

## **Surge in Behavioral Issues Among Students as Schools Struggle to Address Post-Pandemic Challenges**

*By Madelyn West*

As we mark the five-year anniversary of the COVID-19 pandemic and the return to in-person learning, schools have seen a surge in behavioral issues among elementary and middle school students. Educators and experts say technology usage and developmental deficits and delays are among contributing causes.

Schools around the nation have continued to see negative impacts on student behavior within classrooms. In the 2021-2022 school year, the National Center for Education Statistics collected data showing that 87 percent of public schools reported that the COVID-19 pandemic had negatively impacted student socio-emotional development, with 84 percent agreeing that students' behavioral development had also been negatively impacted. In the time between that and the 2023-2024 school year, the percentage of public schools that report negative impacts of COVID-19 has only decreased by 1 percent.

A recent report from the Pew Research Center shows that these behaviors range from getting up and walking around, to verbal and physical violence toward teachers. 23 percent of elementary school teachers and 24 percent of middle school teachers see students getting up and walking around when they're not supposed to as a major problem. 23 percent of elementary school teachers and 27 percent of middle school teachers say disrespectful behavior is a major problem. 68 percent of teachers say they have experienced being yelled at or verbally threatened by their students.

These behaviors are not occurring sporadically throughout the school year. According to the same report by the Pew Research Center, eight in 10 teachers say they have to address students' behavioral issues at least a few times a week, with 58 percent facing this challenge daily.

Educators and experts suggest the lack of opportunity for social and emotional development during remote learning as contributing to these behaviors. Research conducted in 2023 by Francesco Chiappelli and his colleagues at the UCLA Brain Research Institute found that with limited social interactions, disrupted routines, and imposed lockdowns during the

pandemic, children encountered unusual early social, cognitive and emotional development challenges.

This developmental disruption has lasting effects, particularly for children who began their formal schooling during the pandemic.

~~In an interview~~ Dr. Marie Manning, a special education and behavior disorders professor at Eastern Kentucky University, posed a scenario in which a student was in kindergarten during the pandemic.†

“There’s so much that goes on developmentally in face-to-face kindergarten classrooms that you cannot replicate in virtual learning,” she said.

There is more to an early learning classroom than simply academic development; there are social and emotional skills that are taught as well, and it creates a developmental deficit when a child misses the opportunity to learn those skills. When these children then move on to first and second grade, they have to catch up socially and emotionally, while also trying to maintain continuing academic development.

“It does take more time to relearn those skill sets of getting along with others, language interchange, collaboration, cooperation—all of those little things that we teach in kindergarten,” Manning said.†

In addition to the challenges posed by delayed social-emotional development, some educators also ~~see believe that~~ the use of social media and technology, both within and outside the classroom, ~~contributing to plays a role in these~~ disruptive behaviors.

“It’s like their anxiety level is so great that they have to look at an electronic device or text somebody, or they feel like they’re gonna explode...Before the pandemic (electronic devices) wasn’t really an issue. I mean, kids had them, but it wasn’t like they were staring at them all the time,” said Adrian Nix, a middle school science teacher at Model Laboratory School.

A study conducted by Centenary University doctoral student, Denise Scairpon, found that high users of digital devices were significantly more likely to display decreased self-control and were more distractible. These children had lower task persistence, difficulty following directions, and sitting still. The study found that this may result in irreversible damage to their developing brains and limit socio-emotional abilities for school success and beyond.

In attempts to combat these behaviors, teachers are changing the way that they approach classroom management.

According to Effective School Solutions, a company supporting K-12 mental health, ~~lists ways to manage these behaviors. They show that~~ employing approaches like positive and preventative intervention, using a trauma-informed perspective and integrating mental health and occupational therapy services into the schools can help de-escalate and prevent these behaviors.

The most important thing, however, is building rapport and trust with students.

“If you build that rapport with them and they know they can trust you, they would run through a wall for you,” said Mr. Nix, “So when teaching and working with young people, that is the most important thing.”

An ECU student observing in a kindergarten classroom, agrees. “If you don’t have that trust built with the children, “you’re going to tell them to quit, and they’re going to look at you like, ‘okay, whatever’ and go back to doing it”, said Wesley Horsley.

FINAL DRAFT GRADE	<b>Unsatisfactory (0)</b>  <i>Not publishable due to lack of focus and/or effort.</i>	<b>Needs Improvement (2)</b>  <i>There are multiple errors that need addressed.</i>	<b>Emerging/ Developing (3)</b>  <i>Still a work in progress, but room for improvement.</i>	<b>Proficient (4)</b>  <i>Publishable with a few updates.</i>	<b>Mastering (5)</b>  <i>Publishable as is.</i>
<b>Structure/Lead</b>					X

<p><b>(40%)</b></p> <p><i>Story uses inverted pyramid style and/or LINQS structure. Story lead addresses 5Ws/How within the first paragraph or two. Story's whole connects to lead topic.</i></p>					
<p><b>Sources (25%)</b></p> <p><i>Number of sources on record via real-time conversation as laid out in assignment guide. At least one source is an info and/or expert source. Sources are repetitive/too alike. Voices necessary to the story are included.</i></p>					x
<p><b>Language/ Information (10%)</b></p> <p><i>Story is told through facts, and the writing is accurate. Language is objective, clear, concise. Numbers/info are used to illustrate impact. There are no holes in the story.</i></p>				<p>X</p> <p>One attribution questions. Horsley's stuff can probably be written more clearly and further up int he story.</p>	
<p><b>Mechanics (10%)</b></p> <p><i>Spelling, grammar and AP Style are on point.</i></p>					x
<p><b>Fairness (15%)</b></p> <p><i>Story is balanced and inclusive.</i></p>					x

<b>ROUGH DRAFT GRADE</b>	<b>Unsatisfactory (0)</b>  <i>Not publishable due to lack of focus and/or</i>	<b>Needs Improvement (2)</b>  <i>There are multiple errors that</i>	<b>Emerging/Developing (3)</b>  <i>Still a work in progress, but room for</i>	<b>Proficient (4)</b>  <i>Publishable with a few updates.</i>	<b>Mastering (5)</b>  <i>Publishable as is.</i>
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<p><b>Structure/Lead (40%)</b></p> <p><i>Story uses inverted pyramid style and/or LINQS structure. Story lead addresses 5Ws/How within the first paragraph or two. Story's whole connects to lead topic.</i></p>					x
<p><b>Sources (25%)</b></p> <p><i>At least three sources on record via real-time conversation. At least one source is an info and/or expert source. Sources are repetitive/too alike. Voices necessary to the story are included.</i></p>					X Wouldn't mind hearing from others...
<p><b>Language/Information (10%)</b></p> <p><i>Story is told through facts, and the writing is accurate. Language is objective, clear, concise. Numbers/info are used to illustrate impact. There are no holes in the story.</i></p>				X	
<p><b>Mechanics (10%)</b></p> <p><i>Spelling, grammar and AP Style are on point.</i></p>					x

**Fairness (15%)**

*Story is balanced and inclusive.*

X  
Think looking at solutions can help this even more