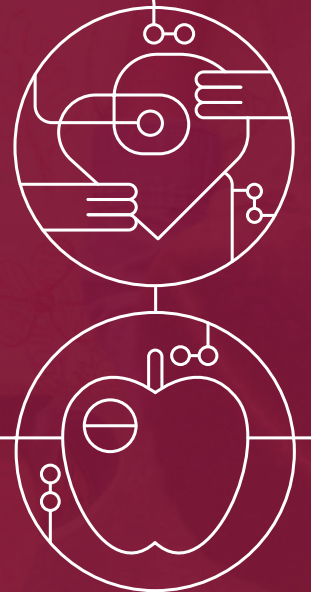EVERFI

What's Impacting Today's Students?

Perspectives from the Field

Introduction

Across the globe, schools and their districts are currently faced with challenges that span across students and systems alike. From a systemic standpoint, school systems face constrained resources which often lead administrators to make challenging decisions about where to allocate limited funds. Student services and non-"academic" education, particularly related to topics that are deemed "soft skills" are areas that are often impacted the most.

Among students, challenges exist as well. Mental health, food and housing insecurity, reliance on digital devices, and the social and political climate can all impact academic performance. The CDC reports that, since 2007, suicides among youth ages 15-19 have increased significantly (31% for males and nearly double for females). Although schools have tried to resource this need through additional counseling and support staff, many are still seeking ways in which to prioritize or adopt a holistic approach to SEL.

Recognizing this, in the fall of 2019, researchers at EVERFI sent out a survey to EVERFI's Educator Community to gain a deeper understanding of their first-hand perspectives on the issues most impacting today's students. Nearly 3,500 teachers responded, representing all grade levels across all 50 U.S. states, Canada, and Puerto Rico. They shared insights into their priorities, their challenges, areas that are currently working well, and areas where opportunities exist. Below is a summary of the findings.

Key Findings

1 Teachers responded that the top three most pressing topics impacting students today are **mental health, social media,** and **cyberbullying,** with **99% responding that it is important to include these types of topics in the school's curriculum.**

2 Despite teachers ranking social media as one of the most pressing topics impacting their students today, only **31% of teachers responded that they had received any professional development on the topic.**

3 **94% of teachers responded that students need training to understand how to use technology in a responsible way.**

4 Fewer than half of teachers who responded **(44%) felt that their school had the resources necessary to support student mental health,** whereas 71% of respondents felt that their schools had the resources necessary to support student physical health.

5 Elementary, middle, and high school teachers all responded that **mental health was the number one topic for which they wanted additional professional development training.**

Teacher Perspectives On The Issues

Within the survey, educators were asked to provide their perspectives in three areas: those of themselves, their students, and their administrators. Teachers from elementary, middle, and high schools all considered mental health, social media, and cyber bullying as top five issues impacting their students. Elementary school teachers also included diversity and inclusion, and digital technology as pressing issues, whereas middle school teachers included college and career readiness, and digital technology. High school teachers included college and career readiness, and financial insecurity in their top five most pressing topics.

Similarly, when asked to identify the issues that they felt students would endorse as most pressing, mental health, social media, and cyberbullying emerged again.

"What do you think are the most pressing issues impacting students today?"

| *Elementary*	*Middle*	*High School*
Mental Health	Mental Health	Mental Health
Social Media	Social Media	Social Media
Cyber Bullying	Cyber Bullying	College and Career Readiness
Diversity and Inclusion	College and Career Readiness	Financial Insecurity
Digital Technology	Digital Technology	Cyber Bullying

Perspectives on Curricular Infusion and Control of SEL Content

When it comes to infusing social and emotional learning (SEL) topics into the curriculum, the vast majority of teachers felt that such topics were essential to include. Nearly all educators (99%) said that topics like mental health, digital literacy, bullying prevention education, diversity and inclusion, and college and career readiness were important to include within educational curricula.

Despite this, however, educators' opinions were split regarding how much control they felt they actually had in regard to including SEL-related topics in the school curriculum. Only 6% of teachers reported feeling like they had total control over these decisions, and 46% felt that they had a good amount of control. In contrast, 40% of teachers reported feeling as though they had very little control over these decisions, and 8% reported feeling as though they had no control at all. Teachers reported similar feelings of control regardless of whether they worked in an elementary, middle, or high school.

How much control do teachers feel they actually had in regard to including SEL-related topics in the school curriculum?

6% felt they had **total control**

46% felt they had a **good amount of control**

40% felt they had **very little control**

8% felt they had **no control at all**
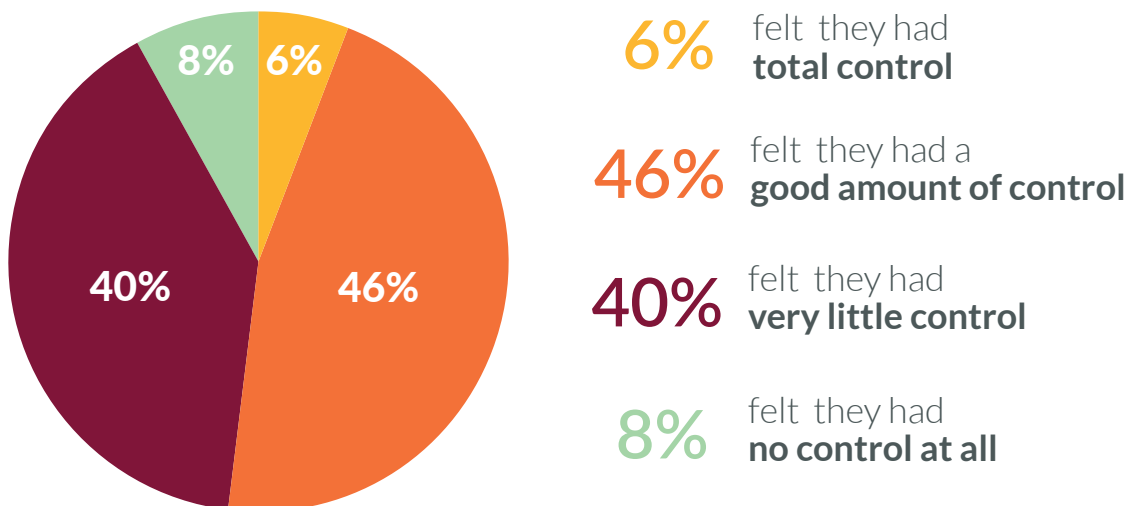
Professional Development Capacity and Need

Teachers responded that bullying, diversity and inclusion, mental health, digital technology, and school violence were the topics for which they most commonly received professional development training. When asked for which topics they would like to receive professional development training, teachers listed mental health, social media, substance use trends, digital technology, and parental relationships as their top five. Elementary school teachers were more interested in parental relationships, whereas middle and high school teachers rated substance abuse trends as more highly desired. All types of teachers listed mental health as the number one topic for which they wanted additional professional development training.

Perspectives on Professional Development:
What Teachers Want vs. What Teachers Get

What Teachers Want

1. Mental health

2. Social media

3. Substance use trends

4. Digital technology

5. Parent relationships

What Teachers Get

1. Bullying

2. Diversity and Inclusion

3. Mental health

4. Digital technology

5. School violence

Opportunities for Improving Parent Engagement

Navigating parent relationships was one of the primary topics on which educators reported wanting professional development training. Across all grade levels, for those schools that engaged parents in well-being efforts, the primary mechanisms for doing so were via telephone (76%) and through parent/teacher conferences/events (74%). Less frequently cited efforts included a parent social media page (34%), website (32%), or workshops held by professionals or school staff (27%).

In a different EVERFI study that looked at data related to incoming college students, 22% reported that they had never had a conversation with their parents/guardians about mental health and well-being.

> Among those surveyed, 60% of high school educators, 41% of middle school educators, and 23% of elementary school educators reported that their **schools do not engage parents around student well-being.**

However, among students who did have a conversation with their parents/guardians around mental health and well-being before coming to college, 64% found the conversations to be somewhat or extremely helpful. And when it comes to experiencing stress or emotional challenges, parents were second only to friends for whom students were most likely to go to for support.

> By providing opportunities to engage parents in conversations about student well-being, schools and school districts can expand the net of support around young people and create space for dialogue with those most likely to have influence.

Well-being (or lack thereof) Within Strategic Plans

Strategic planning can often be a critical element in determining whether or not social and emotional learning efforts are funded and resourced within a school district. Commitment to the topic within a strategic plan allows school districts to outwardly commit and set goals around their efforts.

Among the educators surveyed, fewer than 50% reported that social and emotional learning was mentioned within their districts' strategic plan. From an awareness standpoint, educators teaching high school were least likely to know what was in their districts' strategic plan (54% of high school educators, 42% of middle school educators, and 20% of elementary school educators reported not knowing what was in their strategic plan).
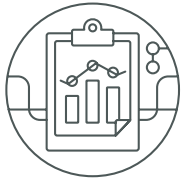
Resources to Support Student Mental Health

In response to a question about whether their school had the resources necessary to support student mental health, teachers' answers differed by school type. There were significantly more teachers from private schools (17%) who strongly agreed that their school had the necessary resources to support student mental health, as compared to teachers from public (9%) or religious (4%) schools.

Although there were fewer school-type differences among teachers who either strongly agreed or agreed that their school had the necessary resources to support student mental health (private: 54%, charter: 50%, public: 44%, religious: 43%), it is noteworthy that **only around half of teachers believe that their school has the necessary resources to support student mental health, despite this topic being rated by teachers as the number one most pressing issue affecting students today.**
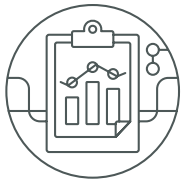
What's Working (and What Isn't)

As schools and districts grapple with the best ways to support the health and safety of their community members, input from educators can provide critical insights into both the strengths and the challenges of such work. By continuing to explore areas for growth — such as strengthening parental engagement and increasing the presence of SEL within strategic goal-setting—district leaders can take steps to ensure that the most impactful issues are at the forefront of their planning process. Issues like mental health, digital wellness, and diversity and inclusion do not exist in silos. It is the responsibility of all community members— including administrators, educators, and family members— to prioritize education, support, and resources around these critical topics, and to engage in ongoing dialogue about the best ways to proactively address them.

About the Authors

Erin McClintock

Erin McClintock, M.Ed. serves as EVERFI's Head of Impact for Social and Emotional Learning. In her role, Erin analyzes the intersections that exist between diversity, equity, and inclusion, mental health, character, digital wellness, and substance abuse, and identifies ways in which strategic planning, systems, policies, practices, and people can manifest change to make an upstream impact on the collective betterment of our world. Erin holds a graduate degree in Counseling Psychology, completed her post-masters studies in Trauma and Addiction Counseling, and has extensive experience in community, school, and collegiate mental health.

Brian Burkhard

Brian Burkhard, PhD is a youth development researcher who has partnered with K-12 schools, universities, nonprofits, and the military to describe, explain, and optimize the ways that young people thrive. Having worked as a school therapist, college program coordinator, and nonprofit manager, Brian brings a practitioner's viewpoint to his research, generating data insights at both the individual and institutional level. As senior research analyst at EVERFI, Brian leads the research efforts of the Impact & Education team, leveraging education technology to drive social change. Brian holds a BA in psychology and classics, and an MS in counseling and human relations from Villanova University, and a PhD in child study and human development from Tufts University.

About EVERFI

EVERFI is an international technology company driving social change through education to address the most challenging issues affecting society ranging from financial wellness to prescription drug safety to career readiness and other critical topics. Founded in 2008, EVERFI powers community engagement in a sustained manner to empower individuals and organizations to make an impact within their communities and to allow educators to equip students with the skills they need for success--now and in the future. EVERFI's community engagement platform has reached more than 30 million learners globally and three out of five U.S school districts use EVERFI courses in the classroom. With the support of like-minded organizations that share EVERFI's mission, EVERFI's K-12 digital resources and professional development are available at no cost. To learn more about EVERFI visit everfi.com/k-12 or follow us on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, or Twitter @EVERFI12.

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