

Technology and Student Well-Being: 10 Charts

Results from a National Survey



EdWeek
Research Center™

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REPORT: Holly Kurtz, Director, EdWeek Research Center - Sterling Lloyd, Assistant Director - Alex Harwin, Research Analyst - Rachel Gong, Research Intern - Taylor Nichols, Research Intern

EdWeek[®] Research Center

6935 Arlington Road
Bethesda, MD 20814
www.edweek.org/rc | rcinfo@epe.org

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Executive Summary

In today's world, technology is ubiquitous and rapidly evolving. As it evolves and new challenges emerge, educators will be tasked with teaching students about healthy and responsible management of their online lives.

From late December 2023 to early January 2024, the EdWeek Research Center conducted a survey of teachers, school leaders, and district leaders to learn more about educators' views and experiences regarding the impact of technology on students.

While many types of technology affect students, the survey research focused on one factor that is having a particularly significant impact: social media.

The survey examined the degree to which educators believe they should be responsible for helping students learn to use social media in ways that support their mental health and well-being as well as the extent to which they think schools in their communities should be responsible for monitoring student behavior on social media.

As educators grapple with the difficulties that students face due to their online interactions, they might look for support from mental health professionals. To better understand the supports that are available, the survey asked school and district leaders to share how the number of school counselors, social workers, and other mental health professionals in their schools or districts has changed since 2020 and to predict how they expect that number will change in the next two years.

The survey research for this report focused on the role of social media but also looked ahead to the emerging challenge of artificial intelligence.

Key findings from the survey include:

- Fourteen percent of survey respondents said they completely agree and another 51 percent indicated they partly agree that educators should be responsible for helping students learn to use social media in ways that support their mental health and well-being.
- A narrow majority of educators (52 percent) believe that schools in their communities should only be responsible for monitoring student behavior on social media in rare circumstances or should not be responsible for monitoring it at all.
- Thirteen percent of educators completely agree and another 59 percent partly agree that social media has made it more acceptable for students to acknowledge personal mental health struggles.
- Only 47 percent of teachers, school leaders, and district leaders believe that mental health staffing in their schools or districts is even somewhat sufficient. That result suggests that educators may not have resources to draw on when students struggle with social media addiction, cyberbullying, or other mental health challenges stemming from their online lives.
- Nearly 7 in 10 educators anticipate that AI will have a negative effect on student well-being over the next decade.

Introduction

When we think about how young people spend their time, it wouldn't be unusual to picture them checking social media to see what their friends are saying or posting something themselves.

Access to social media can provide opportunities for students to learn about new topics and to connect with other people in positive ways. But experts caution that it can also present alarming [mental health risks](#) such as [addiction](#) or cyberbullying.

As a result, educators might seek to help students learn to navigate and manage their social media use in ways that promote their well-being.

Concerns about negative consequences stemming from students' use of social media have also prompted lawsuits from school districts and legislation from policymakers. More than [200 school districts have sued social media companies](#) for developing algorithms that they say cause their students to become addicted to the online platforms. District leaders may be concerned that they [lack the staffing](#) needed to help students address the mental health challenges that result. Legislators in some states have enacted [laws requiring parental consent](#) for young people to establish accounts on social media platforms.

To learn more about educators' views and experiences regarding social media, the EdWeek Research Center surveyed teachers, school leaders, and district administrators from December 21, 2023 through January 2, 2024.

The survey research captured key data on the extent to which respondents believe that educators should be responsible for helping students learn to use social media in ways that support their mental health. It also tapped into their firsthand experience in schools and classrooms to highlight insights about the critical barriers that limit their ability to teach students those skills.

In addition to views on instruction intended to prepare students to use social media in healthy ways, the survey examined the mental health staffing that's available to help educators support students struggling with challenges that are caused or worsened by the harmful uses of technology. It also asked educators to weigh in on the future impact of a newly emerging technology: artificial intelligence.

SURVEY DETAILS

Survey Administered: December 21, 2023-January 2, 2024

Sample: Nationally representative

Method: Online [e-mail invitations sent to online survey]

Respondents: 595 K-12 educators including 126 district leaders, 134 school leaders, and 335 teachers

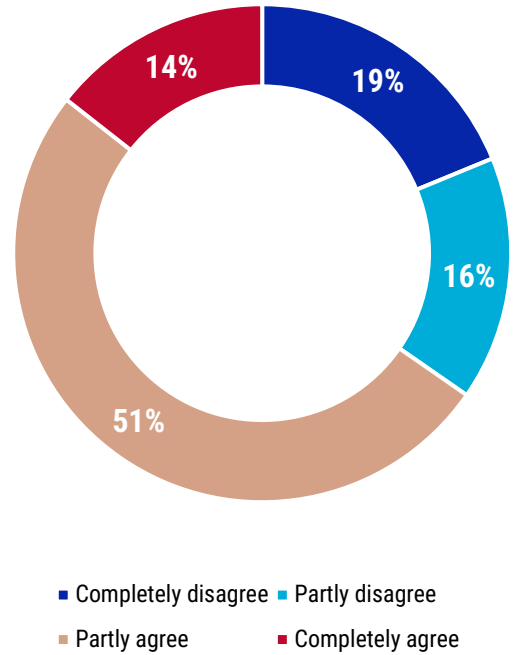
1. Responsibility of Educators

Previous generations of teachers and educational administrators did not have to think about social media instruction as part of their job duties. And today’s educators certainly have many other responsibilities on their plates.

But most current educators do see it as their responsibility to help students learn to thrive in an environment where social media platforms are a commonplace feature of day-to-day life.

Fourteen percent of survey respondents said they completely agree and another 51 percent indicated they partly agree that educators should be responsible for helping students learn to use social media in ways that support their mental health and well-being.

Educators should be responsible for helping students learn to use social media in ways that support their mental health and well-being.



*Results show responses from teachers, school leaders, and district leaders.

2. Barriers to Teaching Students to Use Social Media

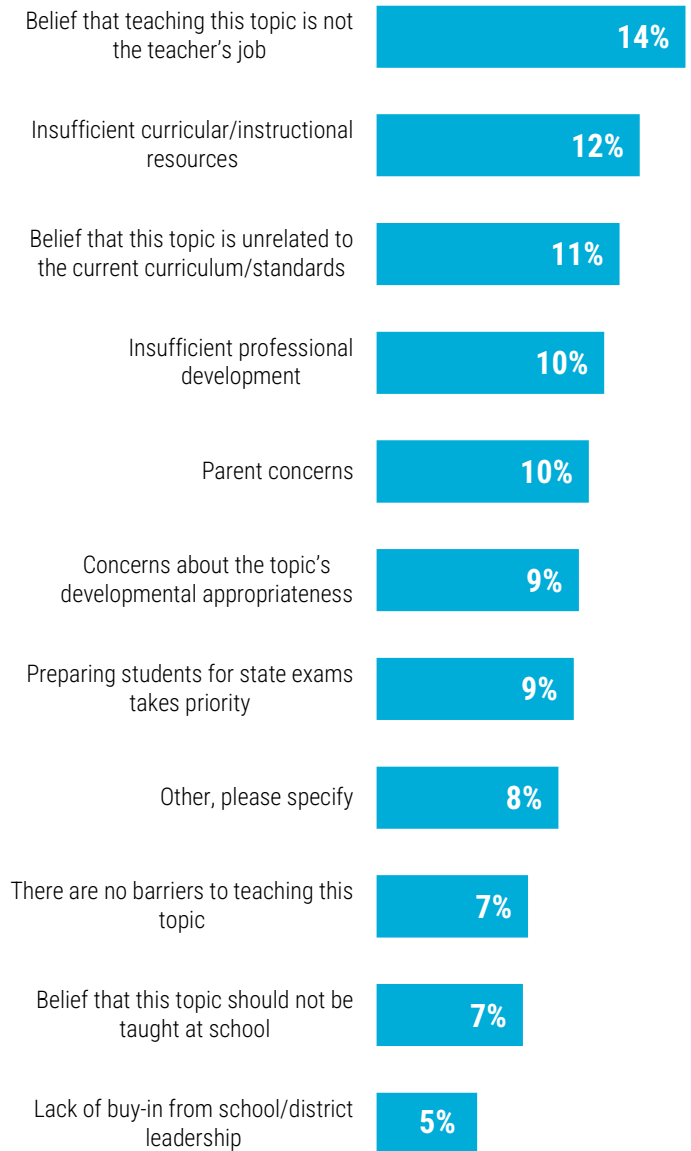
When asked to identify the biggest barrier that limits their ability to teach students to use social media in healthy ways, educators cited a wide variety of factors.

Fourteen percent pointed to the belief that teaching this topic is not the teacher's job.

Other survey respondents cited stumbling blocks that make it more difficult to deliver instruction such as insufficient curricular resources (12 percent), a belief that the topic is unrelated with curriculum or standards (11 percent), and insufficient professional development (10 percent).

Another 10 percent saw concerns from parents as the most significant constraint.

What is the biggest barrier or constraint that limits your ability to teach students (in a developmentally appropriate manner) to use social media in ways that do not damage their mental health and well-being?



*Results show responses from teachers, school leaders, and district leaders.

3. Role of Schools

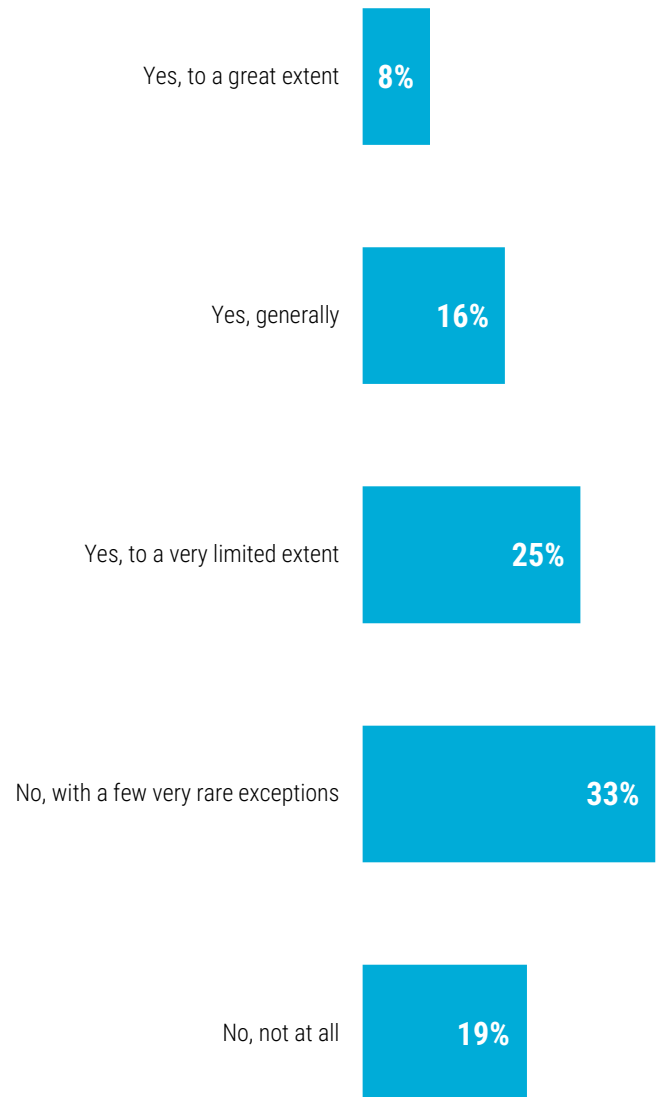
In addition to instruction on healthy uses of social media, schools could have a broader role in ensuring that students are using those platforms safely and appropriately. Survey results reveal diverse perspectives on the role of schools in monitoring student behavior on social media.

A narrow majority of educators (52 percent) believe that schools in their communities should only be responsible for monitoring student behavior on social media in rare circumstances or should not be responsible for monitoring it at all.

One-quarter think that schools should be expected to track such behavior to a limited extent. Nearly the same share (24 percent) said that schools have a duty to monitor it generally or to a great extent.

The diversity of opinions on this question may reflect the complexity of efforts to balance the sometimes conflicting demands of individual responsibility, student privacy, student well-being, and the safety of the community.

Do you believe schools in your community should be responsible for monitoring student behavior on social media?



*Results show responses from teachers, school leaders, and district leaders.

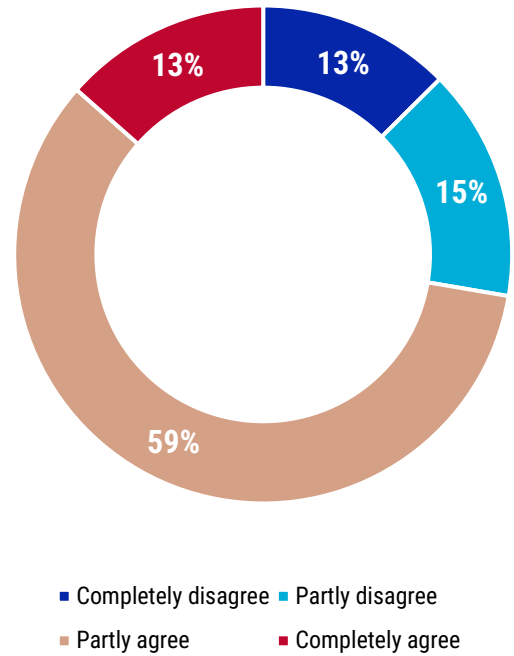
4. Helping to Acknowledge Mental Health Challenges

Despite many potential drawbacks to social media use that could harm students' mental health, it's possible that it can also have a beneficial effect at times if it helps students feel more accepted or supported when they are facing challenges.

Thirteen percent of educators completely agree and another 59 percent partly agree that social media has made it more acceptable for students to acknowledge personal mental health struggles.

Although such acknowledgement can have its own pitfalls around over-sharing or privacy concerns, it could also indicate that social media is helping to destigmatize mental health difficulties.

Social media has made it more acceptable for students to acknowledge personal mental health struggles.



*Results show responses from teachers, school leaders, and district leaders.

5. Self-Diagnosis Through Social Media

The majority of educators (55 percent) said they are unsure how frequently their students use social media to diagnose their own mental health conditions. Of those who said they are aware, nearly half (44 percent) said they believe students sometimes do so while roughly 1 in 5 said such self-diagnosis occurs all the time.

Educators are equally unsure about the degree to which students are using information from social media platforms to try to diagnose the mental health conditions of others. Fifty-four percent said they didn't know how often students are doing so.

But 47 percent of those who indicated they do have knowledge on this topic believed that students sometimes diagnose others through or based on social media and another 21 percent said it happens all the time.

The evolving role of social media and [artificial intelligence](#) will have an unpredictable impact on how students learn about mental health.

The practice of self-diagnosis might raise concerns due to the myriad difficulties stemming from inaccurate mental health information on social media: false alarms, misdiagnosis, or other harmful effects.

However, if the practice has a silver lining, it could be that it might help to destigmatize mental health challenges.

How often—if ever—do your students use social media to diagnose their own mental health conditions or the mental health conditions of others?



■ Never ■ Rarely ■ Sometimes ■ All the time

*Results show responses from teachers, school leaders, and district leaders.

6. Insufficient Mental Health Staffing

As students grapple with the evolving challenges that technology can present, education leaders can look to provide services intended to support their well-being. But the capacity to provide services rests largely on the availability of one key resource: staffing.

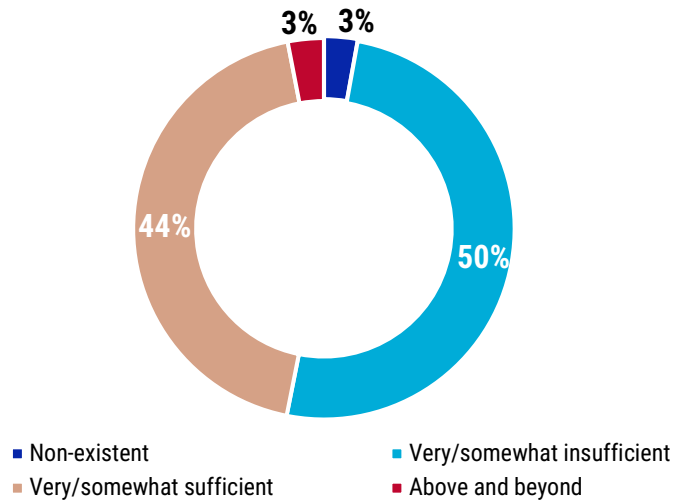
Only 47 percent of teachers, school leaders, and district leaders believe that mental health staffing in their schools or districts is even somewhat sufficient.

That result suggests that educators may not have resources to draw on when students struggle with social media addiction, cyberbullying, or other mental health challenges stemming from their online lives.

The inability to refer students to the mental health professionals they need can place additional stress on classroom teachers whose morale is already suffering due to staffing shortages and the pressures of having many duties on their plates.

Programs providing health care and social services through schools have been viewed positively by the public but are part of a larger [debate](#) about the role of schools and the responsibilities they should have.

When it comes to the mental health professionals responsible for addressing student mental health concerns, how would you describe the level of staffing in your district or school?



*Results show responses from teachers, school leaders, and district leaders.

7. Changes in Mental Health Staffing

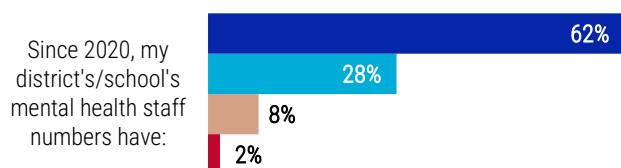
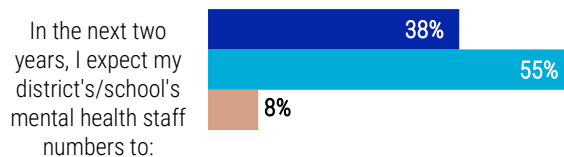
The majority of school and district leaders (62 percent) reported that mental health staffing in their schools or districts has increased since 2020—likely reflecting a prioritization of mental health due to students’ struggles during the pandemic and the influx of federal COVID relief funding that could be used for this purpose.

Nearly 3 in 10 school and district leaders reported that mental health staffing had not changed during this period and 8 percent saw a decline.

Looking ahead, 38 percent expected their mental health staffing to increase in the next two years. More than half (55 percent) saw no change on the horizon. Just 8 percent predicted staffing reductions.

Some districts used COVID relief funding to support mental health services. But as those [funds expire](#), they might have to look for new sources of money to pay for those counseling programs.

The number of school counselors, social workers, and other mental health professionals who work for my district or school has (or will):



- Increase
- Remain the same
- Decrease
- No mental health staff since 2019

*Results show responses from school leaders and district leaders.

8. Use of Teletherapy

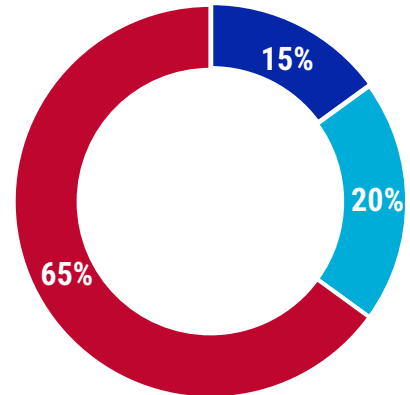
Teletherapy is one type of resource that schools might rely on to assist students with their mental health struggles, especially in the absence of adequate in-person staffing.

As the need to close offices to prevent the spread of the coronavirus reduced or eliminated the availability of in-person services during the heart of the pandemic, teletherapy became a [more common part](#) of the nation's mental health systems. It will likely remain an option for the future.

However, just 15 percent of school and district leaders reported that their schools or districts make teletherapy available to all students. Another 20 percent said it's available to some students.

It's possible that education leaders will turn to teletherapy if it proves to be a cost-effective option for delivering services to students particularly given that federal COVID relief funding—which some districts have used to support mental health programs—won't be available to support future initiatives.

Does your district or school use teletherapy or tele-counseling to help students with their mental health challenges?



- Yes, and it's available to all students
- Yes, and it's available to some students
- No

*Results show responses from school leaders and district leaders.

9. Impact of AI

The survey research for this report focused on the role of social media but also looked ahead to the emerging challenge of artificial intelligence.

There's evidence that students [want to learn](#) about AI and schools will have [an important role](#) in teaching them both how to use it and how to think critically about it.

Some educators are beginning to grapple with the influence of ChatGPT and other AI tools as this form of technology starts to play a part in their students' day-to-day lives. They provide a variety of [reasons](#) for their use of AI in the classroom and also cite some concerns about it.

But many [educators are not using](#) AI due to competing priorities, a lack of policy guidance from their districts, and other reasons.

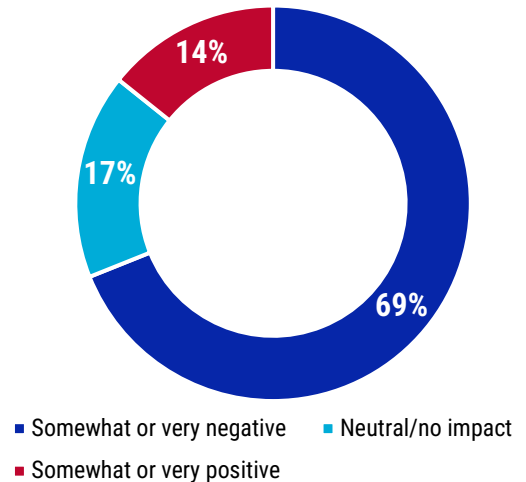
Nearly 7 in 10 educators anticipate that AI will have a negative effect on student well-being over the next decade.

News coverage has highlighted some concerns about the ways that AI might affect learning, privacy, and social interactions but also suggests potential benefits associated with new possibilities for more [personalized learning](#).

To address any impact on students, educators can look to learn more about AI's capabilities and limitations in order to develop strategies for integrating it into instruction in ways that support students' well-being.

Experts suggest that districts can develop [policies](#) on AI to protect student data and to address other challenges. In addition, the U.S. Department of Education may be a source of [guidance](#) as the technology evolves.

What type of impact do you believe AI will have on student mental health and well-being over the next decade?



*Results show responses from teachers, school leaders, and district leaders.

10. Impact of Social Media on Educators

The survey research for this report focused on all the ways that social media can affect students. But it also examined educators' assessments of social media's impact on their own social-emotional skills and those of their co-workers.

Educators view themselves as largely insulated from the social-emotional harms of social media but think their colleagues are more significantly at risk.

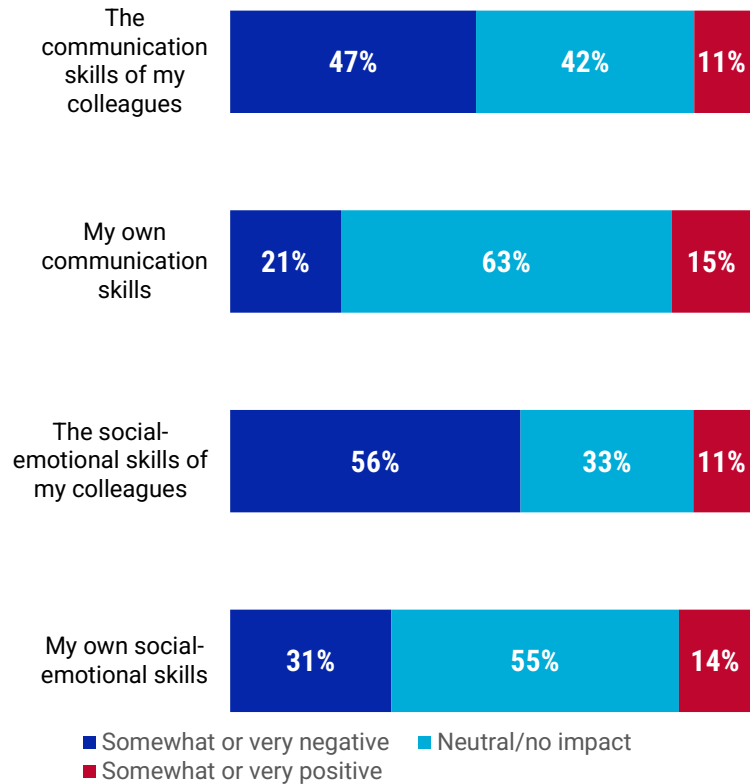
More than 6 in 10 educators believe social media is not having an impact on their own communication skills and nearly the same share (55 percent) said it isn't affecting their social-emotional skills.

Fifteen percent thought that it had a positive impact on their communication skills. Similarly, 14 percent saw a positive effect on their social-emotional abilities.

Twenty-one percent pointed to a negative impact on their ability to communicate with 31 percent citing an adverse influence on their own social-emotional capacities.

By contrast, nearly half (47 percent) observed that social media is having adverse consequences for their colleagues' communication skills and more than half (56 percent) saw a negative impact on their peers' social-emotional abilities.

What kind of impact do you think social media is having on the following?



*Results show responses from teachers, school leaders, and district leaders.