

12-2020

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**Surviving or Thriving? The Impact Community Collaborations Can Make During a Global
Pandemic**

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LS400: Senior Capstone

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December 21, 2020

Abstract

The focus of this Capstone Project is to determine the ways in which communities and schools can help support students and their families during the current global pandemic. This is an important issue for students and their families because due to differences in socioeconomic status, language, and/or time and availability, not all resources are available to everyone. It is argued that regardless of the presence of any of the factors listed above, all students and their families deserve equitable access to resources, especially in the midst of a global pandemic when resources are not as readily available as they normally would be. Considerations of this issue should include the perspective of employees at the ¹Blueland Community Science Workshop because of their relevant experience in working closely with students and their families in collaboration with schools. After interviewing two employees at Blueland Community Science Workshop, three action options emerged as ways to help increase community collaborations with schools. Establishing schools as community learning centers is argued to be the most effective way to achieve the goals of every student and their families having access to resources.

Keywords: pandemic, resources, community, partnerships

¹ Pseudonyms have been used for all names and most locations.

Surviving or Thriving? The Impact Community Collaborations Make During a Pandemic

Jay grew up knowing that one day he was going to make a difference. As an adolescent, circumstances in his life fueled his love for community and science and when he became an adult and noticed the lack of community resources available, he decided to take action. This is the story of a young humanitarian who made his own way in a new country and serves as inspiration for the students of Ag County. This is the story of Jay Suarez.

Jay was born in Jalisco, Mexico to a large family of entrepreneurs. He lived there for all of his childhood and part of his teens and remembers it fondly as a happy time when he was surrounded by loved ones and was encouraged to explore and have adventures. In fact, in his own words he describes it as a “free-range childhood a la Huckleberry Finn”. At fourteen, Jay and his family were forced to move to the United States for better economic opportunities and Jay found it difficult to adjust. He and his family eventually settled in Appleton where his parents found work in agriculture.

At this point Jay was too young to work, but too old for a babysitter so he and his parents started looking into resources available in Appleton. It was when Jay entered the Community Science Workshop in Appleton for the first time, that his jaw dropped in awe. They had experiments and tools that he had never imagined and a welcoming environment that made him want to return. Jay had migrated to the United States, scared and anxious, and when he arrived he found hope and a sense of community in the Appleton Community Science Workshop.

Upon graduating high school, Jay left the Appleton area to attend UC Berkeley, which he credits his time at the science workshop for making possible. At UC Berkeley, he went on to receive degrees pertaining to the sciences in Mathematics, Spanish Linguistics, and Education. Armed with his degrees, and his desire to help educate, inspire, and assist, Jay settled in the Central Coast with a plan. He remembered the impact the Appleton CSW had had on him as a teenager who needed resources, and he became determined to make sure that South County

had that same access. As an immigrant himself, Jay has a personal commitment to social justice and strives for a better community. It is for this reason that once Jay located the disadvantaged area that he wanted to make a difference in, he decided to open up his own Community Science Workshop.

Literature Synthesis & Integration

The year 2020 has been like no year before in every sense of the word. It has brought on a pandemic with everlasting consequences and a new normal that must be navigated by all. It has affected the economy, education, society as a whole, and the way the entire world operates. Elementary students are one of the most vulnerable citizens that must be considered due to their age and inability to fully care for themselves. In 1965, the California government recognized the need and importance of family accountability to ensure the success of students with Title 1, Part A: Parent and Family Engagement (California, 2020). The current situation demands this same attention to ensure that all students are receiving the quality education and resources they need to make them successful. The following paper will explore the impact of the pandemic on students and how the implementation of having community resources and volunteers can aid families and schools.

What is the Issue?

Prior to March 2020, distance learning was an option that busy high school and college students took advantage of to accommodate their hectic schedules. Elementary students (kindergarten through fifth grade) would often use laptops and digital devices as part of class time for supplemental activities, however their whole class time was not generally spent on technology. When it was announced in March that there was a deadly, communicable disease surging throughout the nation—the novel coronavirus, plans were quickly changed to close school sites worldwide and move instruction online. While this has been beneficial for students health-wise, it has led to an unintended consequence; that there now a high rate of students

proceeding through this pandemic with little to no resources or support that is usually provided to them by the schools they attend. Some of the resources students lack access to include an appropriate setting to learn, a daily source of nutrition, and an outlet for creativity. Taking multigenerational homes, and the fact that over 90% of students at the school district qualify for free or reduced lunch into account, it is imperative that students gain access to these resources (California, n.d). These unprecedented times have not only forced schools to close but also other community resources such as libraries, day cares, and cultural centers. It is at these organizations that students were able to receive extra enrichment and reinforcement outside of school (Jacobsen and Blank, 2013) prior to the spread of the coronavirus.

The coronavirus has not only interrupted the lives of many, but also made the lives of many even more difficult. Parents can no longer rely on schools to safeguard their children's learning and parents are discovering that distance learning comes with its own set of distractions, annoyances, and problems. Even when accommodations are put forth, not all families can take advantage of them if it does not align with their schedule. According to Jennifer B. Taylor, assistant superintendent of the King City Union District, "in spite of the devices and access points [being] made available, up to 35-40% of KCUSD families were unable to access online distance learning due to challenges of rural location, socio-economic status, or lack of adults in the home during online learning hours" (2020, para 1).

Why Is It An Issue?

With school closures expected to last into the year 2021 in some areas of California, it is up to schools, families, and communities to decide the best way to educate students. While some counties are currently able to produce enough evidence that infection rates are down and they are taking the necessary steps to reopen their sites safely, Monterey County has yet to receive the all clear from Governor Newsom and the Monterey County Office of Education (Roney, 2020). In fact, this past summer, the schools of Monterey County were placed on a "watchlist" which dictated they must start the 2020-2021 school virtually (Roney, 2020).

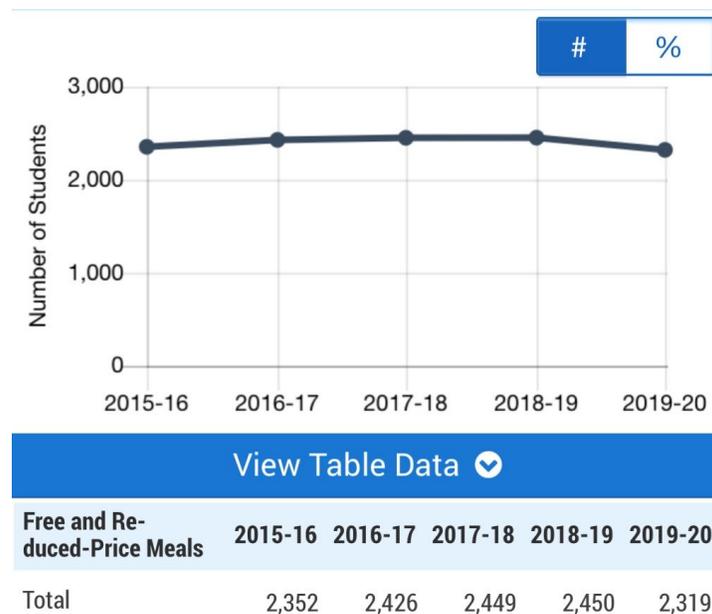
Although this may be considered to be in the best interest for all involved, it does create difficult circumstances for some schools, families, and communities.

Distance learning presents many issues that families must overcome to ensure a quality education for their children. For one, a majority of the students being considered here are minors and as of 2019, “64.2 percent had both parents employed” in the United States (Bu, 2019). The consequences of leaving elementary aged school children unattended at home can range from mild, such as making a mess in the house, to severe, such as getting injured or not logging into Zoom on time, or completing or turning in assignments; both of the latter which could result in negative attention from the school.

Presently, all of the schools within the King City Union District have a high rate of students that qualify for free or reduced lunch (California, n.d). In fact, the following figure illustrates how 2,319 students of the 2,671 who are enrolled in the district qualify (California, n.d).

Figure 1.

Students in the King City Union District who qualify for free and reduced-price meals.



An unfortunate side effect of school closures is that these meals are no longer guaranteed, or as accessible, to students. Factors such as families not having access to a car or living too far away and adults not being present in the home during food distribution windows prevent students and their families from taking advantage of resources even when they are provided. For students and families who are able to make it to distribution sites, school personnel have been setting up tables with sack lunches ready to be picked up daily. Locally, large food distributions are occurring every Tuesday with the help of the National Guard, although since they have been being deployed elsewhere during the pandemic, the call has been put out to the community for volunteers.

It is often said that one cannot be creative until their basic needs, such as shelter and nutrition, are met. Students who have been in quarantine for the last six and half months most likely have spent their days observing and participating in nonacademic content. Schools and community centers are traditionally the location in which even if a student is not particularly creative, they can be nudged or feel comfortable to try something out of their comfort zone. With quarantine forcing children to stay home, students have been lacking this creative push that they used to get from class time, after school programs, and community organizations. Even sites that could operate and offered services to parents were shut down due to parental concern. One such example is ProYouth, a community organization who partners with the King City Union School District, to provide after school services (Taylor, 2020).

What Should Be Done?

For students and their families to successfully make it through this pandemic, it will take the community pulling together. While family, school, and community organizations are typically thought of as three separate entities, together they can create a strong support for students. This type of interaction can be best summarized by Urie Brofenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory of Development, in which the theorist believed that a child's growth and development is influenced by everything in his or her surrounding environment (Brofenbrenner, 1979). If we

operate with Bronfenbrenner's theory in mind, then one could assume that during a pandemic, community members would be the ones to step up. Community members and organizations can forge partnerships between businesses and schools to provide resources that the school would typically provide. In the instance of a pandemic there are several different types of collaborations that could take place.

According to research, family, school, and community partnerships have the potential to "improve school programs and school climate, increase parents' skills and leadership connect families with others in the school and community, and improve chances of success in school and life" (Epstein, 2002, p. 7). In other words, these are the collaborations that take place between organizations within and around the community that directly work with schools to provide opportunities for students. One example of this type of collaboration might be a library. A library has many of the resources that students desire such as quiet place to do work, literature to research, hotspots to connect to, and air conditioning. Organizations such as these can help accommodate families in multiple ways by partnering with schools to place pick-up areas, for food and other items, around schools or bus stops, near a central part of town or their business, or even by having volunteers deliver door to door. According to research, one successful example of this type of partnership is "Being a Lifelong Achiever Starts Today" (BLAST), which is a program in Atlanta, Georgia that features a collaboration between a school, a hospital, and health and fitness center (Little, 2013). Through this particular program, students gained skills pertaining to diet and exercise that otherwise might have been neglected; and in the same program students who did not have access to a community pool were able to learn to swim by having access to the pool provided by the partnership (Little, 2013).

While currently there is little research on how to proceed with schooling, or ensure resources are provided to students during a pandemic, there are several existing options that could be utilized while adhering to social distancing guidelines. One such example is a community school. Community schools are unique in that they provide services that are needed

by the actual community, they do not just teach a certain curriculum or focus on basic subjects. The goal of a community school is to work with “key stakeholders, including students, parents, educators, community members, and partners...to determine...what opportunities and supports, students, family members, and residents need” (Jacobsen and Blank, 2013, para 6).

Essentially, the community school is run by the community for the community. It is not a one-size-fits-all model and must be individually customized to meet the needs of the community by those who know best—the community members themselves. Another opportunity that community schools present is the chance to make learning a part of the family environment; parent engagement is strongly encouraged and “parents often participate in adult-focused activities...such as ESL or GED classes, family literacy programs, and computer training (Jacobsen and Blank, 2013, para 14). In addition to their own studies, it is also easier for the school to keep the parents involved in their child’s education because they spend time in the same place. With current circumstances, if community schools were implemented it would require the cooperation of everyone involved to adhere to strict social distancing guidelines to make it a safe learning environment for all.

While community schools would operate at the same time as regular schooling, and during normal business hours in terms of parent schedules, after school programs are an ideal option for families in which the parents work long hours. Prior to the pandemic, after school programs could be found throughout the country; however, since the spread of the virus, 6 in 10 programs report that they are at risk of shutting down or having to lay off a significant amount of workers, which would make the service difficult to provide (Mitchell, 2020).

Conclusion

In the end, everyone benefits from having healthy and happy students that are having their needs met. The family structure and environment is more pleasant because the children are thriving and are challenged both academically and creatively. The school benefits by having a steady stream of volunteers and access to centers and resources they would not have had

otherwise. Students benefit by networking and obtaining essential social skills that develop students into functioning members of society and the community benefits from a society who is educated, family-oriented, and understands the value of hard work and working towards a common goal. As the literature has shown, when resources are scarce, school-community partnerships will be essential to the lives of students and their families. They say that it takes a village to raise a child and during the pandemic, this sentiment could not be more accurate.

Method

For this Capstone Project the researcher will investigate how employees at the BlueLand Community Science Workshop view supporting students and their families during a pandemic, through school and community partnerships, and what they think could be done to improve it. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature, the researcher will use what she has learned to formulate an action that responds to how students can be supported during a pandemic by school and community partnerships in a way that inspires, informs, or involves a particular audience.

Context

The research for this project took place at the BlueLand Community Science Workshop, located in Monterey County, California. BlueLand is a small agricultural town located in Broccoli Valley along Highway 101. Although the town itself is mostly residential and business, a short drive in either direction offers access to national parks, wineries, as well as popular fast food restaurants. Because BlueLand has a predominantly Hispanic population it is not usual for the town to have celebrations or traditions that adhere to the Mexican culture, such as Dias de Los Muertos celebrations or weekly flea markets.

The BlueLand Community Science Workshop is located right in the middle of the busiest street in town. Its attention-grabbing navy and orange colors invite all to stop in and explore. While the program is intended to attract mainly elementary school aged students, it is

completely open to the public. Community members of all ages are invited to the workshop to drop in and build, tinker, or explore. Those who make up the staff are local high school students, paid volunteers, and people who have a passion for science and helping the community.

Prior to the pandemic, the Blueland Community Science Workshop was heavily involved in afterschool programs; its close proximity to local elementary schools made it ideal to use for that purpose. They also had a full service science bus that employees would park at different school locations to provide materials and a creative space for the students. The workshop itself, both prior to the pandemic and now, operates as a drop in; the goal is not to make anybody feel forced to participate, or locked in monetarily or by contract, but to be there because they want to be.

Currently, in the midst of the pandemic, community members are still invited to the workshop; however, mainly young male elementary school aged students attend. All activities inside have ceased and the workshop has installed tents and chairs in the parking lot. Activities, such as making homemade bottle rockets, occur in this space; and a WI-FI hotspot and amenities are available for those who need a place to sit and do homework. The workshop has also recently partnered with the local recreation center, in which they use the building to provide a youth program, where small pods of children are invited to the center to partake in creative and social activities.

Participants and Participant Selection

The researcher invited two employees of the Blueland Community Science Workshop, and one parent whose child attends the Community Science Workshop, to participate in this study. This group of employees were invited to participate because of their relevant experience in collaborating closely with students and their families, schools, and the community, both prior

to and during the coronavirus pandemic. The parent was interviewed about her son's experiences.

Jay Suarez. The founder of this nonprofit organization. He is about 35 years old, a college graduate, and self-proclaimed "public servant" to those of Blueland.

Candace Zepeda. A paid volunteer at the Blueland Community Science Workshop. She is one of the longest standing employees and is studying to be an alternative educational instructor. Prior to the pandemic, she was in charge of the mobile science bus after school program. She would park the bus at various school sites throughout the week both in Blueland and its rural surrounding cities; students were invited down to create a project or get help with an existing one. She also spoke about her daughter, Zoey's, experiences at the workshop.

Sarah Brush, and son Edgar Brush. A mother and son who reside in Blueland, California. Edgar had attended the workshop about once every two weeks prior to the pandemic.

Researcher. This topic is meaningful to me because since studying individualism versus collectivism in my Human Development courses, I have become interested in the concept of community and how we can use it to better society and the world. I feel that school, family, and community partnerships are essential to this idea, especially during a pandemic, because nothing in society is operating "normally" and it is the responsibility of the

adults to ensure that children are still receiving the quality education and resources they deserve. As a future educator with a passion for social justice and equity, this research is intended to highlight the disparities that exist in Blueland so that they may be examined.

Semi-Structured Interview and Survey Questions for Blueland Employees

1. What do you see as the problem or issue with supporting students during a pandemic through school-community partnerships?
2. What is currently being done to improve supporting students during a pandemic through school-community partnerships? - by whom - and do you think this is good, bad, or indifferent? Why?
3. What do you think should be done about supporting students during a pandemic through school-community partnerships?
4. What do you think are the obstacles/drawbacks/disadvantages to changing supporting students during a pandemic through school-community partnerships?
5. Is there anything else that you would like to say about supporting students during a pandemic through school-community partnerships?

Semi-Structured Interview and Survey Questions for Parent

1. Before the pandemic, how often did you child attend the Blueland Community Science Workshop?
2. Does you child still attend the workshop with its current social distancing protocols? Why or why not?
3. Is your child currently attending school or distance learning?
4. Are you aware of the Community Science Workshop's "Bags Full ofScience" program?
5. Are there any items that your child has to retrieve from school?
 - a. When your school has pick up times, are they convenient for you?
6. How is the communication between you and your child's school?

Procedure

All participants were interviewed and all interviews were done individually. Jay's interview took place at the Blueland Community Science Workshop. It began with a short tour of both the inside and the outside of the facility and ended in a conference room where we completed the interview face-to-face. Ms. Zepeda was unable to meet with the researcher, therefore the interview took place over electronic mail. Mrs. Brush was interviewed over the telephone in a brief seven minute interview. For the face-to face interview a semi-structured interview format was used to allow for follow-up questions to unclear, interesting or unexpected responses. The same interview questions were asked of Candace. Mrs. Brush was interviewed with the second set of questions. Jay's interview was scheduled at his convenience and took about 20 minutes to complete. Ms. Zepeda sent her responses back within two weeks.

Data Analysis

Transcribed interviews were coded and analyzed for emergent themes.

Results

For this Capstone Project, specific members of the community, including parents and

those who have relevant experience in working with children, were interviewed to see what they think could be done to improve supporting students and their families during a pandemic through school and community partnerships. This is important because many students and their families live in poverty and it will take the help of the community members to make access to these resources possible. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature three themes emerged (see Table 1). Evidence-based decision making required evaluating each potential Action Option by the following criteria: availability of employees and/or volunteers, in this case from the Blueland Community Science Workshop; the amount of outreach needed to ensure families know that programs are available; and the amount of communication that would be needed between the parents of each student and their child's teacher, once a child is part of the program. It is important to consider these three criteria because they determine whether or not an action will succeed or not. For students to be successful, it is important that we have people: employees, volunteers—any members of the community, who are willing to step up to help out, even if it may not be their usual field. While volunteers may not always be needed, the idea of establishing a set group who is available when there is a need is ideal. Outreach and communication are a factor because not everybody receives new information the same way. There must be an attempt to reach all individuals across the community, whether that be through commercials on television, posts on Blueland's city and social media web pages, or flyers handed out door to door; every parent and child needs to be given the opportunity to know that the organization exists. While one parent rated the communication between her and her son's school as "fair" (S. Brush, personal communication, November 21, 2020), the most common complaint coming from the other interviewee's, one of which was a parent, was the "lack of communication" (J. Suarez; C. Zepeda, personal communication, October 17, 2020; November 20, 2020). Finally, adherence to social distancing guidelines, aligned with the CDC and California guidelines, must be followed for any of these scenarios to have a chance of being successful. Based on the evaluation of

each Action Option an action will be recommended and justified.

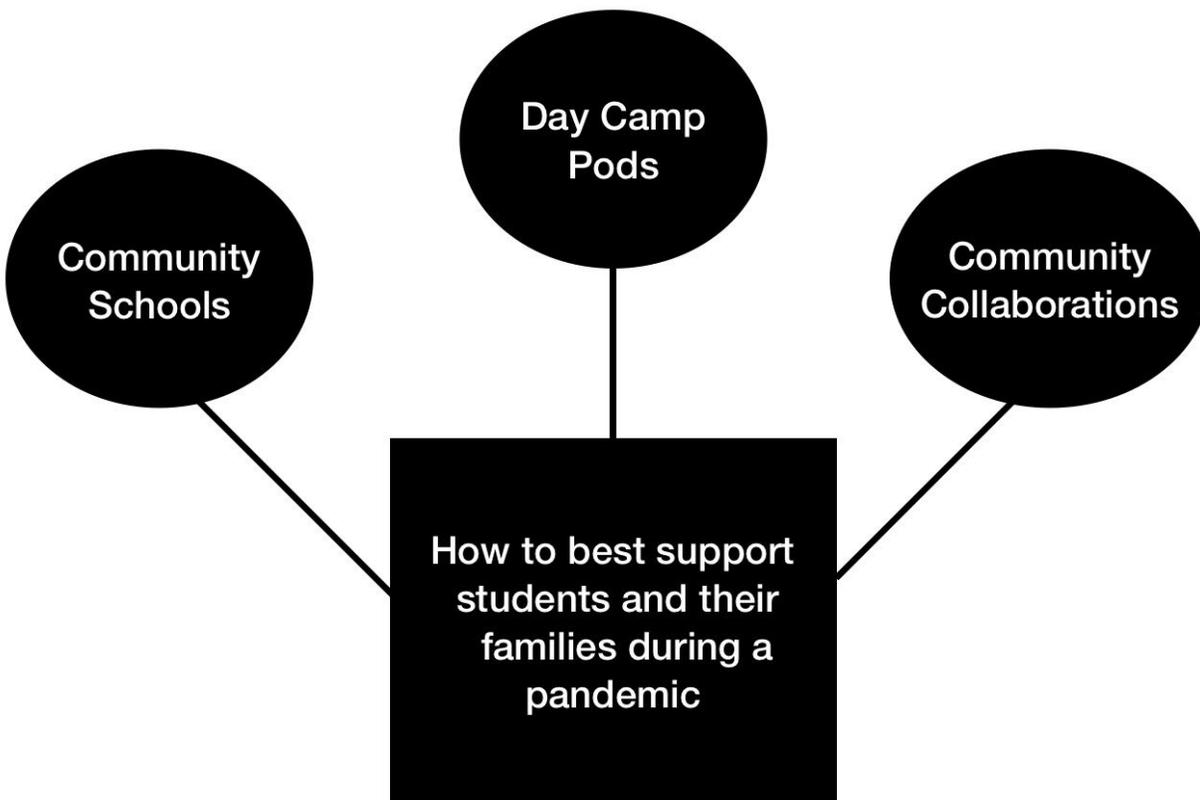


Image 1. Themes which emerged from the data and literature.

Table 1

Evaluation of Action Options

	Availability of Employees/Volunteers	Communication (Outreach and within program)	Adherence to social distancing guidelines
Community Schools: All Day	Medium to High	Medium	High
Day Camp Pods: Replace Afterschool Programs	Medium to High	Medium to High	High

Community Collaborations: All Day	Low to Medium	Medium	High
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Community Schools

For students to continue their education, without resorting to solely online instruction, it will take out of the box thinking and new ways of educating and providing students resources that they need to be successful. According to research, a community school is one way to provide a space for students, teachers, and parents to gather safely (Little, 2013). Jay alludes to this way of thinking, especially for younger grades K-3, when he says that we have an opportunity “[during the pandemic, for schools to] shift focus to younger students to provide a better quality education while parents are working” (J. Suarez, personal communication, October 17, 2020). He believes that it is the responsibility of educators (and like-minded volunteers such as himself) to alleviate the burden off of parents and provide a space for children to gather safely and be educated.

Candace, a mom and newly enrolled distance learning student herself, is someone who could benefit from this type of situation. In addition to being a student, she is also a working parent and says that currently she is having a difficult time managing her daughter, Zoey’s*, schooling. In fact, she relies heavily on her older children to aid her daughter when she is not there, and has even gone as far as to hire a family friend to watch Zoey throughout the week so that she can keep her on task (C. Zepeda, personal communication, November 20, 2020). A community school would provide quiet spaces to study, for both her and her daughter, and also provide access to supplies and resources that they might not otherwise have at home.

A community school would be most effective if it were a collaborative effort between schools and community organizations, such as the Blueland Community Science Workshop. In a community school, schools and organizations could share the responsibility of making up the staff, which could feature teachers and artisans of the community. In terms of outreach and

communication, schools who already have applications for parental communication available, such as ParentSquare, could utilize these to reach out to parents and families to let them know services are available, or to communicate once students are in a particular program. Lastly, for a community school to be successful it would take adherence to strict social distancing guidelines.

Day Camps

Prior to the pandemic, the Blueland Community Science Workshop was well known for providing afterschool program services both at the workshop and at different school sites. Presently, due to the current lack of physical schooling, Governor Newsom has proposed that afterschool program funding be cut by 100 million dollars (Gothold, 2020). Since this money was originally intended for schools, it is only right that it remains to be used for them. Similar to community schools, day camps could run in the afternoon as a replacement for afterschool programs. In this type of scenario, students could be placed with a small pod of students who are similar in age and skill set to them. They would also get the opportunity to be active and around others, one aspect of physical schooling that concerns Candace that her daughter is missing (C. Zepeda, personal communication, October 17, 2020). Essentially, this type of program would be ideal for students who have working parents and/or desire social interaction.

Like community schools, day camps would be most successful if they are a result of the collaborative efforts between schools and community organizations. Depending on where the day camp would be held, would determine how involved a group, such as the Blueland Community Science Workshop would have to be. If it were to take place at their workshop's location then involvement would be high, however, if the day camp were set up at a school or park, volunteers needed from the workshop may not be as critical. The most difficult part of establishing day camps would be outreach and communication since most people are staying home. Organizers would have to find a way of reaching students and families who do not have access to the internet or a television. To try to combat coronavirus, it would make sense for day

camps to be open-air; however, the operation would still need to adhere to strict sanitation and social distancing guidelines to thrive.

Community Collaborations

Another way for students to still receive a quality education and access to resources can be accomplished by schools collaborating with local organizations within their reach. Local resources in which collaborations such as these would make sense would include the local library, a hospital, and/or a recreation center, among others. Many of these organizations have had their doors closed to the community since the start of the pandemic, so it would take organization and planning to open up safely. According to research, libraries offer students, especially those that are considered disadvantaged, the chance to access technology, the opportunity for expanded learning literacy, and direct access to a librarian, someone who can model good habits and help them find the information they desire (Stripling, 2013).

In a scenario such as a community collaboration with a public library, the library would invite students to its location and provide access to instructors and resources in the form of books, Wi-Fi hotspots, technology, and even food. A public library is a great resource because it already provides most of these. As far as staffing, this action option would most likely rely on volunteers from the community. Like community schools, it also presents a great opportunity to bring in local instructors. One advantage for this option is that the library could use its own resources, such as its website or newsletters, to help spread the word about the program so outreach does not fall solely on personnel at schools; and finally,

Conclusion

Of the three action options described above, I recommend that the best way to support students and their families during a pandemic through school and community partnerships would be through a community school. Community schools already exist and provide an excellent blueprint for communities to follow, however, to exist in a post-Covid world, it would be necessary to develop new, safer ways of gathering and educating. Since the BlueLand

Community Science Workshop is already involved with afterschool programs, and working with younger and older members of the community, it would make sense for them to be involved in a community school. In fact, the workshop itself could act as a model for a community school. The workshop could help implement some of the changes it has already made since the pandemic, such as helping move and set up equipment to outdoor areas, erecting tents, and building their own tables for students to work on.

For a community school to be successful it would take constant monitoring; sanitizing; communication between employees, teachers, students, and parents; and extreme organization. The absolute worst-case scenario would be a Covid outbreak, however, if everybody who enters the building is getting a daily temperature check, wearing masks, keeping six feet apart, washing their hands, and mainly staying with the same group of people in the same room, chances of contracting the virus will go down considerably (Roney, 2020). However; professionals should take great consideration when deciding if a reopening is even possible.

The current lack of community involvement in schools may lead one to assume that parents and community members do not want to be involved but that is not always usually case. Many times it is due to several factors, that can include but are not limited to: language barriers, a lack of confidence in navigating the educational system that discourages them from trying, or a sense of isolation from the problem due to lack of communication about needs (Meyer, 2011). To combat these potential negative outcomes, it is the responsibility of school personnel and especially educators, to have an open line of communication with each and every parent and community member who wants to be involved.

In conclusion, many factors must be weighed when deciding how to proceed with educating students through the current coronavirus pandemic. Safety must be first and foremost. While access to technology is critical for the educational aspect, as educators we must also consider our students' mental health and physical and social well-being. A community

school would potentially alleviate all of these concerns by grouping families together where they can still interact at safe distances and have access to resources such as counseling, food, and other essential needs. The pandemic is not an excuse to end life as we know it, it is an opportunity to adapt and create a better society in which communities collectively come together to create a new normal.

Action Documentation and Critical Reflection

For this Capstone Project, two employees of the Blueland Community Science Workshop, and one parent whose child attends the workshop, were interviewed to see what they think could be done to improve supporting students and their families during a pandemic through school and community partnerships. While much research has been done proving the positive effects of community involvement in the classroom while children are physically in school, the pandemic has forced communities worldwide to face the unfortunate truth: there are still a significant number of students who go without food, technology, or an outlet for creativity. In my opinion, this is unacceptable so I decided to investigate further actions that could be done to assist students.

I had previous experience working with Jay in March, just after the pandemic forced closures of both indoor businesses and schools alike. I was tasked with researching a local community organization and had previously seen the workshop in Blueland when I had traveled through there. Jay was more than generous with his time, allowing me to interview him via electronic mail and I could sense his passion for science and helping others through his answers. When it came time to select a community partner for my Capstone project, I did not hesitate to reach out to the workshop and they were more than willing to accommodate me.

After my first meeting with Jay, it became apparent that what the workshop most needed was a steady supply of volunteers. This is because in addition to running the workshop, the employees also provide services and run various events for the city of Blueland. When I

contacted him, Jay's biggest concern was making sure he had enough volunteers to run a biweekly food distribution that families relied on. Before Jay and I hung up the phone we had already set up a plan to distribute flyers virtually and to post flyers both in Blueland and its surrounding cities. We have been distributing the following flyer, changing only the date in the lower left hand corner as needed

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

food bank for monterey county

HEART OF THE VALLEY

THE FOOD BANK AND CITY OF BLUELAND NEED YOUR HELP TO DISTRIBUTE FOOD TO OUR BLUELAND FAMILIES.

JOIN THE CREW, DO SOMETHING FOR BLUELAND
PLEASE CALL/TEXT: 831 BLUELAND TO SIGN UP.
VOLUNTEERS WILL BE WORKING FROM 9:00AM-12:00PM

NO VOLUNTEERS WILL MEAN NO FOOD FOR OUR FAMILIES!

**NEXT EVENT:
TUESDAY
NOVEMBER 10th**

Since we have been sharing the flyer, the response from community members has not been as high as we would have hoped but to our knowledge, it has brought in at least one additional volunteer. Personally, I have participated in the food distribution since the beginning of this semester and I have come to truly enjoy it. I like that I am making a difference in the community and seeing the joy in children's and families faces when they receive their goods for the week. Regardless if there is a pandemic, no family should go without food. For the good of all families in the Blueland community, it is my hope that the Blueland Community Science Workshop will continue their ways of goodwill and inspire those around them to do the same.

Over the past two years, I feel that the Liberal Studies MLOs, the required coursework, and this Action Research Project have helped shape and develop me into an educator who feels confident walking into an elementary school classroom (or signing on to a virtual one). My time in class has been spent under the guidance of skilled professors and mentors who model best practices, and I feel that these relationships and skills will serve me well in the future.

The Liberal Studies MLO's have specifically impacted my life in a different but positive way by opening my eyes to the injustices of the education system and society itself. I now see it as my part of my role and responsibility to advocate for students and to be involved in the fight for social change. To be the professional educator that I envision myself being, I commit to continuing my education and continuing to learn about how to fight social injustices in education through workshops and professional development, and I also choose to be a caring educator who welcomes all students in my classroom.

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Figure 1. Graph that shows number of students qualifying for free or reduced lunch for school years 2015-2020 in the King City Union District. Adapted from California Department of Education and California Longitudinal Pupil Achievement Data System.

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