



How are the teachers doing in COVID-times?

Financial well-being, emotional well-being, and job intentions among Head Start teachers amidst a global pandemic



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Concerns about the well-being and occupational stability of the early care and education (ECE) workforce have been magnified against the backdrop of COVID-19. The global health crisis has created monumental and immediate shifts in the economy, in the job market, in supports that allow teachers to work, such as the availability of in-person school and child care for their own children, and in feelings about the health and safety of schools and workplaces. It has also monumentally changed the ways in which people interact with one another, and for many, it has challenged their financial and emotional well-being. The purpose of this study is to understand how teachers who work in Head Start and subsidized child care, who provide ECE services to children in under resourced communities, are faring during the initial stages of the pandemic. Specifically, this study addresses the following questions:

- 1) How are teachers faring financially during the pandemic and have there been changes in teachers' financial outlook as a potential result of the pandemic;
- 2) To what extent are teachers experiencing clinical levels of depression and anxiety during the pandemic? Has there been an uptick in depression rates since the pandemic?
 - a) What coping skills are teachers' using to handle the stress, and do particular coping skills help buffer teachers from depression and anxiety; and
- 3) What are teachers' job intentions; have they changed during the pandemic?

This study surveyed 110 teachers at Mile High Early Learning (MHEL) and at Rocky Mountain SER (RMSER), two of Colorado's largest providers of Head Start and subsidized child care, about their financial and emotional well-being and job intentions. Surveys were administered 10 months prior to the pandemic and again two to three months into the pandemic. Results suggest that:

Financial Outlook

- No teachers were furloughed as a function of the pandemic. However, of the teachers who had a second job, over a third lost them or had their hours reduced. In addition, of teachers with spouses or partners, 33% of their partners experienced a job loss or reduced work hours, and 35% of teachers have taken in a family member due to pandemic-related job loss.
- Over a quarter of teachers' annual household incomes fell during the pandemic. The median household income for teachers at RMSER is currently between \$20,000 and \$30,000 a year, and at MHEL, the median household income is currently between \$30,000 and \$40,000 a year, both below the self-sufficiency standard of \$72,000 for a family of four in Denver.
- Approximately 87% of teachers have health insurance coverage for themselves and all have paid sick time. However, for partnered teachers, 40% of teachers' partners do not have paid time off should they fall ill and 28% of teachers reside in households where at least

one family member does not have health insurance coverage. As a result, over two-thirds of teachers are worried about being able to pay medical bills if someone becomes sick.

- At the same time, teachers' financial strain and the amount of financial sacrifices that they have had to make have significantly decreased over the last year, likely because they were being paid during the shutdown, and because they received pay raises prior to the pandemic that buffered their financial strain.

Emotional Health

- Two to three months into the pandemic, 54% of teachers are reporting clinical levels of depression, which is a 54% increase in depression rates among teachers compared to one year prior to the pandemic.
- Approximately 29% of teachers are experiencing moderate to severe anxiety during the pandemic.
- Most teachers are employing adaptive and positive coping strategies to handle the stress of the pandemic. However, none of the coping strategies appear to buffer teachers' depression.

Job Intentions

- Almost all teachers (90%) are planning to return to classrooms post shutdown; yet 25% are considering leaving their jobs over the next two year, which are similar rates to those observed a year ago.
- Teachers' primary reasons for considering leaving their jobs include: leadership and management, career changes, moving out of state, and work schedules not aligned with their children's school schedules.

Results suggest a need to: (1) continue advancing advocacy efforts for public funding for ECE that includes money earmarked for teacher pay; (2) improve health insurance coverage to make it more affordable for teachers to cover their family members; (3) increase on-site mental health support for teachers; and (4) advance organizational efforts to build positive relationships among all levels of organizations.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Prior to the COVID-19 global pandemic, a movement was afoot to elevate the early care and education (ECE) workforce¹ due to increasing concerns about their well-being and occupational instability². Many practitioners, advocates and researchers alike noted that the demands of the job had far outpaced the compensation teachers received³. In turn, this created a field in which many ECE teachers have to take a second job or receive public benefits to make ends meet, and in which many early childhood teachers are driven out of the profession⁴. Several studies have also noted an uptick in occupational burnout and depression among early childhood teachers, especially among those who work in Head Start, whose job demands are increasingly expanding⁵.

These concerns have been magnified against the backdrop of COVID-19. When the pandemic hit, unprecedented pressure was put on the ECE system. For many ECE programs that primarily rely on family tuition, ECE closures precipitated by COVID-19 resulted in over a quarter of the early childhood teaching workforce in Colorado who work in community-based settings furloughed or laid off⁶. A recent national study also found that 40% of ECE programs were on the brink of permanent closure⁷. While programs that receive the majority of their funding through public sources may have fared better during temporary ECE closures and were able to continue paying their teachers in the short-term⁸, the severity of the economic downturn may nonetheless be affecting the overall financial health of teachers in these programs.

In addition to COVID-19 potentially placing additional financial strain on the ECE workforce, it has also been well-documented that the worry and isolation stemming from the global health crisis has increased depression and anxiety, has disrupted sleep, and has fostered an increase in risky behaviors such as alcohol and tobacco use among adults⁹. For early childhood teachers, it has also created new work demands and a new set of worries about their own and their families' health as teachers begin to re-open classrooms in the midst of a pandemic which could put them at even greater risk for high rates of stress, anxiety, and depression. This is of concern for both teachers and for children because teachers with high levels of stress and depression are less likely to set a positive classroom climate and are more likely to withdraw

1 Institute of Medicine/ National Research Council. (2015). *Transforming the workforce for children birth through age 8: A unifying foundation*. Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press.

2 Madill, R., Halle, T., Gebhart, T., & Shuey, E. (2018). Supporting the Psychological Well-Being of the Early Care and Education Workforce: Findings from the National Survey of Early Care and Education. OPRE Report 2018-49. *Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation*.

3 Bullough Jr, R. V., Hall-Kenyon, K. M., MacKay, K. L., & Marshall, E. E. (2014). Head start and the intensification of teaching in early childhood education. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 37*, 55-63.

4 Whitebook, M., Phillips, D., & Howes, C. (2014). Worthy work, STILL unlivable wages: The early childhood workforce 25 years after the National Child Care Staffing Study. *Berkeley, CA: Center for the Study of Child Care Employment*.

5 Koch, P., Stranzinger, J., Nienhaus, A., & Kozak, A. (2015). Musculoskeletal symptoms and risk of burnout in childcare workers: A cross-sectional study. *PLoS One, 10*(10), e0140980.

6 Early Milestones Colorado (August, 2020). COVID-19 Provider Survey. Denver, Colorado.

7 National Association of the Education of Young Children (July, 2020). Holding on until hope comes: A survey reveals child care's fight to survive. Washington D.C. NAEYC.

8 Denver Preschool Program (May, 2020). Denver Preschool Program COVID-19 Survey. Denver, CO.

9 Stanton, R., To, Q. G., Khalesi, S., Williams, S. L., Alley, S. J., Thwaite, T. L., Fenning, A. S., & Vandelanotte, C. (2020). Depression, Anxiety and Stress during COVID-19: Associations with Changes in Physical Activity, Sleep, Tobacco and Alcohol Use in Australian Adults. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 17*(11), 4065.

emotionally from children¹⁰. This may be particularly problematic when children, especially those from under resourced communities whose families may be hit hardest by the pandemic, are relying more than ever on the emotional availability of their teachers to buffer their own stress and anxiety.

Purpose

Consequently, the purpose of this study is to understand the financial well-being, emotional well-being, and job intentions of a sample of teachers who work at Mile High Early Learning (MHEL) and at Rocky Mountain SER (RMSER) in the midst of the pandemic. These agencies provide publicly subsidized ECE and Head Start programming to under resourced children and families in Denver and across Colorado, respectively. A secondary purpose of this report is to examine whether teachers' financial strain, depression, and job intentions changed over the course of a year as a potential function of the pandemic and to examine whether particular coping strategies teachers are employing help protect them from depression and anxiety. This study has been designed to help identify the human resource supports that teachers working in ECE programs in the midst of the pandemic may need as they re-enter classrooms and work life.

Background

Mile High Early Learning (MHEL) is Denver, Colorado's oldest provider of subsidized ECE and prior to the pandemic served approximately 623 children birth to five years of age annually in seven centers throughout the city. Children attend these centers from funding made available through Head Start, Early Head Start, The Colorado Preschool Program, The Denver Preschool Program, the Colorado Child Care Assistance Program (CCCAP) and from family tuition. Rocky Mountain SER provides Head Start and Colorado Preschool Program services to 1,174 children three to five years of age in 22 centers in communities throughout Colorado. Prior to the pandemic, teachers in 36 classrooms at MHEL and in 35 classrooms at RMSER were taking part in an evaluation of a teacher well-being and retention initiative in which teachers received pay raises and different professional development and emotional well-being supports to improve retention. For the current study, we were able to leverage data collected on teachers' financial well-being, emotional well-being, and job intentions collected 10 months prior to the pandemic as a part of the teacher well-being and retention initiative evaluation. This enabled us to be able to examine the extent to which indices of teacher well-being and job intentions changed as a likely function of the pandemic and the role teacher coping skills play in protecting teachers from depression in the face of the pandemic.

10 Buettner, C. K., Jeon, L., Hur, E., & Garcia, R. E. (2016). Teachers' social-emotional capacity: Factors associated with teachers' responsiveness and professional commitment. *Early Education and Development, 27*(7), 1018-1039; Curbow, B., Spratt, K., Ungaretti, A., McDonnell, K., & Breckler, S. (2000). Development of the child care worker job stress inventory. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 15*(4), 515-536; Dizon-Ross, E., Loeb, S., Penner, E., & Rochmes, J. (2019). Stress in boom times: Understanding teachers' economic anxiety in a high-cost urban district. *AERA Open, 5*(4), 1-20.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

This study examines the following research questions:

- 1) *How are teachers currently faring financially during the pandemic?*
 - a) Has their financial outlook changed as a potential result of the pandemic?
- 2) *How are teachers currently faring with respect to anxiety and depression during the pandemic?*
 - a) Are teachers demonstrating higher rates of depression than a year prior to the pandemic?
- 3) *How are teachers coping during the pandemic?*
 - a) Are there specific coping behaviors that buffer teachers from depression or anxiety?
- 4) *What are teachers current job intentions?*

Sample and Data Collection

To address these research questions, we drew from a sample of 110 teachers who are currently working during the pandemic in 36 classrooms run by MHEL and in 35 classrooms run by RMSER. These teachers were also working in their respective organizations at least one year prior to the pandemic hitting and had been participating in a larger evaluation of teacher well-being and retention strategies being implemented in their organizations. Of these teachers, 67 worked at MHEL and 43 at RMSER; 64 were considered lead teachers and 46 were considered assistant teachers or instructional/staff aides. For the purposes of this study, we combine assistant teachers and instructional/staff aides and refer to them as “assistant teachers.” We also use the term “teachers” when collectively referencing lead teachers, assistant teachers, and instructional aides/staff.

All teachers in the sample were administered a paper and pencil survey during the first week of May in 2019 as part of the teacher well-being and retention evaluation. Approximately one year later in May and in June of 2020, all teachers were sent another electronic survey to complete. During the second survey administration, each of the teachers in the study worked in centers that were temporarily closed due COVID-19. Teachers at MHEL were preparing to re-open their classrooms at different points throughout the summer and teachers at RMSER were preparing to return to classrooms mid-August 2020.

Surveys queried teachers about the following topics.

- *Demographic Information.* During both survey administrations, teachers were asked to report on their position, their ethnicity, and their contracted work hours, and during the second survey administration, they were asked to report on their age, their marital status, and the number of children/dependents under 25 they support.
- *Financial well-being.* During both survey administrations, teachers were asked about their economic and work situations, including whether they had a second job and whether they

received any public benefits. During the second survey administration, they were also asked about whether they had been furloughed, laid off or had their work hours reduced due to COVID-19, and whether any of these employment changes happened to their spouse or partner. They also were asked questions about their household income, the extent to which it had changed since the pandemic, whether all household members had health insurance and paid sick days, whether they were currently supporting additional family members as a result of the pandemic, whether any family members had to leave the house in order to go to work during the pandemic; and the extent to which they were worried about being able to pay medical bills if they or family members were to fall ill.

In addition, during both survey administrations, teachers completed an adapted version of the *Perceived Economic Pressure Survey*¹¹, which included two subscales. The first, *Can't Make Ends Meet*, assessed teachers' ability to pay monthly bills. This scale was composed of two items. One item asked if the teacher could pay bills at the end of each month and the second item asked if the teacher had any remaining money at the end of each month. Both items were rated on a 1-4 Likert scale and averaged, with lower scores indicating greater ability to make ends meet. The second subscale, *Financial Cutbacks*, assessed whether teachers had to make significant cutbacks in daily expenditures because of limited financial resources. There were a maximum of 17 cutbacks and the higher the score, the more cutbacks the teacher made over the prior 12-month period.

- **Employment Intentions.** During both survey administrations, teachers were also asked about whether they anticipated leaving their respective organizations in the next year and if so, the primary reasons that were driving them to potentially leave. For the second survey administration, teachers were asked if they were planning on returning to classrooms during the pandemic; and if teachers were planning on leaving their jobs anytime soon and the primary reasons that were driving those decisions.
- **Emotional Well-being.** Teachers during both survey administrations also completed a 10-item, shortened version of the *Center for Epidemiology Studies Depression Scale*¹² assessing their symptoms of depression. Teachers were asked to rate how frequently a symptom applied to them over the course of the past week. Ratings were based on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (rarely or none of the time [less than 1 day]) to 3 (most or all of the time [5–7 days]) and scores were summed to achieve a continuous score of between 0 and 30. Scores above 10 are considered symptomatic of clinical levels of depression.

During the second survey administration, teachers also completed *The Generalized Anxiety Disorder*¹³ short version scale. This seven-item measure asks teachers to report on how often, over a two-week period, they exhibited symptomologies related to anxiety. Each item was rated on a 0 to 3 Likert scale, with 3 representing, “nearly every day” and scores across items were summed. Composite scores over five are considered mild anxiety, scores over 10 are considered moderate anxiety, and scores of 15 or higher are

11 Conger, Conger, Elder, Lorenz, Simons, & Whitbeck (1992). A family process model of economic hardship and adjustment of early adolescent boys. *Child Development*, 63, 526–541.

12 Radloff LS (1977) The CES-D scale: A self-report depression scale for research in the general population. *Applied Psychological Measurement* 1, 385–401.

13 Spitzer, R.L., Kroenke, K., Williams, J.B.W., & Lowe, B. (2006). A brief measure for assessing generalized anxiety disorder. *Archives of Internal Medicine*, 166, 1092–1097.

considered severe anxiety. In addition, teachers completed *The Brief COPE Inventory (Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced)*¹⁴, which is a 28-item multidimensional measure of strategies used for coping and emotional regulation in response to stressors. This inventory is comprised of items that assessed the frequency with which teachers uses different coping strategies to manage anxiety stemming from the pandemic. Specific strategies assessed included: (1) self-distraction, (2) active coping, (3) denial, (4) substance use, (5) use of emotional support, (6) use of instrumental support, (7) behavioral disengagement, (8) venting, (9) positive reframing, (10) planning, (11) humor, (12) acceptance, (13) religion, and (14) self-blame.

Analytic Techniques

To address research questions, we used measures of central tendency to describe the sample on key indices, and used t-tests and chi-square tests to compare group differences within and across time. In addition, we used regression analyses to examine relationships between coping strategies and teacher depression, anxiety, and job intentions.

14 Carver, C. S. (1997). You want to measure coping but your protocol's too long: Consider the brief. *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 4(1), 92-100.

CHAPTER 3: RESULTS

This chapter begins by describing the overall study sample. We proceed by examining how teachers are currently faring financially during the global pandemic and explore whether there have been changes in teachers' financial outlook over the past year. Next we describe how teachers are faring with respect to their emotional well-being, whether there have been changes in rates of depression among teachers as a potential result of the pandemic, and we explore whether different coping behaviors teachers use protect them from anxiety and depression, or put them at greater risk for anxiety and depression. We conclude by examining teachers' job intentions and whether there have been changes in their job intentions as a potential function of the pandemic.

Sample Characteristics

One-hundred and ten teachers who work at MHEL and at six Head Start centers at RMSER comprise the sample of teachers for this study¹⁵. Of these teachers, 67 are considered lead teachers and 43 are considered assistant teachers. When examining differences between the two organizations' study participants, we observed MHEL had more lead teachers participating in the study than RMSER and that RMSER had more assistant teachers participating in the study than MHEL.

Of the total sample of teachers, 57% held bachelors (BA) degrees or higher, 17% had an associate degree as their highest level of education (AA), and 26% had not completed a degree. Differences in educational attainment among teachers were also observed between organizations. Teachers at MHEL were more likely to have a BA degree as their highest level of education, while teachers at RMSER were more likely to have a high school degree ($\chi^2 = 18.04$, $p = 0.002$). These findings likely reflect the fact that more lead teachers in the sample were from MHEL and more assistant teachers in the sample were from RMSER.

Teachers ranged in age from 20 to 70 years old, with an average teacher age of between 36 and 37 years old. While there was a great deal of variation among teachers in their years of experience in the field, the average teacher had been working in ECE for approximately 11.31 years (S.D. = 10.30) and their years of experience ranged from less than one year to 41 years.

Table 1. Teacher Race and Ethnicity

Ethnicity	Frequency
Hispanic	59%
Non-Hispanic	41%
Race	
Black	6%
Asian	1%
Caucasian	79%
Native/Indigenous	7%
Middle Eastern	1%
Multi-racial	15%

Table 1 provides additional details about teachers' race and ethnicity. RMSER teachers were more likely to be from Hispanic heritage cultures than were teachers at MHEL ($\chi^2 = 23.81$; $p < 0.001$). This again may reflect the fact that study participants at MHEL were more likely to be lead teachers and study participants at RMSER were more likely to be assistant teachers. Prior studies have found that teachers of Hispanic heritage cultures are more likely to be in assistant teacher positions than lead teacher positions¹⁶. Without information about the entire population of teachers at both organizations, it is unclear whether these findings hold at MHEL and at

¹⁵ Results are presented in aggregate across the two organizations unless differences between organizations were observed.

¹⁶ Schaack, D. & Le, V. (2017). *Who is Colorado's early care and education workforce?* Denver, CO: University of Colorado Denver.

RMSEER. Nonetheless, it may be important for each organization to conduct an equity audit to understand whether there are racial disparities in positionality within organizations to better target teacher development and promotion efforts to foster greater equity.

Table 2. Teacher Marital Status

Marital Status	Frequency
Married	30%
Single	36%
Cohabiting	20%
Divorced	8%
Widowed	6%

With respect to household composition, teachers on average, live in households with between one and two adults, including themselves; and the number of adults in their homes range from one to five. **Table 2** provides information on the marital status of teachers in the sample. Approximately half are married or are co-habitating and live with another adult who often contributes to the household income. Sixty-one percent of teachers live in households where they have dependents full or part-time residing with them. On average, teachers have between one and two children at home and the number of children in their households range from one to six.

How are teachers' faring financially during the pandemic?

Household income and employment status. All teachers in this study reported that none had been furloughed, laid off, or had their hours reduced during temporary school closures due to COVID-19. However, of the 56 teachers who reported being married or cohabitating, 18% had a spouse or partner who had lost their job, and an additional 33% had a spouse or partner whose work hours had been reduced. Prior to COVID-19, 13% of teachers across organizations held a second job. Teachers at MHEL were more likely to have a second job than were teachers at RMSEER ($t = 3.41$; $p = 0.016$). Due to the pandemic, 43% of teachers with a second job, lost their second job or had their hours reduced.

Teachers' household incomes were also low in comparison to the \$72,000 annual household income needed to meet the self-sufficiency standard for a family of four in Denver¹⁷. The median annual household income among teachers was reported as falling between \$20,000 and \$30,000 a year. Household incomes ranged from under \$10,000 a year to between \$100,000 to \$110,000; with 75% of teachers residing in households making \$40,000 a year or less. When comparing the household incomes between teachers at MHEL and RMSEER, teachers at MHEL had higher household incomes than teachers at RMSEER ($\chi^2 = 21.80$; $p = 0.016$). Teachers from MHEL had a median household income of between \$30,000 and \$40,000 a year, compared to between \$20,000 and \$30,000 a year at RMSEER, which again likely stems from the fact that teachers in the study from MHEL were more likely to be lead teachers compared to teachers in the study from RMSEER.

As a result of low household incomes, 40% reported receiving at least one public subsidy such as Supplementary Assistance for Needy Families (SNAP), free or reduced lunch rates for their children, housing vouchers, Medicaid, or Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) during the pandemic. RMSEER had a significantly higher percentage of teachers receiving at least one public subsidy compared to MHEL ($t = 2.65$; $p = 0.012$). We did not observe a significant uptick in teachers use of public subsidies, at least through the first three months of the pandemic. A year prior to the pandemic, 32% of teachers at MHEL received at least one

17 Pearce, D. (2018). *The self-sufficiency standard for Colorado in 2018*. Denver, CO: Colorado Center for Law and Policy.

public subsidy and three months into the pandemic, 36% do. A similar trend was seen at RMSER where one year prior to the pandemic, 60% of teachers received at least one public benefit, and currently 64% do.

When asked about the effects of the pandemic on their household income, 69% reported that their household income had stayed the same, 5% reported that it had increased, and 26% reported that it had decreased. At the same time, 35% of teachers reported that as a result of the pandemic, they are now financially supporting additional family members.

Health-related benefits. Across teachers in this study, 63% reported that they received health insurance as part of their employment package. However, differences were again observed between organizations ($t = 2.84$; $p = 0.005$). Approximately 79% of teachers from MHEL reported having access to employer-sponsored health insurance compared to 52% at RMSER. There were no differences in having health insurance as a benefit based on position; lead teachers and assistant teachers were equally likely to be offered health insurance across organizations.

Of teachers without employer sponsored health insurance ($n = 41$), 66% obtained health insurance from other sources, including from publicly sponsored programs, or through their spouse or partners' job. In total, fewer than 13% of teachers in this study ($n = 14$) reported not having health insurance. When asked whether all members of their household have health insurance, 72% of teachers reported residing in households where everyone was covered, while 28% reported residing in households where at least one other family member lacks coverage.

While all teachers in this study reported having paid sick time, 60% of teachers with other working adults in their households reported that their spouse or partner does not have paid sick leave or paid time off. Of teachers with other working adults in the home, 44% reported that at least one person in their household had to leave the house during the pandemic for work. **Figure 1** displays the extent to which teachers reported being worried about being able to afford medical bills if someone in their household were to fall sick. It is a cause for worry for approximately 69% of teachers.

Financial strain. We also assessed the extent to which teachers felt that they were under financial strain by asking them to rate their difficulties with paying bills and the extent to which they worry about not having enough money left over at the end of each month. These two items were scored on a 4-point scale and averaged, with scores of four reflecting more financial worry and strain. Teachers were also asked to identify, from 17 choices, any financial sacrifices that they have had to make due to their financial strain. These include financial cutbacks such as forgoing medical care, borrowing money, reducing/canceling utilities, living on credit, and selling property.

Figure 1. Teacher Worry About Medical Bills

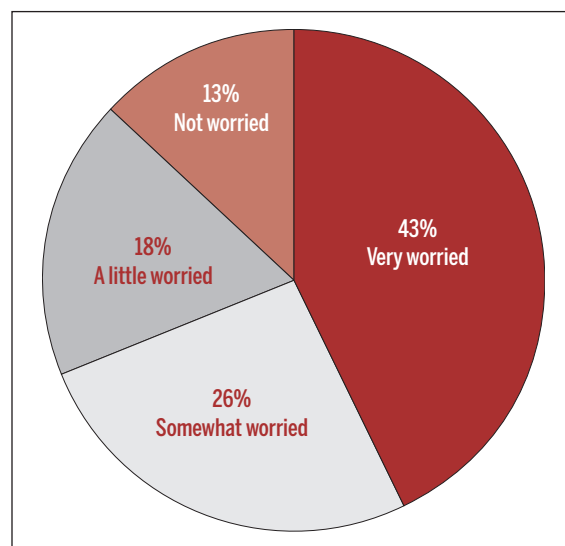


Table 3 displays the means for the financial strain scale and the number of financial sacrifices teachers reported making in May of 2019 and again in May/June of 2020 during the pandemic. As the table shows, teachers experienced a significant reduction in their financial strain over the past year and in the financial cutbacks they have had to make. For example, MHEL experienced an almost 38% increase in teachers indicating they did not need to make financial cutbacks, which is considered significant ($t = 2.83$; p -value = 0.006). RMSE also experienced a 22% increase in teachers not needing to make financial cutbacks, which is also considered significant ($t = 4.29$; $p < 0.001$).

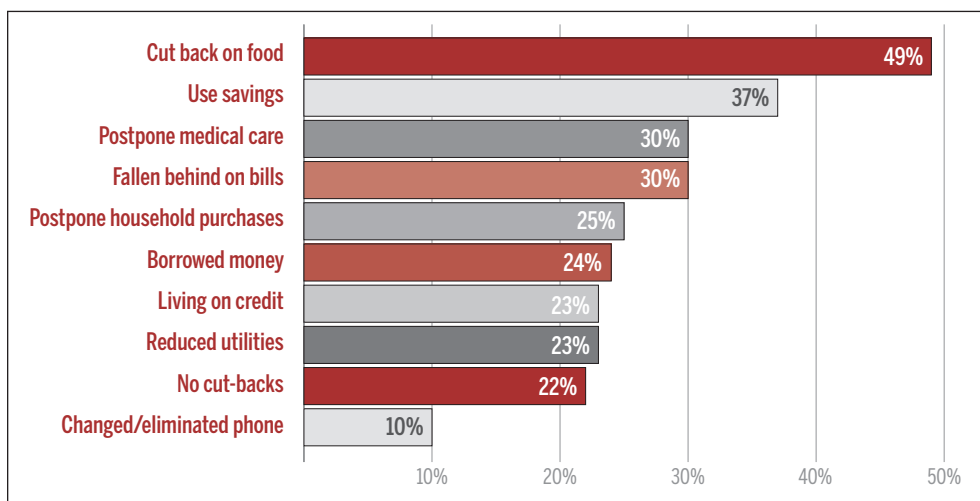
Table 3. Teacher Financial Strain

	Frequency	S.D.	During COVID-19 Mean	S.D.	T	P
Financial Strain	2.97	0.07	2.39	0.72	6.37	0.0001
Financial Sacrifices	4.19	3.15	3.29	2.93	2.24	0.0259

It is possible that these findings reflect the impact of the pay raises on reducing financial worry and that have increased teachers’ abilities to weather the pandemic’s financial storm. At the same time, these findings may also be due to the fact the teachers in this study are working in organizations that were able to continue paying their salaries in the midst of school shut downs, which was not possible for many community-based ECE programs that did not have robust public funding¹⁸. Thus, it is possible that teachers are feeling “lucky” to have their jobs in the face of unprecedented, wide-spread lay-offs, which in turn, may help to decrease their financial worries.

At the same time, it is also important to note that during the pandemic, almost 55% of teachers reported that at the end of a typical month they had just enough money to make ends meet, while 11% reported that they were typically unable to make ends meet. Similarly, 62% reported that over the first three months of the pandemic, they had some or quite a bit of difficulty paying all of their bills and 9% reported being were unable to pay all bills. In addition, 78% of teachers did have to make financial cutbacks over the past year. **Figure 2** displays the most commonly made types of cutbacks. The figure shows that a sizable percentage of teachers are

Figure 2. Financial Cutbacks



18 Denver Preschool Program (May, 2020). Denver Preschool Program COVID-19 Survey. Denver, CO.

still having to make cutbacks on basic necessities such as food, medical care, and utilities. Importantly, findings also showed that there was a significant increase in the percentage of teachers who were forgoing medical care due to financial worries, and this finding held true for MHEL ($t = 2.29$; $p = 0.020$) and for RMSER ($t = 2.82$; $p = 0.006$). Many teachers may also experience longer-term financial challenges stemming from using savings, living on credit, and borrowing money to make ends meet.

How are teachers faring emotionally during the pandemic?

We also asked teachers to complete the *Center for Epidemiology Studies Depression Scale* (CESD) short form, the *Generalized Anxiety Disorder* (GAN) scale, and the *Brief COPE* to understand how teachers are emotionally managing the pandemic. **Table 4** provides descriptive statistics on teachers' rates of depression and anxiety in the midst of the pandemic. Scores on the CESD range from 0.00 to 30.00 and scores above 10 are considered clinically depressed¹⁹. Scores on the GAN range from 1.00 to 25.00; scores between five to nine indicate mild anxiety, scores between 10 and 14 indicate moderate anxiety and scores 15 or higher indicate severe anxiety. **Table 5** show the percentage of teachers which fall into each category on the CESD and GAN.

Table 4. Teacher Depression and Anxiety

	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Depression	20.69	4.842	2.00	30.00
Anxiety	13.72	5.49	1.00	25.00

Table 5. Teacher Depression and Anxiety Rates

	Percent
Symptoms of clinical depression	54%
Mild anxiety	31%
Moderate Anxiety	20%
Severe Anxiety	9%

As can be seen on the tables, the average depression score among teachers was calculated at slightly over 20, indicating average scores above the cut-off threshold for clinical depression. In total, 54% of teachers scored at levels considered clinically depressed. Across all teachers in the study, moderate levels of anxiety were observed; 31% of teachers reported symptoms of mild anxiety, 20% reported symptoms of moderate anxiety, and 9% report symptoms of severe anxiety. Further analyses showed a strong correlation ($r = .720$; $p < .001$) between depression and anxiety; with teachers with greater depressive symptomologies reporting higher levels of anxiety.

We also examined the extent to which changes in depression rates were observed from May 2019 when depression scores were initially collected to three months into the pandemic

19 Björgvinsson, T., Kertz, S.J., Bigda-Peyton, J.S., McCoy, K.L., Aderka, I.M. (2013). Psychometric properties of the CES-D-10 in a psychiatric sample. *Assessment*, 20, 429-436.

to provide an indication of whether teachers were experiencing pandemic related depression. In May 2019, 35% of teachers indicated clinical levels of depression compared to 54% during the pandemic, which represents a significant percentage increase ($t= 2.82, p = 0.005$) of almost 54%.

Table 6 shows the types of coping strategies that teachers were asked to report on to understand how they are managing pandemic related stress. Scores of one represent low levels of use of particular coping strategy and scores of four represent high levels of use. The table shows that most teachers endorsed using positive and adaptive coping strategies such as trying to grow as a result of the pandemic, making a plan of action about how to deal with it both at home and at work, getting used to a new way of living during the pandemic, and trying to do other things such as exercise or hobbies to keep their mind off of the global health crisis.

Table 6. Teacher Coping Strategies

	Mean	SD	Min.	Max.
Self-Distraction	2.87	0.75	1	4
Active Coping	2.90	0.79	1	4
Denial	1.70	0.71	1	4
Substance Use	1.33	0.68	1	4
Use of Emotional Supports	2.36	0.88	1	4
Use of Instrument Supports	2.02	0.89	1	4
Behavioral Disengagement	1.58	0.67	1	4
Venting	1.84	0.69	1	4
Positive Reframe	2.65	0.80	1	4
Planning	2.90	0.80	1	4
Humor	2.14	0.66	1	4
Acceptance	2.83	0.80	1	4
Religion	2.12	0.75	1	4
Self-Blame	2.30	0.65	1	4

We also examined whether particular coping strategies teachers use predict higher or lower rates of depression and anxiety among teachers, after considering other factors that may influence anxiety and depression, such as household income, marital/partner status, and education level. However, we did not find any relationships between coping behaviors and depression or anxiety.

What are teachers' job intentions?

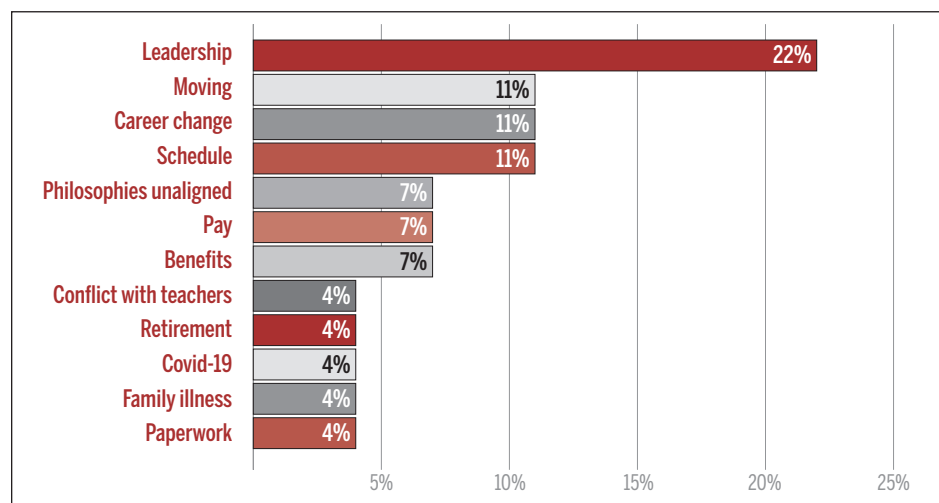
We also asked teachers to report on both their immediate job plans and desires to come back to the classroom in the short-term, and on their projected two-year job intentions to stay in or leave their organizations. Of the teachers surveyed, 91% reported that they planned to return to work at their respective organizations as soon as school re-opened, 8% were unsure if they

would return, and less than 1% did not plan to return. At the time the surveys were administered, only two teachers expressed safety concerns about coming back to work that would prompt them to re-consider coming back.

When asked if teachers planned on staying at or leaving their respective organizations over the next two years, 76% reported that they planned to stay, 18% did not know, and only 6% said they planned on making a job change out of their organizations. These figures are comparable to the figures observed prior to the pandemic. However, teachers at RMSE were more likely to report that they planned on staying in their jobs at least another two-years in comparison to MHEL teachers (t -value = 3.54; p -value = 0.001).

Figure 3 presents the primary drivers that are shaping teachers' decisions to leave or to consider leaving their organizations. The figure shows that the most common reasons given by the 24% of teachers who are considering leaving their jobs are: center or organizational leadership, followed by teaching schedules that do not follow an academic calendar, family events that are causing teachers to move, and career changes (e.g., going to law school, pursuing nursing).

Figure 3. Primary Reasons for Considering Leaving (n = 27)



We also examined the relationships between teachers' coping strategies during the pandemic and whether particular coping strategies predicated a greater likelihood of teachers' planning on leaving their jobs, after considering the influence of other factors such as household income, marital/partner status, education, and years of teaching experience on job intentions. For the most part, we did not find relationships between coping strategies and job intentions, with the exception of one coping strategy: denial. Higher scores on the denial scale predicted a greater likelihood of teachers planning on leaving their jobs ($t = 2.04$, $p = 0.047$). Denial is often considered to be part of an avoidant coping approach which may cause teachers to be more likely to withdraw from highly demanding jobs, such as teaching in ECE, and prompt them to leave²⁰. Thus, helping to develop teachers' resiliency to high demand jobs may be an important focal area for professional development to foster retention²¹.

20 Schaack, D., Le, D., & Stedron, J. (2002). When fulfillment is not enough: Early childhood teacher burnout and job intentions from a job demands and resources perspective. *Early Education and Development*, 31(7), 1011-1031.

21 Ibid.

CHAPTER 4: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to understand how teachers are faring in the early stages of the global pandemic to better target human resource support during this unprecedented time. In doing so, this study provided much more nuanced information about teachers' financial lives. Study findings highlight the role that pay increases made by MHEL and RMSER may have played in reducing the financial strain felt by teachers during these tumultuous economic times. Indeed, one interesting finding from this study is that teachers' financial strain decreased over the course of the year and during the early stages of the pandemic. Again, this may be attributed, in part, to pay raises. It may also be the case that teachers understand how fortunate they are to work in organizations that were not forced to furlough or lay off teachers as a result of school closures and maintained teacher pay during the closures. This may have served to decrease teachers' financial worry and served to potentially increase the numbers of teachers who were willing and excited to return to their respective organizations upon re-opening. This points to the critically important role that public funding plays in creating and sustaining durable programs and how this durability can trickle down into teachers' emotional and financial lives, especially in the face of crises.

Nonetheless, study findings also point to substantial vulnerabilities in teachers' financial lives. Teachers in this study were struggling with spouses or partners being laid off or having their hours reduced, losing income from second jobs, and having to support additional family members. As a result, a sizable percentage of teachers reported decreases in their income, in spite of feeling less financial strain. Currently, many teachers are living on credit, forgoing medical treatments, and 53% receive at least one public subsidy reserved for very low-income individuals or families. Other studies have confirmed that a large portion of the early childhood workforce are public subsidy recipients²². Advocacy efforts might concentrate on quantifying subsidy use and their costs to try and redirect this money toward teacher salaries. MHEL and RMSER have made remarkable efforts to improve teacher wages and public efforts are now (and have been) needed to ensure teaching in early childhood commands a fair wage and a wage in which teachers can make a long-lasting, viable career.

Other financial vulnerabilities in teachers' home lives stem from health care coverage. Nearly two-thirds of teachers worry about paying for medical care or loss of income if a family member falls ill, given that almost a third of teachers reside in families here everyone is not covered by health insurance and that 60% of partners' or spouses' do not have paid sick leave. Prior reports stemming from the larger evaluation of MHEL's teacher well-being and retention initiatives found that health insurance was a major motivator for job change. Many teachers were unable to financially handle the cost of coverage for their whole families and entertained leaving for better family coverage²³. When the economy bounces back, efforts to retain teachers may be well served by improving family health care coverage within each organizations' policies.

Perhaps the most troubling finding from this study is the rate of depression among teachers and the substantial increase in rates of depression that were observed over the past year and as of the beginning of the pandemic. One potential support that MHEL and RMSER might consider

22 Schaack, D. & Le, V. (2017). *Colorado's Early Childhood Workforce Survey, 2017*. Denver, Colorado: University of Colorado Denver.

23 Schaack, D., Donovan, C., Adujumo, T., & Ortega, M. (under review). Factors shaping turnover decisions among teachers working in subsidized early care and education programs. *Journal of Childhood Education*.

is hiring an on-site licensed clinical counselor with a background in culturally responsive approaches that both families and teachers can access. Human resources efforts to provide teachers with community-based mental health resources, to dispel stigmas around mental health and that promote mental health services use may be important as well. Organizational efforts to increase playfulness and joy both within the context of work with children and among colleagues and in lieu of other high demand quality improvement initiatives may also be especially important right now and may indirectly improve quality. Indeed, attending to teacher emotional well-being should be at the heart of human resource efforts.

It also appears that the pandemic has served to create a degree of short-term stability among teachers; with few expressing a desire to leave. However, in the longer term, nearly a quarter are considering leaving over the next two years. Conflict with leaders was the most frequently cited reason for considering leaving. The pandemic may be a perfect time for teachers and administrators to come together and coalesce around joint efforts on behalf of children, and around bringing joy to the workplace. Additionally, efforts might be well spent on leadership development and community-building to continue to create a culture in which teachers' and administrators' work each reinforces each other's' and a culture in which there is an open and supportive feedback loop.

As the pandemic continues and as new problems become solved problems, and as new challenges emerge, it will be important for both organizations to take the pulse of how teachers are continuing to fare and to take the pulse of the general health of each organization. These are indeed unprecedented times and times during which teachers, administrators, families, and children are facing enormous stress. Yet out of these times, early childhood teachers and programs may have the opportunity to rethink persistent challenges and build back better.