Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence

Supporting Rhode Island Educators with SEL During Times of Uncertainty and Stress: Findings from 2020-2021

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Supporting Rhode Island Educators with SEL During Times of Uncertainty and Stress

FINDINGS FROM 2020-2021

Executive Summary

This report shares baseline survey results from over 400 school personnel in Rhode Island who registered for the free course, Managing Emotions in Times of Uncertainty and Stress, developed at the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence and funded by Dalio Education so that it could be offered at no charge to school staff. As part of the course experience, participants could participate in a short survey study to inform the scientific and practitioner communities about emotional experiences, impacts, and opportunities for cultivating resilience in both educators and students during this time of crisis. Participants reported on their emotional experiences, sources of stress and joy, recommendations for support, and key demographics through open-ended and closed-response questions.

Key findings included (1) differences between school personnel's responses, now and before the pandemic, on standardized measures of affective experiences and what they shared in their open-response questions regarding their feelings of inclusion, personal accomplishment, emotional exhaustion, intentions to quit, and perceived principal emotional intelligence, (2) sources of joy grounded in school personnel's experiences with their students, colleagues, and families, and sources of stress included "everything else" related to the practice of teaching, and (3) a substantial lack of support for school personnel's social-emotional needs and their request for resources and skill development.

About the YCEI

Founded by Dr. Marc Brackett, the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence is a self-supporting unit in the Child Study Center at the Yale School of Medicine. The Division of Research within the YCEI is directed by Dr. Christina Cipriano, and the team is at the forefront of translational emotion science, building and evaluating SEL tools and interventions with youth and educators to support whole-school community thriving. Our research advances SEL science, practice, and policy, through innovative tools, methodologies, and lines of inquiry that foster inclusive and equitable conditions for teaching and learning, improves individual skill-building, advances SEL

measurement and evaluation, and evolves the definition of the field. Learn more at www.ycei.org/research-overview.

Abbreviations

AES: Affective Experiences Scale
CASEL: The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning
CRESS: Crisis Response Educator SEL Survey
EFESS: Emotion-Focused Educator SEL Survey
EI: Emotional Intelligence
MBI: Maslach Burnout Inventory
P-SOW: Sources of Well-being modified for the pandemic
SEL: Social and Emotional Learning
SOW: Sources of Well-being
YCEI: The Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence

Supporting Rhode Island Educators with SEL During Times of Uncertainty and Stress

FINDINGS FROM 2020-2021

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Research Questions

We organize this report around four research questions. From 2020-2021:

1 ### How were school personnel feeling about work?
Specifically, we examined which feelings school personnel reported when asked to describe, in their own words, their typical feelings at work, and which feelings school personnel rated as the most frequently experienced at school.

2 ### What were the sources of stress?
Specifically, we examined which experiences school personnel reported when they were asked to describe, in their own words, their experiences of stress and frustration at work, and sources of stress frequently experienced at school using rating scales.

3 ### What were the sources of joy?
Specifically, we examined which experiences school personnel reported when asked to describe their experiences of joy at work.

4 ### What were the sources of support?
Specifically, we examined how much school personnel felt they were supported by their school or district in their own social and emotional needs, what strategies they reported using to manage their feelings, and what they reported, in their own words, schools could do to better support educators.

Supporting Rhode Island Educators with SEL During Times of Uncertainty and Stress
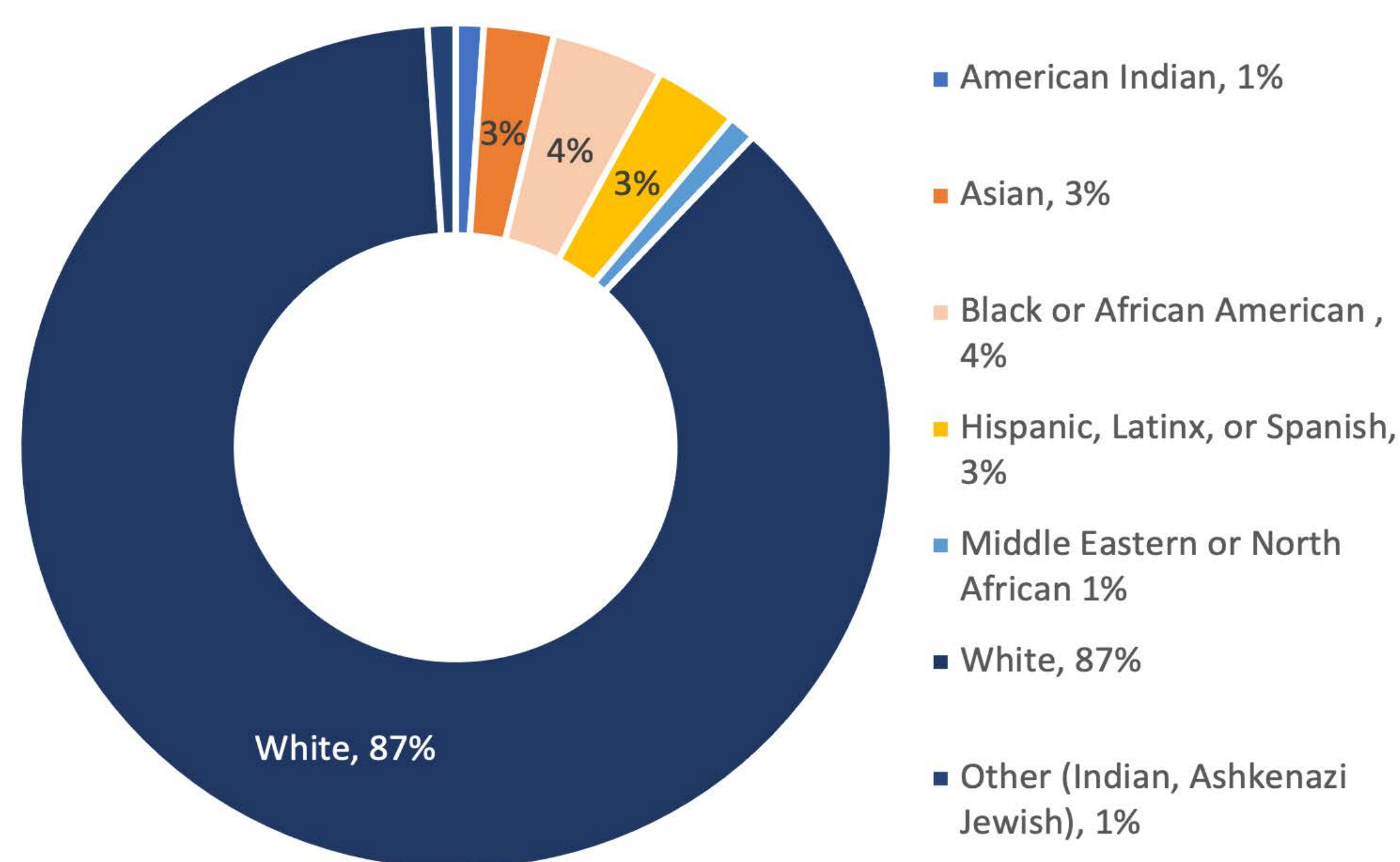
Methods

PARTICIPANTS

Of the 418 school personnel who participated in the course at the time this data was drawn, (August 9, 2021), 221 (53%) consented to participate in the research study. The sample was largely female (89%) and white (87%). Participants ranged in age from 22 to 65 (M = 43, SD = 12), teaching experience from 0 to 40 years (M = 11, SD = 16) , and role (classroom educator = 55%, support staff = 21%, leadership = 11%, and instructional specialist = 13%).

Role in School

Instructional Specialist 13%

Leadership 11%

Support Staff 21%

Classroom Educator 55%

Average Teaching Experience

11 years, with a range of 0-40 years

Average Age

43 With a range from 22-65 years old

Race and Ethnicity

- American Indian, 1%
- Asian, 3%
- Black or African American , 4%
- Hispanic, Latinx, or Spanish, 3%
- Middle Eastern or North African 1%
- White, 87%
- Other (Indian, Ashkenazi Jewish), 1%

White, 87%

3% 4% 3%

Gender

10% 1%

89%

- Female
- Male
- Non-Binary

School Setting

- Public, 87%
- Private, 3%
- Charter, 5%
- Independent, 3%
- Religious, 2%

Grade Level

Afterschool	Elementary School	Middle School	High School	Preschool/Daycare	Postsecondary	Other
.04%	26%	13%	29%	.05%	.04%	.08%
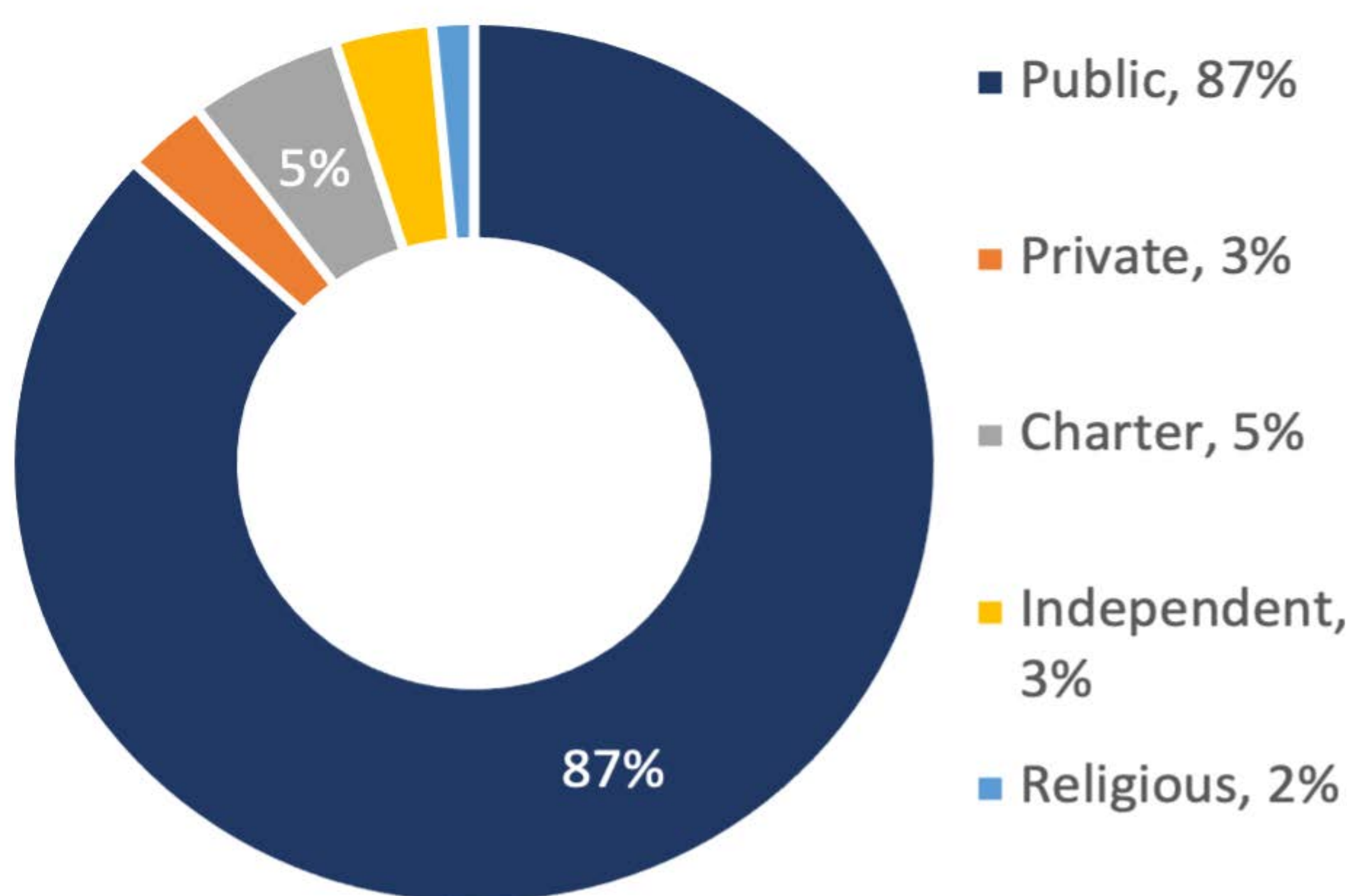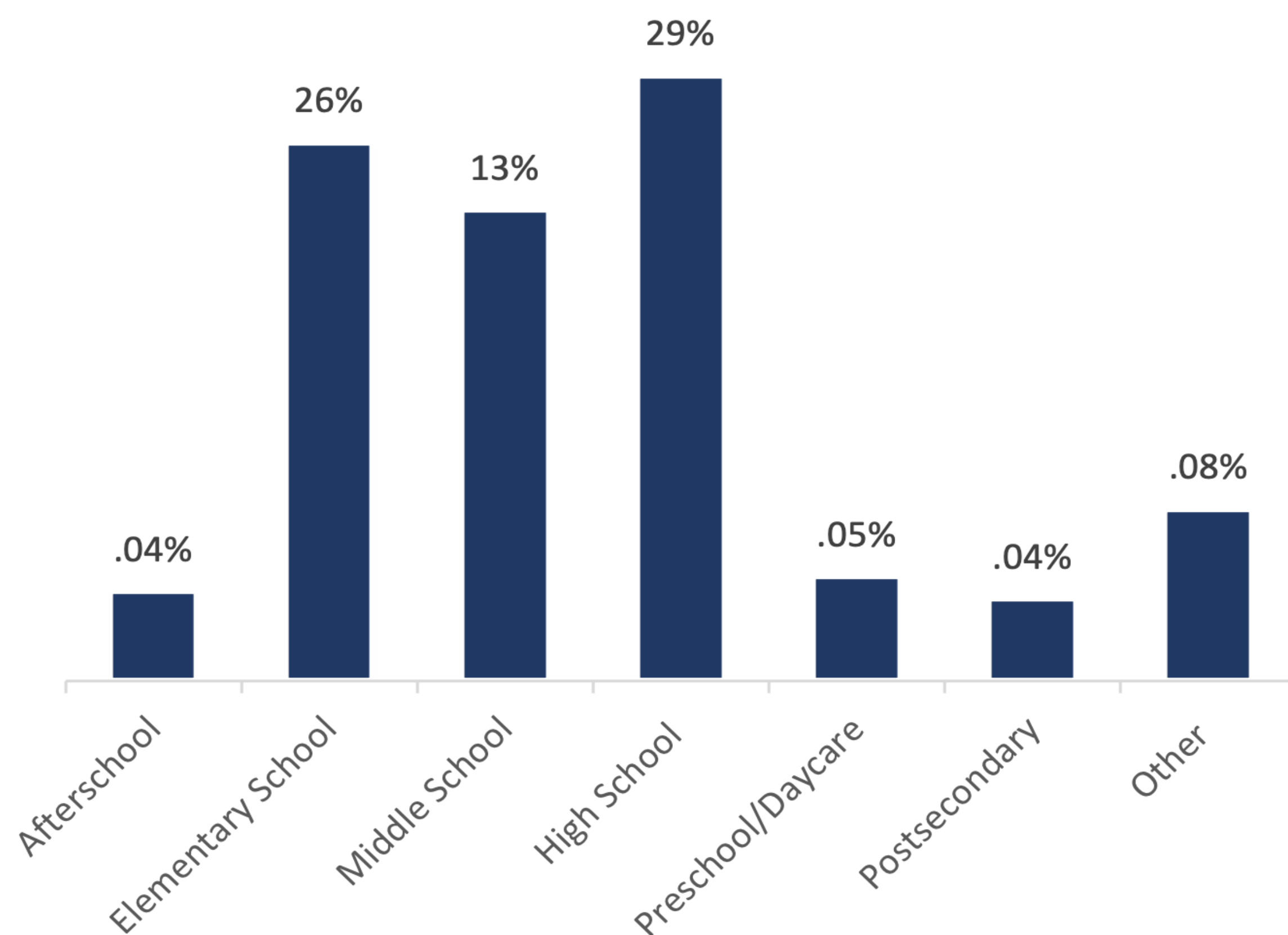
Mode of Instruction

80%

80% of participants reported their school utilizing a combination of distance and in-person learning.

Schoolwide SEL Implementation

66% *Before pandemic* → **54%** *After pandemic began*

Proportion of Studens with IEPs

- N/A 12%
- None 3%
- Most 14%
- All 15%
- Some 56%

MEASURES

The survey participants completed included demographic and descriptive items, questions from several scales that research teams at the YCEI have been developing for the past two years prior to the pandemic, and related open-ended questions.

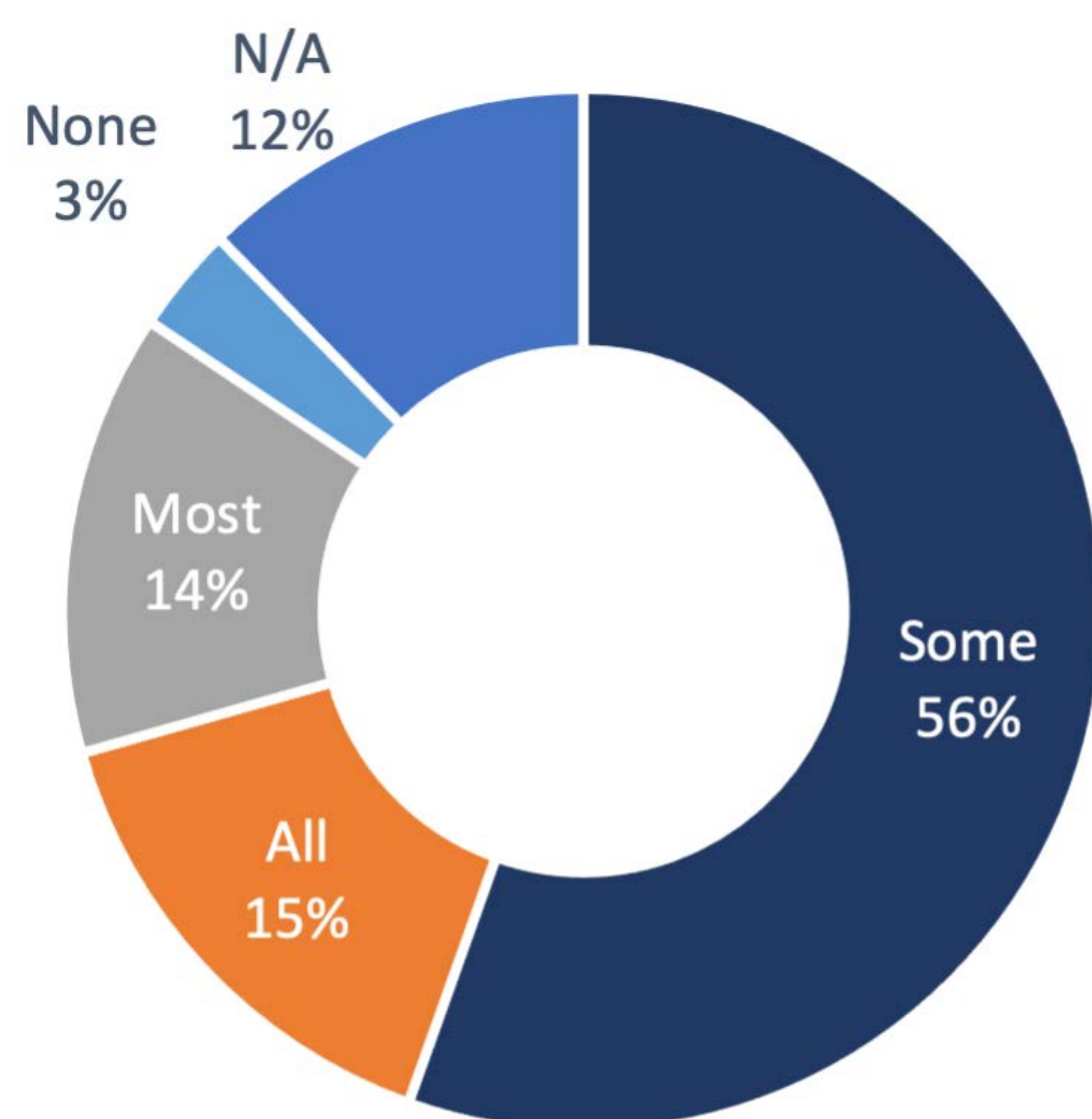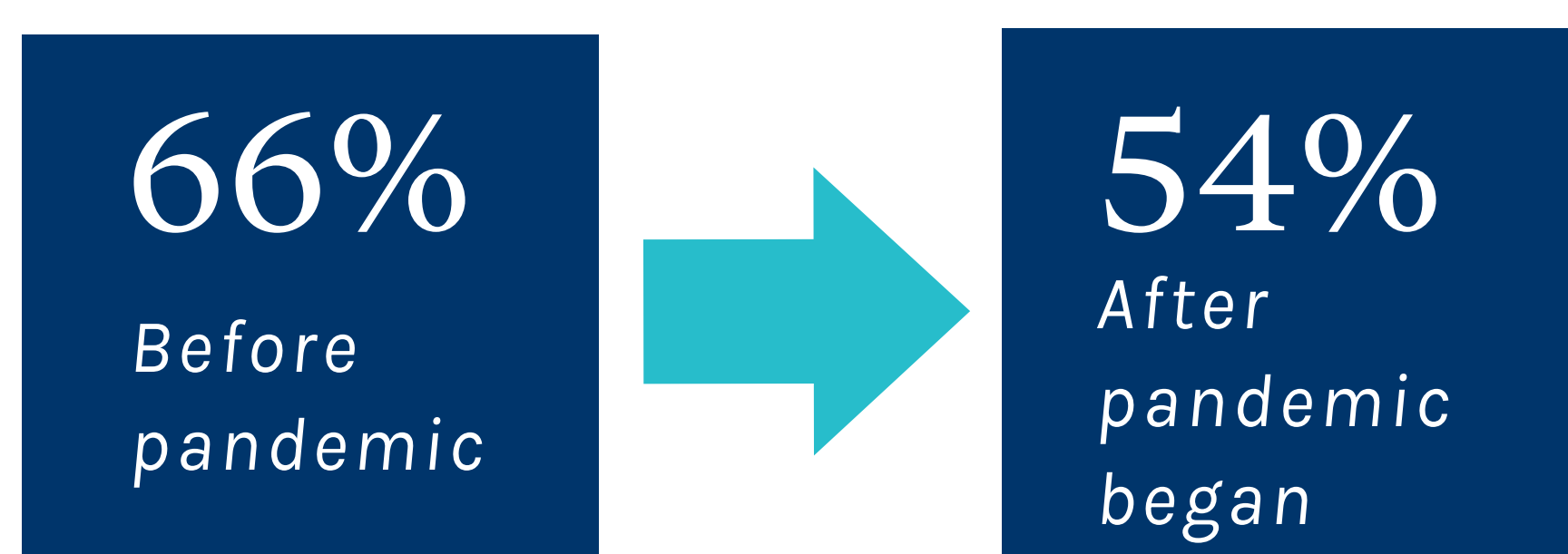### Demographic and COVID-19 Learning Context.

In addition to the demographic information already reported (age, gender, ethnicity, years of teaching experience, role in school, grade level, school type, and proportion of students with IEPs served), the survey included items to understand school personnel's current learning context, specifically whether their school was currently delivering instruction in-person, online, or mixed.

How School Personnel Feel.

School personnel's affective experiences and well-being were measured several ways. First, school personnel were asked to respond to the prompt: "How do you currently feel?" and instructed to type one feeling into one of three text boxes. This allowed us to gather their most salient feelings in their own words. Next, school personnel completed the 50-item Affective Experiences Scale (AES; Floman et al., IP), a teacher-report survey designed to capture educator experiences of positive and negative affect; the survey captures 29 positive and 21 negative feelings.

School personnel were asked to rate how often they experienced the emotion in the past few weeks from *None of the time* (1) to *All of the time* (5). For the open-ended questions, school personnel were asked to reflect on their experiences of stress and frustration and joy and inspiration at work, and then asked to type their responses to the pandemic. Finally, burnout was measured using the 14-item Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), including the Emotional Exhaustion, Personnel Accomplishment, Principal Emotional Intelligence (EI), Turnover Intentions, and Feelings of Inclusion subscales. Participants indicated how frequently, from *Never* (1) to *Daily* (5), they had particular experiences in the past few weeks (Maslach et al., 1986). Example items include "I feel I'm positively influencing other people's lives through my work" and "My principal is emotionally supportive of others."

Sources of Stress and Well-being.

Sources of stress and well-being were measured with two open-ended questions related to sources of stress and joy, and with items from the P-SOW. The SOW (Floman et al. IP) is a teacher-report survey designed to identify how much experiences and perspectives common in education reflect educators' professional experience. It was modified in response to the COVID-19 crisis to

include pandemic-specific items and omit items less applicable during the current crisis (P-SOW; Floman et al. IP). For the open-ended questions, school personnel were asked to reflect on their experiences of stress/frustration and joy/ inspiration at work, and then asked to type their responses to the following questions in text boxes: "What are the top three factors that contribute to your stress and frustration at school?" and "What are the top three factors that contribute to your joy and inspiration at school?" Extensive qualitative analyses were conducted on a random subset (N=500) of the open-ended responses of sources of stress and sources of joy; a text frequency analysis was conducted on the full sample of responses (N=2601) for confirmation. School personnel were also asked to rate how well each of the 11 P-SOW item statements reflect their experience at work over the past month from *Never* (1) to *Daily* (5), reflecting sources of well-being related to having positive relationships with students and colleagues, feeling supported by school leaders, and feeling safe at work. Example items include "I make a difference in my students' lives" and "My colleagues are respectful to me."

Emotion Regulation.

School personnel reported the frequency that they used 15 emotion regulation strategies over the past two weeks. Listed strategies

included items such as: "I reached out to someone to talk about my feelings" and "I tried to use humor or see the light side of things." They rated each item on a scale from *None of the time* (1) to *All of the time* (5).

School Support of School Personnel's Social and Emotional Needs.

The CRESS (Zieher et al., 2020) was designed to better understand educators' SEL practices in response to the COVID-19 crisis, including guidance, support, and priority of schools, as well as educator use of SEL for themselves and with students. Select items from the CRESS were included in the survey. The CRESS is drawn from the Emotion Focused Educator SEL Survey (The EFESS), a teacher-report survey designed to capture teacher practices to cultivate positive classroom culture, emotion literacy, emotion regulation, social problem solving, and SEL integration (Strambler et al., IP).

Specifically, school personnel were asked to rate "How much has your school (or district) supported your own social and emotional needs" on a scale from *Not at all* (1) to *A lot* (4) that also included the option *Unsure*. They were also asked to answer an open-response question: "What could schools do to better support your health and well-being?"

Results

COVID-19 LEARNING CONTEXT

The majority of Rhode Island school personnel (80%) reported their schools were offering a combination of distance and in-person learning; few reported they were offering only distance learning (10%), or only in-person learning (9%). Less school personnel reported that their school implemented a school-wide SEL approach after the pandemic (54%) than before it began (66%).

HOW SCHOOL PERSONNEL FEEL

School personnel open-response feeling word entries were calculated per text box and overall. Feeling words were collapsed if they had the same word root (e.g., "overwhelming," "overwhelmed," and "overwhelm") or if they were misspelled (e.g., "anxious" and "axious") (see Table 1).

> The most common feeling words reported overall were **overwhelmed**, **frustrated**, and **anxious**.

School personnel's most common affective experiences as reported across the survey questions included: pleasant feelings related to happiness, excitement, and hope and unpleasant feelings related to exhaustion, discouragement, and anger (see Table 2). School personnel who reported that they worked in-person at least some of the time were asked to report their sense of safety from COVID-19. On average, school personnel felt moderately to very safe from COVID-19 (60%) though 30% reported feeling a little unsafe and 8% reported feeling not at all safe.

EMOTION FEELING CATEORIES

- High Energy Unpleasant
- Low Energy Unpleasant
- High Energy Pleasant
- Low Energy Pleasant
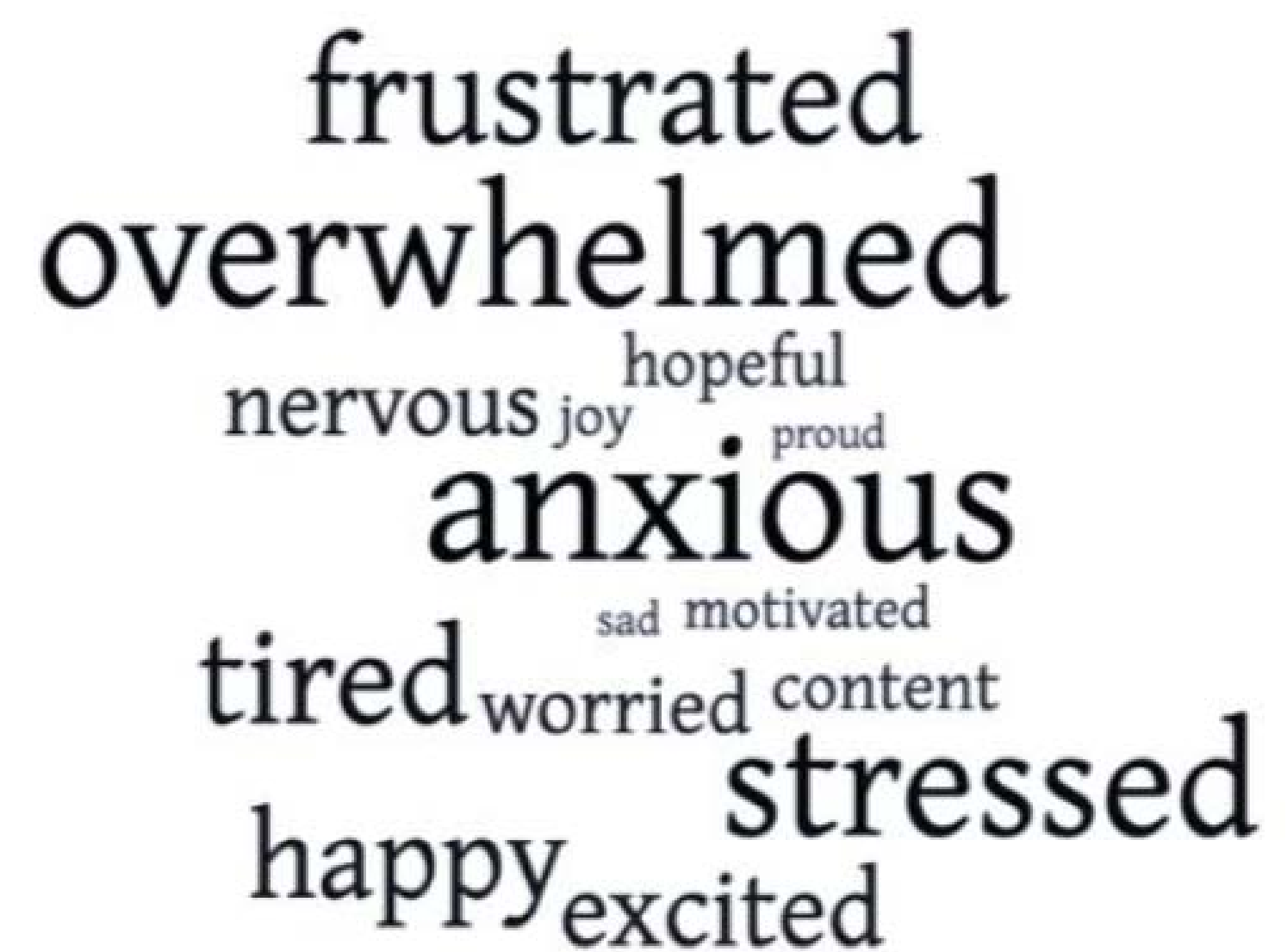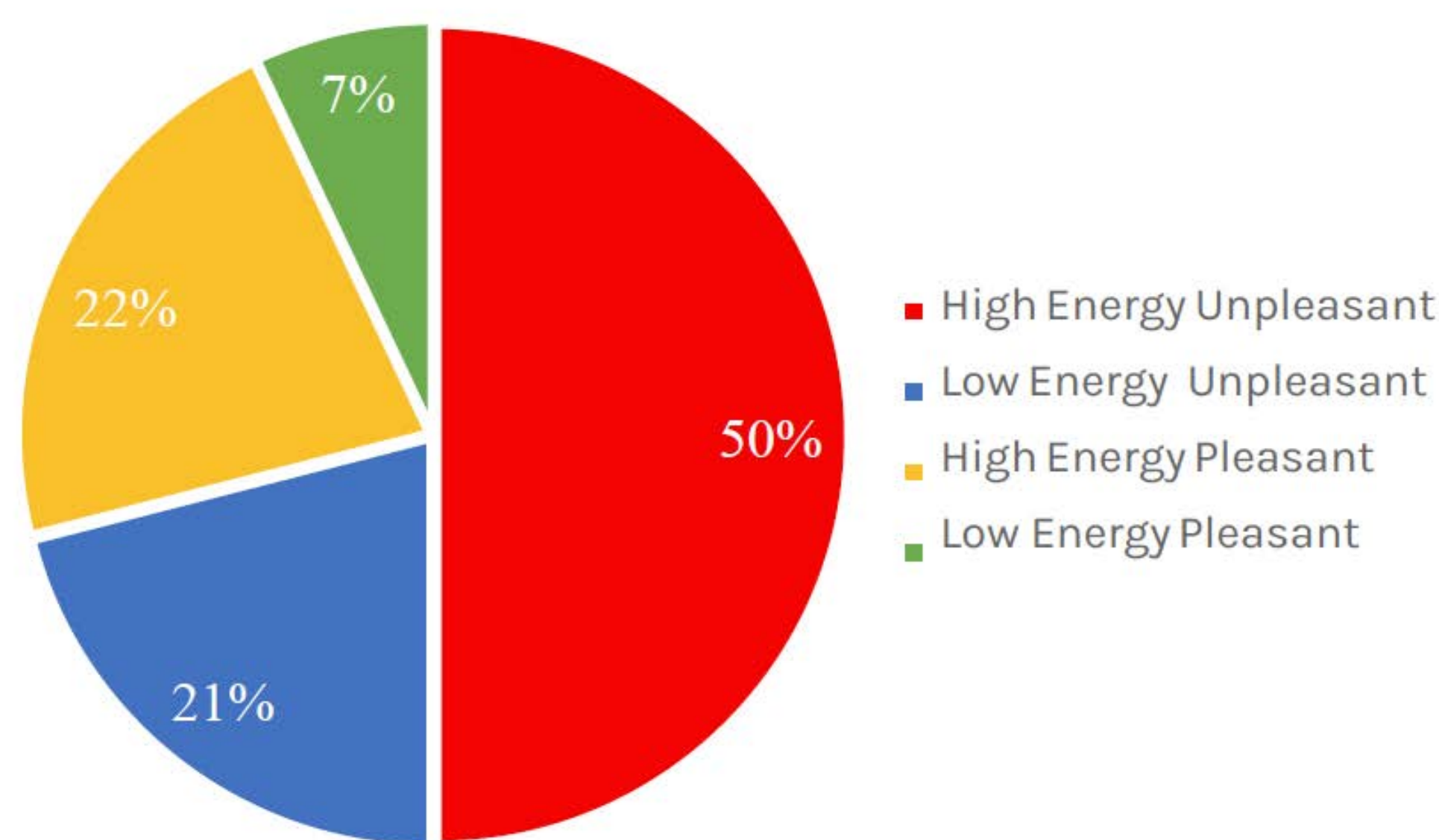
TABLE 1: *TOP EMOTION FEELING WORDS*

High Energy Unpleasant	%	Low Energy Unpleasant	%	High Energy Pleasant	%	Low Energy Pleasant	%
Anxious	26%	Tired	34%	Happy	22%	Content	36%
Overwhelmed	19%	Discouraged	16%	Excited	13%	Grateful	13%
Frustrated	19%	Sad	8%	Hopeful	8%	Calm	11%

Note. Feeling words were collapsed according to the Mood Meter and if they were of the same root word or misspelled (i.e. "frusturated" and "frustration").

TABLE 2: *AFFECTIVE EXPERIENCES*

Pleasant Feelings	M	SD	Unpleasant Feelings	M	SD
Compassionate	4.05	0.82	Tired	3.38	1.05
Empathic	4.02	0.88	Exhausted	3.28	1.13
Sympathetic	3.76	0.94	Worried	3.04	1.10
Grateful	3.73	0.96	Anxious	3.04	1.27
Determined	3.73	0.84	Frustrated	2.93	0.93
Thankful	3.70	0.98	Annoyed	2.64	0.90
Accepted	3.59	0.93	Burned-out	2.56	1.13
Motivated	3.39	0.87	Nervous	2.54	1.24
Focused	3.39	0.85	Disconnected	2.34	1.05
Appreciative	3.35	0.97	Isolated	2.18	1.17
Included	3.23	1.02	Disengaged	2.11	1.02
Proud	3.20	0.92	Sad	2.09	1.01
Accomplished	3.18	0.83	Down	2.09	1.01
Successful	3.16	0.83	Alone	1.98	1.14
Enthusiastic	3.16	0.99	Bored	1.98	0.98
Content	3.12	0.89	Angry	1.95	0.92
Valued	3.09	0.98	Excluded	1.93	1.050
Creative	3.04	1.06	Depressed	1.88	1.02
Satisfied	3.02	0.86	Embarrassed	1.44	0.71
Inspired	3.00	0.96	Ashamed	1.25	0.71
Joyful	2.98	0.83	Humiliated	1.23	0.63
Fulfilled	2.96	0.80			
Excited	2.95	0.94			
Passionate	2.60	0.96			
Amazed	2.60	0.96			
Moved	2.60	0.96			
Awed	2.29	1.04			

Note. The table contains the most common affective experiences reported by school personnel, as measured by the AES (Floman et al, 2019). A higher mean indicates a greater instance of reports of the affective experience (e.g., feeling compassion) by school personnel.

SOURCES OF STRESS AND WELL-BEING

The most common sources of stress were **lack of time, resources, or training** (16% of responses), stress related to **COVID-19 (6%)**, and **leadership and communication (6%)**.

The most common sources of joy were **Students (43%)**, positive interactions with and support from **Colleagues (24%)**, and **Teaching (5%)**.

Other sources of stress related to school community, such as parents, leadership, admin., and colleagues (13%), COVID-19, such as school regulations, safety, and general COVID stress (9%), feelings, such as isolation, unappreciation, judgement, exhaustion, and incompetence (6%), and also job concerns, such as low pay, being overworked, and technology (6%). See Appendix A for full descriptions and examples of each source of stress.

Other sources of joy related to student progress, such as "watching a student have an *aha* moment" (11%), positive student interactions (11%), personal growth (6%), parents, such as "supportive parents" (4%), and feelings, such as motivation, excitement, and creativity (2%). See Appendix B for full descriptions and examples of each source of joy. Furthermore, based on responses to the P-SOW, school personnel's most common sources of joy included positive interactions with students and colleagues and the least common source of joy was support from school leadership (.01%).

The most frequent word for sources of stress was "lack" (16%), while the most common word in sources of joy was "students" (43%). See Table 4 for the top five most common words and their corresponding frequencies reported by the wider participant pool.

TABLE 3: *SCHOOL PERSONNEL SOURCES OF WELL-BEING AT WORK*

	M
My colleagues are respectful to me.	4.43
I have positive one-on-one interactions with my students.	4.24
I feel emotionally safe at school.	3.97
I feel physically safe at school.	3.96
I make a difference in my students' lives.	3.89
I work collaboratively with my colleagues.	3.77
There are enough material resources available at my school to effectively meet all student needs.	3.36
There are sufficient staff in my classroom/school to meet all students' needs.	3.23
School leadership recognizes my contributions to the school.	2.97
School leadership offers opportunities for valuable professional development.	2.75
School leadership considers me in the school's decision-making process.	2.70

Note. Items were rated from *Never* (1) to *Daily* (5) on the frequency of experiencing the above items over the previous month.

TABLE 4: *FIVE MOST COMMON RESPONSES TO SOURCES OF STRESS AND JOY*

Sources of Stress	%	Sources of Joy	%
Lack	12	Students	43
COVID-19	6	Colleagues	24
Leadership	6	Teaching	5
Students	6	Helping	5
Colleagues	4	Support	4

Note. Percent frequency of the five most common words reported by the wider participant pool (*n* = 567).
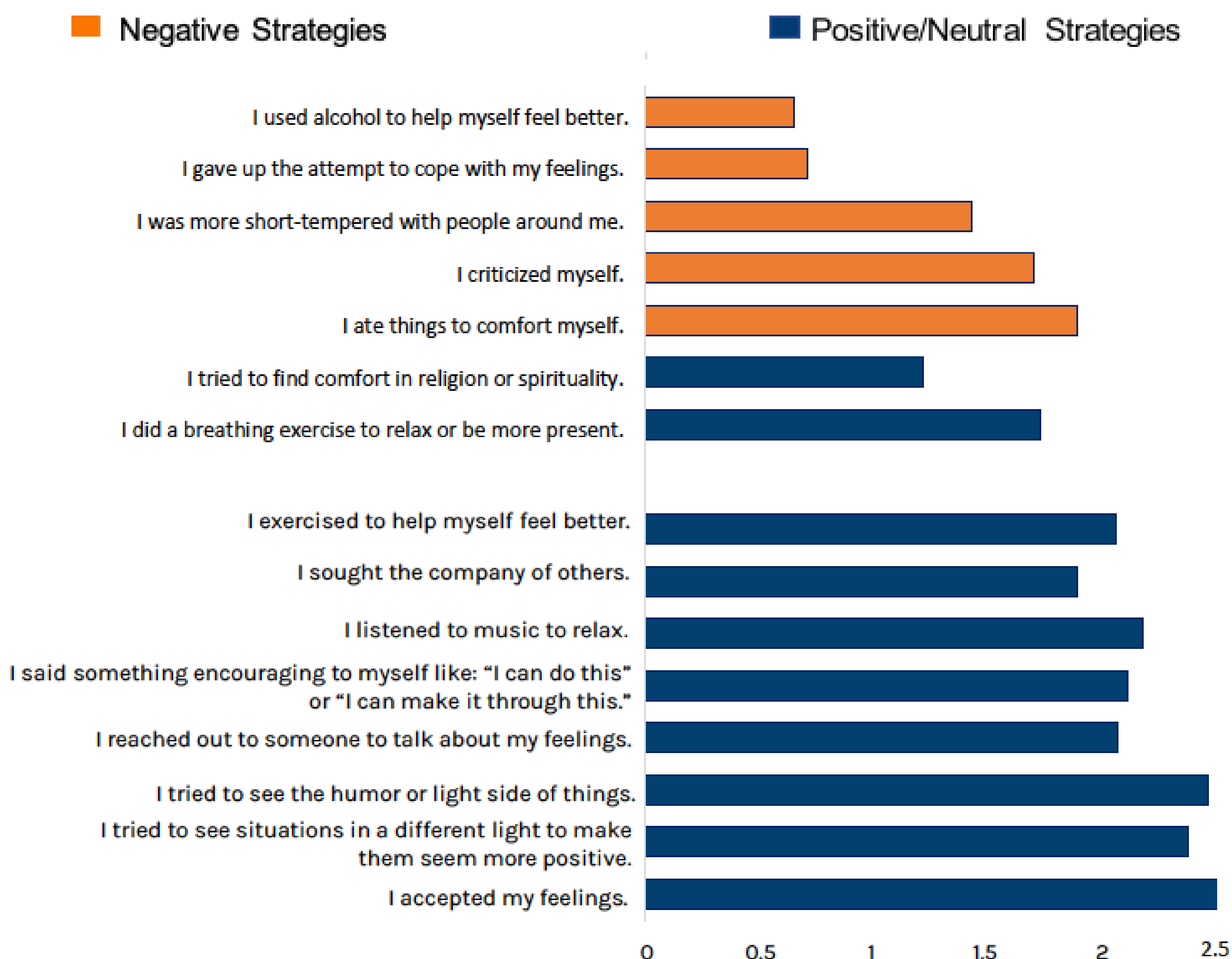
EMOTION REGULATION

School personnel endorsed a range of emotion regulation strategies, with the most common being acceptance (M = 2.54 SD = .96), cognitive reappraisal (M =2.47, SD = 1.04), and the use of humor (M = 2.38, SD = 1.02), and the least common being religion/spirituality (M= 1.22, SD = 1.3), giving up (M = .71, SD = .86), and using alcohol to cope (M = .65, SD = .91). Educators reported using healthy/neutral strategies significantly more often than unhealthy strategies. See Table 5 for the frequencies of all strategies and information on which strategies were coded as healthy or neutral (e.g., positive self-talk, listening to music) and those that were coded as unhealthy (e.g., giving up, taking anger out on others).

TABLE 5: *EMOTION REGULATION STRATEGIES*

Note. Displays means of common usage of emotion regulation strategies. A higher mean indicates a greater instance of reports. N = 209.

SCHOOL SUPPORT OF SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL NEEDS

On average, school personnel reported that their school supported their social and emotional needs to some extent (49%), although 25% reported their school was providing very little support, and 8% reported receiving no support at all. When asked how schools could better support them, the most common responses were related to general support (35% of responses), more communication/transparency (15%), supporting COVID protocol (12%), providing more recognition and acknowledgement (10%), and providing more resources/training (8%). That being said, some schools are doing a great job meeting school personnel needs (8%) and some educators do not believe schools are responsible to help or are uncertain how their school can help (15%). See Appendix A for a description and examples of each theme.

QUOTES FROM RHODE ISLAND SCHOOL PERSONNEL

WHAT ARE THE FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO STRESS AND FRUSTRATION?

"Lack of physical connection, which leads to lack of emotional connection."
- High School Educator

"Not knowing my students."
- Middle School Counselor

"Lack of control in decision-making."
- Director

"Lack of resources, the unknown, lack of support."
- Preschool/Day Care Mentor

"There is too much to do and not enough time to do it."
- Middle School Educator

WHAT ARE THE FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO JOY?

"Collaboration among colleagues. We have a great group of teachers in our building and it's great working together, being together, and learning together."
- Middle School Educator

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WHAT COULD SCHOOLS DO TO BETTER SUPPORT HEALTH AND WELL-BEING?

"Value **SEL** as much as test scores."
- Elementary School Principal

"Recognize staff as people first rather than just employees."
- School Psychologist

"**Overcommunicate**. Currently, we have no information. We learn about our work in the newspaper."
- State Educator

"Truly support me...physically and mentally."
- High School Educator

"Encourage time OFF-time spent with family, away from work, etc."
- Elementary School Special Educator

"Implement a district-wide SEL curriculum."
- High School Social Worker

WHAT COULD SCHOOLS DO TO BETTER SUPPORT THE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL OF COLOR?

1. "I firmly believe every district in the United States needs a Wellness Center for Faculty & Staff."

2. "Listen more to the voices of teachers and staff, make decisions with everyone in mind."

3. "Transparency, accountability, REAL steps towards equity."

4. "Support teachers within the classroom. Help with academics as well as [SEL] for themselves as well as the children."

Discussion

As of 2021, unprecedented federal funding has been allocated to the development, promotion, and implementation of SEL (Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES Act), 2020). Our findings suggest that school personnel continue to impress with their resiliency and strength in the face of incredible challenges. Rhode Island educators reported strong levels of passion, motivation to work with students, growth while collaborating with colleagues, unprecedented ability to adapt, and willingness to stay in the profession.

In this survey, Rhode Island school personnel report extremely high feelings of compassion, empathy, and sympathy. While these data are encouraging, we cannot ignore that the highest levels of negative affect emotions reported were tiredness, exhaustion, and worry. Our educators have often been the unsung front-line workers in the past few years (Beames et al., 2021). Perpetual feelings of sympathy and compassion can lead to burn-out and compassion fatigue (Koenig, 2018).

Notably, prominent themes that emerge from the data are the need for continued financial, emotional, and psychological support and appreciation of all educators. Educators in our sample shared a pattern of affective experiences that have been found across the country and throughout the pandemic. Importantly, self-management, the ability to regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively across situations, is best accessed when we are experiencing on average more pleasant than unpleasant emotions. This is a stark contrast to the majority of affective experiences reported in our sample and suggests educators would benefit from support in healthy regulation strategies to support thriving and resilience. Strategies may include setting realistic expectations for ourselves in terms of emotional and mental health, our students, schools, districts, and the education system at large. Further, practicing patience and giving oneself grace to recognize that with each day that passes we can be encouraged that change is happening.

Educators in our sample were clear in their requests for additional support from leadership, calling for increased communication, the prioritization of their wellness alongside their students, school-wide SEL efforts, transparency, accountability, and real steps toward equity.

Moving Forward, Together

December 2020, the YCEI launched the course, *Managing Emotions in Times of Uncertainty and Stress*, to educators and school staff across the nation on Coursera, free of charge. To date, over 65,000 learners have enrolled, and over 90% of those who completed the course said they were either "satisfied" or "very satisfied" with the course as a whole.

Our team will continue to review and report on findings from school personnel who participate in the corresponding research study alongside the course to support the transmission of data findings in real time.

Key findings included (1) differences between educators' responses on standardized measures of affective experiences and what they shared in their open-response questions regarding their feelings of inclusion, personal accomplishment, emotional exhaustion, intentions to quit, and perceived principal emotional intelligence, (2) sources of joy to be grounded in their experiences with their students, colleagues, and families, and sources of stress to be "everything else" around the practice of teaching, and (3) a significant lack of support for educator SEL and requests for resources and skills.

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Appendix

APPENDIX A: SOURCES OF STRESS SUPPORT CODING SCHEME

Category	Subcategory	Definition	Examples
1. COVID-19	1a. School regulations	Regulations in the school based on mask-wearing policies, hybrid model, remote learning	*"Isolation due to covid safety procedures"*
	1b. Safety	Personal worries because of COVID (e.g., family, health issues)	*"Getting covid at school"*
	1c. General covid stress	General fear of COVID-19; feelings of unknown related to/due to COVID-19	*"COVID-19"*
2. Feelings	2a. Isolation	Feeling alone or separated from the community	*"Isolation"*
	2b. Unappreciation	Feeling undervalued or ignored	*"Feeling that I'm not valued"*
	2c. Judgement	Feeling judged or held to unrealistic standards	*"Very high expectations during a pandemic"*
	2d. Exhausted	Feeling overworked and stressed	*"Exhaustion/many tasks"*
	2e. Incompetence	Feeling unskilled /underprepared/ineffective	*"Not feeling adequately prepared"*
3. School Community	3a. Parents	Unrealistic parental demands/ expectations or lack of parental involvement	*"Parents who blame teachers"*
	3b. Leadership/ administration	Poor communication from leadership/lack of transparency; lack of trust from superiors in educators' capabilities	*"Disconnect between leadership and work being done"*

	3c. Colleagues	Lack of cooperation/coordination with coworkers; coworkers' incompetence	"Colleagues not working as a team"
4. Job Concerns	4a. Low pay	Not being financially compensated fairly or lack of job security	"Anxiety about future job"
	4b. Overworked	Increased responsibilities, e.g. more paperwork; too much of a workload	"Increased amount of paperwork"
	4c. Technology	Issues that arise from using technology	"Not having enough technology"

APPENDIX B: SOURCES OF WELL-BEING SUPPORT CODING SCHEME

Category	Subcategory	Definition	Examples
1. **Student Progress**		Students thriving academically and socially	"Students participating, learning, and growing"
2. **Student Interactions**	2a. Teaching students; watching students learn	Activities related to being a teacher	"Teaching science"
	2b. Personal student interaction	General comments about interacting with students; positive personal interactions	"Interacting with my students"
3. **Personal Growth**	3a. Learning new skills	Learning about technology; taking on new responsibilities	"Leadership role to help others"
	3b. Accomplishments	Succeeding at tasks, doing well at things	"Rising above the hard times (my class of struggling readers just finished a classic American novel)"

Category	Subcategory		
4. Parents		Collaboration and support from parents/families	"Understanding parents"
5. Feelings	5a. Motivation	Being recognized for good work and making a difference	"Being acknowledged"
	5b. Creativity	Creating new programs and inventiveness	"Creating new programs"
	5c. Excitement	Enthusiasm about seeing students and getting back to school	"Seeing students"
6. Leadership		Collaboration with administration; support from administration	"The support from my administration"

APPENDIX C: SOURCES OF SCHOOL SUPPORT CODING SCHEME

Category	Subcategory	Examples
1. Support	1a. Mental health/personal days	"Allow for mental health breaks throughout the school day. Maybe 15 mins of mental decompression."
	1b. Show appreciation	"Appreciation and acknowledgement of the things we are all doing would support educators' well-being."
	1c. Technology	"Stop adding more and more new technology-- without training"
2. COVID-19	2a. Protocol	"Offer covid testing to faculty and staff"
	2b. Distance learning	"More support/help finding activities during distanced learning."
3. Communicate	3a. Be transparent	"Better communication/transparency with covid cases from our school"
	3b. Realistic expectations	"We even have guest speakers hired to talk about how teachers need to take time for themselves and focus on our mental well-being - while simultaneously having our time wasted and being given more responsibilities"

	3c. Feedback	*"It would be helpful to have some outside feedback. What are the deans hearing from students? From parents? What do they observe?"*
4. Mind and Body		*"They truly support me...physically and mentally."*
5. Nothing	5a. Well-supported	*"I feel well-supported and listened to. Many things are in place, but so much is out of their control."*
	5b. Not sure	
	5c. School is not responsible	*"I do not look to the school to improve my health, that is my responsibility."*

Note. n = 52