University, is conducting to understand the perceptions and experiences of educators and administrators who worked all three years during the COVID-19 Global Pandemic. You are invited to participate in this study as the information that you share will help better understand the experiences of educators during and after the pandemic.

The study involves interviews with educators and administrators who worked during the COVID-19 Global Pandemic. This study seeks to interview approximately 30 educators, both teachers and administrators. Each volunteer/participant will be interviewed one time for approximately 60-90 minutes. Participants who volunteer will also complete a brief demographic questionnaire. The interviews will occur outside of the school day and no costs will be incurred by your district, school, or the individual participants. Raw data will be maintained for five years and then destroyed, with only the Principal Investigator and his advisor having access to the data.

All participant communications will be kept strictly confidential. Only the Principal Investigator and his advisor will have access to the raw data and only summarized data will be presented at meetings and in publications. Pseudonyms will be used for the school district, schools, and individual participants. Additionally, there are no foreseeable risks for participants nor is there any compensation for participation.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. One is free not to participate or to withdraw at any time, for any reason, without penalty. If you have any concerns, you can contact the Institutional Review Board at IRB@wcsu.edu. Should you agree to participate, please sign a copy of this form and return it to me via email or in person prior to the interview.

For more information about this research, contact Peter J. Dittmar at 203-648-2558 or dittmar001@wcsu.edu, or his dissertation chair, Dr. Tricia J. Stewart, at 585-455-5603 (Cell) or stewartt@wcsu.edu.

YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE DECIDED TO PARTICIPATE AFTER HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED ABOVE.

___________________________________ _______________
Participant's Signature Date

___________________________________ _______________
Witness Date

Appendix D: Educator Demographic Questionnaire

Instructions: Please complete the following questions as completely and honestly as possible. If you are unsure, or if the question does not apply to you, you may leave it blank.

1. Name (For researcher purposes only):______________________________________

2. What is your gender (Circle one)?

   Male   Female   Other (Specify):____________________

3. Your racial background/ethnicity (Circle all that apply):

Caucasian   *African American*   *Hispanic/Latino*   *Asian*

Hawaiian/Pacific Islander   *American Indian/Alaska Native*   *Other (Specify):* __________

4. Your highest level of education (Circle one):

   Bachelor's   *Master's*   *Sixth Year*   *Doctorate*

5. Years of Teaching Experience:______________________

6. Years of Administrative Experience (If applicable):____________________

7. Educational position during the three COVID-19 Pandemic school years (Please provide your content area or administrator role during those years):

   2019-2020 Position:__________________   Content/Role:________________

   2020-2021 Position:__________________   Content/Role:________________

   2021-2022 Position:__________________   Content/Role:________________

8. What is your current position?

   2022-2023 Position:__________________   Content/Role:________________

Appendix E: Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for Teachers

Research Questions:

1. What were educators' experiences during the COVID-19 Pandemic?
2. How have educators' responsibilities changed with the COVID-19 Pandemic?
3. To what extent did educators experience compassion fatigue since the most active periods of the COVID-19 Pandemic?
4. What are educators' perceptions of what is needed to support them as professionals based on their COVID-19 Pandemic experiences?

Interview Questions:

1. Tell me about your teaching experience during the pandemic.
2. How did your experience during the COVID-19 Pandemic differ from your previous experience?
    a. Probe: How did you experience that difference emotionally? In what ways did it relate to your stress level inside or outside of work?
3. How did you feel as a person gaining and processing new information during the COVID-19 shutdown period?
    a. Probe: How did you feel professionally as an educator during the COVID-19 shutdown period?
    b. Probe: Did you receive any online teacher training? What was it? To what extent was this helpful? What more could have helped you?
4. What did administrators do to support you while teaching during the pandemic?
    a. Probe: In what ways was this helpful? What could they have done better?
5. What was your interaction like with students and families during the COVID-19 Pandemic?
    a. Probe: Were there any challenging interactions?
    b. Probe: Did your students disclose any personal struggles? If so, what?
    c. Probe: How did these interactions make you feel and think?
6. What were the technology supports for students during the online period?
    a. Probe: What was that like for you as an educator teaching remotely and adjusting to the new technology demands?
7. What were the emotional or motivational supports for students during the online period?
    a. Probe: Can you explain how you felt about students' motivation and engagement during the online period of the pandemic? What was that like for you?
    b. Probe: Do you feel like your responsibilities changed? If so, how?
8. How did you feel professionally and emotionally as an educator during the period of a hybrid model with a mask while students were in cohort groups? What was positive or negative?
    a. Probe: What was the climate of the school like during the hybrid period?
    b. Probe: How did it feel not knowing what students looked like when they wore masks? What was this like for your teaching and learning activities?
9. How did you feel professionally and emotionally as an educator as school returned to in-person with mask optional? What was positive or negative?
    a. Probe: How did administrators support you? What could have been improved?
10. What types of struggles did students come to you with during the three years of the global pandemic? How did you respond?

a. Probe: This includes remote learning, hybrid model, and in-person with mask optional.
b. Probe: How were the struggles for students different during the various phases of returning to school? How did you respond? What was this like for you?

11. What was your stress level like when school went online, when school was in the hybrid model, and when school returned fully with mask optional? What made it that way?
12. To what extent have you been able to separate work from your personal life when your job first went online after the school closure? Has this added to your emotional or physical exhaustion? How?
    a. Probe: How about your ability to separate work from your personal life when your job was split between remote teaching and a hybrid model for students or when teaching returned to fully in-person learning? Has this added to your emotional or physical exhaustion? How?
    b. Probe: What was personally hard for you? (Isolation, helplessness, ineffectiveness)
13. In what ways do your students' stressors and trauma relate to your personal emotional state?
    a. Probe: How does empathy play a role in your professional practice?
    b. Probe: In what ways do you create strong relationships with students?
14. Compassion fatigue, or secondary traumatic stress, is defined as "the natural consequent behaviors and emotions resulting from knowing about a traumatizing event experienced by a significant other—the stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person" (Figley, 1995, p. 7).
    a. Probe: To what extent do you think you have experienced this during the time of COVID-19 or now?
15. After having taught through the COVID-19 Pandemic, how would you like to see educators supported now and in the future?
16. Given what we have talked about, is there anything else you would like to share about your personal experience teaching during the COVID-19 Pandemic?
    a. Probe: This could be in relation to your personal life or professional life, interpersonal relationships, job satisfaction, or teaching responsibilities.

Appendix F: Semi-Structured Interview Protocol for Administrators

Research Questions:

1. What were educators' experiences during the COVID-19 Pandemic?
2. How have educators' responsibilities changed with the COVID-19 Pandemic?
3. To what extent did educators experience compassion fatigue since the most active periods of the COVID-19 Pandemic?
4. What are educators' perceptions of what is needed to support them as professionals based on their COVID-19 Pandemic experiences?

Interview Questions:

1. Tell me about being an administrator during the pandemic.
2. How did your administrator experience during the COVID-19 Pandemic differ from your previous administrator experience?
    a. Probe: How did you experience that difference emotionally? In what ways did it relate to your stress level inside or outside of work?
3. How did you feel as a person and administrator gaining and processing new information during the COVID-19 shutdown period?
    a. Probe: What professional responsibilities did you need to take during this time?
    b. Probe: Did you provide any online teacher training? What was it? How did you perceive that it helped teachers?
4. In what ways did you support educators and your school during the pandemic?
    a. Probe: What could have been done better?
5. What was your interaction like with staff, students and families during the COVID-19 Pandemic?
    a. Probe: Were there any challenging interactions?
    b. Probe: Were any personal struggles disclosed to you? If so, what?
    c. Probe: How did these interactions make you feel and think?
6. What was it like adjusting to the new technology demands during the remote teaching/online period?
    a. Probe: What was it like as an administrator during the fully remote period?
7. What was the personal or emotional support provided for administrators and educators during the remote teaching/online period? Was the support needed, why or why not?
    a. Probe: What was the greatest needs of administrators during the fully remote learning period?
    b. Probe: Do you feel like your responsibilities changed? If so, how?
8. How did you feel professionally and emotionally as an administrator during the period of a hybrid model while students were in cohort groups? What was positive or negative?
    a. Probe: What was the climate of the school like during the hybrid period?
    b. Probe: How did it feel not knowing what people looked like when they wore masks? What was this like as a building leader?
9. How did your feelings evolve both professionally and emotionally as school returned to in-person with mask optional? What was positive or negative?
    a. Probe: How did you support educators? Did you receive support as an administrator?

10. What types of struggles did educators or families come to you with during the three years of the global pandemic? How did you respond?
    a. Probe: This includes remote learning, hybrid model, and in-person with mask optional.
    b. Probe: How were the struggles for educators or families different during the various phases of returning to school? How did you respond? What was this like for you?
11. What was your stress level like when school went online, when school was in the hybrid model, and when school returned fully with mask optional? What made it that way?
12. To what extent have you been able to separate work from your personal life when schools went fully online after the school closure? Has this added to your emotional or physical exhaustion? How?
    a. Probe: How about your ability to separate work from your personal life when school was in a hybrid model for students and when school returned fully in-person with mask optional? Has this added to your emotional or physical exhaustion? How?
    b. Probe: What was personally hard for you? (Isolation, helplessness, ineffectiveness)
13. In what ways do your staff and students' stressors and trauma relate to your personal emotional state?
    a. Probe: How does empathy play a role in your professional practice?
    b. Probe: In what ways do you create strong relationships with staff and students?
14. Compassion fatigue, or secondary traumatic stress, is defined as "the natural consequent behaviors and emotions resulting from knowing about a traumatizing event experienced by a significant other—the stress resulting from helping or wanting to help a traumatized or suffering person" (Figley, 1995, p. 7).
    a. Probe: To what extent do you think you have experienced this during the time of COVID-19 or now?
15. After being an administrator through the COVID-19 Pandemic, how would you like to see educators supported now and in the future?
    a. Probe: How would you like to see administrators further supported?
16. Given what we have talked about, is there anything else you would like to share about your personal experience as an administrator during the COVID-19 Pandemic?
    a. Probe: This could be in relation to your personal life or professional life, interpersonal relationships, job satisfaction, or administrator responsibilities.

Dissertation Registration Form

Student: Peter Dittmar Date: 08/23/2024

Dissertation Title: AN EXPLORATORY CASE STUDY OF EDUCATORS' EXPERIENCES WITH COVID-19: COMPASSION FATIGUE AS AN UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCE OF A GLOBAL PANDEMIC

Dissertation Committee Members: See attached Dissertation Approval Page

For Office Use Only.

Tricia Stewart, PhD	*Tricia Stewart*	08/23/2024
Dissertation Committee Chair	Signature	Date
Marcia A. B. Delcourt, PhD	*Marcia A. B. Delcourt*	08/23/2024
Program Coordinator	Signature	Date
Joan Palladino, EdD	[signature]	3/10/2025
Dean, School of Professional Studies	Signature	Date