

“I HAVE PEOPLE WHO LISTEN TO ME.”

FACULTY IMPLEMENTATION OF SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL COMPETENCIES  
DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

By

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*Dedicated to my students:*

*You have taught me more than I could ever repay*

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Relay Graduate School of Education (GSE) is a national institution of higher education focused on teacher preparation and teacher leadership programming. Relay’s mission is for novice teachers to develop the skills necessary to support their students and feel motivated to continue long-term as impactful educators. Relay’s New York campus faced unexpected challenges to realizing this mission due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the field of education. Many P-12 teachers reported a desire to leave the profession, citing COVID-19 and stress as primary reasons (Jotkoff, 2022; Diliberti et al., 2021). Teachers expressed a lost sense of connection to their students, their peers, and their professional identity (Reich et al., 2020). Teachers' self-efficacy decreased, while feelings of anxiety intensified (Kraft et al., 2020).

This capstone project explored a phenomenon: amidst the many pandemic-related stressors weighing heavily on teachers, institutional survey results at the Relay New York campus revealed a stark contrast – teachers were reporting a stronger graduate student experience than ever before. The New York campus experienced a surge in their Net Promoter Score (NPS), a metric for satisfaction in businesses and some institutions of higher education. NPS asks students, “How likely is it that you would recommend Relay to a friend or colleague?” At the same time as New York became the epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic in spring of 2020, Relay New York’s NPS score reported a record high for the campus (NPS: +3.0, up from -19.0 in the fall). Relay New York’s NPS continued to climb, reporting a fall 2021 NPS beyond the institutional average (NPS +16.7).

In this study, I investigated why Relay New York experienced increased NPS scores and affirming student survey results during the COVID-19 pandemic, based on the hypothesis that faculty acted with social and emotional competencies. Relay leadership may use findings from this research inquiry to codify best practices for faculty in order to support novice teacher development in the “new normal” of COVID-19.

This project developed the following research questions based on a literature review and the area of inquiry. This study utilized two data sources to investigate the project questions and triangulate data: institutional survey data and faculty interviews.

<b>Project Question</b>	<b>Finding</b>
How (if at all) did faculty actions contribute to a growth in positive student experience at the Relay NY Campus during the COVID-19 pandemic?	<p><b>Finding #1:</b> Faculty actions appeared to drive positive student experience at Relay New York, but given the consistency year over year, are not a clear contributor to growth in Relay New York’s Net Promoter Score (NPS) from 2019 to 2021.</p> <p><b>Finding #2:</b> The reason why students reported positive feelings about faculty appeared to shift between 2019 and 2021. Students who reported an overall positive experience at Relay New York are more likely to mention social and emotional competencies when describing faculty in 2021 than in 2019.</p>
How (if at all) did Relay NY faculty implement social and emotional competencies in their teaching and advising work with graduate students during the COVID-19 pandemic?	<p><b>Finding #3:</b> Faculty demonstrated competency in relationship skills. Faculty considered best practices for building positive relationships with individual graduate students and created the conditions for positive relationship building among their community of graduate students.</p> <p><b>Finding #4:</b> The COVID-19 pandemic heightened levels of familiarity in faculty and graduate student relationships. Faculty needed to demonstrate self-awareness in order to navigate new, blurred lines of intimacy with success.</p>

**Finding #5:** Faculty's detailed descriptions of student experiences during the pandemic is indicative of strong social awareness. Faculty readily took students' perspectives, recognized their strengths, and demonstrated empathy and compassion.

**Finding #6:** In each stage of the pandemic, faculty continuously innovated their instruction and flexed course policies in response to situational demands. Faculty felt tension between support they offered during the heights of the pandemic and a pull to return to pre-COVID norms.

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Based on these findings, this study makes the following recommendations:

**Recommendation #1:** Relay should monitor future institutional survey data for evidence of continued faculty social and emotional competencies perceived by graduate students. Relay faculty should reflect on individual survey data for evidence of social and emotional competence.

**Recommendation #2:** Faculty best practices for building positive relationships with students should be included in new faculty onboarding.

**Recommendation #3:** Relay faculty and students developed close personal bonds during the pandemic. This study recommends Relay take increased action to maintain these close relationships with alumni via faculty relationships.

**Recommendation #4:** Relay can learn from faculty innovation of online instruction to inform future staff training. Current faculty desire more feedback and direct training on continued improvement in online learning.



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## CONTEXT

The Relay Graduate School of Education (GSE) is a national institution of higher education focused on teacher preparation and teacher leadership programming. Founded in 2011 in New York City, Relay has since expanded its accreditation in twelve more states nationwide. Relay's enrollment mirrors its national growth, increasing from approximately 300 students to 2,800 students served annually. The New York Campus is Relay's first and longest standing. Notably the New York campus is also Relay's largest, enrolling approximately forty percent of Relay's total student body or about 1,200 students.

Relay has a unique practitioner-based curriculum that marries theory and application. All Relay faculty are former P-12 teachers and school leaders with a record of accomplishment in the classroom. Relay students have opportunities to practice instructional skills and receive targeted feedback from faculty through their assignments. This cycle of learning theory, practicing skills, and growing through feedback is the basis of Relay's pedagogical approach to teacher preparation.

Relay's national offerings include graduate, certification, and professional education programs. This study focuses on graduate students enrolled in Relay's Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) and Advanced Certificate programs at the New York Campus. MAT students pursue their initial certification in teaching while on a transitional licensure. That means in addition to being full-time graduate students at Relay, they are also full-time classroom teachers at public and charter P-12 schools across New York State. This dual role presents unique challenges and opportunities for novice teachers. In response, Relay's NY faculty act as both advisor and instructor to ensure graduate students receive comprehensive support.

The focus of this capstone project was both time-sensitive and critical, as the downstream effects of the COVID-19 pandemic continued in real-time. Relay's mission is for novice teachers to develop the skills necessary to support their students and feel motivated to continue long-term as impactful educators. Relay New York faced significant obstacles to realizing this mission due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The key stakeholders in this study are Relay's campus leadership. Relay leaders will be able to utilize findings from this research inquiry to codify best practices for faculty to support novice teacher development in the "new normal" of COVID-19.

## PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

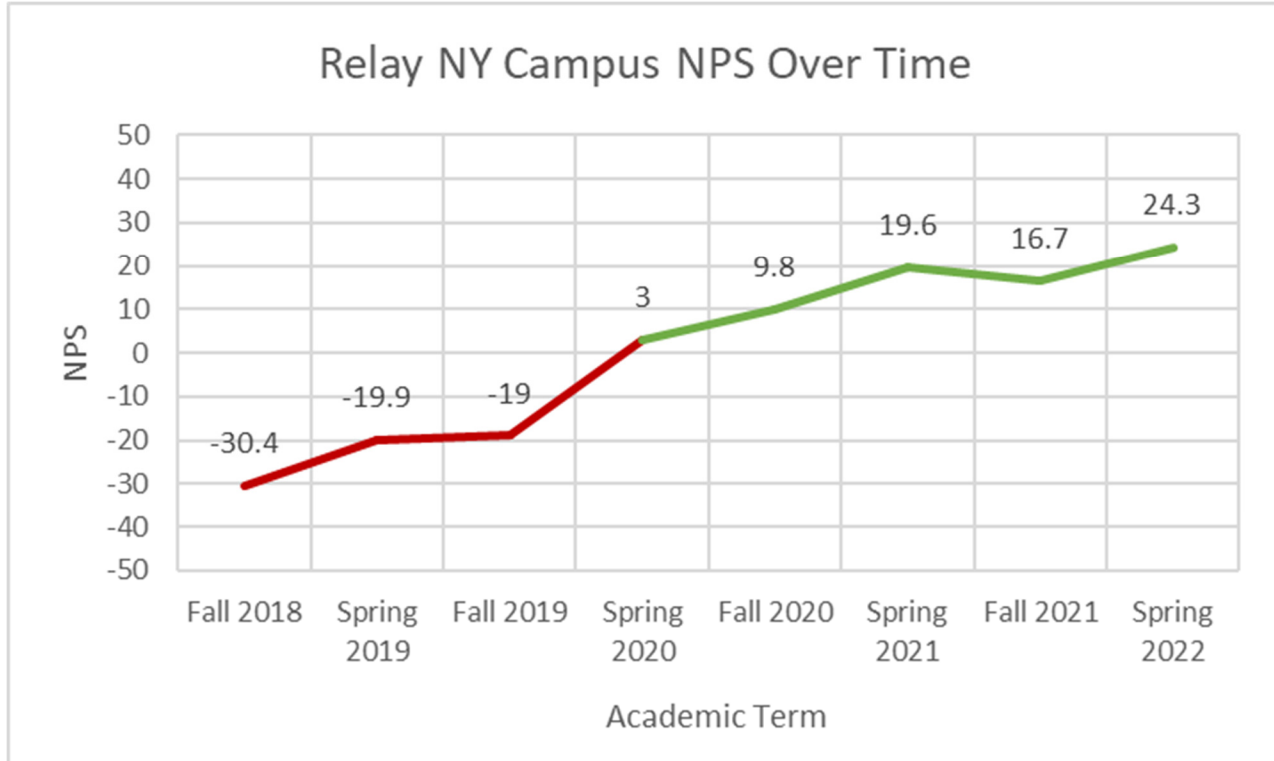
The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on the field of education. In the past three years, national headlines have warned of burnout, discontent, and the precipice of a “Great Resignation” among teachers across the United States. While staffing shortages for teachers existed prior to the pandemic, they have only grown in magnitude since 2020, and there may be even more teachers transitioning out of the profession in the future. The National Education Association (NEA), which represents about three million teachers across the United States, conducted a survey among its members in January 2022. Approximately 53% of educators reported they felt ready to leave the profession earlier than planned, with even higher numbers among Hispanic and Latino teachers, at 59%, and Black teachers, at 62% (Jotkoff, 2022). The same survey reported that 90% of educators felt burnout was a serious problem in the profession, 74% had to cover for colleagues or take on additional responsibilities due to staffing shortages, and 91% reported pandemic-related stress as a serious problem for educators.

The COVID-19 pandemic has increased concerns regarding mental health in the United States. Czeisler et al. (2020) conducted a study in June 2020 where 31% of adults reported symptoms of depression or anxiety. Out of those who identified as essential workers, 54% reported at least one mental or behavioral health symptom (Czeisler et al., 2020). Elevated levels of mental health concerns due to the pandemic is cause for concern among teachers. Historically, teachers exhibited symptoms of depression and anxiety at a higher rate than the general population. A 2016 study of public school teachers in the United States reported 32% showed symptoms of depression, versus a nationally reported rate of 7.4-8% among all Americans aged 12 and older (Schonfeld & Bianchi, 2016; Pratt & Brody, 2014). Novice

teachers exhibit more depression and anxiety symptoms in comparison to teachers with more experience in the classroom (Devos et al., 2012).

It came as a surprise to discover that amidst the many pandemic-related stressors weighing heavily on teachers described above, institutional survey results at the Relay New York campus revealed a stark contrast – teachers were reporting a stronger graduate student experience than ever before. For example, the New York campus experienced a surge in their Net Promoter Score, a metric for satisfaction in businesses and some institutions of higher education. NPS asks students, “How likely is it that you would recommend Relay to a friend or colleague?” At the same time as New York became the epicenter of the COVID-19 pandemic in spring of 2020, Relay NY’s spring 2020 NPS score reported a record high for the campus (NPS: +3.0, up from -19.0 in the fall). Relay NY’s NPS continued to climb, reporting a fall 2021 NPS beyond the institutional average (NPS +16.7). **Figure 1** shows this positive trend.

**Figure 1: Relay New York Campus NPS Over Time**



Relay New York’s performance on this metric is worth scrutinizing. One potential explanation for students’ satisfaction could be Relay instructors’ ability to enact social and emotional learning (SEL) competencies. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) cites strengthening adult SEL competencies as a key focus area for school districts to consider in the wake of the pandemic (CASEL District Resource Guide, 2022). Research has shown that adults with SEL competencies are more effective at modeling it to students (Brackett et al., 2008), build stronger relationships with their students (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009), and report less burnout and higher job satisfaction (Cipriano & Brackett, 2020).

If Relay NY faculty approached teaching and advising with these competencies in mind, it is possible that students’ positive experiences were a product of faculty expertise in this area.

In this study, I investigated why Relay NY experienced record high NPS scores and affirming student survey results during the COVID-19 pandemic, based on the hypothesis that faculty acted with social and emotional competencies. The goal of this project was to codify strategies and learnings that Relay faculty should continue both in New York and across national campuses.



## LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review focused on understanding social and emotional learning (SEL), starting with its history and how it is defined in literature. Based on the research questions in this study, this literature review also explored the ways in which social and emotional competencies are incorporated into K-12 schools, into state policy, and within teacher preparation programming. Finally, this literature review incorporated relevant research concerning the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the field of education, including K-12 schools, teacher education programs, and teachers themselves.

### **Defining Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)**

**The history of SEL.** In 1968 Dr. James Comer, MD, MPH, a child psychologist, partnered with Yale University's Child Study Center to implement a program at the two lowest achieving and lowest income elementary schools in Connecticut (Comer School Development Program, 2023; CASEL, 2021). The program acted on a theory that schools should address the needs of the whole child. By the 1980s, both elementary schools reported increased academic performance, high attendance, and lower rates of behavior issues (Comer School Development Program, 2023). This success inspired the New Haven Social Development project, which would pilot SEL strategies in K-12 classrooms into the early 1990s, setting the stage for the Fetzer Institute conference in 1994 (Elbertson et al., 2010).

The Fetzer Institute conference brought together professionals in the field of education, health, and psychology who believed the present approach to education had a "missing piece" (CASEL, 2021). During the conference, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL, 2022) was founded and the term social and emotional learning (SEL) was first introduced. CASEL is a non-profit organization that has stayed at the forefront of the SEL

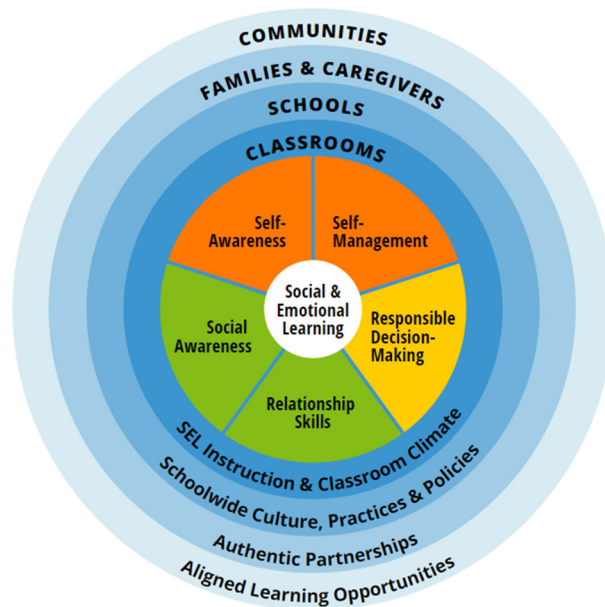
movement. CASEL is a trusted source internationally on SEL research, policies, and evidence based strategies.

**Defining Social and Emotional Learning.** Social and emotional learning has appeared in research with varying definitions and measurement since its introduction in 1994 (Humphrey et al., 2011). Research on SEL is interdisciplinary, bridging the fields of education, psychology, neuroscience, sociology, and philosophy (Bridgeland et al., 2013). Terms such as character education or soft skills have been associated and occasionally conflated with SEL in literature. This study adopts CASEL’s definition:

“SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions” (CASEL, 2022).

The CASEL framework (2022), also referred to as the CASEL wheel, is shown in **Figure 2**. The CASEL framework outlines a foundation of five core SEL competencies, defined by CASEL below: self-awareness, social-awareness, self-management, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making.

**Figure 2:** CASEL Wheel, (CASEL, 2022)



- Self-management: The abilities to manage one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors effectively in different situations and to achieve goals and aspirations.
- Self-awareness: The abilities to understand one’s own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior across contexts.
- Social awareness: The abilities to understand the perspectives of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds, cultures, and contexts.
- Relationship skills: The abilities to establish and maintain healthy and supportive relationships and to effectively navigate settings with diverse individuals and groups.
- Responsible decision-making: The abilities to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations (CASEL, 2022).

## **SEL Programming**

**Increased support for SEL programs in schools.** Social and emotional learning has become a growing part of dialogue in education over the past few decades. Children spend a large portion of their time in school, and development of social and emotional competencies occur during their school-age years (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Initially, schools introduced SEL via formal programs implemented during specific blocks of the day. The effect size of formal SEL programs, even when well designed and implemented with fidelity, was small or moderate. Research later showed teachers that integrated SEL into the entirety of their students' school day, rather than compartmentalizing SEL instruction to a single lesson block, experienced better outcomes (Jones et al., 2010). The same held true for schools that incorporated a vision for SEL into the broader school community, instead of separated into classroom spaces.

Literature explains common issues with implementing SEL programs. Some SEL programs available for purchase are not evidence-based or the accompanying staff training is insufficient (Elbertson et al., 2010). In other instances, programs only focused on a single element of SEL, like anti-bullying curriculums or character development programs. Additionally, research on SEL program implementation shows that teachers had to shorten or eliminate lessons due to competing demands in school schedules (Jones et al., 2010).

There has been an increase in state support for SEL programming in schools during the last several years. States demonstrate support for SEL by prescribing K-12 SEL standards and developing clear guidance for their implementation (Dusenbury & Yoder, 2017). According to a state scan conducted by CASEL in 2022, 27 states issued K-12 SEL competencies and 44 states have published guidance for SEL implementation (Dermody & Dusenbury 2022). The number of states with K-12 SEL standards increased 50% between 2020 and 2022. The number of states

with guidance for SEL implementation increased almost 70% between 2020 and 2022. The recent growth in state support for SEL indicates more acceptance of its efficacy and overall value. The COVID-19 pandemic likely contributed to the policy growth as well.

**SEL in teacher preparation.** Teachers believe that SEL is important and teachable. A nationally representative study conducted in 2013 surveyed 600 P-12th grade teachers on their valuation of social and emotional learning (Bridgeland et al., 2013). Approximately 93% of teachers endorsed SEL as very or fairly important for students' school experience. In addition, 95% of teachers believed social and emotional skills are teachable and that they would benefit students across different backgrounds.

Education preparation programs may not adequately prepare new teachers to lead their students in social and emotional learning. Koller et al. (2004) surveyed first year teachers and experienced teachers; both reported they did not think their teacher education program prepared them to identify or manage students' mental health. Currently, 27 states have SEL standards that teachers are responsible for covering (Dermody & Dusenbury, 2022). Yet, the Education Trust (2022) found that just 10 states require preparation programs to provide training for new teachers on how to support students' social and emotional development. The gap between state standards for students' SEL and education program curriculum for teacher preparation means that teachers are not prepared with the training needed to be successful (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017).

Research focused on how SEL is incorporated into teacher preparation programs is emergent. Schonert-Reichl (2017) was the first to tackle a comprehensive review of U.S. teacher preparation programs for SEL content. They evaluated 3,916 courses offered at 304 colleges of

education, representing all 50 states. Their study looked for evidence of coursework on any of CASEL's five core SEL competencies.

When it came to promoting teachers' own social and emotional learning, Schonert-Reichl (2017) found that a majority of states' programs addressed, on average, one to three of the SEL dimensions. Zero states had a majority of programs where coursework on teachers' SEL included all five dimensions. The most commonly addressed SEL dimension in the courses coded were social-awareness, 16.78% of courses, and responsible decision-making, 10.9% of courses (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2017).

The same study looked for evidence that colleges of education promoted teachers' knowledge and skills related to their students' SEL. Schonert-Reichl et al. found that instruction on how to foster students' SEL is not included in required coursework for the majority of teacher education programs (2017). Most college of education programs included in the study failed to include any of the five dimensions in their coursework related to students' SEL. In fact, just Washington, D.C. and Utah had a majority of programs that included even one dimension of students' SEL in the courses coded. It is important to note that Schonert-Reichl's review used course descriptions on school websites, not detailed course content, which is a potential limitation of the study.

**SEL at Relay GSE.** In the United States, Relay GSE is one of over 27,000 programs within 2,000 institutions that offer teacher training (NCTQ, n.d.). About 200,000 people graduate from teacher preparation programs annually in the United States. Relay GSE is a two-year graduate program; other teacher preparation programs include a four-year bachelor degree and 1-2 year graduate programs.

Relay's mission statement includes students' social and emotional wellness. According to their website, "We encourage teachers and leaders to adopt a strong focus on social and emotional skills...Our programs are designed to help graduate students support and reflect upon both academic and social-emotional measures of student growth" (Relay Advantage, n.d.).

### **Teachers' Social and Emotional Competence**

**Teaching is an emotional profession.** It is not sufficient for new teachers to receive instruction on how to teach SEL to their K-12 students, they also need to maintain their own social and emotional competence to be successful in the work (Schonert-Reichl, 2017).

Teaching is emotional labor, requiring adequate emotional management to succeed (Hoschild, 1983). Teachers' ability to manage their own emotions informs their effectiveness and behavior in the classroom. While other service professions require positive relationships, teachers uniquely have to build those at scale in their classrooms (Maslach & Leiter, 1999). Maintaining quality relationships with all students is emotionally draining work, albeit critical for student success. Ryan & Patrick (2001) characterize classroom settings as social environments, with the teacher facilitating norms of social behavior. When teachers and students interact in a supportive and warm manner, student motivation and engagement is stronger. Positive student-teacher relationships affect students' adaptation to their initial school experience, their perception of the school environment, and their resulting academic achievement (Pianta et al., 1995; Wang & Holcombe, 2010).

A teacher with social and emotional competence will be able to recognize a student's emotions, how their emotions motivate their behavior, and then respond effectively to support the student (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Teachers with social and emotional competence are

also more effective in implementing social and emotional skills curriculum, including coaching students in real time, standing as a role model for prosocial behavior, and setting the conditions for a positive classroom culture (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). In one study that looked at the influences of thirty variables on student learning, the most significant impact on student academic achievement was social and emotional variables (Wang et al., 1990).

**Developing new teachers' social and emotional competence.** In particular, new teachers experience challenging and intense emotions. These emotions can be both positive and negative, which Intrator (2006) characterizes as “emotional drama” (p. 235). First year teachers report feeling unprepared to recognize warning signs of stress or burnout in themselves (Koller & Bertel, 2006). Intrator asserts:

“Helping student teachers negotiate the zig and zag of their emotions, contend with the emotional lives of their students, and understand how what is happening inside of them shapes how they teach and how their own students perceive them is a critical element of supporting our new teachers” (2006, p. 234).

Donahue-Keegan et al. (2019) urges teacher preparation programs to invest in cultivating new teachers' “emotional agility” so they might recognize and manage the waves of emotion (p. 152). This action is multi-layered for teaching faculty who instruct teachers. Donahue-Keegan et al. states, “Helping teacher candidates and in-service teachers develop their social-emotional stamina must be a focus of teacher educators, who must simultaneously develop their own social-emotional stamina” (2019, p. 156).



## **The Impact of COVID-19 on Schools**

Researchers are interested in understanding the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, COVID-19 has dominated as a keyword in academic publications over the past two years across different fields (An & Zakaria, 2022). Despite the heightened interest in understanding the effects of the pandemic, we are still a long way away from understanding the issues it created and exacerbated in education, and therefore creating a clear path forward (Carter Andrews et al., 2021).

**Rapid and widespread school closures.** On March 13, 2020, the U.S. White House issued a proclamation declaring a national emergency due to the outbreak of COVID-19 (U.S. President, 2020). By the end of the month, nearly all public school districts in the country had shut down. This was “the first-ever nearly synchronous nationwide closure of public K-12 schools in the US” (Zviedrite et al., 2021, p. 1). The repercussion was equally historic, “Approximately 100,000 public schools were closed for  $\geq 8$  weeks because of COVID-19, affecting >50 million K-12 students” (Zviedrite et al., 2021, p. 1).

School closures had never occurred at the same scale or speed in modern history (Quezada et al., 2020). According to UNESCO (2020), 92% of the world’s students, or 1.6 billion people, felt the effect of the pandemic on their educational pursuits. After the healthcare industry, the education sector has been the most impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic (Hebebe et al., 2020). Relay GSE, like many institutions of higher education, was included in the March school closures.

**Teacher preparation programs needed to adapt and innovate online.** A primary adjustment made by teacher preparation programming in 2020 was to virtual instruction. In

addition to state adjustments to deadlines for teaching certification requirements, most teacher education programs (TEPs) pivoted to online instruction (Choate et al., 2021). The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) conducted a survey among its members in April 2020. Out of the 188 teacher education programs that responded to the study, 98% had moved their instruction online (AACTE, 2020). Relay shifted to a mix of asynchronous and synchronous online instruction in early March as well.

The COVID-19 pandemic required teacher preparation programs to innovate and make changes. Ellis et al. (2020) conducted an exploratory study interviewing leaders from initial teacher education (ITE) programs internationally about their response to COVID-19. Leaders expressed excitement about changes made in ITE due to the pandemic, including video observations and using virtual platforms for communication with school-based partners. One school leader interviewed stated,

“Lockdown has helped to alleviate academic staff fears about online learning...it’s removed some of the resistance that we have had in the past...There are lots of exciting things that we can do to make our courses a lot more innovative going forward.” (Ellis et al., 2020, p. 567).

Kidd & Murray (2020) argue favorably for these innovative shifts, suggesting that the pandemic-induced pivot to virtual learning actually helped to reinforce pedagogical agility, both in the graduate instructors teaching teachers and the novice teachers themselves. Glenn et al., (2020) also suggest that novice teachers may have increased comfort with flexibility in light of constant changes. Darling-Hammond & Hyler (2020) suggest strong teacher education programs

will set teachers up to be able to teach across a variety of models (virtual, in-person, hybrid) in the future.

**Teacher educators adapt instruction.** Teacher educators were deliberate about building social relationships with students during the pandemic. Scull et al. (2020) conducted research at an Australian teacher preparation program. They found that teacher educators reserved time during class, sans recording, where students could talk personally and process their experiences early in the pandemic. An instructor named Kathy shared, “And we all loved that time of the session because the students really opened up . . . [We] would set themes each week ‘What are you cooking this week or those sorts of things’” (Scull et al., 2020, p. 501). Scull et al. also found that instructors paired back content in favor of brevity or broke apart learning activities into smaller parts. Teacher educators were explicit about how to ask for help, sought feedback regularly, and were flexible in response to student needs.

Quezada et al. (2020) conducted a study at a teacher education program within a small, private liberal arts college in California. They found faculty had altered course assignments, extended deadlines to alleviate stress, and routinely asked for feedback on class formats. Additionally, teacher educators allowed students to make Zoom appointments with them outside of class or in smaller groups to check-in on how they were coping with the circumstances.

Teacher educator programs also amplified consideration of teachers’ mental health. The University of North Florida (UNF) special education teacher preparation program integrated trauma informed practices in class for pre-service teachers (Hoppey et al., 2021). Faculty developed self-care modules and made deliberate space at the beginning of class for personal check-ins to promote community.

Virtual environments can be isolating for students and the stressors of the pandemic seemed to have increased feelings of anxiety in the online world (Scull et al., 2020). Instructors had to work towards building relationships with students and relationships among students to combat these feelings of isolation (Boiling et al., 2012). “Strong pedagogical relationships” between students and their professors are key to successful participation in online learning (Scull et al., 2020, p. 504).

**State adjustments to teacher certification.** In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, states adjusted traditional teacher certification requirements. Teacher certification requirements vary by state, but generally include a bachelor’s degree, licensure exams, and teaching experience. Due to limited opportunities to sit for the exams in testing centers, as well as interruptions to clinical teaching experiences, states passed emergency legislation that modified certification requirements (Slay et al., 2020). In spring 2020, thirty-three states fully or conditionally waived exam requirements for teacher candidates (Deans for Impact, 2020). New York did not initially change requirements for teaching certification, but did offer flexibility to meet them. New York was one of five states nationally that maintained standard requirements but allowed teachers to apply for an emergency certificate. In New York, the Emergency COVID-10 Certificate is a free extension that permits teacher candidates to “work in New York State public schools or districts for two years while taking and passing the required exam(s) for the certificate or extension sought” (NYSED, n.d.).

**Impact on enrollment.** The amount of students graduating with a bachelor’s degree in education had been steadily declining prior to the pandemic, even though the number of students with a college degree had increased over the past decades. Between 2006 and 2019, bachelor’s degrees in education declined 22% while the number of degrees conferred overall increased 29%

(King & James, 2022). Similarly, teacher preparation programs had less students enrolling in recent years. Prospective students are concerned about reports of staff shortages and related pandemic stressors. There is not conclusive data yet on how, if at all, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected enrollment in teacher preparation programs.

### **The Impact of COVID-19 on Teachers**

**Teaching during a time of crisis.** Research on school communities after natural disasters has found teachers play a central role in responding to trauma. In a study conducted in post-Katrina New Orleans, teachers were required to support students' academic and emotional needs in spite of traumatic conditions, while also coping with their own personal stressors (Carlson et al, 2010). O'Toole & Friesen (2016) describe teachers as "first responders in tragedy" (p.1) and Lowery & Burts (2007) detail "survival circumstances" where teachers support students and themselves (p. 72).

**Chronic stress and anxiety.** The teaching occupation has long been vulnerable to burnout (Jackson et al., 1986). Research prior to the COVID-19 pandemic establishes teaching as one of the highest stress service industry professions (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005). Chronic stress can influence teachers' physical health and their emotional bandwidth (Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008). Teachers' stress levels can affect their students. In a study of 10,000 1st grade students and teachers, findings show that more students had mental health issues in classrooms where teachers report high levels of stress (Milkie & Warner, 2011). Factors like personality traits, environmental factors, and coping mechanisms informed teachers' ability to combat psychological stress from the job (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005).

The COVID-19 pandemic further intensified teachers' stress and anxiety. In a sample of 949 former public school teachers, 44% that left teaching voluntarily during the pandemic cited COVID-19 as the primary reason (Diliberti et al., 2021). Stress was the reason named most frequently overall. In fact, three out of four teachers in a sample of 949 selected "often" or "always" when asked how stressful their work was in the past year (Diliberti et al., 2021, p. 10).

Kraft et al. (2020) surveyed 7,841 teachers in the spring of 2020 about their working conditions during remote teaching. Stress was more significant in teachers at majority Black and high-poverty schools than compared to teachers at well-resourced schools (Kraft et al., 2020). One reason is educational inequities expanded during the pandemic. Students in high-poverty schools were less likely to have technology at home for virtual instruction, for example.

**Feelings of disconnect and lowered self-efficacy.** Kraft et al. found teachers' self-reported sense of success fell dramatically during the pandemic; 53% of teachers said they experienced less success than reports pre-COVID-19 (2020). Reich et al. (2020) interviewed 40 teachers across different grades and school structures to build an understanding of their lived experiences during COVID-19 in spring 2020. They found that teachers felt a loss of connection to their students, their peers, and their professional identity. Feelings of burnout, mourning, and decreased self-efficacy followed (Reich et al., 2020).

The dean of John Hopkins School of Education, Christopher Morpew, summarized compounding challenges to the field:

"A lot of teachers are not being prepared to monitor and mediate their own mental health. That's paired with an increasing number of students coming to schools with their own mental health issues, and challenges from home. As a teacher, you're having to

counsel, to provide therapy, to be a nurse, to fill so many roles because schools have cut back so much. And, your teaching role is as difficult as ever. So you're put in an impossible situation.” (Pearce, 2022).

## **PROJECT QUESTIONS**

1. How (if at all) did faculty actions contribute to a growth in positive student experience at the Relay NY Campus during the COVID-19 pandemic?
2. How (if at all) did Relay NY faculty implement social and emotional competencies in their teaching and advising work with graduate students during the COVID-19 pandemic?

This capstone project explored a phenomenon: why did teacher satisfaction at Relay New York GSE increase dramatically while teachers experienced significant issues due to pandemic related stressors? The first research question aligned with my hypothesis that Relay faculty actions were the root cause of the phenomenon. The question was designed to identify specific actions that contributed to positive student experience overall. This will assist Relay with the area of inquiry because it helped to codify faculty actions as best practices. The second research question narrowed the focus from faculty action to specific social and emotional competencies. This focus contextualized the study within current, critical dialogue in research on the value of SEL.



## PROJECT DESIGN

### Data Collection and Analysis

This study's project questions required data that captured faculty actions toward graduate students during the pandemic. This study also required data to illustrate a difference before COVID-19, since the phenomenon being examined centers on the surge in positive student experience at Relay during the pandemic. This study used two data sources to investigate the project questions and triangulate data: institutional survey data and faculty interviews.

**Institutional Survey Data.** According to Babbie (2017), surveys are “excellent vehicles for measuring attitudes and orientations in a large population” (p. 256). Relay administers institutional surveys twice a year, in the fall and spring semesters. Graduate students receive a unique link via email to an online questionnaire. The surveys are approximately twenty-eight questions and are a mix of open and close-ended. The Relay research team provided access to survey data for the purpose of this study. I did not administer the surveys myself. I compared institutional survey data from fall 2019, before the COVID-19 pandemic, to fall 2021, during the COVID-19 pandemic, for the New York campus. The fall 2019 survey had 976 respondents and the fall 2021 survey had 675 respondents.

Within the survey results, I used the Net Promoter Score (NPS) as a key metric. NPS is an established metric used broadly to measure customer experience and brand loyalty. NPS asks survey respondents, “How likely is it that you would recommend Relay to a friend or colleague?” Respondents answer on a scale of 0 (not likely at all) to 10 (extremely likely). NPS then splits scores into three categories. Respondents who answer 9-10 are “promoters,” those who rate 7-8 are “passives,” and ratings of 0-6 are “detractors.” An organization calculates their

NPS by subtracting the percentage of detractors from the percentage of promoters. An NPS can range from -100 to +100, with a higher, positive score being the most desirable. I compared the scores between overall NPS in 2019 and 2021, as well as the breakdown in categories of scores (percentage of promoters, passives, and detractors). **Table 1** illustrates the score comparison. **Table 2** shows the breakdown of categories of scores.

*Table 1: NPS Percent Growth Fall 2019 vs. Fall 2021*

	Fall 2019	Fall 2021	Percent Growth
NPS Score	-19	+16.7	+35.7

*Table 2: Breakdown of NPS Scores by Categories*

Fall 2019			Fall 2021		
Value	Percent	Count	Value	Percent	Count
Detractors	42.8%	320	Detractors	24.0%	126
Passives	33.3%	249	Passives	35.4%	186
Promoters	23.8%	178	Promoters	40.7%	214
	Totals	747		Totals	526

Relay’s institutional survey followed the NPS prompt with an open-ended question, “Why did you choose this rating?” I used a deductive coding scheme to analyze the qualitative responses. My initial codes were “Faculty, Curriculum, Practitioner Model, Operations, Cost, Flexibility/Work Load, Virtual/Hybrid Model, Mission/Community, Certification, Reputation/Credibility, and Location.” I included the code “Vague/NA” for comments that lacked clarity or completeness. I developed this set of codes based on the most common sources mentioned in students’ qualitative responses. I coded some comments twice based on the

multitude of sources mentioned. For example, I coded the following response “Faculty” and “Mission”: “Professors are mostly nice and understanding. Relay is aligned with what my school's mission is.” **Table 3** includes example quotes for each initial code in both the 2019 and 2021 data sets.

**Table 3:** Example Quote for Initial Codes: NPS prompt “Why did you choose this rating?”

Initial Code	Example Quote 2019	Example Quote 2021
Faculty	Because it's a blessing being able to attend a school where professors actually care about your growth.	It's a great school, with great faculty and professors that care about developing young teachers.
Curriculum	Relay has excellent materials for teaching teachers and has a curriculum that smoothly builds teaching practices.	Relay is a great school to learn more about being an educator and I absolutely love how much it emphasizes culturally responsive teaching practices.
Practitioner Model	Without Relay, I would not be able to achieve my goals in education while working in the Bronx. This means a lot to me and I think there is a lot to be said for this type of a program.	Relay combines pedagogy with application smoothly and effectively!
Operations	The application process was not clear. We did not know when the application was due. We had to call, and were told different answers.	Easy and effective to navigate
Cost	Because [the] program is effective and cost efficient	RELAY is the most affordable and efficient way I know to get certified in NY while working full time

Flexibility/Work Load	The schedule and accommodations RELAY has given me in the program give me the opportunity to help balance my work load.	The program has been very helpful without being overbearing, work wise or financially.
Virtual / Hybrid Model	Many people are very busy and a program that allows online and in-person learning is ideal.	I think it being online was a huge benefit to me, and I likely would not choose this rating if I had had to commute in for class.
Mission/ Community	I believe in the mission of Relay, the mission that every student needs a great teacher.	Teachers are helping teachers pursue higher education in the midst of a pandemic. We are all understanding the struggle but here to assist one another.
Certification	If you need to get certified it's great.	It is really good and it helps you become a certified teacher
Reputation / Credibility	Relay doesn't carry name recognition or weight in a positive way.	It doesn't have a good reputation
Location	It's a fine workload, but the location is difficult from Harlem.	(None)
Vague/NA	Because I haven't finished it yet!	I'm not sure how I feel.

After this initial round of coding, I sorted the respondents by their NPS (promoters, passives, or detractors) and filtered by comments that mentioned faculty as their “why.” This allowed me to notice trends within this particular rating group. I focused primarily on promoters who referenced faculty because my project question centers on faculty actions contributing to positive student experience. As a result, comments by graduate students who felt favorably about Relay (promoters) and attributed their score response to faculty were a key data grouping. **Table 4** shows example quotes from net promoters who attribute their positive score to faculty.

**Table 4:** Net promoters who attribute their positive score to faculty, example quotes

Net Promoters	2019 Sample Quote	2021 Sample Quote
<b>NPS: 9</b>	I chose this rating because the content is filled with helpful information to help us succeed as teachers. The staff is also helpful and attentive	I have enjoyed my classes so far and the instructors are extremely caring, knowledgeable, and empathetic.
<b>NPS: 10</b>	The faculty is very supportive and pushes you to succeed.	Begin by ensuring that I feel safe and surrounded by an academic community that values student diversity, differences, voice, and need for security.

The next set of survey data I analyzed was an additional selection of survey questions related to student experience with faculty. I chose two questions with quantitative responses and one open-ended question. The questions are:

1. Please indicate your level of satisfaction with the following aspects of your Relay GSE experience: The quality of the core and content teaching faculty (Likert scale: Very Dissatisfied, Dissatisfied, Somewhat Dissatisfied, Somewhat Satisfied, Satisfied, Very Satisfied)
2. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement: I feel supported by a faculty or staff member at Relay. (Likert scale: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Somewhat Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree)
3. What are the strengths of our program? (Open-ended)

The quantitative questions used a Likert scale, so I was able to compare numeric results in 2019 and 2021 directly. The results are in **Table 5** below.

**Table 5:** *Students’ feelings about faculty in Fall 2019 and Fall 2021*

Survey Question	Fall 2019	Fall 2021	Percent Growth
Level of satisfaction with the quality of teaching faculty	81.4% satisfied or very satisfied	87.3% satisfied or very satisfied	+5.9%
Extent to which you agree or disagree: I feel supported by a faculty or staff member at Relay	79.9% agree or strongly agree	85.4% agree or strongly agree	+5.5%

I coded responses from the open-ended question, “What are the strengths of our program?” using the same deductive coding scheme I applied to the NPS data set. The codes were “Faculty, Curriculum, Practitioner Model, Operations, Cost, Flexibility/Work Load, Virtual/Hybrid Model, CRT/SEL, Certification, Mission/Community, and Vague/NA.” I did not use two of the codes from the NPS data set, “Location and Reputation/Credibility,” because there were no applicable student responses. I included two additional codes because there were new comments that did not fit a prior code. I added the code “CRT/SEL,” or Culturally Responsive Teaching and Social Emotional Learning, to capture comments that specifically noted the presence of either as a strength in Relay’s program. I also added the code, “None,” for any respondents who explicitly named they saw no strengths in the program overall. **Table 6** includes example quotes for the initial codes of the 2019 and 2021 data sets.

**Table 6:** Example Quote for Initial Codes: “What are the strengths of our program?”

<b>Initial Code</b>	<b>Example Quote 2019</b>	<b>Example Quote 2021</b>
Faculty	The faculty accommodate student needs promptly and are very understanding.	The professors that strive for student success.
Curriculum	Relay's curriculum is very applicable in the classroom. Every week in class, I learn a new technique that I can immediately apply to my class.	The curriculum is helping me everyday in my classroom.
Practitioner Model	How Relay allows the teacher to be hands-on and interactive. It is better than writing papers.	This course is extremely practical and I am able to apply weekly learnings to my teaching for immediate turnkeying. I really like this about Relay.
Operations	Support team responds quickly and effectively	Everytime I have a question or need help, someone gets back to be very quickly
Cost	Low cost, accessible for a wide range of students	Making social-economic movement feasible by providing quality affordable education.
Flexibility/Work Load	The strengths are making the coursework manageable with working full time.	That there's so much flexibility and consideration with everyone's schedules.
Virtual / Hybrid Model	The balance of online and in-class work.	The distance learning has been extremely helpful this year with managing my work and other life obligations. Hoping this continues for next year as well.

Mission/ Community	Putting mission to practice	I like the community being built and the overall support from both my fellow residents and my advisors.
Certification	Unlike other programs, every class is dedicated and aligned with teaching or getting students certified	Everything is laid out clearly for students on how to complete the steps for certification.
CRT/SEL	The cultural responsiveness lens	The strengths are teaching us to be more culturally responsive in all areas of education while helping all students with needs to meet mastery.
Vague/NA	Student guidance	Feedback
None	None that I can think of, to be honest.	N/A

I then followed a similar path of analysis to how I approached the NPS data set. After initial coding, I filtered students' comments that mentioned faculty as the primary strength they saw in Relay's program. I created secondary filters for students who responded they were "Satisfied" or "Very Satisfied" with the quality of teaching faculty and students who responded they "Agree" or "Strongly Agree" they felt supported by a faculty or staff member at Relay. The subsequent data set represented students who felt favorably about faculty overall. Their qualitative responses were a rich source of insight for developing themes in my analysis. See examples in **Table 7**.



*Table 7: Sample responses from students who felt favorable about faculty overall*

Quality of Teaching faculty	Feel Supported by faculty or staff member	What are the strengths of our program?	
		2019 Sample Quote	2021 Sample Quote
Satisfied (5)	Agree (5)	The strengths of the program are the professors.	The professors. All are friendly, empathetic, and know what they're talking about.
Very Satisfied (6)	Strongly Agree (6)	Professors!! They understand our workload as teachers and understand how hectic life gets, so if we communicate they are willing to work with us. They are super knowledgeable and helpful.	The faculty that I have been able to learn from have all been responsive, kind, accommodating, and extremely knowledgeable in the content areas that they teach.

**Interviews with Faculty.** The second source of data for this study was faculty interviews. I conducted interviews with ten Relay faculty in November 2022. The faculty I interviewed all taught at Relay in the academic school years of 2019-2020 and 2021-2022. This criterion ensured they could speak to a pre-pandemic perspective relevant to the study questions. I joined a faculty meeting to advertise the study. I shared the study’s goals and verbally asked for voluntary participation, followed by an email request shown in **Appendix A**. I anticipated a small response and hoped for at least three interview participants. I was pleased to discover that faculty were eager to share their insights. Ten faculty members volunteered their time for interviews.

Relay New York has three primary faculty teams: faculty focused on year one students, year two students, and teaching exceptional learner students. In total, Relay New York had approximately twenty-one full-time faculty during 2019-2021. The ten faculty I interviewed

represent nearly 50% of total faculty and are members of all three teams. I interviewed six faculty from the year one team, three faculty from the year two team, and one faculty from the teaching exceptional learners team. After faculty volunteered, I shared communication via email reiterating the voluntary nature of their participation, included in **Appendix A**.

I developed the interview protocol in **Appendix B** in relationship with CASEL's framework for Social and Emotional Learning. I designed my questions based on three of CASEL's five core competencies, self-awareness, social awareness, and relationship skills, which I believed were most relevant to understanding specific faculty actions. In turn, this focus aligned with my research questions. For the purpose of this study, I defined the core competencies using CASEL's definition, shared earlier in the literature review.

I conducted the faculty interviews via Zoom. Each interview was approximately 60 minutes. I recorded the interviews for the sole purpose of analysis in this study and exported the transcript. I watched the recordings to clean up the automated transcript and ensure accuracy. I uploaded the edited transcripts to NVivo, which is a qualitative data analysis software. I used a deductive coding scheme. My codes were, "Relationship Skills, Self-Awareness, Social-Awareness, and Faculty Actions." The first three codes derived from CASEL's SEL framework and aligned with the interview question protocol. The last code, "Faculty Actions," had four sub-codes, "Course Policy, SEL in Coursework, Organizational Action, and Virtual Innovation." These sub-codes stem from best practices for faculty action during the pandemic that emerged in the literature review.

After coding each interview using the codes described, I then coded the interview data again using sub-codes for each of the SEL competencies. The sub-codes stem directly from

CASEL’s definition of each competency. The sub-codes for relationships skills are developing positive relationships, practicing teamwork and collaboration, and seeking or offering support or help when needed. The sub-codes for self-awareness are identifying one’s emotions, linking feelings, values, and thoughts, and developing interests and a sense of purpose. The sub-codes for social-awareness are taking other’s perspective, recognizing strengths in others, and demonstrating empathy and compassion. I chose to use sub-codes in order to pull out more nuanced themes for each competency in the data set overall. **Table 8** shows this progression from code to sub-code, using the example of Relationship Skills.

**Table 8:** *Progression from code to sub-code for SEL competencies*

Quote	Code	Sub-code
<p>I saw a lot more people in office hours than I had ever before. So when I look back at, you know, that that was, I think, my third or fourth year at Relay, I guess it was, must have been my third. You know, if I compare that to the previous couple of years, it was a huge increase in the number of people signing up and wanting that one on one time to connect.</p>	<p>Relationship Skills</p>	<p>Seeking or offering support and help when needed</p>

**Data Analysis Summary Table**

Project Question	Data Source	Description	Coding Schema	Analysis Focus
How (if at all) did faculty actions contribute to a growth in positive student experience at the Relay NY Campus during the COVID-19 pandemic?	Institutional Survey	NPS Score scale of 0 (not likely at all) to 10 (extremely likely)	Detractors 0-6 Passives 7-8 Promoters 9-10	Quantitative growth in NPS between 2019 and 2021
	Fall 2019 (976 respondents)	Why did you choose this [NPS] rating? (Open-ended)	Deductive Coding See Table 3	Qualitative responses from Net Promoters (9 or 10) who cite faculty as the primary reason they chose a positive rating
	Fall 2021 (675 respondents)	Please indicate your level of satisfaction with the following aspects of your Relay GSE experience: The quality of the core and content teaching faculty	Likert scale: Very Dissatisfied (1) Dissatisfied (2) Somewhat Dissatisfied (3) Somewhat Satisfied (4) Satisfied (5) Very Satisfied (6)	Growth in quantitative responses between 2019 and 2021  Qualitative responses from students that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Were “Satisfied” or “Very Satisfied” with the quality of teaching faculty (5 or 6)</li> <li>• “Agree” or “Strongly Agree” they felt supported by a faculty or staff member at Relay (5 or 6)</li> <li>• Cite faculty as the primary program strength</li> </ul>
		Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement: I feel supported by a faculty or staff member at Relay.	Likert scale: Strongly Disagree (1) Disagree (2) Somewhat Disagree (3) Somewhat Agree (4) Agree (5) Strongly Agree (6)	
		What are the strengths of our program? (Open-ended)	Deductive Coding See Table 6	

<p>How (if at all) did Relay NY faculty implement social and emotional competencies in their teaching and advising work with graduate students during the COVID-19 pandemic?</p>	<p>Faculty Interviews (10)</p>	<p>Interview questions based on three of CASEL's five core social and emotional competencies: self-awareness, social awareness, and relationship skills.</p>	<p>Codes:</p> <p>Relationship Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing Positive Relationships</li> <li>• Practicing teamwork and collaboration</li> <li>• Seeking or offering support and help when needed</li> </ul> <p>Self-Awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identifying One's Emotions</li> <li>• Linking feelings, values, and thoughts</li> <li>• Developing interests and a sense of purpose</li> </ul> <p>Social-Awareness</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Taking other's perspective</li> <li>• Recognizing strengths in others</li> <li>• Demonstrating empathy and compassion</li> <li>• Recognizing situational</li> </ul>	<p>The first three codes derive from CASEL's SEL framework and align with the interview question protocol.</p> <p>The code and sub-codes for faculty actions stem from best practices for faculty action during the pandemic that emerged in my literature review.</p>
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			demands and opportunities Faculty Actions <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Course Policy</li><li>• SEL in</li><li>• Coursework</li></ul> Organizational Action <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Virtual Innovation</li></ul>	
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## FINDINGS

**Research Question #1:** How (if at all) did faculty actions contribute to a growth in positive student experience at the Relay NY Campus during the COVID-19 pandemic?

**Finding #1:** Faculty actions appeared to drive positive student experience at Relay New York, but given the consistency year over year, are not a clear contributor to growth in Relay New York's Net Promoter Score (NPS) from 2019 to 2021.

Institutional survey data do not indicate faculty actions as a clear contributor to growth in Relay New York's Net Promoter Score (NPS) from 2019 to 2021. Overall, graduate students reported similar positive feelings about faculty before COVID-19, in fall 2019, as they did during COVID-19, in fall 2021. Students reported consistent positive feelings about Relay faculty in the survey questions included in this study, with marginal growth during the pandemic in fall 2021. As shown in **Table 4** earlier, 81.4% of students felt satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of teaching faculty in fall 2019. In fall 2021, 87.3% of students felt satisfied or very satisfied with the quality of teaching faculty. This represented +5.9% growth. Similarly, 79.9% of students agreed or strongly agreed they felt supported by a faculty or staff member in fall 2019. In fall 2021, 85.4% of students agreed or strongly agreed. This represented +5.5% growth. Students' feelings about faculty are overall positive before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Faculty actions are the primary contributor to positive student experience at Relay New York according to institutional survey results. Students who reported a positive experience at Relay in fall 2019 and fall 2021 cite faculty actions as a contributor more than any other reason. Faculty are the most cited reason why students chose a net promoter score and when asked to

describe the program's strength. This is true before the COVID-19 pandemic, in fall 2019, and during COVID-19, in fall 2021.

Net promoters, or students who said they would recommend Relay, were more likely to cite faculty when asked why they chose their positive rating than any other reason in both fall 2019 and fall 2021. Promoters mentioned faculty 19 times in fall 2019 and 31 times in fall 2021. For example, in 2019 a net promoter explained their score, "The faculty is very supportive and pushes you to succeed." In 2021 a net promoter shared, "The professor is really patient with me."

Students who reported negative experiences at Relay, net detractors, were unlikely to cite faculty as a reason they would not recommend Relay. Only three detractors in 2019 and zero detractors in 2021 mentioned faculty as the reason why they reported a negative score. Detractors were most likely to cite Relay's credibility or the curriculum. For example, one detractor in 2019 (NPS 2) said, "My experience with my professor was amazing, and Relay was affordable. But the work itself was not challenging." Another student in 2019 (NPS 5) wrote, "Only a 5 because even though my advisors and professors have been amazing, I have had a lot of issues around registration and miscommunication with financial department...if it wasn't for this my answer would be much higher."

Students who reported neutral experiences at Relay, net passives, were equally unlikely to cite faculty as their reason. Only three students in fall 2019 that scored as passives mention constructive criticism for faculty. In fall 2019, a student (NPS 7) wrote, "Because the school is good but need to improve the connection between the staff and the students." In fall 2021, only one passive student (NPS 8) cited faculty when asked about their rating. The comment actually mentioned faculty positively. The student said, "I think Relay is an amazing choice if you want



to do your degree and work at the same time. I love the faculty. I think it being online was a huge benefit to me, and I likely would not choose this rating if I had had to commute in for class.”

Overall, students who are not willing to recommend Relay in 2019 and 2021 are unlikely to cite faculty actions as a contributor to their ratings.

When asked to describe the program’s strengths, students repeatedly referenced faculty actions. Faculty were the top cited code in both 2019 and 2021 when students describe the program’s strength. Students cited faculty 99 times in 2019 and 93 times in 2021. Even NPS detractors, who said they would not recommend Relay, had good things to say about faculty when asked about program strengths. One NPS detractor in 2021 wrote as a strength, “Professors themselves, period.”

**Finding #2:** The reason why students reported positive feelings about faculty appeared to shift between 2019 and 2021. Students who reported an overall positive experience at Relay New York are more likely to mention social and emotional competencies when describing faculty in 2021 than in 2019.

It is not that students felt more positively about faculty during COVID-19 than prior, evidenced in Finding #1. It is *why* students report positive feelings which changes between 2019 and 2021. Qualitative survey data reveals a shift in descriptive language used by Relay students about faculty before and during the pandemic. Students reporting an overall positive experience at Relay New York (Net Promoters, Satisfied/Very Satisfied; Agree/Strongly Agree) are more likely to mention social and emotional competencies when describing faculty in 2021, than in 2019.

Net promoters in fall 2019 described faculty as helpful and supportive in their qualitative responses. The quality of faculty instruction and curriculum is also a theme. As **Table 9** shows, one student responded, “I chose this rating because the content is filled with helpful information to help us succeed as teachers. The staff is also helpful and attentive.” Another student wrote, “I am impressed by the quality of instruction at Relay.”

Net promoters in fall 2021 are more likely to mention social and emotional competencies in their qualitative responses. Patience, flexibility and empathy emerge as themes. As shown in **Table 9**, a student shared that they chose a promoter rating because, “I feel safe and surrounded by an academic community that values student diversity, differences, voice, and need for security.” Another student wrote, “I have enjoyed my classes so far and the instructors are extremely caring, knowledgeable, and empathetic.”

**Table 9:** Net promoters who attribute their positive score to faculty, example quotes

Net Promoters	2019 Sample Comment	2021 Sample Comment
<b>NPS: 9</b>	I chose this rating because the content is filled with <b>helpful</b> information to help us succeed as teachers. The staff is also helpful and attentive	I have enjoyed my classes so far and the instructors are extremely caring, knowledgeable, and <b>empathetic</b> .
<b>NPS: 10</b>	I am impressed by the <b>quality of instruction</b> at Relay.	I feel safe and surrounded by an academic community that values student <b>diversity, differences, voice, and need for security</b> .

In addition to net promoters, students that felt positively about faculty actions (Satisfied/Very Satisfied; Agree/Strongly Agree) in fall 2019 described faculty as knowledgeable, flexible, and supportive when asked about the program’s strengths. Curriculum and staff content knowledge is a theme. As shown in **Table 7** earlier, one student wrote, “Professors!! They understand our workload as teachers and understand how hectic life gets, so if we communicate they are willing to work with us. They are super knowledgeable and helpful.” Another shared as a program strength, “Supportive faculty, assignments that connect to teaching, coursework feels practical and applicable.”

Students that felt positively about faculty actions (Satisfied/Very Satisfied; Agree/Strongly Agree) in fall 2021 included similar themes of knowledge, support, and helpfulness when asked about the program’s strengths. In addition, social and emotional competencies emerged as a theme. Students named faculty’s compassion, empathy, and care in their descriptive responses. In addition to **Table 7**, shown earlier, the below bullet points underscore this trend in qualitative responses. Additional responses in 2021 included:

- Great faculty of experienced and **compassionate** educators.
- I have people **who listen to me**
- **Caring** professors. Effective teaching
- I love how patient, **empathetic**, and understanding my professors are.
- The **flexibility**, differentiation, **compassion**, and understanding!!!!
- Professors are all **caring** and **kind**
- **Flexibility**. I appreciate how **understanding** the faculty are.
- The professors. All are friendly, **empathetic**, and know what they're talking about.

Institutional survey data revealed faculty actions as a significant contributor to positive student experience in both 2019 and 2021. While the data did not prove out faculty actions as the reason why NPS increased in 2021, the data illustrated that more students are likely to note faculty social and emotional competencies in 2021 when describing faculty.

**Research Question #2:** How (if at all) did Relay NY faculty implement social and emotional competencies in their teaching and advising work with graduate students during the COVID-19 pandemic?

**Finding #3:** Faculty demonstrated competency in relationship skills. Faculty considered best practices for building positive relationships with individual graduate students and created the conditions for positive relationship building among their community of graduate students.

Faculty were intentional and strategic about relationship building with graduate students during the pandemic, when teachers were experiencing increased personal and professional stressors and the format of learning had changed to virtual. During interviews, faculty shared several best practices in relationship building that they believe led to stronger relationship building online. Not all of the strategies were new. Faculty used some of the strategies previously, but then refined or updated them based on the context of the pandemic.

### **Building relationships with individual graduate students**

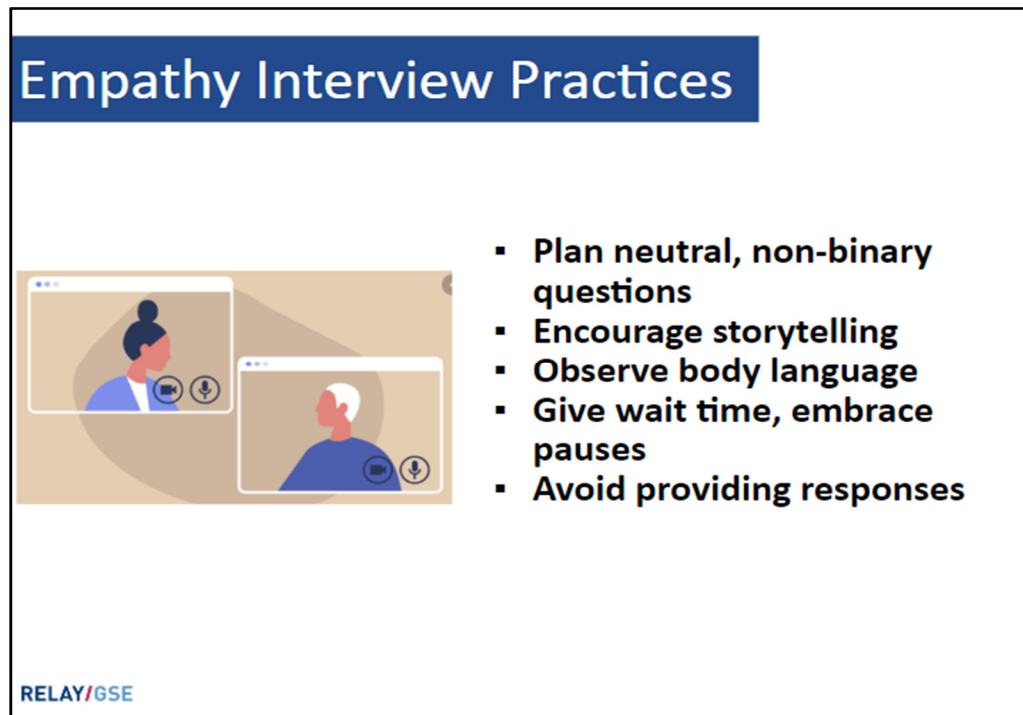
**Empathy Interviews/Conversations.** The majority of faculty in this study conducted empathy interviews or empathy conversations at the beginning of the academic school year. Faculty held the conversations one-on-one with graduate students via Zoom with the express purpose of learning about the individual student. Faculty viewed the conversations as an opportunity to build positive relationships and to get to know the individual students' background, goals, and interests. Bernie asked questions such as, “Who are you outside of teaching? Why are you teaching? Who’s important in your life?” Bernie explained his rationale, “I want to get to know people and what really motivates them, or what they are hoping to

experience in the program or in their careers. And then in that way, I like to use that information to guide them and the why behind what they're doing in our graduate program or beyond.”

Providing space for students to meet individually is crucial for relationship building (Quezada et al., 2020). During these meetings, Jeff made sure students talked about themselves, “People...they're looking to be heard and be seen...if you can get a person to talk about themselves, then you're gonna develop a relationship with them.”

Empathy interviews are not unique to Relay faculty. The concept originated in design thinking. Designers used empathy interviews to understand user experience. Birchall (2018) described empathy interviews as, “a human-centered approach to understand the feelings and experiences of others.” In September 2020, Relay faculty received an internal training on how to conduct empathy conversations. Relay leadership provided New York faculty with tools and resources, including best practices and example questions. **Figure 3** shows a slide from the training.

*Figure 3: Slide from faculty training on Empathy Interviews*



**Empathy Interview Practices**

- **Plan neutral, non-binary questions**
- **Encourage storytelling**
- **Observe body language**
- **Give wait time, embrace pauses**
- **Avoid providing responses**

RELAY/GSE

The slide features a blue header with the title 'Empathy Interview Practices'. Below the header is an illustration of a Zoom meeting with two participants. To the right of the illustration is a bulleted list of five practices. At the bottom left of the slide is the text 'RELAY/GSE'.

Several faculty did not require the empathy interviews, noting that not every student wants a personal relationship over Zoom. Bernie said, “Not everyone signs up...And so that's something I would say, the strategy that...I heavily relied on, but then it didn't work for everyone.” Faculty did believe they had stronger relationships with students who opted into the empathy conversations. Eileen shared, “I often found that the people who came to those optional beginning of year office hours were the people with whom I had the closest relationships.”

**Taking notes during 1:1 meetings.** Faculty consistently stated they took notes during their individual conversations with students, either during the beginning of year empathy interview or during office hours. Faculty referenced their notes each time they followed-up with the student. Faculty did this to promote positive relationship building, bridging the gap during

virtual meetings to ensure graduate students felt a personal connection. Katie said, “Anytime I’ll meet with a student I will...look back at notes that I’ve taken about... previous conversations we’ve had or things that I’ve noticed in supporting the student. And I think that that’s a really key thing that helps the grad student to feel seen, you know.” Their notes allowed faculty to ask personal questions based on previously gathered information. Kevin said, “When I meet with them [students], I pull up my running record, if they go, you know, you told me that you liked running...on the west side, you know, have you kept up with it...And so I think it’s that type of information gathering.”

Research showed the importance of building relationships between instructors and students to combat feelings of isolation online (Scull et al., 2020, Boiling et al., 2012). Bernie agreed this approach helped him to strengthen relationship building during the COVID-19 pandemic. He said, “I like to take notes for things that people tell me because then I can bring them up and then that makes them feel really seen. For example, a grad student yesterday at office hours, she just got an opportunity to coach in her school. And I took a note from our beginning conversation, and I’m like, I knew that... you’ve been really interested in doing that.” These personal follow-ups helped him to build relationships when he saw students less frequently overall. Bernie said, “So those are the types of things I think help people see that there’s a through line. Maybe we only talk a couple of times [per] semester because of COVID, but I am taking notes to try to capture who people are to really bring that alive.”

Relay faculty preplanned the strategies they commonly used to build relationships, empathy conversations and taking notes. Faculty were aware this risked perception as mechanical or engineered. As a result, faculty thought a lot about communicating with authenticity. For example, Bernie pushed himself to be vulnerable during conversations with



students, noting his positional power. He reflects, “Authentic relationship[s] do not work where one person knows a lot about one person [and the] other person doesn't know much. My strategy in those empathy conversations was to be vulnerable...[I am] in a position of relative power...I wanted them to know, I am indeed human and make mistakes a lot and have as an educator.” Kevin named related concerns about being authentic in advisor relationships. He said, “I hate when our work specifically feels transactional. And so I try to spend a lot of my advisement time, kind of, you know, building relationships.”

### **Community Building**

In addition to building positive relationships with graduate students individually, faculty also took action to create opportunities for collaboration and group relationship building among their classes.

Sasha got creative. She took the empathy interviews described earlier and made them into a whole group experience. She explained, “I had a Google spreadsheet of different questions...So like, when's your birthday? Where are you from? What are you proud of like? It's fun get to know you stuff. But also...What are your goals? What are your fears?...I gave them time in class to look at everyone's answers. So then they got to comment back on other people.” Since Sasha had also shared her own responses, she felt the impact of the activity was two-fold, “It creates a good group culture, but I think it got them to trust me and think of me as like a colleague in this work, in addition to a professor.”

**Community Circles or Professional Learning Groups.** About half the faculty interviewed utilized community circles or professional learning groups in their weekly live classroom sessions. The format varied slightly among faculty, but the general concept was that

within a larger class, smaller groups meet regularly. Typically, faculty reserved time for community circles in the first 15-20 minutes of their live class session. Community circles was a practice that Relay New York faculty also participated in themselves. In 2021, Relay New York staff met in small groups for 20 minutes prior to the monthly campus meeting.

Kevin described his model for groups, “They range from like, probably three to six. Sometimes the opening prompt is just checking in, how are you doing? I usually add something topical, like icebreakers. You know, what's your favorite subway seat?” This gave the students time to greet one another and get comfortable. Kevin then paired the same groups together later for a content-specific learning activity.

Bernie utilized professional learning groups prior to the pandemic. He said, “In typical years, I had it very structured where we'd have a shared text, a podcast, we'd listened throughout the semester.” During the pandemic, Bernie shifted how he used the time in response to students’ needs, “it just didn't make sense to do that during this time. Because...they just didn't have time to listen to those things or read those things. Instead, it was a lot of tell your people what's going on. What is a good thing that happened this week? What is the challenge? And so there's a lot of community building.” The dedicated time to process their experiences in community was similar to other institutions’ approach during the pandemic (Hoppey et al., 2021, Scull et al., 2020). Bernie also considered how it made students feel about him as their instructor, “I think that enabled grad students to understand through my decisions and class that it mattered to me to know how they're doing on the emotional level, on the personal level.”

Faculty envisioned community circles as safe places, for teachers to collaborate and even to commiserate. Joseph explained, “I think there is a book about ‘Don't Go into the Teacher's

Room,' or something like that, and that's BS. Come on...you should do that! You should be getting to know your colleagues.” For Joseph, community circles provided that sense of personal connection, “Getting something off your chest and letting your shoulders come down and getting advice on something is really important, so that's a space for it too.” Kevin agreed, “One of my norms that I always talk about is commiseration vs. collaboration...One of the reasons we do these community groups is...just you checking in with each other. You commiserate all you want there, you know, talk about how terrible it is, and how awful it is, and etc.” Kevin made sure dialogue did not end there, however, saying, “When it is time to collaborate, hopefully, you know, they've vented, they've expressed, they've heard, they've gotten what they've what they've needed, so it's like a mix of both.”

Tim shared how his thinking about community builders evolved during his time at Relay. Tim said, “We've had this focus on sense of belonging the past few years, and culturally responsive teaching. And I think, when you make that your emphasis, and you model for teachers, the types of questions and spaces that you want them to create for their own students, by building in 10 to 15 minutes at the beginning of class, it really sets the tone.”

Some faculty did not organize formal groupings via community circles. Instead, they relied on more informal community builders or icebreakers at the beginning of class sessions. Eileen said, “I always started class with...a community builder. Sometimes it would be related to the content. And sometimes it wasn't. Because I think that's a good opportunity to learn things about people that you might not otherwise learn.” Even in the online realm, Eileen's students chose to share personal details. Eileen noted her surprise at this willingness, “I think it's really interesting to me, the things that people choose to share about themselves in those kinds of activities...it helps people make connections and helped me connect with graduate students.”

Eileen felt that community builders struck a different chord during the pandemic, “By the nature of being a new teacher, and a pandemic, being a graduate student, there is just this, like inherent sense for many people of vulnerability.”

Katie had a different experience, stating, “I did not do community circles, which many colleagues have mentioned and had success with.” Katie related her decision to her own experience, “I am cognizant just how hard it is to be on Zoom and to be vulnerable. That's even something that's hard for me, among colleagues that I know and trust, and so I have opted more towards community builders that are kind of aligned to a theme.”

**Finding #4:** The COVID-19 pandemic heightened levels of familiarity in faculty and graduate student relationships. Faculty needed to demonstrate self-awareness in order to navigate the new, blurred lines of intimacy with success.

Faculty and graduate students both experienced personal, concurrent effects of the global pandemic. In addition, technology platforms like Zoom became normalized and easier to access to communicate online. Together, these factors contributed to more familial and frequent interactions.

**Virtual Office Hours.** Relay New York faculty offered office hours prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. During the pandemic, faculty reported seeing more students in office hours than ever before. Katie said, “I really have leaned into office hours, and I think, saw that as an opportunity to connect with students in the ways that I would often do informally in class. And I think, thinking back to before the pandemic, I wouldn't really spend as much time in office hours as I do now.”

Tim believed more students wanted a point of connection during a difficult time. This reflects findings in the literature review that teachers were experiencing high levels of stress and reporting feelings of disconnect (Diliberti et al., 2021, Reich et al., 2020). Tim said, “I saw a lot more people in office hours than I had ever before...it was a huge increase in the number of people signing up and wanting that one on one time to connect.”

Technology may have increased the frequency of office hours conversations that faculty had with teachers. Graduate students were using platforms such as Zoom in their daily work. They became fluent with how to use the technology and it had become more broadly normalized as a form of communication (Glenn et al., 2020). Joseph shared, “I was seeing my graduate students way more often than I did before the pandemic...ease of actually getting on Zoom and

everyone was using it...was just a natural thing to do like, hey? Let's just hop on and talk this through." Joseph preferred this ease of creating touchpoints, "Whereas before it'd be like, hey, let's schedule a meeting. I'll be at your school in four weeks from today...the normal was not actually that effective."

At the same time, platforms like Zoom introduced unique challenges. Video calls opened both parties to their respective personal lives. Tim talked about this exchange, "There are some situations where I've built even stronger relationships with them [students] than I would in person. In those cases, it's those office hour calls one on one, where we're literally in each other's homes." Tim reflected, "There is something very powerful about...just seeing each other's backgrounds, right, seeing each other's families. I met teachers, kids and pets, and partners, and that was something that I had never experienced before."

Mia leveraged this newfound closeness as an opportunity to build relationships in the virtual realm. She said, "I tend to first ask teachers to not blur their backgrounds, and to not put up fake backgrounds because I want to see what their life is like. And I usually thank them for letting me into their home or into their classroom, because those are really personal spaces." Mia then asked students about something she sees, for example, "Oh, I see that you have like a monstera plant in the background. I also have one but mine is not doing very well. How do you keep it alive?" Mia's questioning is purposeful. She explained, "These are like genuinely true questions. But it also humanizes a person they've never seen in the flesh. It makes it clear that, yes, I care about your success at Relay, but we also share an interest."

In return, some faculty chose to share their personal lives. For Joseph, this was a way of modeling for graduate students how they can do the same with their own students. Joseph said, "I also try very hard to weave in my personal story...[and] my personal house into my teaching. I

just think it's really important to be doing that, and to [be] showcasing how we build community and how they might be able to do that with their students, too.” Joseph made space in his live class session to include his two small children. He explained, “Classes are from six to eight thirty. It's in the middle of bedtime for my two kiddos, and each of them comes down in the middle [of] class and says, good night...I pick him up, [he] says hello to everybody. He says good night to everybody, gives me a kiss, and then he goes to bed.”

**Demonstrating self-awareness.** Faculty increased their availability to hold space for graduate students and ensure they felt supported. During the increased quantity of office hours, faculty needed to play a supportive role. There was a tension here, because faculty were not immune to the effects of the pandemic. Every faculty member interviewed spoke to the complexity of being a consistent support and being human during a tumultuous time. Literature on teaching during a crisis affirms these same challenges (Carlson et al, 2010; Lowery & Burts, 2007). Ben summarized the emotional drain, “How do I support people in this time of uncertainty when I myself am experiencing enormous amounts of anxiety and fear and frustration?”

Faculty demonstrated self-awareness by identifying their emotions. Kevin named, “I'm experiencing the same pandemic they're experiencing, experiencing the same feelings of languishing....disconnect, living in virtual worlds.” Mia connected her emotions to her work with graduate students. She said, “We have people, we've lost people, we've lost teammates, we've lost family...One of the hardest things to do as a professor is to ask your students for empathy. And so it's exhausting to be brave for them.”

Faculty needed to navigate this new normal with self-awareness. They were talking with students individually more than ever before, and doing so in personal vulnerable contexts. All

while experiencing their own challenges. Faculty had to consistently be clear about their own emotions, and then link those to their purpose, values. Bernie's reflection demonstrated his self-awareness. Bernie said, "When you're driving a ship of a cohort of a lot of humans, and you're also experiencing COVID, and you're also experiencing burnout...it was hard to maintain face, but then in the same way, that's what I had to do. And so that's what I did." Bernie's sense of purpose as an educator informed his decision to show up for students, "I wanted to be the best I could be for them and to create that culture that they needed and deserved...I had to put their needs a lot of times before my own."



**Finding #5:** Faculty’s detailed descriptions of student experiences during the pandemic is indicative of strong social awareness. Faculty readily took students’ perspectives, recognized their strengths, and demonstrated empathy and compassion.

Faculty’s increase in office hours discussed in Finding #4, along with relationship skills discusses in Finding #3, informed their strong personal knowledge of student experiences during the pandemic. When asked how the pandemic affected graduate students, every faculty responded with specific examples of how the pandemic affected individual students.

Mia gave an account of a detailed memory that has stayed with her. She said,

“I remember meeting with a teacher one day and she was in her mask in her classroom while she was on a prep period. And it was so hot in her classroom that her mask - she was wearing a surgical mask - her condensation from breathing had made her mask wet. But she couldn't take it off. She was afraid to take it off. So she just kept putting new ones on over it. And just the breathing and the sweat from her face in her June hot classroom. I was like, can you find a room that you don't have to wear that just for half an hour? And she was like, I'm not taking it off. But we're gonna meet you know, and it's like that kind of commitment to have to breathe through three wet masks just to talk about an assessment you have coming up. No, no, I will never forget seeing that ever.”

**Taking students’ perspective.** Faculty were aware that students experienced illness themselves or in their personal networks. At the beginning of the pandemic, New York was an epicenter. Katie said, "I also think the trauma, for lack of a better word, of being a teacher in New York City during that time, was particularly pronounced. Many students experienced loss directly within their family or peripherally. Many students got sick themselves.” Kevin added,

“I had several students lose parents, loved ones, grandparents to COVID. I had a student that was unable to travel back to her country, because of COVID restrictions, and immigration status...so she was unable to say bye to her mom.”

Ben pointed out related stressors occurring during the same time. Ben said, “While all that's happening, there's also these incredible political crises. Black life is constantly threatened. Our democracy is tenuous. Seditious attacks on our state, our national capital, there's all these other things happening.” Ben took the perspective of his students in this context, “While teachers are navigating fears around getting sick, they're also navigating fears around national stability and the safety for their lives and the people that they love and their students' lives.”

Faculty knew about the pressures that graduate students were under in their full-time jobs. Some first year students who would have had an on-ramp of mentorship became classroom teachers right away. Eileen said, “The graduate students who I worked with were not all full time classroom teachers. Then when the pandemic hit, they were because everybody needed to be doing everything all the time. And so my graduate students were thrust into roles.” Kevin echoed this impact of staffing shortages, “Every conversation I have with teachers is about, you know, my co-teacher is out sick or my co-teacher quit and so like so staffing seems to really to be a big crunch. I think related to that, obviously is that personal toll.” Tim also noted how graduate students felt the impact of the pandemic on their own students, “I heard many stories about teachers losing touch with students that they had worked closely with in person, kids just not showing up to class and just losing track of them over the course of the pandemic.”

Mia recognized the financial insecurities caused by the pandemic. She said, “The pandemic took a huge toll on teachers' financial security. Many of them became caregivers to older family members...Many of them lost side jobs that they held, which is ridiculous that

teachers have side jobs. Many of them had to change their financial priorities with caregiving for their own children.” This posed a risk to graduate students’ pursuit of their teaching certification, because certification exams are an added cost. Mia understood how this stressor contributed to student action, “It’s not lost on me that money creates trauma...many of the responses I would get from teachers were trauma responses, associated with a fear of not having money because you have to pay to keep your job.”

**Demonstrating empathy.** Faculty recognized that they were asking graduate students to do something they had never done before, a relative first for Relay faculty. Relay’s hiring model requires that all faculty are prior P-12 teachers with a record of accomplishment in the classroom. In the past, faculty had a shared experience with their graduate students because they had once been in their shoes as a first- or second-year teacher. During the pandemic, graduate students teaching online or in-person with COVID precautions were practicing types of teaching that Relay faculty had never done or mastered. Mia spoke plainly about this difference. She adeptly saw from the student perspective, “I’ve never been a pandemic online teacher, I’ve never had to lead a science classroom where kids weren’t allowed to move because there’s still social distancing. I’ve only been able to facilitate labs where my kids can stand next to each other. Like, what a cluster right?” Similarly, Eileen added on, “At first, especially, folks would say, how do I teach phonics to kindergarteners online? And I would say, like, heck, if I know! I’ve never done that, right? It really put my graduate students in this position of an expert, much more than me.”

Faculty understanding of students’ circumstances manifested into compassion for graduate students. Kevin said, “I would never ask you to do anything that I didn’t do myself, or, I wouldn’t do myself...I’ve never taught kids virtually...I kind of feel bad holding a bar that I’ve never actually met myself.” For Jeff, the personal responsibility he felt hit hard. Jeff said, “In

our roles, as advisors and instructional fellows and coaches...there was a sense of powerlessness that we felt because we were not on that front end of helping students like K-12 students.”

Faculty’s social awareness, knowing they were asking students to do something they had not done before, led them to act with empathy and respond by affirming student experience. Faculty spoke to common statements they used to reiterate their support. Mia said, “What I said over and over, probably 100 times was, all of us, myself included, are being asked to do something perfectly that no one was trained to do.” Tim was aware that students might not want solutions, just an empathetic listening ear. He said:

“What I would always try to do is just model that listening and, you know, validating and affirming the many challenges that they were experiencing. I was always careful to not jump to offering advice, right, because I think sometimes people don't want that in the moment. They don't want you to be a problem solver. It might even be a trigger for them. Sometimes it's good just to listen and just be like, yeah, this really sucks right now. I am so sorry that you're going through this. I'm so sorry that your students are going through this. We're going to just continue to do the best we can to support each other and one another. I think, that refrain, even though I probably said it, hundreds of times, I meant it every time. And I think that they did feel that, at least I hope.”

**Recognize students’ strengths.** Faculty’s social awareness made them quick to perceive student strengths. Faculty articulated respect and admiration for their students.

Faculty repeatedly named graduate student perseverance as a strength, as well as their commitment to their K-12 students. Eileen said, “They just kept doing it. They kept teaching. Whether it was on the computer or at school, they kept doing it every day. And you know how hard that is not during a pandemic, and the fact that these are brand new teachers who did not

sign up for this, and they just kept going to school every day.” Not only did students keep going, they also continued to improve. Eileen went on to say, “They were still saying, but how can I make this better for my students? Right, what can I do to make this better? And that's just so hard and really admirable.”

Bernie also noticed graduate students' desire to provide a strong student experience. Bernie said, “I think the strengths particularly were people stayed focused on students, they really wanted to do the best by students.” Mia noted this commitment to students as well, “I would say next to nurses and health care providers, teachers are the strongest damn people on the planet. There is such a deep commitment that they had to kids, to schools, and to families. It's not even a do whatever it takes, because even that has limitations. But, it's a self-sacrifice position.”

Faculty noted graduate student innovation during a time of crisis as a theme. Graduate students' willingness and ability to innovate impressed Ben. Ben said, “Students were constantly bringing in new technologies and new platforms and new techniques for virtual learning that were just impressive and impressive period, and particularly impressive in the timeframe in which they learned them while navigating grad school and being a first year teacher...I think is definitely a strength.”

Katie pointed to strengths of flexibility, resiliency, and vulnerability. She said,

“I think flexibility just in navigating the many challenges that came immediately with shifting online, whether it was technology or access or collaborating with colleagues. I think resiliency in their commitment to staying the course in our program, staying the course throughout the year. And I also think just a strength is vulnerability, I've worked with a few students now that come to mind who are very open about challenges they may have experienced or struggles with their own mental health. And I

think it's a hard space to be in, particularly when you want to be successful and you are steeped in the identity of a teacher. But I think that vulnerability is a real strength.”

Bernie also added, “They wanted to be in community with each other. Certainly a strength that they brought. I think people maintain some form of optimism, you know, through these experiences and with each other.”

**Finding #6:** In each stage of the pandemic, faculty continuously innovated their instruction and flexed course policies in response to situational demands. Faculty felt tension between support they offered during the heights of the pandemic and a pull to return to pre-COVID norms.

**Changes to course policies and instruction.** Faculty responded to their knowledge of student circumstances discussed in Finding #5 by making changes to their course policy and curriculum. The most frequently cited change among faculty interviewed was modifications to a late submission policy. Prior to the pandemic, Relay had a national late policy for assignment submissions. Assignments submitted past deadline without an extension request would receive a -10% score deduction. Faculty could use some discretion when applying this policy.

During the pandemic, some faculty made the decision to loosen or eliminate the late policy. Ben said, “My late policy became significantly more generous.” Tim connected the changes to empathy, saying, “It was just coming from that place of empathy, where, I get it, you are going through some crazy stuff right now at your school, or in your personal life. And we've just got to be flexible.” Kevin did not apply the -10% late policy often, finding it hard to reconcile with what he knew about the challenges facing graduate students. Kevin said, “It's kind of hard to disconnect being a professor from being an advisor...I find it [-10% late penalty] very difficult to give, I give it very selectively, and rarely.” Eileen was even more decisive, crediting her evolving priorities. Eileen said, “Oh, I threw late submissions out the window. And, you know, ultimately, I mean, I don't think it was because of the pandemic so much as because like, I shifted the kind of things that I cared about, which may, I mean, maybe the pandemic was a good nudge.”

While supportive in the moment, relaxing the late policy could have an unintended impact on students' on-time graduation. In some cases, faculty were confident it was the right

support for students. Tim said, “I was much more accepting of late work in a way that I hadn't been...And, you know, I think the thing that I am most proud of is that I got 100% of that cohort to graduate. We did it.” In other scenarios, students had difficulty navigating without the accountability of hard deadlines and had a pile up of late work at the end of term. Katie said, “I issued a policy where there was a blanket extension...it removed the late penalty for assignments. I think that, though, did lead to some hard moments at the end of the term where that flexibility then did not lead to graduate student success.” Katie did not have a perfect solution yet, “That's something I've thought a lot about is how to continue to hold that high expectation in a time of crisis.”

In addition to changes to the late policy, faculty also made modifications to assignments in order to respond to the demands of the pandemic on teachers. Bernie shared how his faculty team applied the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework to create more options for students. “It used to be where the capstone or the culminating project was 100% written. And we changed that so they can record their reflection...we increased universal design for learning.” Ben agreed with this approach to diversify student options. He was, “...infinitely more flexible in terms of how folks are expressing their expertise and their knowledge base.” Bernie also discussed case study options, for example, “Typically grad students were asked to work with a student in their school community. Given the demands of finding space to do that we opted to provide a case study student option.” Bernie believed this helped, but again was not without adverse cost, “I think the rigor is maintained in a lot of ways, but then some of the authentic practices lessened.”

Faculty continuously reflected on how students were experiencing the pandemic to inform choices they made in their live class session. Katie said, “It's caused me to shorten my



sessions, just because I'm wary of screen time, and has made me recognize...how much we can cut and how much teachers appreciate brevity.” Bernie echoed the stress that teachers experienced on their time, saying, “We significantly increased the opportunities for work time during class, because scarcity was time.” Katie also made new instructional choices during the session due to larger class sizes. Katie said, “I think now, I teach a group of 55. And my instruction has shifted as well towards a lot less whole group conversation, just because that feels difficult in terms of ensuring equity of voice.” Katie incorporated breakout rooms on Zoom.

The changes that faculty made throughout the different waves of the pandemic represented hours of additional work. Mia detailed the breadth of changes:

“When we were 100%, working from home, I had to restructure all of my pedagogical examples to an online learning setting. Okay, I've never taught kids online. I was shooting from the hip...And now I'm teaching as a remote teacher to teachers who are teaching in person, but I'm used to teaching this in person... now I'm teaching people how to do something in a way that's not comfortable for me. Right? I feel like this is the fourth year in a row that we have to do something for the first time. That's really exhausting.”

As her interview ended, Mia named, “This has been a valuable reflection process for me, because I've been trying to put a pin on why as an educator, I'm so tired. Because we've been innovating for four years. I'm not a new teacher...this is not new work to me. But we're trying to keep people happy and alive and healthy and invested and make them good teachers. No one taught us how to do that.”

**Striking a balance of support.** After witnessing the adverse effect that unlimited flexibility had on some students, faculty were interested in finding the “just-right” level of

support moving forward. Kevin said, “I think the COVID pandemic made me be even more flexible in terms of, no worries, literally no questions asked. But, what I will say is that, I don't know if I've had this kind of boomerang effect.” Kevin now offers extensions for assignments in one or two week intervals, “I self-corrected more recently, where I've tried to set firmer deadlines.... I think I'm just trying to reel it back in...I now found myself really renegotiating it.”

Faculty still recognized the continued impact of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Bernie summarized, “Maybe people are not getting as sick right now, but the impact is the trauma of many experiences on students...on school communities.” The pressure of learning gaps was one example of an ongoing impact. Bernie explained, “Kids are behind grade level, and teachers are trying to teach them grade level content, while filling the gaps and scaffolding up is really challenging...And so the demands feel just as intense.”

Striking the right balance was important to faculty that care about teaching teachers. Kevin said, “Navigating this fine line between, ultimately, maintaining high expectations for adults... because the extension of their work is the experience and learning of kids.” Even though some policies might return to pre-pandemic standards, faculty doubted they would lose sight of what they learned. Mia said, “But the empathy never... isn't gonna go away. I think what I asked of them in terms of deliverables, I feel like I'm getting back to normal. I always joke that it's back to like 2019 BC, before COVID. So I feel like I'm okay with the academic work, but the route to get there and the empathy required, I don't think I will ever, I'm not, I can't let that go.”

**Mixed feelings about continuing virtual instruction.** Faculty had mixed emotions about Relay remaining an online learning experience. Bernie expressed concern that engagement was not as high in the virtual classroom. He inferred this might also contribute to higher student satisfaction rates, because graduate students' participation lightened. Bernie said,

“I will say that students do not engage as strongly in class as they did in the real world. You know, classes, cameras are off, even with resetting norms and all kinds of things....they don't feel as high as expectations to show up in a lot of ways, which does feel good. Yeah, that's an important part of the data that I feel, it really tells the narrative of that data that I want to push back on.”

Cameras being off is a theme in faculty reflections on the challenges of a virtual format long-term. Tim said, “I think teaching online was a struggle at first for me, and I think it still is. I really don't like when people have their cameras off, and you're just talking to a bunch of black boxes, it just feels like not what I had signed up for, and less meaningful.” Katie shared a similar experience, “it's usually only a handful of 55 teachers that have cameras on and are actively showing their face.”

Tim lamented students turning cameras off, while trying to be understanding. Tim again saw from the student perspective, “I always try to be mindful of the fact like, hey, you've had a really long day, right? Maybe you just took your work clothes off, and you're settling down... I know, some of my grad students this year are parents and so maybe they're holding their kid or something. I get why you might not want to have a camera on.” That said, Tim returned to the drawbacks, “It's just hard to build a relationship with a black screen. Right? So I think, unfortunately, there's a lot of grad students the past couple of years that I never saw their face and I just didn't get to know that well.”

Before COVID-19, Relay faculty visited graduate student classrooms in-person for a clinical observation at least twice a year. Faculty talked about missing elements of in-person observations. Tim said, “Prior to this, it used to be like, hey, we're gonna walk the streets, we're gonna go into these classrooms...I felt more of a connection to the teachers. Now we just watch

videos and sometimes it's like a very poorly angled video where all I can see is the teacher at the board. I can't even see the kids, you know, and it's just I missed that.” Katie said, “It was so much more meaningful to get a chance to see teachers in their classrooms and to express my support and development, literally showing up. And I feel so different now.”

Some faculty were in full support of the virtual model. Sasha saw the benefit for students who also had full-time teaching roles. She said, “Not asking students to commute after a long day's work is just one of the best gifts we can provide them...just more time, more energy back to them.” Sasha also liked the ability to see her graduate students quickly on Zoom, “When you're on Zoom, you could really see, ooh, what's everyone else doing. Pros/cons to everything, but I do think I like teaching online more than in-person.”

**Desire for formal skill development.** Faculty hinted that they would like additional professional development for teaching online. A handful of faculty referenced a single training Relay hosted at the beginning of the pandemic. Tim said, “At first, I think we got one, maybe two-hour PD session on how to teach online and, you know, credit to the online team, it was probably one of the best PD’s I've ever been to. We still ended up having to do a lot of trial and error from there...I wish that we had gotten a little bit more support when it came to our online teaching.”

Faculty recognized the benefits of follow-up observations and formal development. Katie said, “While we had that initial training related to teaching online, we then very quickly were able to figure out how to translate our systems into an online space. But I do think I still would benefit from development related to instruction online, particularly since that's the direction we're going as an organization.” Katie later added, “I also felt like there was a significant loosening just in terms of accountability where I don't think I was ever observed

teaching online. And that was a big part of what teaching in person was.” Kevin agreed, “But outside of that first fall...we kind of stopped doing PD in a lot of ways like we used to.”

## RECOMMENDATIONS

**Recommendation #1:** Relay should monitor future institutional survey data for evidence of continued faculty social and emotional competencies perceived by graduate students. Relay faculty should reflect on their individual survey data for evidence of social and emotional competence.

As recently as January 30, 2023, the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus maintained that COVID-19 is a global health emergency (Dillinger, 2023). Similarly, Xavier Becerra, the United States Health and Human Services secretary, renewed a public health emergency declaration on January 11, 2023. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to be a pressing health crisis with far-reaching impact. For teachers in New York City, the impact is felt daily in staffing shortages, absences due to illnesses, and learning loss in students. With the pandemic and its rippling effects far from over, it will be important to monitor institutional survey data for evidence of continued faculty social and emotional competencies (SEC) perceived by graduate students at Relay.

Rationale for continued monitoring of faculty SEC is two-fold. First, Relay should ensure the current positive spike in student perception of faculty's social and emotional competence continues. In particular, this is critical as the pandemic continues. Second, literature affirms the benefits of teachers with social and emotional competence in the classroom environment and on student success. Faculty with SEC are better positioned to recognize and respond effectively to student emotion (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009).

This study recommends that Relay monitor future institutional survey data for evidence of faculty demonstration of social and emotional competence. This can occur at the leadership level and through individual faculty member analysis.

**Recommendation 1.1:** When Relay leadership analyze trends in the institutional survey data, special attention should be paid to questions regarding faculty that will lend insight into their use of SEC. The questions used in this study offered valuable insight on faculty SEC. The questions recommended are:

1. Why did you choose this (NPS) rating? (Open-ended)
2. Please indicate your level of satisfaction with the following aspects of your Relay GSE experience: The quality of the core and content teaching faculty (Likert scale: Very Dissatisfied, Dissatisfied, Somewhat Dissatisfied, Somewhat Satisfied, Satisfied, Very Satisfied)
3. Please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statement: I feel supported by a faculty or staff member at Relay. (Likert scale: Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Somewhat Disagree, Somewhat Agree, Agree, Strongly Agree)
4. What are the strengths of our program? (Open-ended)

There is increased opportunity to monitor faculty SEC in the future, because Relay's research team has added new survey questions as of spring 2022. Relevant, new questions include:

1. Please indicate your level of satisfaction with the following aspects of your Relay experience:
  - a. Teaching faculty responsiveness (Likert scale: Very Dissatisfied, Dissatisfied, Somewhat Dissatisfied, Somewhat Satisfied, Satisfied, Very Satisfied)

- b. Teaching faculty modeling culturally responsive and inclusive practices  
(Likert scale: Very Dissatisfied, Dissatisfied, Somewhat Dissatisfied,  
Somewhat Satisfied, Satisfied, Very Satisfied)

**Recommendation 1.2:** In addition to analyzing trends as an institution, monitoring these trends can occur on an individual basis. Relay faculty complete a standard reflection template each round of survey data. Faculty review their personal survey results and institutional survey results to consider trends in the data and personalize action steps. Faculty then share their reflections with their managers, who also review their individual survey data. There is additional opportunity here to add prompts into the reflection template that require faculty to look for evidence of SEC in student responses. A sample reflection prompt might be, “How did you demonstrate social and emotional competence this term? Where in the data do you see evidence of your SEC?”



**Recommendation #2:** Faculty best practices for building positive relationships with students should be included in new faculty onboarding.

Faculty interviewed in this study demonstrated strong relationships skills. This study recommends the following practices for building positive student relationships based on findings:

1. Beginning of academic year empathy interviews/conversations with individual graduate students
2. Taking personal notes during 1:1 office hours or meeting times to be used for continuity and follow-up
3. Community Circle groupings during live class sessions

**Recommendation 2.1:** Faculty should conduct empathy interviews at the beginning of each school year. In a virtual learning environment, with an average of 50+ students on Zoom during live sessions, Relay faculty are not able to rely only on class times to build meaningful personal relationships. Strong interpersonal relationships between faculty and students are important for graduate student success. Positive student-teacher relationships inform academic achievement, as student motivation and engagement is stronger (Pianta, Steinberg, & Rollins, 1995; Wang & Holcombe, 2010). Strong relationships also help to combat the isolation of virtual environments (Scull et al. 2020; Boiling et al., 2012). By reserving time at the beginning of the year to get to know their students, faculty build a foundation of connection and trust. This also allows faculty to build positive relationships at scale (Maslach & Leiter, 1999).

**Recommendation 2.2:** Faculty should take notes during their individual meeting times with graduate students in office hours throughout the year. Relay faculty frequently cited this best practice during interviews in this study. Faculty would review past notes prior to meeting

with a student, allowing them to ask personal questions about their progress towards goals or updates on their interests. This created a continuity of dialogue, despite the disruption of personal touchpoints caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Especially during the ongoing pandemic, providing space to connect with graduate students for support and processing is an important practice (Quezada, et al., 2020).

**Recommendation 2.3:** Faculty should create smaller groupings, i.e. community circles, in their larger classes. As the faculty interviewed shared, smaller groups that meet consistently are able to build more personal relationships than when interacting in the larger group settings. Community circles provide space for informal check-ins, academic prompts related to coursework, or themes based on cultural events (Hoppey et al., 2021; Scull et al., 2020). Given that teachers reported feelings of disconnect during the pandemic, community circles are also an important practice for peer relationship building (Reich et al., 2020).

**Recommendation #3:** Relay faculty and students developed close personal bonds during the pandemic. This study recommends Relay take increased action to maintain these close relationships with alumni via faculty relationships.

This study found that faculty developed strong, personal relationships with graduate students who they taught during the pandemic. Amidst the stress and anxiety of teaching during a crisis, graduate students found solace in office hours with professors who demonstrated self-awareness. As mentioned, alumni who graduated in 2021 and 2022 reported the highest ever NPS scores and feelings of satisfaction about their Relay experience. This is an important subset of students to maintain engagement with over time.

Relay's Alumni Affairs team might consider how to utilize faculty and student bonds to cultivate long-term relationships with alumni teachers. Approximately 90% of Relay alumni from the last six years are still working in the field of education (Relay Alumni, n.d.). Currently, Relay has an Alumni & Student Advisory Council (ASAC). The council meets once monthly during the school year to discuss continuous improvement for Relay as an institution. Missing from this dialogue are topics relevant for alumni only, including ways in which alumni can continue to engage with faculty and Relay as an institution. Relay has a community of 12,743 alumni. In comparison, Relay's Instagram account for Relay Alumni has 229 followers. There is room for growth in alumni engagement, and their relationships with faculty may be key.

**Recommendation #4:** Relay can learn from faculty innovation of online instruction to inform future staff training. Current faculty desire more feedback and direct training on continued improvement in online learning.

**Recommendation 4.1:** As Relay transitions to an updated model that is fully online and national in the 2023-2024 school year, this study recommends leveraging the experience of veteran faculty who taught online in school years 19-20 through 22-23. Relay leadership can use these learnings to formalize staff training in exemplary online instruction.

Faculty interviews in this study revealed the ways in which they innovated modes of online instruction to maximize student engagement and community. Faculty now have a bank of knowledge based on three years of leading virtual instruction with positive results. Their insights are critical to the organization's long-term success as an online institution of learning.

An internal survey is an easy start to gleaning faculty's experiences. Prompts in an internal survey might include:

- What tools and techniques have been most effective for leading live sessions online? Why?
- What tools and techniques have been least effective? Why?
- What supports have you implemented for students during the COVID-19 pandemic that you think are worth extending? Why?

The last question will also help illuminate supports that faculty have utilized that they believe should continue in the ongoing pandemic. In interviews, examples of these were extension requests on assignments.

**Recommendation 4.2:** Relay should (re)implement feedback loops between faculty and managers focused on the quality of their online instruction. During interviews, faculty

mentioned formal observations occur less frequently since moving to online instruction.

Instructors should be observed at least once per term and offered feedback aligned to Relay's faculty rubric. As written, the faculty rubric does not currently detail criteria for effectiveness in the virtual environment. Relay should consider revising the faculty rubric to reflect the online nature of the 2.0 program.

A theme in faculty interviews was the desire for more formal training in online instruction. Faculty received one formal training from the online learning team at the beginning of the pandemic. Afterwards, they relied on trial and error and word of mouth to determine modes of virtual instruction. Relay should consider planning additional online learning trainings, based on the overall best practices found in recommendation 4.1

## CONCLUSION

The goal of this study was to provide Relay leadership with best practices for teaching and advising graduate students during an ongoing pandemic. By exploring the root causes behind increased NPS scores and affirming student survey results, particularly during a time of amplified stressors on teachers, this study was able to affirm the demonstration of social and emotional competence by Relay faculty. Relay faculty acted intentionally to build positive relationships, demonstrate social and self-awareness, and continually innovated instruction to better student experience. This study's findings underscored how Relay faculty are the driving force behind positive student experience. I hope that recommendations from this study help to inform Relay leadership's ongoing planning for faculty development.

On a personal note, this study helped me to process, codify, and admire the full commitment of teaching faculty throughout a global crisis. I concluded every faculty interview by asking if there was anything I should know about their approach to teaching and advising during the pandemic that I had not asked yet. Mia's response, shared below, is emblematic of the abundant compassion and care towards teachers demonstrated by Relay faculty. I conclude this study with Mia's words:

“I think it's less what you should know, and more so, what any reader of your work should know. Society needs to go easy on teachers for a little while. They are in a politicized, traumatized, economically disadvantaged, and highly criticized field. No teacher goes to work wanting to do bad, wanting to do poorly, wanting to fail kids. The overarching message is: if society could go a little easier on teachers, their jobs will be made exponentially easier.”

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Email Communication to Faculty

#### Email Invitation to Information Session

Hi all! Thank you again for your time in T&T yesterday morning. As I shared, the focus of my study is the growth in positive student experience at Relay during the COVID-19 pandemic. I am exploring the social and emotional competencies of Relay faculty towards graduate students, with the goal of codifying strategies and learnings. I will be hosting an optional information session about my study today at 2pm. Please stop by if you are interested in participating but may have additional questions. Look forward to seeing you! ZOOM: <https://relay.zoom.us/j/9965851985> Passcode: 540729

#### Email Follow-up after Faculty Meeting

Hi NY Faculty,

I hope everyone had a good start to the week! As I shared during T&T, I am beginning my dissertation at Vanderbilt University, Peabody College and **I am reaching out to see if you would be interested in participating in my capstone study**. The focus of my study is the growth in positive student experience at Relay during the COVID-19 pandemic. I am exploring the social and emotional competencies of Relay faculty towards graduate students, with the goal of codifying strategies and learnings.

I am seeking study participants who taught at Relay during SY 2019-2020 and SY202-2022. Your participation would be an interview that would last approximately 1 hour, held during the weeks of 10/31 and 11/7. **If you are interested in participating, you can schedule a time using this link**. If you do not see a preferred time available, please reach out directly – I would be happy to work with your schedule! Your participation in this study is voluntary and would be confidential.

I am grateful for your insight; thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,

Maura

Email to Faculty Volunteers

Hi [faculty name],

I hope you are doing well! Thank you for volunteering your participation in my study. I am really looking forward to talking with you soon.

You can schedule an interview using this link to a Google Calendar. If you do not see a preferred time available, please reach out directly – I would be happy to work with your schedule! I have embedded the Zoom link and passcode where we will meet in the calendar invitation.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to participate at any time. Your identity will remain anonymous during and after the study. I anticipate each interview will take approximately 1 hour. I am going to record the interview for accuracy and data collection integrity; the recording will be used strictly for analysis in this study. If you are no longer interested in participating, I understand.

Thank you again for your consideration!

Sincerely,

Maura

## Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Date:

Time:

Location: Zoom

Interviewer Name:

Interviewee Name:

### Opening

Hello! I want to start by thanking you for your voluntary participation in this study. This study focuses on growth in positive student experience at [Graduate School of Education] during the COVID-19 pandemic and faculty implementation of social and emotional competencies in their teaching and advising work during that time. Your perspective and insights as faculty are greatly valued.

Your identity will remain anonymous during and after the study. I have prepared a set of interview questions, but may ask follow-up questions based on our conversation. I anticipate the interview will take approximately 60 minutes. I am going to record the interview for accuracy and data collection integrity. I will use the video strictly for analysis in this study.

Your participation in this interview is voluntary. You may stop participating at any time during the interview or may defer specific questions. After the interview concludes, if you decide you no longer want to participate you may contact me directly via email or phone.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

### Questions

1. How would you describe yourself as a professor? **[self-awareness]**
  - a. What is your personal teaching philosophy?
  - b. What is your approach to student advisement?
2. When you think about your role as a professor and advisor, what are some social and emotional competencies you believe are particularly important and why? **[self-awareness]**
  - a. Are there any specific authors, resources, or frameworks that come to mind?
3. Tell me about your graduate students. How, if at all, did the COVID-19 pandemic impact your graduate students? **[social-awareness]**
  - a. What were some of the challenges they faced? How did you know?
  - b. What are some of their strengths?
4. How, if at all, did the COVID-19 pandemic impact your teaching and advisement? **[social-awareness]**
  - a. What actions did you take to respond to the challenges graduate students faced (named earlier)?
  - b. What supports did you put into place for your graduate students? Did you adjust any course policies (ex: late submissions)?
  - c. In what ways/to what extent do you feel like you tried to demonstrate empathy?

- d. How did students feel in your class during the COVID-19 pandemic? How did you know?
5. How, if at all, has the COVID-19 pandemic impacted the way that you teach and advise now? [**self-awareness**]
  - a. What did you do differently, that you continue to do now? Why?
  - b. Where did you get ideas or direction for the changes you made in your teaching and advising?
6. What were some ways you built relationships with your graduate students? [**relationship skills**]
  - a. What do you think was most effective?
  - b. Did you try anything that was not effective?
7. Can you think about a time during the COVID-19 pandemic that you experienced or felt success as a professor? Tell me about it in as much detail as you can remember. [**self-awareness**]
  - a. What were some of the most influential factors that impacted your success as a professor during this time?
8. Can you think about a time during the COVID-19 pandemic that you experienced or felt failure as a professor? Tell me about it in as much detail as you can remember. [**self-awareness**]
9. Do you feel like the campus supported your actions during the COVID-19 pandemic?
  - a. If YES ask:
    - i. Did you have a manager or team? What role did they play in your actions?
    - ii. Can you give an example of what the campus may have done that contributed to your actions?
  - b. If NO ask:
    - i. What are some of the ways you wanted to be supported?
10. Is there anything you think I should know about your approach to teaching and advising during the COVID-19 pandemic that I have not asked you?

Closing:

Thank you for your participation today! As a reminder, your responses will remain confidential. Your participation in this interview is voluntary. If you decide you no longer want to participate or have this interview included you may contact me directly via email or phone.

I am looking forward to sharing the study findings with you this spring. Do you have any questions or concerns before we end?