



Something Had to Give During Shutdown, and It was Schoolwork!

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Context for This Study

- **INSIGHTS is a social-emotional learning (SEL) intervention for kindergarten and first grade that includes parent, teacher, and classroom components.**



Research Questions

1. How did rural families respond to the COVID-19 pandemic school shutdown (in March 2020)?



Research Questions

1. How did rural families respond to the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown (March 2020) and into the summer and fall of 2020?
2. What parenting strategies did families use during the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown?

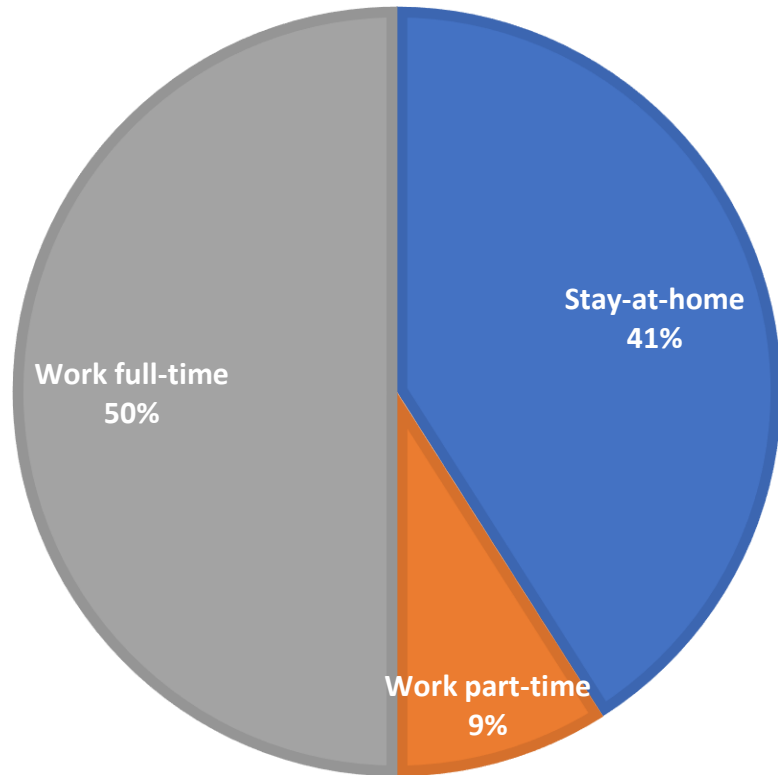


Our sample



- 22 mother
- Children in K, G1 or G2
- From INSIGHTS sample
- Rural Nebraskan

■ Stay-at-home ■ Work part-time ■ Work full-time



Our sample

- Age range 29-44
- Between one and four children at home
- All non-Hispanic white women
- Median yearly household income \$60,000
- 32% free and reduced-price lunch

Method



Develop Structural Codes



Identify Themes

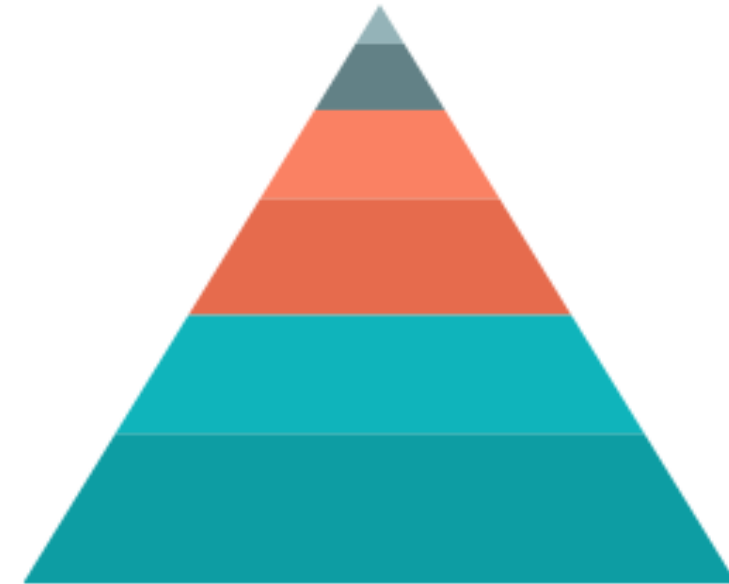


Verify codes through discussion
and interrater reliability analysis

- Conducted 9 interviews, some individual and some group
- Data were coded by our team with training in qualitative research
- We used Saldaña's (2021) techniques for thematic analysis

Overview of Topics

Rural Midwestern Family Experience During Covid



- Resilience & Adaptation (25.89%)
- Child Educational Challenges & Accommodations (20.44%)
- Work Challenges & Family Management (20.16%)
- Social-Emotional & Mental Health Challenges (15.26%)
- Discussion & Fear of Disease Spread (11.44%)
- Resource Availability (6.81%)

This presentation will describe challenges faced by families, and the resilience and resources with which they responded.



Educational Challenges



Work Challenges



Social-Emotional Challenges



Resilience



Educational Challenges



Work Challenges



Social-Emotional Challenges




Resilience

During school closure, parents had difficulties with getting their children to complete school-work, supporting kids with different educational needs, juggling different Zoom schedules, and managing the dual role of teacher and parent.




Educational Challenges



"I basically felt like I had to become a kindergarten teacher overnight...So, for me, I felt almost abandoned, because we would get the assignment, and then there'd be no follow up."

(Emily, age 32, mother of two)

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Parents found it
difficult to meet
demands for school-
at-home
requirements.

"Educationally my children suffered...It was like pulling teeth...[to] get her to do some of the assignments...and one day I just like threw my hands up and I'm like, we're done...you're learning everyday living things...we'll go outside...It was causing her stress and it was causing me stress, I was becoming the mean mom because I was fighting to try and get her to do her work...It wasn't worth it anymore, so we just kind of stopped."

(Grayson, age 38, mother of three)



Educational Challenges



Work Challenges



Social-Emotional Challenges



Resilience



Educational Challenges



Work Challenges



Social-Emotional Challenges




Resilience



Work Challenges

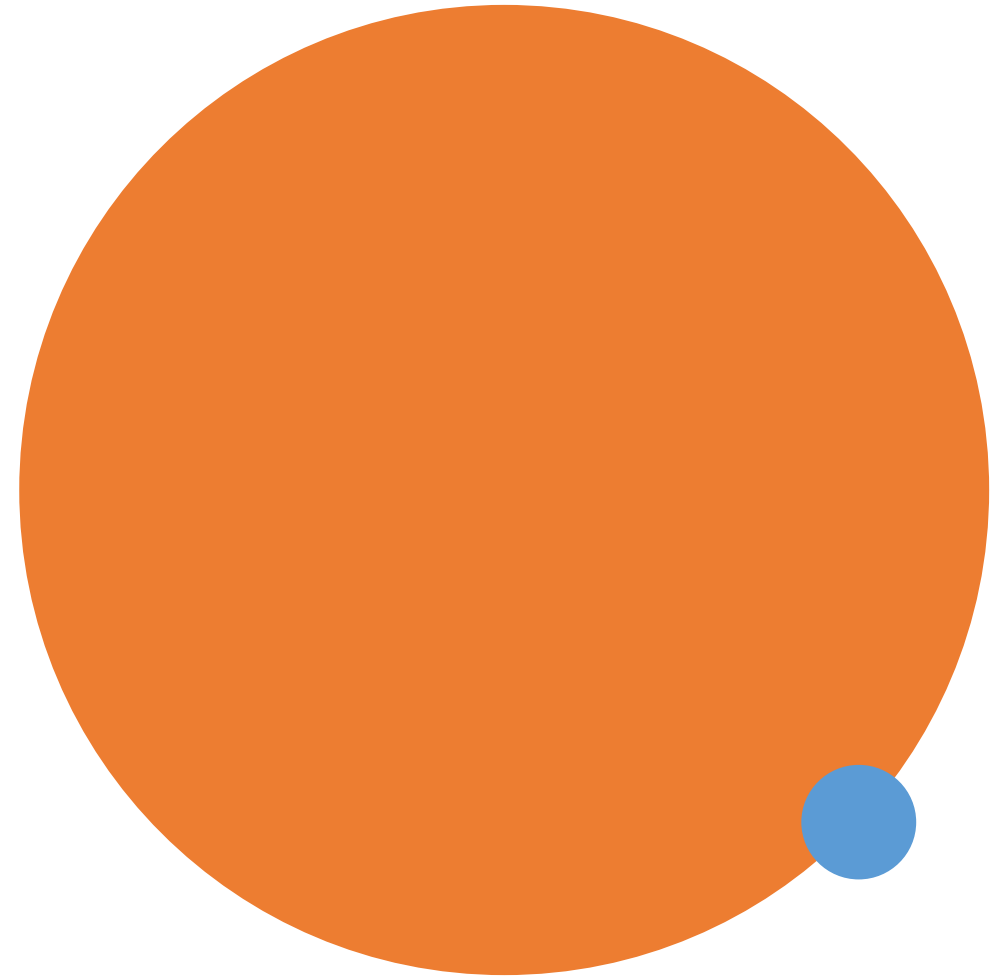
Parents faced sudden transitions in work and home life. Parents who worked from home described challenges related to managing the demands of their jobs, schooling children, and childcare simultaneously.





“Just the constant pressure to maintain professionalism in an environment that doesn't really allow you to... your personal life and your professional life just start colliding. And it was really, really challenging, to keep those two things, to have the integrity of both things. I felt like I was just massively failing at everything.”

(June, age 35, mother of three)





Educational Challenges



Work Challenges



Social-Emotional Challenges



Resilience



Educational Challenges



Work Challenges



Social-Emotional Challenges



Resilience



Parents described numerous social-emotional challenges for themselves and their children, including anxiety about the pandemic, stressors from school and work, relationship strain, and social isolation.



Social-Emotional Challenges

"Things that she wouldn't necessarily argue about doing in class...she'd be arguing with me about. [We had] a fight every day, and [that would] take half my day. At the time, thankfully, I wasn't working full time. I don't know how people who have jobs full time are doing this."


(Emily, 32, mother of two)



"We are going to do the worksheets that she sends us once a week and hopefully we'll catch up this fall...and it was super stressful until I stepped back and was like, okay bare minimum, we're going to read for half an hour and we're going to do your math, end of story that's all we're going to do."

(Emerson, age 30, mother of two)





"My son's class completely was going back at basically kindergarten as first graders and even though a lot of us parents tried to do that, there was just pieces they missed. Social...educational pieces that were missed."

(Olivia, 34, mother of two)



Educational Challenges



Work Challenges



Social-Emotional Challenges



Resilience



Educational Challenges



Work Challenges



Social-Emotional Challenges




Resilience



Resilience

In response to the rapid increase in novel challenges due to the pandemic and school shutdown, parents used adaptive strategies to mitigate the effects of pandemic-related stressors.





"One of the biggest things that I learned was affirming my child's feelings as we're going through things. My kid, his feelings got a lot bigger with the pandemic and so just recognizing that and acknowledging that with him really seemed to make a big difference."

(Bethany, age 38, mother of three)

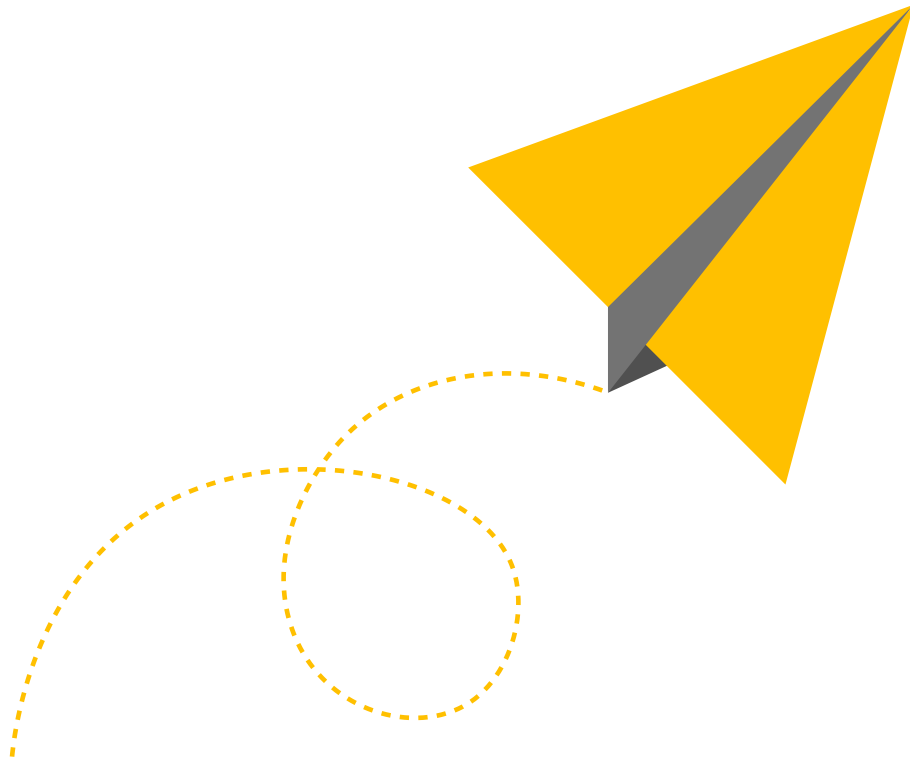


Parents also reported unexpected benefits of the shutdown, mainly time together as families.



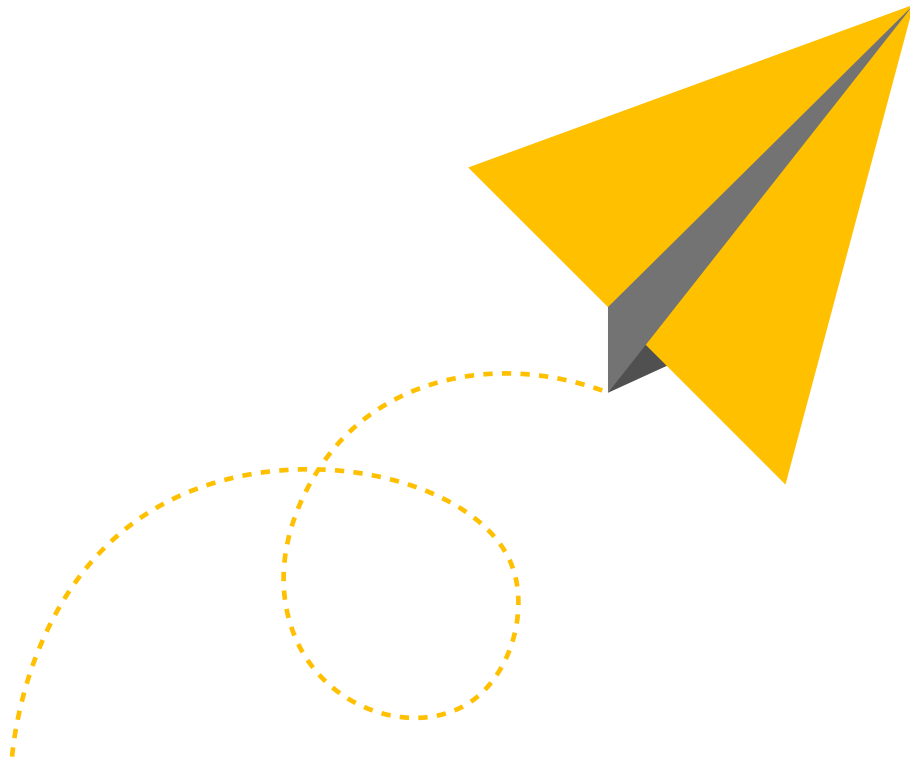
“You know honestly COVID, this was our best summer of our family. We love all being together all the time.”

(Rachel, age 32, mother of four)



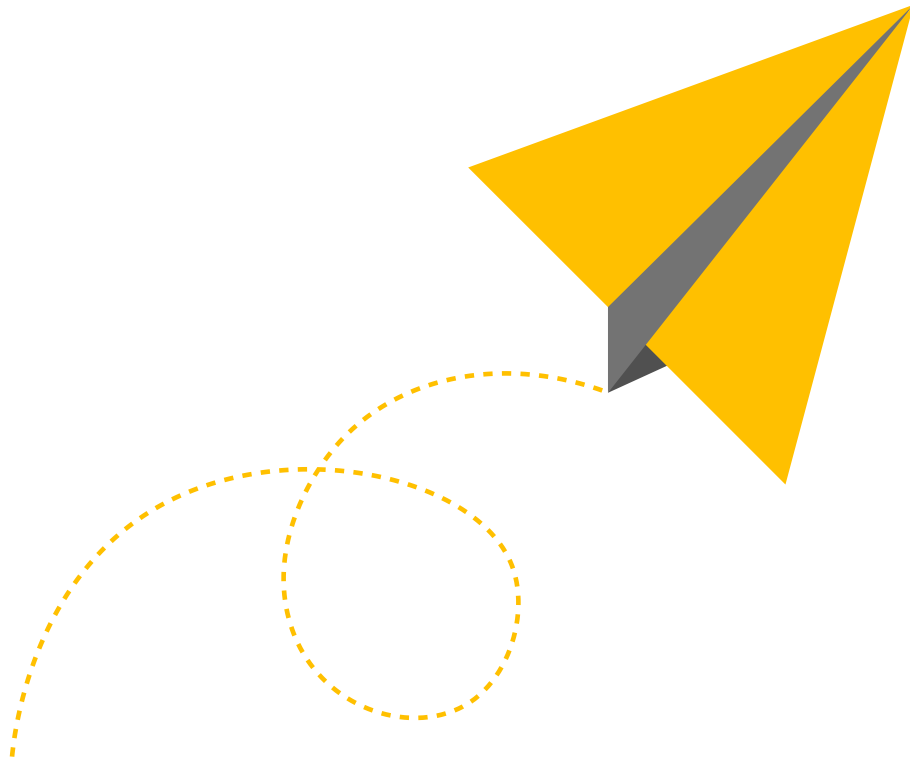
Takeaway

1. Parents of young children stated that during school closure, their needs, values, and priorities were often different from the schoolwork requirements and educational benchmarks set by the school.



Takeaway

2. In response to challenges, parents shifted priority from maintaining pre-pandemic educational progress, toward a more holistic focus that included social and emotional well-being.



Takeaway

3. Pandemic-related constraints fostered families' use of social-emotional skills, novel problem-solving strategies, openness to change, and opportunities to build stronger family relationships.

Lessons from Early Childhood Practice & Policy

Children experience school as a system. The well-being of each point of the system affects the quality of education.

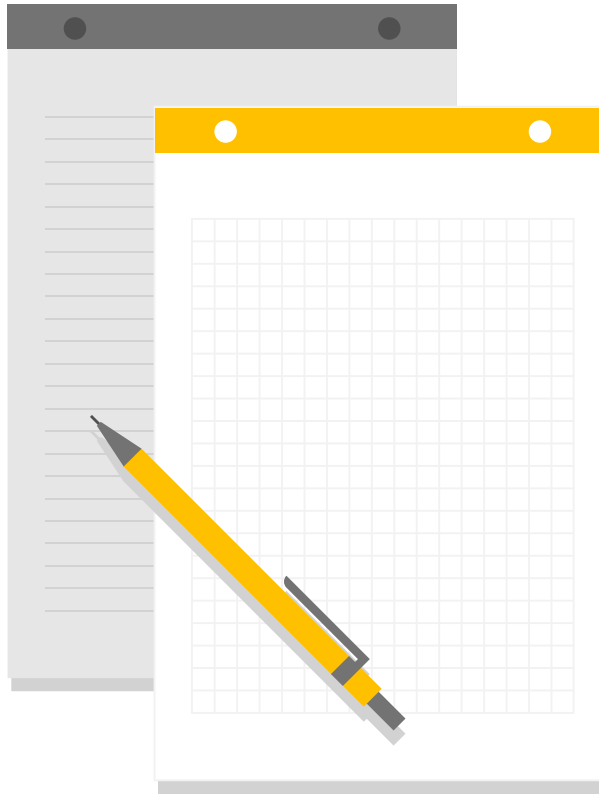




Implications for Early Childhood Policy

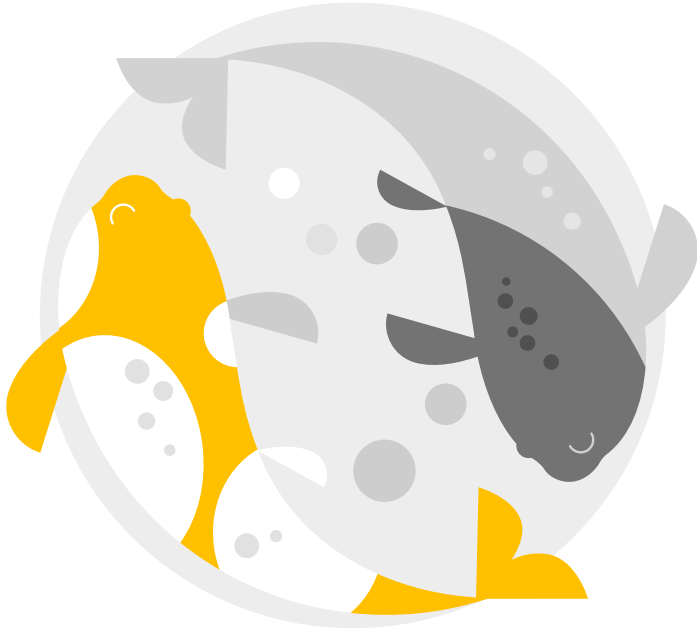
Expansion of technological resources to rural communities, including broadband internet.

Increasing availability of social resources, like childcare and social-emotional programming in schools.



Implications for Early Childhood Research & Practice

Understand differences
between parent priorities and
educational benchmarks



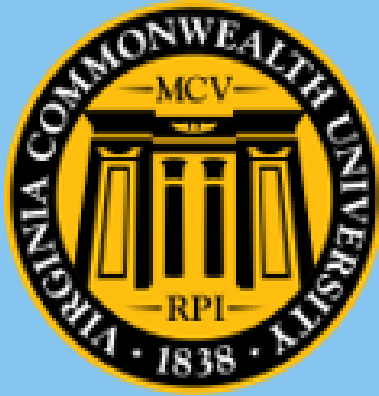
Implications for Early Childhood Practice & Policy

Explore connections between
family well-being, social-
emotional development, and
children's academic success



Implications for Early Childhood Practice & Policy

Find points of convergence
from which to develop shared
goals for building
collaborative school-
community relationships



THANK YOU !!

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UNL AND VCU RESEARCH TEAM

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