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Abstract

This study explored the state of knowledge and practice of humane education in pre-K-12 schools in the United States. Humane education is a pedagogy that takes a systems approach to creating a citizenry able to build a more just, compassionate, and sustainable world for the health and well-being of people, other animals, and the natural environment. Currently, 18 states have mandates that could support the teaching of humane education in their schools, however, each of these states has different guiding language for what humane education is and how it is taught, and no standardized way to train teachers. Through an online survey completed by 829 pre-K-12 formal educators, support staff, and administrators, a baseline understanding of the state of humane education in the 2018-2019 school year was created. It will serve as reference in the future about the status of knowledge and practice of humane education in U.S. formal education settings. Stated barriers to implementation of humane education are discussed. Additionally, findings support a call to the profession of humane education to acquire knowledge and practice skills in trauma-informed teaching.

State of Humane Education in the United States: 2018-2019

Humane education has a long history and was born out of the recognition that compassionate treatment of other animals was critical to the development and maintenance of a compassionate and benevolent society. This early recognition dates back to the 1600's, while initial formative practice of humane education was established during the mid to late 1800's. The first organized humane education group was known as the Bands of Mercy which brought people, primarily children, together to be kind to animals. In the early 1900's, many U.S. states were requiring humane education in their schools. However, during the world wars, humane education lost ground as children were taught to be "war ready" instead of compassionate and empathetic (Unti & DeRosa, 2003).

While support for humane education within politics and formal education waned during and immediately after the world wars, humane education was sustained through smaller, regional organizations such as humane societies, animal rescues, and animal shelters, which generally focused on the prevention of cruelty to animals and highlighting the benefits of companion animals (Unti & DeRosa, 2003; Unti & Rowan, 2001). Typically, these organizations utilized outreach programs implemented in public schools, extracurricular events, and summer camps to teach children the importance of kindness to animals through focusing on the treatment of companion animals (Samuels, Meers, & Normando, 2016; Unti & DeRosa, 2003). The concepts of humane education and kindness to animals were also sustained through popular media, particularly children's literature, where authors promoted the human-animal bond, animal consciousness, and taught morals (Oswald, 1994).

The era after World War II saw the revival of animal protection as an organized effort, bringing with it a renewed focus on humane education, spearheaded by the newly founded

Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) (Unti & DeRosa, 2003). During the 60's and 70's, the HSUS and similar organizations expanded their focus beyond companion animals, addressing concerns about the use of animals and nature, treatment of wildlife, and research into animal consciousness, in turn expanding the focus of humane education beyond the simple message of kindness to animals (Unti & Rowan, 2001). However, most humane education programs were still run primarily though shelters, rescues, and local humane societies working independently, meaning that the general focus of these programs continued to be centered around companion animals (Unti & DeRosa, 2003).

Recently, there has been a resurgence of commitment to developing training for and implementation of comprehensive humane education both in informal and formal education settings. Some notable and groundbreaking developments to formalize humane education include the founding of the Institute for Humane Education in 1996. The Institute for Humane Education (IHE) partners with Antioch University New England to offer a Master of Arts, a Master of Education, and a graduate level professional development certificate, all in humane education. IHE also offers an online, free, and award-winning library of humane education lesson plans and resources. Another critical organization in the formalization of humane education is the Academy of Prosocial Learning (APL) which was founded in 2016. APL offers the CHES (Certified Humane Education Specialist) credentialing program and the only Humane Education Specialist Register globally. Lastly, in terms of formal training for humane education professionals, the Institute for Human-Animal Connection at the University of Denver founded the Raising Compassionate Kids: Humane Education and Interventions for Early Learners professional development certificate in 2016, and renamed Building Empathy and Stewardship: Certificate in Humane Education, in 2020. Further, several non-profit organizations provide

humane education professional development training for teachers and informal educators (e.g., HEART, RedRover Readers, Roots & Shoots). Another critical aspect of this resurgence is the establishment of the Humane Education Coalition (HEC) in 2017 that actively brings global humane educators together as partners in the work of humane education. Lastly, the Association for Professional Humane Educators (APHE), founded in 1970, remains the first and only membership-based organization that is dedicated to providing networking opportunities and resources to those involved with or interested in humane education.

As defined by the Academy of Prosocial Learning (2018), "[comprehensive] humane education encourages cognitive, affective, and behavioral growth through personal development of critical thinking, problem solving, perspective taking, and empathy as it relates to people, animals, the planet, and the intersections among them; it allows learners to process personal values and choose prosocial behaviors aligned with those values" (para. 4). The intersectionality of oppressions of people who may be perceived as different or "other", other species, and the natural environment are acknowledged and laid bare in order for participants of humane education to work toward solutions to the harms that global human society inflicts continuously.

Problematically, systematic evaluation of *comprehensive* humane education programming is nearly non-existent. Of the 18 English language studies assessing the efficacy of humane education programs, the programs are completely different, with notably different objectives, and different measurement tools being utilized to evaluate their impact on learners, making generalizations about the efficacy of humane education untenable (Bexell, 2019). The published humane education study designs often lack rigorous design methodology. Additionally, most of the studies solely utilize a post-intervention assessment, limiting the outcome measurement capacities, while also relying heavily on self-report tools to evaluate

attitude and behavior shifts in children. Others were one-time survey studies that do not offer information about the efficacy of humane education programming, but instead a broader baseline of teachers' attitudes toward humane education interventions. In order to reliably and validly assess the efficacy of humane education, generalizable humane education objectives need to be created, agreed upon and utilized, and rigorous measurement tools pertinent to those objectives need to be created and utilized by researchers.

Additionally, small sample sizes are a major limitation of humane education research, while sampling bias is also present in most studies. For example, existing studies have only surveyed participants within specific geographic areas, for example Ontario, Canada and the state of Wisconsin, where education climate and practices (curriculum development, standardized testing requirements, classroom demographics, etc.) differ from those across the rest of North America (Daly & Suggs, 2010; Lane et al., 1994). Similarly, most of the studies only include public school elementary students and teachers, greatly limiting the generalizability of findings to other populations. Research within more diverse environments is needed, including within a variety of formal educational settings (e.g., private, charter, homeschool environments), and with samples of children and teachers that are representative of the larger U.S. population.

Furthermore, the programs that have been evaluated are not comprehensive humane education interventions, but specific to one area of humane education, most being on the relationships between children and animals used for companionship. This makes it difficult for the field of humane education to state empirically that it is an effective pedagogy, or even what that pedagogy is or should be. This creates a call to the profession to create a critical pedagogy for humane education (Itle-Clark & Comaskey, 2019) to include more uniform interventions and standardized evaluation protocols to understand the practice of humane education.

While groundbreaking work is being done in this re-emergent field, infiltration into formal schooling in the U.S. has been meager. With a desire by humane education professionals to support the U.S. education system in creating a healthy and feasible future, further honing of humane education methodology, teacher training, and evaluation research are critical next steps. Additionally, there is a need for humane education professionals to seek partnerships with U.S. formal education and mental health professionals to learn about the barriers to student engagement in learning content and skills due to modern societal pressures.

To effectively collaborate with professionals in the U.S. formal education system, it is essential for humane education professionals to understand the current focus of public schools and other formal education institutions. To guide academic instruction and performance, forty-one states currently utilize the Common Core State Standards, a set of standards for mathematics, English language arts, and literacy, while the remaining states generally have other state-wide standards (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2020). Alongside academic performance, many schools are placing a stronger emphasis on character education and social-emotional learning (SEL) programs, such as the Second Step program, to help students build values and skills such as empathy, problem solving, responsibility, and emotion management (Smith, 2013). The intended outcomes of these SEL and character education programs are to improve student academic performance and social skills, reduce violent or disruptive behavior, reduce drug and alcohol use, and aid students in developing their own set of morals and values (Antoncic, 2003; Smith, 2013). Many of the values and skills developed through character education overlap with the goals of humane education, such as development of problem-solving skills, empathy with other people, and toward others, to name just a few. This overlap can create a strong foundation for collaboration between humane educators and the U.S. education system.

Methods

This study explored current understanding of and humane education practice by U.S. formal educators, support staff, and administrators, and barriers to the utilization of humane education content and pedagogy.

Data Collection

An online survey, using the web-based survey software Qualtrics, was utilized for data collection. The survey (see Appendix A) was created by the Policy Committee of the Humane Education Coalition in collaboration with a research team from the University of Denver. The survey includes 39 questions designed to gather quantitative and qualitative data from pre-K-12 educators across the United States concerning their knowledge and utilization of humane education in schools. Institutional Review Board approval was obtained October 7, 2018 under the project number and title: [1325044-1] State of Humane Education in PreK-12 Schools in the U.S. Prior to completing the survey, participants were directed to read a letter describing the study and informing them of their consent through proceeding with the survey. Data collection took place between October 18, 2018 and June 30, 2019. Finally, as an incentive, participants were offered the choice to be placed into a drawing for one of six, humane education packages, valued at $500 each.

Recruitment

The recruitment process for this study involved both a top-down approach and grassroots (snowball) distribution of the survey participation request. To start, the survey invitation letter and link were distributed to several large education organizations, including teachers' unions, advocacy organizations, honor societies and teacher training programs. For example, the *American Federation of Teachers* posted the survey link on their social media pages, while the

Colorado chapter of *Teach for America* included the link in their monthly newsletter. At the grassroots level, members of the Humane Education Coalition Policy Committee and of the research team distributed the link to their colleagues and friends in the education sector, using social media, email, and in-person recruitment methods, representing a convenience sample. In order to ensure all educational contexts were represented, public, private, charter, and homeschool education professionals were invited to complete the survey.

Inclusion criteria

A total of 829 valid responses to the survey were obtained. In order to be part of the data set, respondents had to answer at least one question beyond the demographic data, or approximately 30% completion of the survey.

Demographics

Participants included principals, teachers, social workers, psychologists, administrators, and guidance counselors among other professionals in school settings such as nurses, school-based therapists, librarians, behavior interventionists, case managers, speech language pathologists and paraeducators. Of the professionals who responded to the survey, the length of experience in education varied, with 47 respondents having two years or less of experience, 105 having between three and five years, 117 had six to 10 years, 129 had 11 to 14 years, and a majority (431) had 15 or more years of experience. Teachers of grade levels pre-K-12 were represented in this study, and included teachers of English/language arts, math, science, social studies, health/physical education, the arts and library sciences. Private institutions (68), public institutions (705), and charter schools (26) were represented in this study with many schools falling under Title 1 guidelines (524). Responses were collected from education professionals

from all 50 states, Washington, D.C., and Puerto Rico. See Appendix B for the distribution of participants from each state.

Results

Familiarity with Humane, Character and Moral Education

The survey first asked respondents about their familiarity with humane education and two education domains with which humane education has similarities, character and moral education. It is a common experience for humane educators to need to explain what humane education is. This study explored whether pre-K-12 professionals are familiar with humane education, as not knowing what it is or that it exists clearly poses one of the greatest barriers to implementation. In response to the question, *are you familiar with the term "humane education?"* 232 respondents stated yes, they were familiar with the term humane education, 595 respondents stated no, and two did not respond.

Respondents that stated they were familiar with humane education were then asked to provide their definition in an open text box. To analyze the definitions provided, six key components from the humane education definition from APL (shared above) were selected and searched for: animals, humans, environment (OR "all living things" in place of those three), connection, action, and empathy. Each provided definition was reviewed and two researchers coded them with a 0-6 system on how many of the components were included. Similar words and phrases were accepted (e.g. kindness and compassion were accepted instead of empathy) if they produced the same idea. For example, if a respondent wrote, "teaching kindness for humans, animals, and the environment," they would receive a four or one point each for including: kindness, humans, animals, and environment.

After coding the 206 definitions provided, only 12 contained all six components utilized by the researchers, 46 respondents produced five, and 64 provided four. The remaining 84 respondents provided between zero and three correct components.

Additionally, an ANOVA test was run comparing knowledge of humane education versus time in education and job title (see Table 1). The test found a significant main effect for both; however, follow-up Tukey tests were not significant for job title. Follow-up Tukey tests for time spent in education were significant between 6-10 years in education and 0-2 years in education with 6-10 years reporting less knowledge (difference = -0.21, p= 0.05). Additionally, there was a significant difference between 6-10 years of experience and 15+ years of experience, with 15+ years reporting more knowledge than 6-10 years (difference = .13, p= 0.03).

Table 1

Analysis of Variance for Knowledge of Education

Source	*df*	SS	MS	*F*	*Pr(>F)*
LengthWork	4	2.18	0.5438	2.730	0.0282*
JobTitle	4	2.35	0.5878	2.951	0.0195*
LengthWork:JobTitle	14	2.23	0.1592	0.799	0.6707
Residuals	804	160.16	0.1992		

Note: Significant codes: 0 ‘***’ 0.001 ‘**’ 0.01 ‘*’ 0.05 ‘.’ 0.1 ‘ ’ 1

The survey then shared a definition of humane education: *Humane education encourages cognitive, affective, and behavioral growth through personal development of critical thinking, problem solving, perspective taking, and empathy as it relates to people, animals, the planet, and the intersections among them; it allows learners to process personal values and choose prosocial behaviors aligned with those values (Academy of Prosocial Learning, 2018).* This was followed by inquiring: *Does your state have an education mandate that incorporates humane*

education into school standards? Fifty-six respondents stated yes, that their state has a mandate, 260 stated no, and 479 answered that they did not know; thirty-four did not respond.

To determine whether participants in states with humane education mandates know whether they have mandates, a chi-square test was performed. The vast majority of respondents (60.2%) didn't know if they were in a state with a humane education mandate or not (see Table 2).

Table 2

Respondent Knowledge of State Mandate

	Yes	No	I Don't Know
State has Mandate	30	154	210
No State Mandate	26	105	266
Total	56	259	476

Only 7.6% of respondents from states with a mandate were aware of the fact that their state had a mandate. The chi-square test determined no difference in respondents correctly acknowledging if they had a mandate or not, regardless of what type of state they lived in (χ^2 = 0.66, p = 0.42).

Two education domains that address themes common to humane education, with the exception that they are directed toward other humans, are moral education and character education. Because these are seen as potentially supportive of humane education, this study inquired about their utilization in schools by asking: *Does your state have moral or character education mandates that incorporate character education into school standards?* Two hundred and eighty-two respondents said yes, my state has a mandate for moral or character education, 175 said no, and 332 said I don't know; 40 did not respond. Participants who answered "*Yes*" to

this question were asked to describe the mandate. To identify common themes across participant descriptions of their state mandates, two members of the research team independently reviewed the data and compiled a list of the most frequent responses. The researchers then cross-compared their lists and subsequently compiled a final list of the most common response themes. (This methodology was utilized in other open text box analyses noted below.) The list below highlights the items that were mentioned by participants most often, in descending order of frequency:

- Character education embedded in curriculum
- Social emotional learning standards
- Moral and character challenges incorporated into curriculum
- Positive behavior intervention programs

Implementation of Humane or Character Education

To explore whether character or humane education initiatives were being implemented in the respondent's school, the survey asked: *Do you have any character education/humane education initiatives in your school or district?* Four hundred and seventy-eight responded yes, 142 responded no, and 151 did not know; 58 did not respond. The "yes" respondents were asked to provide details in an open text box and those results are shared below in descending order of frequency.

- Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS)
- Socioemotional learning focus, no specific program named
- Guidelines, curricula, or values created by each school individually
- Second Step program
- Focusing on one trait at a time, school-wide (e.g. spending one month learning about respect, citizenship, responsibility, etc.)

Topics Germane to Humane Education

Topics germane to humane education are incorporated into schools. If schools are addressing these issues already, this may lay some groundwork and familiarity with facts and skill sets needed to teach about these topics. To explore this, it was asked: *Which of the following issues are you currently addressing in your educational work (formal or informal)?* Participants were able to select all that apply and in total there were 1,963 options selected (see Figure 1).

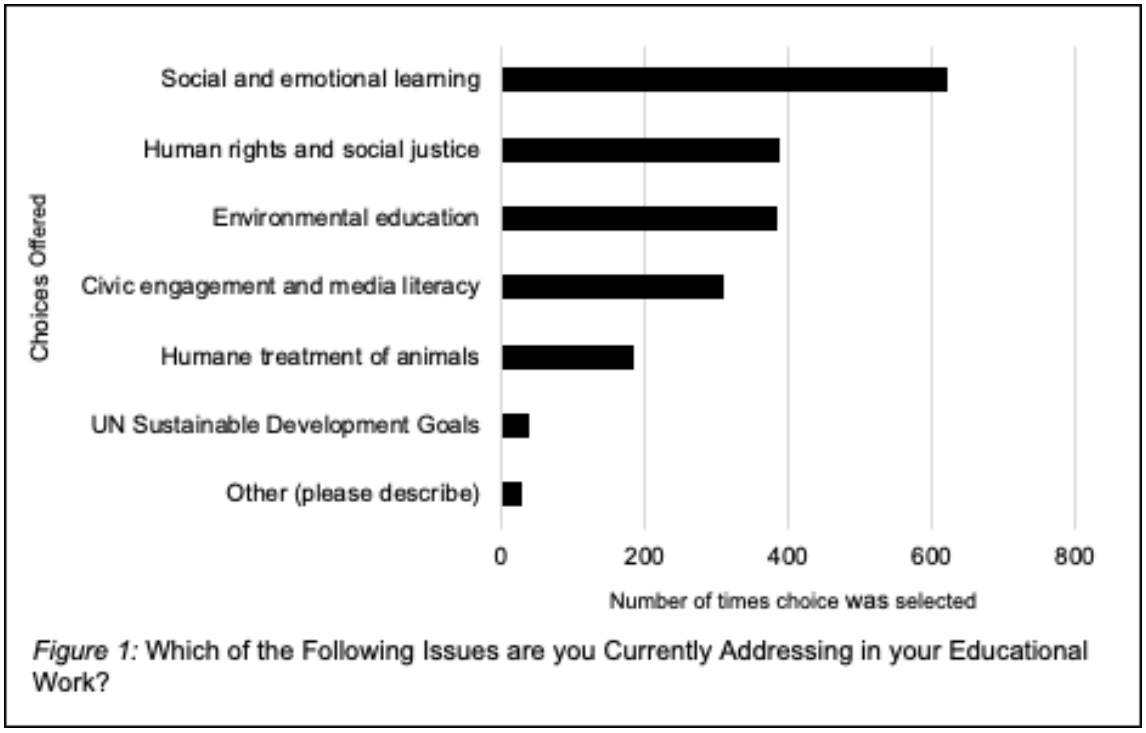

Figure 1: Which of the Following Issues are you Currently Addressing in your Educational Work?

Because many humane education organizations offer programming and instruction to schools outside of traditional educational offerings, it was asked: *In what setting are you addressing these humane education-related topics?* Respondents were asked to select all that apply. Six-hundred and sixty-four stated that humane education related topics were included in their classroom instruction, 224 stated they were covered in off-site experiences (field trips), and 210 stated they were included in clubs affiliated with their school. Eighty-five respondents stated

that these topics were included in other ways in their school, those can be seen in the list provided below, in descending order of frequency.

- Guest speakers
- STEM/STEAM projects
- Animals in the classroom, outdoor gardens and outdoor lessons
- Impromptu discussion
- After school activities including clubs
- Community service opportunities
- Social emotional learning

Accessing Resources

To guide the field of humane education in developing and distributing materials of use to U.S. teachers, knowing how educators access available resources is helpful. Toward this aim it was asked: *For any of the above issues, what resources do you use to teach these concepts?* In total, there were 2,366 responses (see Figure 2).

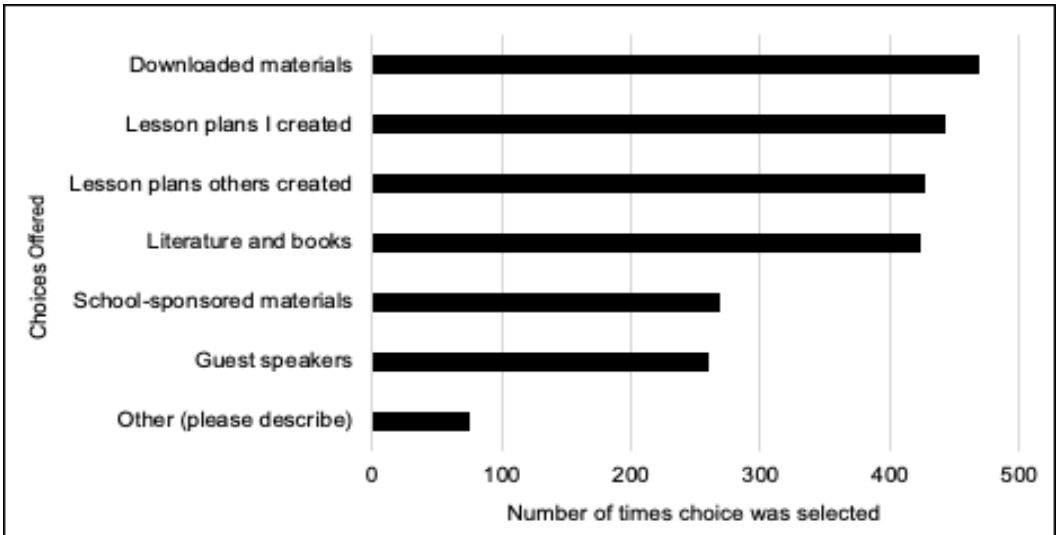

Figure 2: For any of the above Issues, what Resources do you use to Teach these Concepts?

The 75 “other” responses are presented in the list below, in descending order of frequency.

- Teachable moments, authentic encounters, and sharing personal experiences
- Field trips
- Conversations with students, both teacher and student driven
- Out of pocket materials
- Community partnerships
- After school clubs

Use of Experiential Learning

As all educators know, experiential learning often creates the most impact for students. To gain an understanding of how educators may be accessing experiential humane education related content it was asked: *Has your school taken students on field trips that promote care for animals, people, or reverence for the environment?* Three hundred and eighty respondents stated that yes, they had taken students on such field trips, 223 stated no, 125 stated they did not know, and 101 did not respond. The “yes” responses were analyzed with the prior stated methods and those results can be found in descending order below:

- Gardens and farms
- Animal shelters or rescues
- 4-H-related trips
- Zoos
- Natural areas (parks, lakes, etc.)

Inclusion of humane education topics in the course of the normal school day may not be possible, however like with field trips, educators and students may access these topics in other ways through their school. Therefore, it was asked: *Does your school offer any clubs/after-*

school activities that pertain to any of the following topics: animal protection, social justice/human rights, environmental ethics? Two-hundred and twenty-six respondents stated that their school has a club or after-school activities on these topics, 423 stated that their school does not, 79 stated they do not know, and 101 did not respond. The list below reflects the topics that schools offer during extracurricular activities:

- General environmental clubs
- Community service clubs and activities
- Gay-Straight Alliance and LGBTQ+ oriented clubs
- General diversity and social justice clubs
- Recycling club

Societal Pressures on School-aged Youth

Societal pressures on youth present two things for humane educators to consider, one being how humane education can assist in alleviating these problems, and the other being how these issues might be barriers to student learning and mental health. To begin to understand these issues, it was asked: *In your experience, have any of the following societal issues impacted your students, school, or community?* Participants selected all that apply and in total, there were 2,229 options selected (see Figure 3).

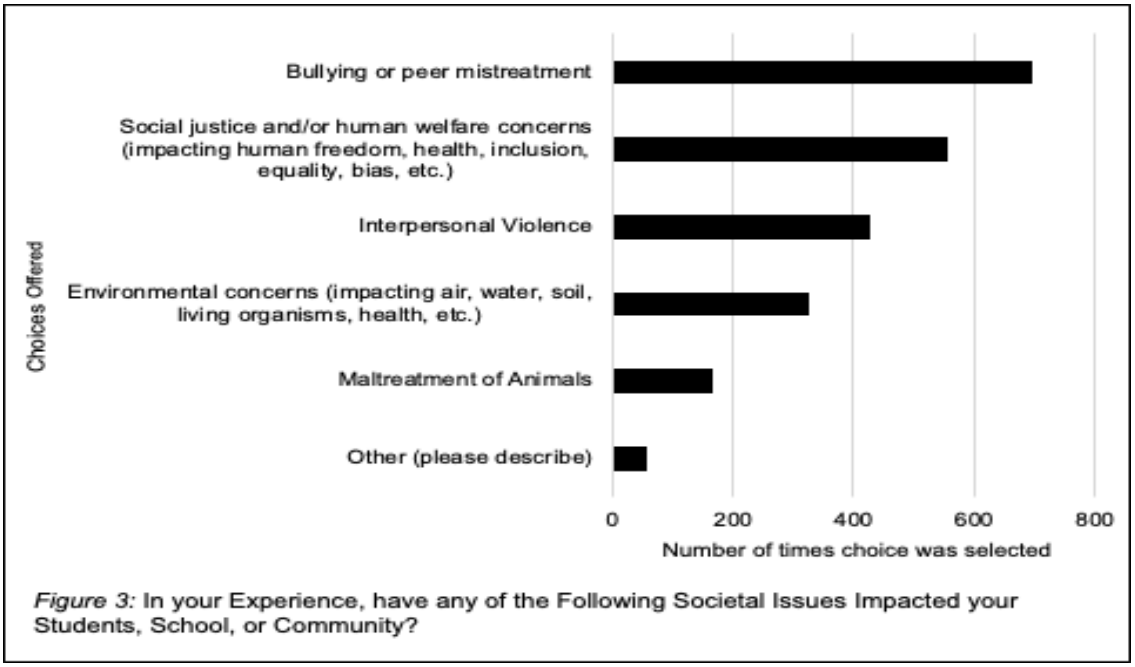

Figure 3: In your Experience, have any of the Following Societal Issues Impacted your Students, School, or Community?

To determine whether the societal issues facing youth differed by type of school or setting of school, a variable that was a sum of the number of individual societal issues respondents identified as present in their schools was created. Nearly half of respondents (47%) reported 3-4 barriers (see Figure 4).

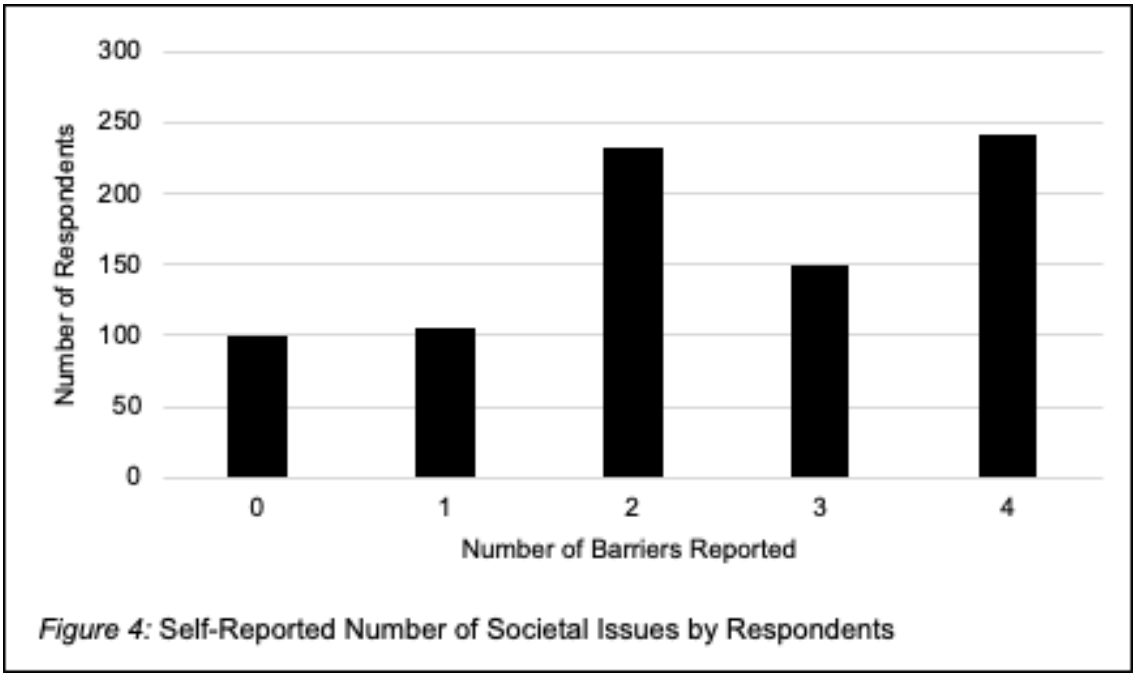

Figure 4: Self-Reported Number of Societal Issues by Respondents

More specifically, the barriers that respondents could choose were bullying, environmental concerns, interpersonal violence, maltreatment of animals, and social justice/human welfare (multiple choices could be selected). Of those choices, 695 or 84% of participants selected bullying, 428 (52%) selected interpersonal violence, 327 (39%) selected environmental concerns, 277 (33%) selected maltreatment of animals, and 261 (315) selected social justice/human welfare.

The researchers also examined the relationship between the number of societal issues reportedly facing participants' students and community and the number of "high needs" students served by the participants' school. As defined by the U.S. Department of Education, high needs students are "...at risk of educational failure or otherwise in need of special assistance and support, such as students who are living in poverty, who attend high-minority schools (as defined in the Race to the Top application), who are far below grade level, who have left school before receiving a regular high school diploma, who are at risk of not graduating with a diploma on time, who are homeless, who are in foster care, who have been incarcerated, who have disabilities, or who are English learners" (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). There were main effects of school type ($F = 4.00$, $p = .019$) and of estimated percent of high needs students ($F = 9.54$, $p < .001$) on number of societal issues; there was no interaction ($F = 0.90$, $p = .519$). Private school respondents had significantly lower reports of societal issues than "other" schools (difference = -0.64, $p = .019$) and public schools (difference = -0.39, $p = .05$). There were five significant differences between schools with varying percentages of high school needs on the number of societal issues they face. Respondents from schools with less than 20% of high needs students reported less societal issues than all other schools (21-39%, difference = -0.41, $p = .05$; 40-59%, difference = -0.48, $p = .02$; 60-79%, difference = -0.64, $p < .001$; 80-100%, difference =

-.079, $p < .001$). Respondents in schools with 21-39% of high needs students also reported less societal issues than respondents from schools with 80-100% of high needs students (difference = -0.38, $p = .036$). As expected, respondents from schools with higher needs also report higher societal issues.

The Barriers

To ascertain barriers to inclusion of humane education related themes, it was asked: *For any of the above issues, what barriers do you face in teaching these concepts?* See Figure 5 for results.

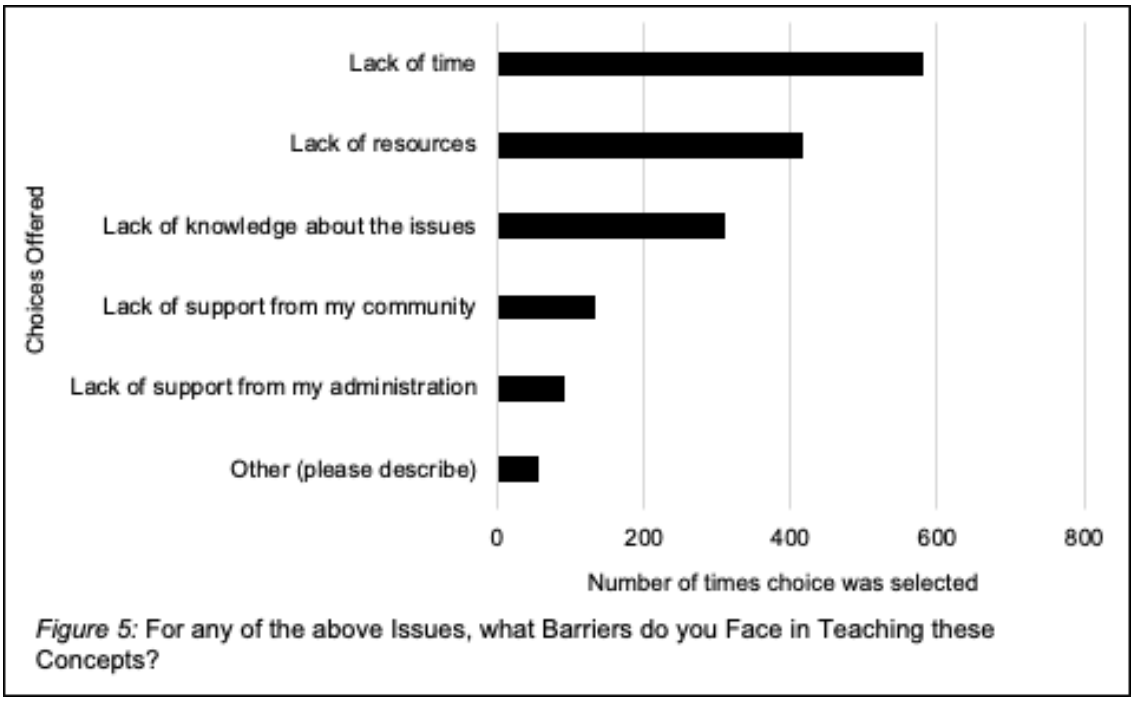

Figure 5: For any of the above Issues, what Barriers do you Face in Teaching these Concepts?

The list below presents additional themes that respondents shared through an open text box for "other", it is noteworthy that many re-emphasized barriers presented as selections. Responses are listed in descending order of frequency.

- Lack of resources
- Lack of funding
- Lack of support from administration

- Language and cultural barriers
- Ignorance about the issues and lack of knowledge among administration
- Unsupportive communities
- Lack of teacher motivation, engagement and commitment

Barriers to implementation of humane education and type of school or setting of school. To determine whether the number of barriers a respondent was facing to implementing humane education differed based on the type of school or setting of school in which they worked, a variable that was a sum of the number of individual barriers respondents identified as issues for them in implementing humane education was created. Five barriers were presented as options, and respondents could check all that applied, so barrier scores ranged from 0-5. Most respondents selected 1-2 barriers to implementation (see Figure 6).

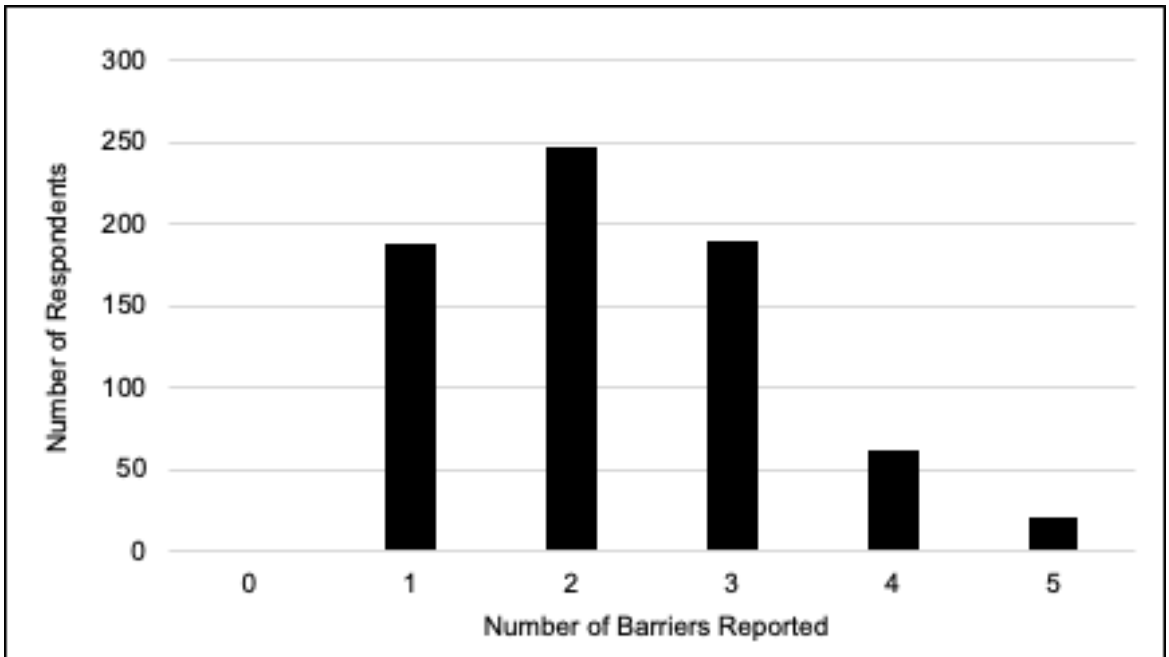

Figure 6: Self-Reported Number of Barriers to Implementing Humane Education by Respondents

There was no difference in the number of barriers by school type (e.g., public, private, or other). However, there was a main effect of percent of high needs students on the number of

barriers reported (F = 4.00, p =.003). Respondents from schools with less than 20% of students with high needs reported significantly fewer barriers than respondents from schools with 60-79% high needs students (difference = -0.44, p = .02) and fewer barriers than respondents from schools with 80-100% high needs students (difference = -0.41, p = .02). There was also a significant interaction between school type and percent of high needs students on reported barriers (F = 2.81, p =.005). This interaction was largely driven by an outlying mean in that "Other" schools with 60-79% of high needs kids reported much higher barriers than any other groups. Generally, there are more barriers to implementation of humane education in schools with higher needs.

For the field of humane education to better help address barriers to humane education it was asked: *Which of the following would be helpful to teach about these issues?* Results can be seen in Figure 7.

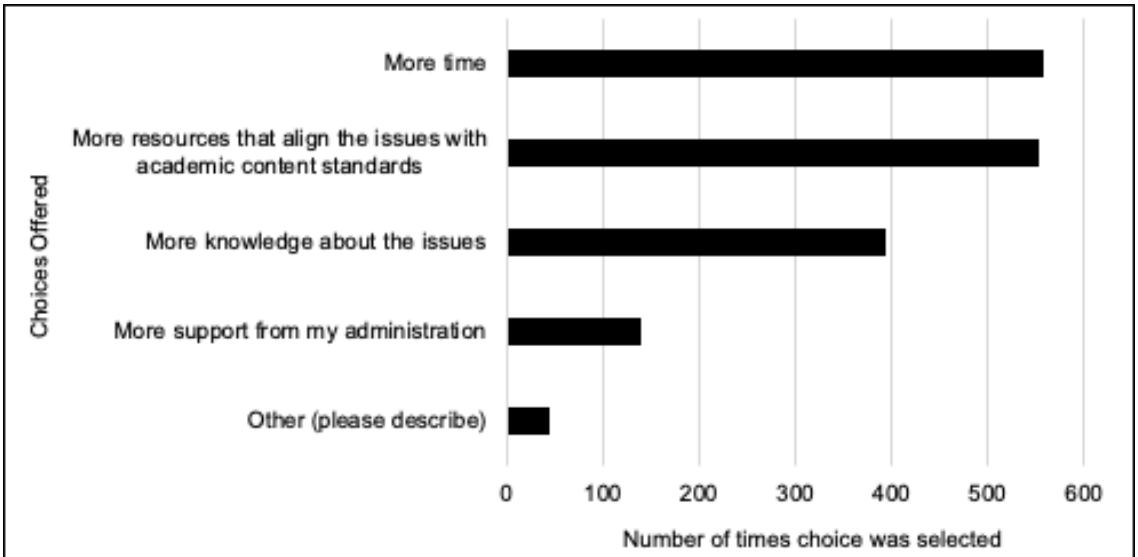

Figure 7: Which of the Following would be Helpful to Teach about these Issues?

Of the 45 "other" responses, those results can be seen in the list below, in descending order of frequency.

- District and state support as well as support from administration
- Increased funding
- Colleagues who care about what's happening in the world and to our planet
- More access to programs, field trips and speakers
- Less focus on state testing
- More school counselors
- Increased awareness of the issues

Support for Humane Education

In preparation for the final question of the survey, the selected definition of humane education from APL was presented again for the respondent. This was followed by inquiring: *Based on the provided definition of humane education, would you support the implementation of humane education into your school?* Six hundred and four respondents said yes, 22 said no, and 203 did not respond. Thirteen of the participants who responded “yes” and five who responded “no” (total 18) utilized the open response option to express concerns related to how the broader implementation of humane education may translate to additional state or federal mandates, while already experiencing difficulty addressing current curriculum and state testing demands.

Discussion

Results demonstrate that one of the largest hurdles facing the field of humane education is simply that teachers and administrators in U.S. schools have not heard of, and/or do not have a clear understanding of what humane education is. This is particularly alarming when the majority (51.99%) of participants have been in education for over 15 years. While 72% of participants self-reported not knowing the definition, nearly 30% of the respondents self-reported they did know but were unable to provide a comprehensive definition. Many believed it solely focused on

animals, while others assumed it was focused on student-centered education. Many participants provided a more traditional yet deficient definition of "kindness/empathy for all living things." While this definition is widely used by humane educators, it leaves out key components of comprehensive humane education. Additionally, from the phrase "living things" it cannot be determined whether respondents believe that humane education includes care and respect for the abiotic (non-living) aspects of the natural world. Currently, a number of differing definitions from humane education organizations are available, creating confusion among educators and even within humane education practitioners. In education, geometry is geometry, chemistry is chemistry, and so on. These results demonstrate that humane educators must create a standard definition and critical pedagogy to be recognized across educational settings. After doing so, understanding and awareness of the field can be disseminated.

A promising finding is that while most participants did not know the definition, once they were provided with one, overwhelmingly they would support humane education in their school. With issues youth are currently facing, it is apparent that school educators can see the value in humane education and how it can help address these issues. With this high level of support from current educators, humane educators can be empowered to look into ways to partner with local and state education systems.

This study investigated educational mandates that require humane education in schools. A majority of participants did not know if their state had a mandate, including those that live in the 18 states that currently have one. This shows that while the state may have a mandate in place, it is not enforced or perhaps even acknowledged. Additionally, there were participants in states that did not have a mandate that said they did, which shows an overall ignorance of humane education mandates in the U.S. Multiple participants (18) stated that they did not want

more requirements and mandates from the state or federal level as they are already having a hard time addressing current mandates. These results demonstrate that (currently) mandates are ineffective when it comes to bringing humane education into schools and that other methods should be explored.

In order to find those other methods, one must first address the barriers to including humane education that educators are facing. As expected, common reported barriers were time, resources, administrator buy-in, and knowledge on the topics. To address these barriers, it is important for humane educators to offer training, lesson plans, and other materials at low to no cost whenever possible. Additionally, aligning of humane education interventions with current mandates is needed. More specifically, how humane education encompasses Social Emotional Learning and character education, and how specific topics and lessons address state and national standards may increase implementation. Helping with lack of time in the school day as a barrier will be explored in the recommendations section.

Many of the barriers were expected, however intense issues students are facing such as bullying and interpersonal violence were noteworthy. Data also showed that public schools had significantly higher reports of harmful issues than private schools, a difference of which humane educators should be aware. Humane education interventions often address sensitive topics (e.g. food justice, racism, violence, modern-day slavery, use of animals in laboratories) of which youth often have no control of in their lives, or may be struggling with on a daily basis (Walkley & Cox, 2013). For example, a lesson on food justice may have students research where food comes from or how humans and animals are treated in the food production system. While this is important information, what if that lesson is being presented to students who only have meals at school as their family cannot afford food at home? It is likely those students will not have many

choices to change their eating habits while eating their school meals (though of course they could rally their school to, for example, only source free-range organic eggs, and if those are not affordable, rally the egg industry to make them so). That said, it doesn't mean that humane educators should avoid difficult topics, but instead being sensitive to what learners are facing and guiding them toward addressing issues they care about and upon which they have agency.

To enhance learning, there is a need for humane educators to become trauma-informed educators (Walkley & Cox, 2013). Topics humane educators often help to address can be draining and triggering, so to bring that to youth who spend their days being bullied, or worrying where their next meal will come from, must be done in a way that recognizes and supports that child's potential trauma. Humane educators should be prepared to acknowledge the past and present issues that a child may have experienced, while still providing a vehicle of healing and hope. Humane educators must seek out trauma-informed training to sustain their educational approach and offerings.

Recommendations

Formal education professionals. The findings from this study suggest a shift away from focusing on high-level policy change. The findings also suggest a shift toward exploring the impact of grassroots level change (i.e., at the school or classroom level vs. state or district), that may include:

- More awareness of accessible humane education resources for teachers (toolkits, curriculum, etc.). There are already numerous free, teaching resources available for teachers, however many respondents reported needing more resources. This shows a need to increase awareness that resources are available so that the educators who have expressed a desire to have humane education in schools can integrate the topics more easily.

- Offering humane education in a variety of settings to allow for flexibility. If school systems are unable to integrate humane education into their existing curriculum due to overwhelming barriers, offering other opportunities could be beneficial. These could include field trip offerings and extracurricular clubs and activities. Another good use of humane education resources may also be the creation of catchy campaigns that do not take much time out of the school day.
- Development and inclusion of humane education courses within teacher/mental health professional training programs. It would be beneficial to reach school professionals from the beginning of their training. This effort collaborates with universities that offer education degrees and school mental health profession degrees at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Humane education professionals. In addition to training for formal educators, there is a need for professional development opportunities for humane educators who work in informal learning environments. These include but are not limited to:

- Development of free opportunities in comprehensive humane education training. Once the field has established an agreed upon definition and pedagogy, there will be a need for all humane educators to engage in professional development to ensure best practices are followed. Additionally, as the world constantly evolves, humane educators must stay up on current events to best bring topics to students.
- Trauma-informed training should be pursued. Humane educators must take it upon themselves to expand their abilities with trauma-informed teaching. This step is crucial in ensuring students are approached with sensitive and supportive education.

Finally, there is a need for more research into the efficacy of humane education. Current studies are paltry and lacking in research rigor. Personal anecdotes and case studies can be beneficial, however, to gain buy-in from larger organizations such as schools of education or state bureaus of education, a rigorous research agenda is needed. Whether humane education works, why it is important, and how it can be integrated into current teaching needs to be determined. Only if these things can be determined will there be a possibility that schools allocate time for humane education, or support training for formal education staff (pre-service or in-service) so that humane education objectives can be integrated into the nation's schools seamlessly.

Limitations

There are noted limitations to this study. One limitation lies in the potential bias introduced via the recruitment methods. Due to the survey being voluntary, respondents who chose to take the survey may have done so because they already had knowledge of, or experience with humane education, while those who chose not to take the survey may have done so due to a lack of familiarity. Additionally, the snowball method of recruitment is likely to have garnered respondents with personal or professional connections to the Humane Education Coalition Policy Committee or the research team, creating the limitation of convenience sampling. This may also have introduced a sample bias of responses from having prior knowledge and being supportive of humane education. While this is a concern, results did show a general lack of knowledge of humane education, and on how to define humane education.

The sample was unevenly distributed across the U.S. Though there were respondents from Puerto Rico, Washington, D.C., and all fifty states, some states, such as Louisiana and Vermont, only had one respondent each. Others, such as Colorado, New York, and Tennessee all

had more than fifty. Future research with larger samples from all areas would be helpful in creating a clearer understanding of the state of humane education in the United States.

Conclusion

This study highlights critical work to be done by the profession of humane education starting with raising awareness of humane education as a field of practice, what humane education is, and the availability of training and numerous accessible resources. Concurrently, there is a need to create a universally accepted definition of humane education, and a carefully and collaboratively crafted critical pedagogy of humane education. Additionally, this study asks humane educators to seek training in trauma-informed education, and at this time, not to burden our formal educators with more imposed mandates. Lastly, this study highlights pathways for future research, such as creating reliable and valid evaluation tools in parallel with the emerging critical pedagogy to develop methods for effective integration of humane education into the formal U.S. education system.

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Appendix A

Survey

School Information

1. Where is your school located? Please provide your school's zip code.

2. Is your school a public or private institution?
Public
Private
Other (please explain)

3. Which grades does your school serve? Select all that apply.
PreK
Kindergarten
1st Grade
2nd Grade
3rd Grade
4th Grade
5th Grade
6th Grade
7th Grade
8th Grade
9th Grade
10th Grade
11th Grade
12th Grade

4. How would you describe your school's community? Select all that apply.
Urban
Rural
Suburban
Other (please describe)

5. Does your school fall under Title I guidelines?
Yes
No
I don't know

6. How many students are enrolled in your school?

1-300
301-700
701-1000
greater than 1000

7. What is the estimated percentage of high-needs students in your school?
Subscript: The US Department of Education defines high-needs students as students at risk of educational failure or otherwise in need of special assistance and support, such as students who are living in poverty, who attend high-minority schools, who are far below grade level, who have left school before receiving a regular high school diploma, who are at risk of not graduating with a diploma on time, who are homeless, who are in foster care, who have been incarcerated, who have disabilities, or who are English learners. For the purpose of this survey, please also include percent students who currently receive free or reduced lunches.
less than 20%
21-39%
40-59%
60-79%
80-100%
Information not available

8. (Optional) Please use this space to share additional feedback about your school (e.g., magnet, charter, STEM).

Educator Information

9. How long have you worked in education?
0-2 years
3-5 years
6-10 years
11-15 years
More than 15 years

10. What is your official job title in education?
Teacher
Guidance Counselor
Social Worker
Administrator
Other (please describe)

11. What grade(s) do you currently teach? Select all that apply. - *Displayed only if teacher is selected for the job title.*

Pre-K
Kindergarten
1st Grade
2nd Grade
3rd Grade
4th Grade
5th Grade
6th Grade
7th Grade
8th Grade
9th Grade
10th Grade
11th Grade
12th Grade

12. What subject(s) do you currently teach? Select all that apply. - *Display only if teacher is selected for the job title.*

English/Language Arts
Math
Science
Social Studies/History/Civics
Health/Physical Education
The Arts (i.e. Music, Art, Drama)
Library Sciences
Other (please describe)

13. What grade levels do you serve? Select all that apply. - *Display only if social worker, guidance counselor, or administrator is selected for the job title.*

Pre-K
Kindergarten
1st Grade
2nd Grade
3rd Grade
4th Grade
5th Grade
6th Grade
7th Grade
8th Grade

9th Grade
10th Grade
11th Grade
12th Grade

Curriculum and Standards

14. What methods do you utilize to gain the tools and skills needed to fulfill educational mandates in your school and/or classroom? Select all that apply.

School and/or district-wide training
Conferences/workshops (not provided by the district)
Consult with peers
Contact a third-party to provide education (i.e., guest speaker)
Online resources (webinars, Pinterest, smartboard lessons, websites, etc.)
Resources provided by school (basal readers, textbooks, etc.)
Purchase educational resources
Other (please describe)

15. Are you familiar with the term "humane education?"

Yes
No

16. (If Yes) Please provide your definition of humane education.

(open text response)

17. (If No) What do you think humane education could mean? *(open text response)*

Display text after previous question is answered:

18. Please find a formal definition of "humane education" below:

Humane education encourages cognitive, affective, and behavioral growth through personal development of critical thinking, problem solving, perspective taking, and empathy as it relates to people, animals, the planet, and the intersections among them; it allows learners to process personal values and choose prosocial behaviors aligned with those values (Academy of Prosocial Learning, 2018).

19. Does your state have an education mandate that incorporates humane education into school standards?

Yes
No
I don't know

20. (If Yes) Please describe the education mandate your state uses to incorporate humane education into school standards. *(open text response)*

21. Does your state have moral or character education mandates that incorporate character education into school standards?

Yes
No
I don't know

22. (If Yes) Please describe mandate(s). *(open text response)*

23. Do you have any character education/humane education initiatives in your school or district? *(select one)*

Yes
No
I don't know

24. (If Yes) Please describe the initiative(s). *(open text response)*

The Issues

25. Which of these issues do you think are important to address in your school and/or community? Select all that apply.

Bullying or peer mistreatment
Interpersonal violence
Maltreatment of animals
Environmental concerns (impacting air, water, soil, living organisms, health, etc.)
Social justice and/or human welfare concerns (impacting human freedom, health, inclusion, equality, bias, etc.)
Social and emotional learning
Other (please describe)

26. In your experience, have any of the following societal issues impacted your students, school, or community? Select all that apply.

Bullying or peer mistreatment
Interpersonal violence
Maltreatment of animals
Environmental concerns (impacting air, water, soil, living organisms, health, etc.)
Social justice and/or human welfare concerns (impacting human freedom, health, inclusion, equality, bias, etc.)

Other (please describe)

27. (Optional) Please use this space to share about any societal issues impacting your students, school, or community. *(open text response)*

28. Which of the following issues are you currently addressing in your educational work (formal or informal)? Select all that apply.

Human rights and social justice
Environmental education
Humane treatment of animals
Social and emotional learning
Civic engagement and media literacy
UN Sustainable Development Goals
Other (please describe)

29. In what setting are you addressing these humane education-related topics? Select all that apply.

Classroom instruction
Off-site experiences/field trips
Clubs
Other (please describe)

30. For any of the above issues, what resources do you use to teach these concepts? Select all that apply.

Lesson plans I created
Lesson plans others created
Downloaded materials
Guest speakers
Literature and books
School-sponsored materials
Other (please describe)

31. For any of the above issues, what barriers do you face in teaching these concepts? Select all that apply.

Lack of knowledge about the issues
Lack of support from my administration
Lack of support from my community
Lack of resources
Lack of time
Other (Please describe)

32. Which of the following would be helpful to teach about these issues? Select all that apply.
More knowledge about the issues
More support from my administration
More resources that align the issues with academic content standards
More time
Other (please describe)

33. Has your school taken students on field trips that promote care for animals, people, or reverence for the environment?
Yes
No
I don't know

34. (If Yes) Please list any field trips you have taken. *(open text response)*

35. Does your school offer any clubs/after-school activities that pertain to any of the following topics: animal protection, social justice/human rights, environmental ethics?
Yes
No
I don't know

36. (If Yes) Please list the activities that apply. *(open text response)*

37. Display the following text for the final two questions:
Humane education encourages cognitive, affective, and behavioral growth through personal development of critical thinking, problem solving, perspective taking, and empathy as it relates to people, animals, the planet, and the intersections among them; it allows learners to process personal values and choose prosocial behaviors aligned with those values (Academy of Prosocial Learning, 2018).

38. Based on the provided definition of humane education, would you support the implementation of humane education into your school?
Yes
No

39. Please explain your response. *(open text response)*

Appendix B

Number of Responses by Location

State/Location	Number of Responses	State/Location (cont.)	Number of Responses (cont.)
Colorado	71	Indiana	8
New York	63	Maine	7
Tennessee	57	Maryland	7
California	46	Arizona	6
North Carolina	40	Iowa	6
Texas	38	Connecticut	5
Washington	38	Kansas	5
New Jersey	34	Nebraska	5
Delaware	29	Alaska	4
Florida	29	Nevada	4
Michigan	28	Oregon	4
Ohio	28	South Carolina	4
New Mexico	25	Hawaii	3
Massachusetts	24	Idaho	3
Illinois	21	Kentucky	3
Pennsylvania	20	New Hampshire	3
Minnesota	19	West Virginia	3
Virginia	19	Mississippi	2
Missouri	17	South Dakota	2
North Dakota	16	Wyoming	2
Georgia	12	Washington, D.C.	2
Arkansas	11	Puerto Rico	2
Montana	11	Louisiana	1
Utah	11	Rhode Island	1
Oklahoma	10	Vermont	1
Wisconsin	10	Replied “Cole”	1
Alabama	8		

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