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**You Had Me at Student Advocacy: Creating a Space for Students to Succeed in a
COVID-19 World**

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Abstract

The focus of this Capstone Project is on the effects the COVID-19 pandemic has had on students' success. This is important because the level of student advocacy during this unprecedented time is a direct reflection of some of the deeper issues surrounding equity engraved into the current education system. Identifying and addressing these issues allows the movement to be made towards fixing them. This creates a better chance of permanent change long after the pandemic. The primary stakeholder perspectives chosen were parents, students, and educational professionals. Three action options emerged from an analysis of the data and were explored as ways to address the issue presented. Schools creating more accessible supplemental academic aid for students, and a push for more parental involvement is argued to be the best option. Based on data, this option will work in favor of ensuring better student outcomes, and success in an educational system now altered by COVID-19.

You Had Me at Student Advocacy: Creating a Space for Students to Succeed in a COVID-19 World

As you lay in bed and think about the week you have ahead of you, you compare it to last week's events, and the weeks before that. It is the same week you have lived for months. You set your alarm to 10 minutes before school starts because instead of needing time to get up, get dressed, pack your bag, and maybe even eat some breakfast; you only need enough time to make sure the wifi is connected and your laptop is charged. You have to log onto your computer in order to interact with your classmates and to attend school, virtually, as you have now for months.

After you get out of school, you then have to find the motivation to do your homework and sit in front of the computer for another couple of hours. Distractions consistently present themselves in your new "learning environment," which in reality is just the quietest area in the house. You are hoping that you do not run into a problem with your online tasks, that you were able to retain some of the information you were supposed to learn during the day. You may have even begun to create a pattern for yourself of just turning in work for the grade, instead of actually learning. As you finish reviewing the previous weeks in your head, you begin to set your phone down and take one last look at the date. It is March 2021, you realize it has been a year since you have been in a classroom. You turn over in bed, as your last thoughts float to the top of your head; you wonder if things will ever improve or go back to normal, and what that might even look like now.

This unprecedented situation we are in right now has made this a reality that students all over the country, including me, have to face. On a daily basis, I experience how this reality has skewed the view of the school. I see it every day in my sibling's attitude towards school, in my own personal attitude, and especially in the actions of my students at my tutoring job. There is a

lack of want from all different learners and students all across the board, things have shifted to an “I have to” ideal. In that way, student success has been seriously hindered and there is a lack of motivation regarding learning. After having no choice but to roll with the punches that this last year has had to offer, students have been forced to adapt to this new way of learning or tragically fall behind.

During this period of my life, I have had a lot of time to reflect on my own learning experience in my early school days. Specifically, how that has affected my view of the current schooling situation. Growing up, school was placed at the forefront of my and my sibling’s priorities. We have had parents that sacrificed greatly to make sure we had everything we could ever need in order to succeed, including moving to a new city so we could have access to better schooling. It is only now in the midst of the chaos, I realize that because of my school’s and my parent’s advocacy in my early school years, that I am now somewhat able to navigate successfully through my schooling during this pandemic. So, when I think about the students who may not have had the same support system behind them, I begin to believe that they are at a severe disadvantage. The most vulnerable students are continuously not equipped with the correct amount of support and resources necessary to succeed, which makes their path to learning during this pandemic extremely hindered. Now more than ever, student advocacy and equity needs to be put under a microscope. This will not only identify the issues at hand but work towards improving conditions long term, in hopes of creating student success for all students. By doing so, we will be able to identify and analyze what we have learned, and use it to support students' success not only the rest of the age of COVID-19, but the rest of these students' school experience.

Literature Synthesis & Integration

In 2020, the world was completely flipped on its head by the COVID-19 virus. Many aspects of Americans' daily life have been affected greatly by the pandemic. The economy, society, and schooling have been left to deal with the succeeding consequences of this event. In that way, schools and educational institutions all across the nation were forced to change teaching modalities and ways of learning have been affected. While most schools and administrators were working towards finding a way to make distance learning work, a plethora of aspects were considered: access to technology, differentiated learning, creations of engaging materials, participation etc. As the pandemic continues we are able to identify how successful or unsuccessful these choices have been in the long run. With us entering our 2nd year of this, we can begin to address how COVID-19 has affected student success and possibly begin to understand how some of the issues we are dealing with have more to do with equity and less to do with our current situation.

What is the problem?

The unparalleled response to the global pandemic has touched every aspect of the education system and the overall learning experience for students. To protect teachers, students, and families, schools all across the nation switched to some sort of online learning, hybrid-type situation. The change was abrupt and left much to be desired for all parties involved, projects unfinished, conversations in-waiting, graduations, and experiences taken away from students. Most of all schools and educational institutions, during this unprecedented time, have been advocating for student success. Merriam Webster dictionary defines the word "success" as a "favorable or desired outcome" (Webster, 2021). Thus, student success can be measured as a desirable outcome for a student. There are many aspects that play into this, but the indicators of

success that are noted time after again by educators are knowledge, responsibilities, and connection (Curtis & Werth, 2015). Although these are overarching broader categories, they play into a bigger picture of students' experiences in school; affecting how and when they learn best.

With school switching to online modalities, at home learning comes with an abundance of obstacles that hinder a student's learning. Distractions, annoyances, and technological problems all come along with distance learning. Parents have come to realize that they can no longer rely on in-person schools and teachers to safeguard their child's learning (Hernandez, 2020). The type of virtual K-12 schooling received is not equipped for all families, and students. "Individual students need to be motivated, organized, and supported. Differences in their environment, meaning their access to instructional support as well as their internet access, can cause significant variations in student success". (Black 2020). This is where the issue of equity begins to come to a head.

Why is it an issue?

At its peak, the number of school closures affected 55.1 million students and 124,000 private and public schools throughout the U.S. (Education Week, 2020). Nearly every state in America recommended or ordered schools to remain closed for the remainder of the 2019-20 school year (Coronavirus and School Closures, 2020). It is evident school closures have had a very real impact on those who are most vulnerable, and have additional barriers to face, regardless of the condition of the world around us. The coronavirus has put a mirror to our education system that magnifies the inequities in our schools. It seems that pre-Corona virus, far too many people lived without the same advocacy as the majority, in addition to inequities to exist without hesitation or question. Online teaching and learning are only effective if students have access to the internet and computers that work. Besides technology, while evaluating

possible success of online learning, schools and districts need to assess and consider the level of diversity in affective/emotional responses to learning at home, in addition to access to safe and affective learning areas (California Department of Education, 2020). It would serve students well to have school sites that show understanding about at home living situations as well, for example at home responsibilities, parental expectations and involvement.

Students' willingness to participate and learn in school had been continuously hindered to do these aspects. Regardless of inequities engraved in the school systems, it is worth mentioning how mental draining online learning can be (OECD, 2020). So many students are feeling the weight of the world on their shoulders at this moment. Thus, teachers again should take into consideration: lack of understanding on what is going on in world due to this pandemic or why they are forced to learn online, anxiety of participation over virtual classroom meetings, screen fatigue, and lack of motivation, and connection to their classmates (Gewertz, 2020).

New findings indicate that by the end of the school year, most students will have fallen behind the mark of where they would have been if they stayed with in-person schooling. In the most drastic cases research says that some students will lose a school year worth learning both academic, and socio-emotional growth (Goldstein, 2020). Without major improvements in schooling coming soon, many students could descend into academic downwards spirals. It is times like these that we are to examine what we can do to make things better, not only now in the current state we are in, but to improve schooling for all students for years to come.

What should be done?

When taking a step back and looking at the big picture of student advocacy, we can begin to identify where districts and schools have faltered over the past year. Student success can be facilitated in a Covid-19 world, with access to proper support and resources. Online teaching and

learning only works if students have access to resources and support as close as possible to what they would receive in-person. This looks like purposely building activities that can be personalized, and used for intentional learning. As well as the creation of more ways to increase parental knowledge, and involvement (García and Weiss, 2020). It would be in the best favor of the students' success for districts and schools to make an effort creating schooling that facilitates all different types of learning, and accessible resources regardless of the current situation. The pandemic has put a serious strain on students' willingness to learn new material, so working towards advocating for students, regardless of their personal situation is key in providing equity (Kuhfield, 2020). When districts work towards recovery by investing in resources to help schools and students, they will be able to make up for the lost academic ground when they return to normal school operations. It is also principal that schools make moves towards redesigning the system to be able to reach all students, ensuring that all children have access to the conditions and resources that enhance learning and development (García and Weiss, 2020). By working towards this redesign, they will better be able to work towards fixing inequities that are long withstanding in the current education system.

Conclusion

For the last year the whole nation's way of life has been uprooted in so many unprecedented ways. Schools across the country were forced to close their doors; educators, and students were forced to completely shift learning mindsets and modalities. While educators were forced to think quickly on their feet and come up with ways to engage students learning in hope of pleasing the masses, many things slipped through the cracks. It seems like the lack of general academic support in addition to accessible resources for parents and students, allowed for inequities to bubble to the surface. Inequities and lack of universal student advocacy allowed

these cracks to reveal themselves as deep burrows that can be identified as years of damage created by the educational system. In order to work towards relief for students, an assessment must be done on the student experience throughout the pandemic. By doing so, we will be able to identify and analyze what we have learned, and use it to better support students' success moving forward.

Method

For this Capstone Project, I investigated how local educational professionals and students view student equity and academic success during a global pandemic and what they think could be done to improve it. An additional goal was to document the state of the education system from a rare point in history. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature, I used what I have learned to formulate an action that responds to the focus issue in a way that inspires, informs, or involves a particular audience.

Context

The research was conducted at a tutoring/education center located in Colvis¹, California. This site is in the middle of a suburban area. It is caddy-corner to multiple shopping centers and down the street from an elementary school, residential neighborhoods, and two parks. It is a place where subject based learning including reading, writing, math, and academic tutoring is done to improve students' knowledge. Students come for help with their classes, or to work through a specialized program that can help them long-term. This center is housed in a building with three rooms, an office, a private room, and the main room full tables for both the tutors and students to sit at. There are countless resources for both educators/tutors to use with their students of all ages that come to learn. The staff is made up of paid tutors consisting of college

¹ Pseudonyms have been used for the names of people, places, and organizations

graduates, current college students, educational professionals and people who are passionate about helping create confident and lifelong learners.

Prior to the pandemic this center ran as mostly an afternoon program for students to attend from 2:30-7:30. Once the pandemic hit and they were able to operate safely and follow covid-regulations, they opened from 8:00 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. Whether it be giving students reliable and supportive space to attend Zoom classes or creating more hours and availability for sessions; they are now able to help students with their online/distance learning. These new post-covid changes allow for help to be accessible more than ever.

The second research location was conducted at Clover South High School. Two of the interviewees attend school at this site. The parent of one of them works in this school district as a Registrar, dealing first hand with administration, parents and students at the elementary school, Independence Elementary, less than 2 miles away. Both schools are located in suburban areas, surrounded by several neighborhoods, and gated communities. Clover South has a student body consisting of a mostly prominent a hispanic student body (43% percent hispanic, 38% white, 9% asian 5% black). About 40% of students come from low-income families. Students with disabilities make up about 13% of the students at Clover South (Greatschools, 2021). This school is rated above average in school quality compared to other schools in California but this does not ensure that all students are receiving opportunities, resources, and support they need in order to succeed.

Participants and Participant Selection

I invited two employees of Teach Society, in addition to two students who attend Clover South High school in Fresno, California, and mother of one of the students to participate in this

study. This select group of participants were invited to participate because of their relevant knowledge and unique experiences regarding their communities, schools, and families before, during and currently during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Katherine Brown: Director of the tutoring/education center. She is about 30 years old, a college graduate, and a hard-working caring leader to all of her students and employees at Teach Society.

Georgina Hernandez: Head tutor at Teach Society. She is the longest standing employee/tutor and a college graduate. She is about 25 years old and has a first hand experience with the students before and after the pandemic occurred.

Matthew Andres is an 18 years old, Mexican American student. Matthew attended Clover Highschool at the beginning of pandemic, and was in his senior year of highschool when the school closed down and learning shifted to online. He is now a freshman in college, and was forced to make the shift through distance learning, and is able to reflect on how COVID-19 affected his student success.

Marie Cortez is a 15 year old Mexican American student. She is a student athlete, who currently attends Clover South Highschool. When the pandemic started she was in her sophomore year, now she is a couple weeks away from being a senior. She participated in 8 months of distance learning but once hybrid learning was an option her parents opted for her to go back to in person classes for 2 days a week. She has a unique view of both types of learning that have occurred during the duration of this pandemic.

Sharon Cortez: Mother of Marie Cortez, but is also a school registrar at Independence Elementary. She spoke about both her experience of working with parents, students, and the local educational system at her school, in addition to her experience of being a parent during this unprecedented time.

Researcher

This topic is personally meaningful to me because as a student myself I have felt greatly affected by the pandemic, especially with my schooling. With having to switch to online modalities and spending hours in front of the screen every day, I have felt my engagement and drive to learn falter. I also witnessed daily how the same things are happening to others around me. I noticed in my younger siblings during their discussions with me, how they do not feel fully supported during this time when they need it the most. Most of the time there is this unspoken change with the students my co-workers and I work with at Tutoring Club, because just like me, students' disengagement has increased considerably. As I move forward with this project I need to be mindful of not letting my own experience with COVID-19 and online schooling influence others' truth of the matter. I want the unique stories and experiences to speak to the issue and at the same time allow a possible solution to present itself in the process.

Educational Professional Semi-Structured Interview and Survey Questions

1. What do you know about school during the global pandemic? What are you most concerned about when it comes to students' academic success during this unprecedented time?
2. What is currently being done to promote student success; - by whom - and what are the strengths and weaknesses of these efforts? Do you think that what is being done is enough?
3. What do you think should be done about making sure every student feels advocated for and supported?
4. What challenges surrounding student equity have presented themselves during this pandemic?
5. Is there anything else that you would like to say about the pandemic and the effect it has

had on students?

Student Semi-Structured “Opportunity” Interview

1. Tell me about your experiences with online school. What do you see as the benefits of online school during a global pandemic? What about the challenges?
2. What is currently being done to support your academic success;- by whom? - and what are the strengths and weaknesses of these efforts?
3. How has the pandemic affected your schooling experience, and your motivation to do well in school?
4. During this time as a student, do you think you are set up for success? If any, what kind of support are you receiving as advocacy for your success?
5. What can be done to make school more engaging for you? What would make it more supportive?
6. Is there anything else that you would like to say about how this last year has affected your attitude towards school/learning?

Procedure

Participants were interviewed. All interviews will be done individually. When it was not possible to interview participants in person, they were invited to complete a phone interview or paper and pencil survey of the same questions. Face-to-Face interviews took less than one hour, were audio-recorded (with participant consent), and took place in a place that is comfortable and chosen by the individual. A semi-structured interview format was used for face-to-face interviews, to allow for follow-up questions to unclear, interesting, or unexpected responses. All

interviews/surveys were scheduled at the convenience of the interviewee and should take approximately 15-25 minutes to complete.

Data Analysis

Transcribed interviews were coded and analyzed for emergent themes.

Results

For this Capstone Project, three educational professionals, and two students were interviewed to see what they think could be done to improve the quality of education they are receiving in their schooling during this global pandemic. This is important because the level of student advocacy during this unprecedented time is a direct reflection of some of the deeper issues surrounding equity that are embedded into current education systems. When these issues are identified and addressed, there can be movement towards fixing them. Doing so creates a better chance of permanent change long after the pandemic is gone. 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: time required, resources, and reach. It is important to have these three criteria in place because they help to determine the validity and successfulness of an option. Time is an important factor to consider because stakeholders will have to sacrifice some of their time in order to help the action be put into place. Furthermore, if those involved in this action do not have the necessary resources, they will not be able to properly succeed with these plans. The last important element to consider is reach. It is key in addressing elements of student success, planning for the future, and trying to ensure every student feels they are advocated for. Based on the evaluation of each Action Option an action will be recommended and justified.

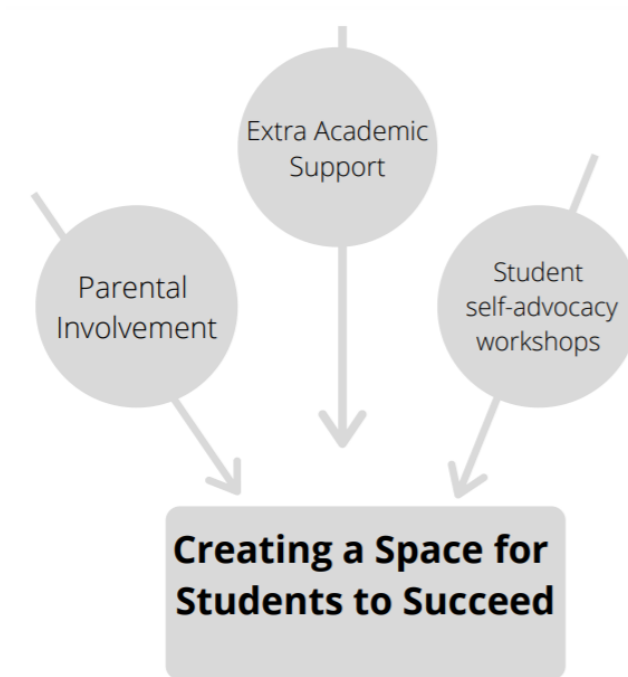


Image 1. Themes which emerged from the data and literature.

Table 1

Evaluation of Action Options

	Time Required	Resources	Reach
Creating a push for parental involvement and providing resources so it is accessible.	Medium	Low/Medium	Medium
Extra aid in/out of classrooms in forms of tutoring, individualized instruction, and support for students.	High	High	High
Student self-advocacy workshops	Medium	Low	Low/Medium

Parental Involvement

Through one of my in-person interviews, an educational professional stated, “...it’s impossible for parents to handle it because they’re not teachers” (K. Brown, personal communication, April 14 2020). She discussed with me the impossible feat that parents have had to face since learning modalities switched abruptly last March in 2020. Now more than ever parents have begun to realize how challenging teaching, learning, and being a student can be. Additionally, in the midst of it all, parents are not equipped with the right resources or information to adequately support their students' learning.

In order to improve student success in this unusual situation, schools need to focus on increasing parental involvement. If schools had expressed the importance of parental involvement before COVID-19 took over the world, parents may have been in a better position to advocate for their children. One way this can be accomplished is through family night workshops for those parents who want to help their children with school work but may lack the proper education to be able to help their children when they are away from school. Additional actions include contacting parents via emails, and having them fill out questionnaires pertaining to which areas they need the most support, so they can properly assist their child.

Another way to increase parent involvement is by proactively involving and informing them about weekly events, learning updates, etc. An educational professional discussed how her school site is promoting parental involvement, and their efforts in easing parents' worries about returning their students to in person during a pandemic, when they stated that “Our administration reached out to parents and tried to encourage parents to come in and see what we're doing. I think a lot of parents are apprehensive because of the safety protocols and are worried about their kids getting sick... I think that parents need to be reassured that we're

following the protocols and that we're not in a situation where we're having widespread contagion COVID running through school” (personal communication citation needed here). She also described how her school site reached out to parents through surveys about their thoughts on different schedules models for their children. The parents and teachers agreed AM/PM models were not the best options for this school site (S. Cortez, personal communication, April 12 2021). When parental involvement was prioritized, a clear decision emerged and most importantly they were able to figure out a schedule that could accommodate most families and students.

When evaluating the action option of creating a push for parental involvement and resources by the three criteria, it was concluded that time needed to implement these workshops would be a moderate amount of time. These resources for parents may take a lot of time to create, plan, and execute, especially if the goal is to make them useful and worthwhile. The number of resources needed would be low to moderate because there are several different routes that schools may choose to go in order to boost parental involvement, it would depend on the school site. The main concern in resource planning would be finding volunteers to run workshops and sending out weekly information/wrap-ups. These wrap-ups can include what teachers went over for the week, and be a glimpse of what they are heading towards in the following week. The weekly informational papers can include school news, activities, small shoutouts to student successes, ways to get involved, etc. The reach of this approach is moderate to high due to the differing choices on implementation. Parental involvement can be encouraged in many ways, but the parents need to be motivated to become a part of a school’s community and understand the power it can have in supporting their child's success as a student.

Extra Academic Support

The pandemic has put a serious strain on students of all ages, because for the past year students and teachers have been forced to adapt to learning modalities that change on a rolling basis. This has created concern in teachers, educators, and administrators, that there may be a learning gap created from inequities in the learning process. Kathrine Brown, a educational professional stated, “I'm scared about next year because next year there's going to be so many more kids that are behind and that need the teachers' help than ever before...they need to be able to provide the extra support in the classrooms, they need to on a normal basis” (K. Brown Personal communication, April 14, 2021) She explains that although there is a constituent push for summer school and intervention, it seems to be a broken system, and not a top priority for schools in her district (K. Brown, personal communication, April 14 2020). The lack of accessible resources, support and academics is what will hinder the bounce back from the effects of the pandemic. It is important to analyze what kind of impact extra support/aid in and out of classrooms, free tutoring, and individualized instruction may have on student success.

Sixteen year old student Marie Cortez spoke about how she feels her teachers are handling student success during this current learning situation she stated, “Teachers are more trying to get through this time period than trying to set us up for success, they're just looking forward to when things go back normal, rather than helping us through this situation, or pushing us to become better students” (M. Cortez, personal communication, April 10, 2021) Of course this is understandable, because during this unprecedented time what teachers and schools are being asked to do is difficult. Despite this importance, schools are creating a disservice to students by waiting for things to go back to normal instead of acting within the now. It would have prevented a lot of damage to student success, motivation and engagement if agencies like

free or minimal cost tutoring, individualized instruction and extra support were implemented at school sites.

With that being said, offering extra academic aid in any form will generally take a lot of time to put into place. The needed time will come from the students, teachers and parents. It will take time for school sites to set up ways to accommodate students, and be able to sufficiently and economically provide the extra support for the students. In that same way the number of resources required will be high as well, because teachers, tutors, and in class room aids will possibly be needed to better support students' success. Importantly, funding will be needed to pay for these resources, and pay for the employees putting in extra time for the students. Despite the time, resources, and even cost being high, this is all in favor of making this option available and accessible to all students regardless of obstacles they may be facing, for that reason this option has a really high reach. Schools have to be willing to create these resources and accessibility in order to properly advocate for students. By creating accessible aid in the form of tutoring, individualized instruction, and extra support in class, schools would be setting their students up for success regardless of circumstances.

Student self-advocacy workshops

When asked what should be done to ensure students will be advocated for, a director of a tutoring center declared “ they need to be taught how to advocate for themselves for when they have for this online school or for any time really, when they have an issue, what they need to do about it, to address it right away, rather than just let it go for a month, or until it’s too late ”. She went on to discuss how she has observed that self-advocacy is not something that schools place importance on (K. Brown, personal communication, April 14). In the midst of an ever changing

educational environment students need the skills to be able to articulate their needs, be organized, and reach out for help when needed.

Now, more than ever, it is necessary for students to understand that by having self advocacy skills they are already one step closer to reaching their goals, and finding success as a student. Student self-advocacy workshops are an action option that puts the students in a position to take ownership of their work. Similar to the other two options, if schools had made an agenda to teach students about self-advocacy, before the pandemic students would have been better set up for success regardless of the situation.

Although, it is not the most engaging content for a student to be taught; having them learn this personal practice can help to create lifelong success for themselves, not only as a student but as human beings. One way this can be accomplished is holding workshops that go over scenarios that involve self-advocating and having students role play what they would have to do in these situations. In these workshops students can evaluate their strengths and weaknesses as communicators and students; then discuss with teachers and peers about what could be done to accommodate their journey to academic success. . Georgina H from Teach Society, stated “Building students’ self-concepts, understanding their own personal strengths and weaknesses, and learning to frame those parts positively can help students to get to where they need to go” (G. Hernandez, personal communication, April 18). At the very least students deserve the right to learn about their rights as students and how to fight for them. Self-advocacy workshops can provide those tools to equip students to succeed.

In terms of time, this option will require a moderate amount in order to put together, plan, and execute it correctly. It will depend on the school site on how they would want to operate these workshops, it could be done as smaller lessons built into the curriculum, spread out over

months, or even as supplementary after school programs. The number of resources needed would be minimal, and it may be possible to use items already on hand. The biggest necessity may be finding volunteer teachers to teach these workshops. The reach of these workshops is low to medium due to the differing applications of these options. The school would have to decide if this is something that needs to be retaught every year, if it should be done during a critical time period, or if it something that will be incorporated regardless of time and repetition. Most of all, in order for this option to work, students would need to be motivated to learn and understand the importance of self-advocacy and how it plays into the bigger picture of their own student success.

Conclusion

After careful consideration of all three actions, it is important to consider which option is best for students' long term success. In that way, I recommend that schools should create more accessible extra academic support for students and create a push for more parental involvement. Through a literature review and data collection from the interviewing process, I believe that these recommendations will work in favor of ensuring better student outcomes, and success in an educational system forever altered by COVID-19. This section will provide a discussion on the concession, limitations, and the possible tribulations that stakeholders may face with this action opinion.

Concessions.

While I recommend a combination of two actions, that does not indicate that the last option of self advocacy workshops for students is not a viable option. This option can serve as a good alternative for those students who do well in school, but are not able to access their full potential as a student yet. While teachers, administrators, and parents more often than not seem

to only worry about students who are falling behind, it is important for students to learn to advocate for themselves. By having these self-advocacy workshops, students will be able to better understand their rights and responsibilities as students, as well as where to access and ask for help when needed. This action's main function is to help students from being pushed along in the education system and aid in creating opportunities for students to succeed.

Limitations

While I choose a combination of extra academic support and increasing parental involvement as the best option, it is still important to recognize the limitations to these action options. One of the biggest qualms of this suggestion is the lack of data currently available, because we are still living in a world very much affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This creates a gap in the answers to whether or not these options would suffice an ever changing educational system. Students have to be willing to accept the extra academic support, tutoring, resources in order for this to benefit them. It will take a lot of time; time from students, staff, volunteers, and parents in order for this option to be successful.

Potential Negative outcomes

It is important to consider the possible negative outcomes that may occur with this action solution. There are some possible implications that could evolve from my recommendations. The pandemic has turned everyone's world upside down and it will take a long time for normalcy to be identified, so a negative outcome could occur from pure lack of structure in most people's lives. Students may feel discouraged to participate in extra academic activities because of the pure lack of disengagement and interest in school that online learning has created. It is important to recognize that most parents that have students in school, work, several children, and busy lives. So to assume that every parent will be available to get involved, is to do the parents school

and most importantly the students a disservice. Finally, the last potential negative outcome that could present itself with this option is lack of funding. It is a worry that combining these two options will cost schools too much money, especially during and after a pandemic.

Conclusion

Regardless of the potential negative outcomes and limitations associated, the combination of the two options of making accessible extra academic support for students and pushing for parental involvement, is still the best solution to increase student success for students in a post-COVID-19 world . These actions place student advocacy as top priority, and allows parents to have the resources to better support their students. By offering students help in the form of, more in class support, free and or accessible tutoring, individualized instruction, as well as looking for community resources that enrich learning, schools will be able to properly advocate for students. Additionally by promoting parent involvement in the form of more frequent teacher-parent conferences, parent meetings, informational flyers/pamphlets, parents can be better informed and equipped to help their students when they are away from school. The COVID-19 pandemic has completely changed the way the educational system functions, but hopefully with the help of this action it can continue to serve students correctly and work to create change that benefits all types of students long after the pandemic becomes history.

Action Documentation

The issue addressed in this Capstone project is students not having the proper amount of advocacy for their success during Covid-19. The issue results from schools and districts not having the proper resources in place in the middle of a pandemic in order to properly aid student success. Many students have been left feeling overwhelmed, worried, and discouraged about learning due to the lack of student advocacy, in addition to lack of communication, and

knowledge about current resources that are available. Over the past year, students, parents, and schools have had to continuously adapt to ever changing learning environments and modalities in order to keep everyone safe. Due to this student success has been compromised, but through literature review, data collection, and the conducting of several interviews with three educational professionals, and two students, three action options emerged that will work towards addressing this issue. The first option is to create extra academic aid for students in the form of more individualized instruction, in-class support, free and or accessible tutoring, in addition to getting in touch with community resources that create enhanced learning experiences for students. The second option is promoting parent involvement, in the form of frequent parent-teacher conferences, parent meetings, creation of informational flyers/pamphlets that can better inform parents and equip them with the knowledge to help their students when they are away from school. The final option is to hold student self-advocacy workshops that will help put the students in a position to take ownership of their education. This option will allow students to learn about their strengths and weaknesses as communicators, organization skills, and about their rights as students. The option chosen was a combination of a push for more parental involvement and extra aid for students. This recommendation was the most effective option, covered the most ground as far as reaching people, and has most of the reassurance that students will be advocated for. From there a letter was written, then sent to the school administrators and school representatives. This letter contained content and information on the literature review, data collection, general research conduction that occurred from this research project. Finally, the letter contained a recommendation on what could be done in order to better advocate for students and aid their success in school. This letter emphasized the point that this option was only a

suggestion , and its main aim is in hopes of aiding administration during this unprecedented time. As of today, I have not yet received a response from anyone at the school site.

To the Administration of Independence Elementary:

My name is Marina Morales, I am a student at California State University of Monterey Bay. I am currently working on my senior capstone, which is a research based project that deals with student advocacy and success during a worldwide pandemic. I would like to share my findings with you and the ideas I have on what can be done to better support students' success especially during this unprecedented time.

The research conducted was primarily focused on what could be done to better support students' success in a Covid-19 world. Putting this issue under a microscope allows us to better understand the priority, or rather lack of, placed on student advocacy during this unprecedented time. This analysis can serve as direct reflection for some of the deeper issues surrounding equity in our current education system. Identifying and addressing these issues allows the movement to be made towards fixing them. In return it will create a better chance of permanent change long after the pandemic.

After thorough examination of the interview data and literature, I would like to share my suggestion of schools creating more accessible extra academic aid for students and creating a push for more parental involvement. By offering students help in the form of: more in class support, free and or accessible tutoring, individualized instruction, addition to possibly looking for community resources that can enrich learning, schools will be able to properly advocate for students. This in conjunction with promoting parent involvement in the form of more frequent teacher-parent conferences, parent meetings, informational fliers/pamphlets, parents can be better informed and equipped to help their students when they are away from school.

It should go without saying that the work that you guys have done to advocate for your students over the past year in the midst of a pandemic has been nothing short of a miracle. Regardless of all the obstacles that this pandemic has thrown your way, you guys as a school site have had no choice but to rise to the occasion and work tirelessly to overcome these challenges. So in that way, I want to make sure that I am expressing myself respectfully and state I am coming from a place of compassion. I want to be able to simply offer the knowledge that I have gained from reviewing literature, data collection, and conducting research.

This letter is in hopes of creating a conversation around the importance of student advocacy and push for accessible resources that ensure student success. When it is safe to do so, and the right time I would love to meet with you, have a conversation about these particular issues and gain some perspective and knowledge from you.

Thank you for your time, I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Marina Morales
marimorales@csumb.edu

Image 2: Screenshot of letter sent to the administration at Independence Elementary

Critical Reflection

Ever since my freshman year here at CSUMB, there has been one required course that always seemed daunting to me more than any other; it was the LS 400: Senior Capstone. This course has always caused a bit of panic because of the importance it placed on trying to create

change by research based action. I was always a little bit worried about picking my topic, and making the right decision. However, when the time came the idea for my project fell into lap. Having lived and experienced school through a pandemic, I felt compelled to make my capstone about this extraordinary time period we are in. Currently I work at a tutoring center, and the toll the pandemic has played on student motivation in school is incredibly evident. The students I work with on a daily basis seemed to be less interested and engaged in their schooling. This project opened my eyes to understanding why this is an issue, and what can be done to avoid this from happening currently and in the future long after the pandemic is history. The one thing I wish I knew more about now that I wish I had known at the beginning of is that this was an issue long before the pandemic hit, it not only being intensified and recognizable due to this. The important next steps are taking what I have learned and using it to create change, even if I was not able to create the bigger waves intended to with the schools in this area. I can take this information and utilize this knowledge in my future classroom, to ensure every single one of my students always feels set up for success and advocated for.

Synthesis and Integration

My time here at California State University of Monterey Bay (CSUMB) has been incredibly influential to my life and professional development. The coursework, Liberal Studies (LS) MLOs, and this action based project have been challenging at points but in hindsight rewarding, and impactful in allowing me to build my professional skills as a future educator. Starting with MLO 1: Developing Educator, this one exemplifies the ways in which students write, speak, and think critically about knowledge, skills, and responsibilities of being a California public educator. This project itself has given me a chance to speak to educational professionals while learning from them in the process. This particular MLO allowed me to gain

perspective on all the different learning approaches and the importance of properly facilitating learning in schools.

In the same manner, MLO 3: Innovative Technology Practitioner, allowed me to recognize the role that technology has in innovating teaching, learning, and effective instruction. During this unprecedented time period with Covid-19, technology has been the saving grace in allowing students to continue learning during social distancing learning. In doing this project I heavily relied on the use of technology for my creation of this write-up, communications, and data research.

Finally, with the courses and projects I have completed in my time at CSUMB, MLO 5: Subject Matter Generalist, has been fulfilled. I am able to demonstrate competency in this subject area by completing a comprehensive and complete depth of study with my coursework, and specifically my capstone project. In order to be the professional educator I envision myself to be, I will be committed to continuing to learn and furthering my education through more coursework, professional development, and experiences. Most importantly, I will never remain complacent when it comes to doing everything I can to support my future students' success, and I will work towards always being responsive to my classroom's environment.

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