California State University, Monterey Bay

Digital Commons @ CSUMB

5-2021

Academically and Mentally Exhausted: Looking Through the Challenges Caused by Distance Learning

Guadalupe Gonzalez
California State University, Monterey Bay

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/caps_thes_all

Recommended Citation

Academically and Mentally Exhausted: Looking Through the Challenges Caused by Distance

Learning

Guadalupe Gonzalez

California State University, Monterey Bay

LS 400: Senior Capstone

Dr. Patty Whang

May 26, 2021

Abstract

The focus issue addressed in this Capstone Protect is on the academic and mental health challenges students faced due to distance learning. This is important because a students' academic performance and mental health status are very important in becoming strong and well adjusted? individuals. An evidence based argument offered is that having stable and reliable internet access plays a key role in a student's academic performance. The three primary stakeholder perspectives chosen were two parents, one parent teacher, and three students because considerations of the issue should include the perspectives of the ones affected by this transition and from those that have witnessed the pros and cons of distance learning. Three action options that emerged from an analysis of the data were allowing more access to resources, hiring a school psychologist, and providing more engaging lessons. Providing more engaging lessons is argued to be the most effective way to achieve the goals of keeping students motivated, achieving academically, and their mental health from declining.

Academically and Mentally Exhausted: Looking Through the Challenges Caused by

Distance Learning

As the clock struck at midnight and a majority of individuals, including myself, celebrated going into the New Year (2020) with family and friends, thinking the year would be one to remember for all the great things we would accomplish. Little did we know that world as we knew it would drastically change, and it was definitely a year to remember but not for the right reasons. In March 2020, the United States government ordered all businesses, places of worship, childcare facilities, and schools to close and for individuals to stay home due to the Coronavirus pandemic. Many thought that the Coronavirus (COVID-19) was just a hoax and things would go back to normal within a few months. Fast forward to March 2021, a year later, and schools, places of worship, and businesses are barely starting to open up but not at full capacity. Many of us are still adjusting to this overwhelming year and looking back at memories that have transpired still affects us today.

You are probably wondering why this matters or what effect it has had on students of all ages. For me, COVID-19 turned my life upside down as a student. Granted, I have taken many courses online in previous semesters, but nothing prepared me for this type of distance learning. As a single parent going to school was my only way of focusing and comprehending my studies. When we had to switch to remote learning, I wanted to take time off school because how was I going to be able to focus while caring for my children at home at the same time? Remote learning has become so stressful and has taken a toll on me mentally. Juggling being a single parent while trying to graduate and offer my boys a better life was not what I had in mind for the Fall (2020) and Spring (2021) semesters. At one point during this transition, I became extremely depressed and just wanted to drop out. Following that mental breakdown, I tested positive for

COVID-19. I felt my world crashing right before me. I had no strength or energy to keep up with my daily life. Along with battling COVID-19 and trying to stay healthy, keeping up with my academics was a battle I was not prepared for. We have millions of students using the internet simultaneously, and within my household, I have five devices connected to our WiFi on a good day. So, along with motherly distractions, I also have to worry about technical issues that may or may not happen during class. All these changes due to COVID-19 have affected me academically and mentally. As a college student, I can only imagine the adverse negative effects that younger students have to endure and overcome during this pandemic.

Now, picture yourself as a happy student having tons of friends, loves going to school, and greeting your teacher and classmates every morning. Now, what if all those things you loved doing were all gone in a matter of months? With many students of all ages and grades struggling with keeping up with their academics and struggling even more with their mental health, we can only ask that parents and teachers pay more attention to us. We, as students, need you more than we ever have in the past. When we ask for help, do not put the spotlight on us and embarrass us in front of the entire class. Take the time to repeat course material in different ways because some of us did not understand it the first time. Parents, if you can check on us daily to ask how we are doing in school. Allow us to take a break to breathe. We ask that you not give up on us but continue to motivate us in being a better student and reassure us that everything will be okay. We look to you for guidance and motivation. Teachers and parents, we thank you for your understanding as we find our way through this pandemic. Yes, I miss my friends and classmates, and I hope we can soon go back to school and in-person teaching; so I, along with millions of others, can feel normal again. This pandemic has taught me, and probably many others, to never

take anything for granted, and if we continue to have faith, we will always find a way to succeed. We just need to never give up and always push forward.

Literature Synthesis & Integration: Education and Mental Health during Distance Learning

Many students along with myself have come across many issues when it comes to our academics and mental health due to the Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19). Since mid-March 2020, the first schools across the United States have closed and switched to distance learning. Soon after, the rest of the schools across the states ranging from Transitional kindergarten (TK) to Universities made the transition to distance learning. Many students face challenges trying to keep up with their academics and maintain stable mental health.

What is the Problem?

The Coronavirus (COVID-19), according to the Center of Disease Control (CDC, 2020), is an illness caused by a virus that can spread from person to person. The virus that causes COVID-19 is a new coronavirus that has spread throughout the world. COVID-19 symptoms can range from mild (or no symptoms) to severe illness and even death.The first case of the deadly COVID-19 hit the United States on January 21, 2020. The CDC requires that individuals remain at least 6 feet apart, wash their hands for a minimum of 20 seconds with soap and water and stay home and only go out when necessary. They also require individuals to always wear a mask. The big problem is the impacts and trauma of these recent events will eventually exacerbate long-standing opportunity gaps (Kuhfeld et al., 2020).

Due to the nature and severity of this virus all schools including child care facilities have closed and made the drastic transition from in-person schooling to distance learning. This change has affected more than 55 million students ranging from TK-High school with more students

attending the University level also being affected (Golberstein, Wen, and Miller, 2019). The transition to online learning, means all students need to have access to the internet at home. This can be a big problem when some families are unable to afford such a necessity; leading to students falling behind in class and a drop in their academic performance.

Why is it an Issue?

To fully understand why a student's academic performance and mental health status are important, we must understand everything they are going through because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Their world was turned upside down when schools were instructed to close. According to Frenette, Frank, and Deng (2019), having a stable and reliable internet access can still hinder a student's academic performance. This is because it also depends on the device(s) that child(ren) are using. Not having the right device to facilitate their learning can make online learning ineffective; this may then cause their academic performance to drop. Frenetter et al. (2019) further explain that 1 in 20 households where children are under the age of 18 do not have the funds to provide them with reliable internet access. Having reliable internet access is the key component to a students' academic performance during this online schooling phase.

Walberg's 1981 theory on Educational Productivity, can be used to better understand just how important learning is. Walberg's theory of educational productivity asserts that "psychological characteristics of individual students and their immediate psychological environments influence educational outcomes (cognitive, behavioral, and attitudinal)" (as cited in Rugutt & Chemosit, 2005, p.1). There are 11 influential categories of learning, eight involve social-emotional influences: classroom management, parental support, student- teacher interactions, social- behavioral attributes, motivational- effective attributes, the peer group, school culture, and classroom climate (Greenberg et al., 2003). Those eight categories are great

examples and implementing them in the classroom can lead to prosperous educational outcomes. Due to the transition to online learning, students are being robbed of these important and influential educational outcomes.

According to Kessler et al. (2007), mental health is very important and a majority of mental health problems begin during the childhood and adolescent years and many students are usually in good health mentally and physically and only go to their health care providers for yearly check-ups and immunizations. Getting treatment for mental health typically does not happen until years after. Students TK through middle school are at a higher risk of developing some type of mental health disorder due to COVID-19 and distance learning (Kessler et al. 2007).

Worldwide, more than 56% of students said their mental health had suffered during the pandemic (Redden, 2021. In contrast, during a study conducted by Chegg (2021), more than 75% of American students that were surveyed stated that their mental health has suffered drastically due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit in March of 2020, according to Brennan (2021), visits to psychiatric emergency department at Rady Children's Hospital have increased as students both in grade school and middle school struggle with virtual learning, social isolation and unstable living arrangements. Brennan (2021) also stated that similar findings through the CDC, noticed a higher percentage of pediatric emergency room visits relating to mental health during the pandemic compared to previous years.

Many psychologists who specialize in education research fear that students will suffer psychologically due to the continuous loss of access to friends, teachers, and routines associated with going to a physical campus. Research also indicates that the school environment is

important for academic motivation and social development, and many students rely on schools

for mental health care (Stringer, 2020).

What Should be Done?

Since the transition to distance learning many students including myself try to find ways

to keep up with our academics while still focusing on our mental health. There is a call for action

for teachers and parents to do their part to keep students engaged with their academics without

mentally exhausting them. First and foremost in order to achieve steady academicas in students

is to offer synchronous class time (Gallagher and Cottingham, 2020). This can be very effective

when it is built around small group peer interactions and direct teacher-to-student feedback.

Having synchronous class meetings can give students a reason to show up to class keeping their

attendance from declining. It also allows them to see friends and familiar faces that will also

keep them motivated and engaged with their classwork.

It is apparent that many students are not adjusting academically or mentally to distance

learning. There are three learning mindsets that can help with the transition to distance learning

and keep students engaged (Kelleher and Hulleman, 2020). The first being sense of belonging,

followed by purpose and relevance, and lastly growth mindset. These three mindsets are key

components that parents and teachers can use to help their child(ren) and students remain

engaged with distance learning and keep their academics from falling. For teachers, creating a

sense of belonging can be done by incorporating lesson plans that students can relate to and that

are interactive. Allow students time to express themselves during class time. Teachers and

parents can also motivate their students to bring purpose and relevance to their academics. Take

the time to go over what exactly you are asking the students to do for assignments and allow

them to ask questions if needed. Research suggests that by incorporating or relating assignments

to everyday life or their existing interest can motivate students'. Lastly, allow students to grow, by never setting them up for failure and always motivating and encouraging them to do their best.

Parents can also provide the student with a quiet area for them to remain focused in class and without distraction.. A survey conducted in March by Barnes & Noble College Insights stated that 64% of survey respondents expressed concerns about being able to focus and maintain the self-discipline needed to study remotely (Friedman, 2020). Regardless of the age of the student, providing a study area at home can help keep them focused and keep them from becoming stressed and overwhelmed. As for teachers, finding alternative ways to keep students engaged by switching up lesson plans, taking five minutes breaks to stretch and providing time for class discussions can develop positive educational outcomes.

Lastly, The World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) provides tips that individuals can do to keep their mental health from declining and to help others who may need some extra support and care. Some of the tips include developing an everyday routine such as working out, or making time for yourself enjoyment. WHO also emphasizes the importance of social contact so keeping in regular contact with people close to you by telephone and online channels (ie. social media) can help individuals remain in good spirits. Providing all these as a teacher or parent can help combat the issues with academic performance and mental health status during distance learning.

Conclusion

Since the start of the pandemic many students have faced challenges keeping up with their academics and not becoming overwhelmed. Overall, there are several things parents and teachers can do to keep students' academic performance from declining and making sure they are

mentally healthy during distance learning. Providing interactive and engaging lesson plans that

students can relate to will help motivate them with their studies (Kelleher and Hulleman, 2020).

Additionally, developing daily routines and keeping in touch with close family and friends can

keep a student's mental health from declining (WHO, 2020). Therefore, incorporating such tips

can help a student flourish both educationally and mentally.

Method[1]

A student's academic performance and mental health status are very important in

becoming strong and well adjusted individuals. For this Capstone Project, I investigated how

parents and students view academic performance and mental health status. This included a

consideration of their personal struggles and opinions on what they feel can be done to help ease

the transition to distance learning, keep their academics from declining while not causing any

mental health issues in the process. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research

literature, I formulate an action that brings awareness to academic performance and mental

health status in a way that inspires, informs, or involves a particular audience.

Context

This research project took place in a South Monterey County town known as Gtown. The

City of Gtown[2] is located in the heart of the Salinas Valley, formed by the Gabilan Mountains

range to the east and the Santa Lucia Mountains range to the west. The 2010 United States

Census reported Gtown's population of 17,930. The population density was 7,647.9 people per

square mile (2,952.9/km²). The racial makeup of Greenfield was: 13 (0.1%) Pacific Islander, 179

---

[1] From the Capstone Project of Guadalupe G. (SP 21)
[2] Pseudonyms have been used for the names of people, places, and organizations.

(1.1%) Asian, 183 (1.1%) African American, 648 (4.0%) from two or more races, 878 (5.4%) Native American, 5,976 (36.6%) White, 8,453 (51.8%) from other races, 14,917 (91.3%) Hispanic or Latino.

Gtown has four elementary schools, one middle school and one high school. All schools with the exception of Gtown High School are located in the same school district. For this project two students are from Gtown Elementary School and the third student is from Gtown high school. Gtown elementary school is one of three elementary schools located in the Gtown school district. The school district was first opened in 1993 and since then has opened more schools throughout the city (Ed-Data, 2020). According to the mission statement of the school, Gtown elementary school lives by the model ALL MEANS ALL. It provides rigorous instruction and creative opportunities for all students. The school strives to build critical and creative thinkers who are inquisitive communicators and lifelong learners that have everything it takes to be successful in life. Gtown elementary school had a total of 628 students enrolled during the 2019-2020 school year. Out of those 628 students, 338 of them are English learners and 110 are Fluent English Proficient. The ethnicity by enrollment is as follows: 0.5% Filipino, 96.7% Hispanic or Latino, 2.7% White, and 0.2% two or more races. 84.7% are socioeconomically disadvantaged (California Department of Education, 2020).

Gtown high school is the only high school in this fast growing city. Gtown high school was first opened in 1998 and is located at the southern end of the city. It had a total enrollment of 1,283 students during the 2019-2020 school year (Ed-Data, 2020). Gtown High School has a total of 301 English learners and 804 Fluent English Proficient students. The ethnicity by enrollment is as follows: 0.1% Asian, 98.4% Hispanic or Latino, 0.1% African American, 0.1% American Indian, 0.1% two or more races, 0.9% White, 0.2% Filipino, and 0.2% Pacific

Islander. 90.8% are socioeconomically disadvantaged (California Department of Education, 2020).

Participants and Participant Selection

I invited four parents and three students to talk about any changes they may have noticed with their child(s) academic performance and mental health status. I also invited three students to talk about their own personal experiences with distance learning and their current mental health status.

Parents:

Molly: A 54 year old Hispanic mother of a high school student.

Sally: A 40 year old Hispanic mother of 7. Two of whom are currently in elementary school and one in a trade school.

Rose: A 37 year old single mom of 5. Two of whom are in elementary school, one in middle school and one in high school.

Lavender: A 31 year old mother and special education teacher. Son is currently in 5th grade.

Students:

May: 17 year old Junior at Greenfield High School.

Jane: 13 year old 6th grader at Cesar Chavez Elementary.

Doe: 12 year old 5th grader at Cesar Chavez Elementary.

Researcher

My name is Guadalupe Gonzalez and I am a Senior completing a B.A. in Liberal Studies

at Cal State University Monterey Bay with a minor in human development. My end goal is to one day have my own classroom teaching 3rd to 5th grade students. I chose to address this topic because as a current student, I myself have faced many challenges and struggles adjusting to distance learning and trying to keep up with my academics while still trying to stay sane. Also, as a future teacher, being able to be as helpful to my students and look at all possible ways to keep them engaged with their studies will hopefully, in turn, keep their academics from declining. I am similar to my participants in a way because I myself have faced struggles and challenges due to distance learning. Nonetheless, I also differ from them because I have experience with distance learning.

Semi-Structured Interview and Survey Questions

   Parent interview

1. What problems/challenges if any do you see with your child's academic performance and mental health due to distance learning? or What are you most concerned about when it comes to your child(s) academic performance and mental health due to distance learning?

2. What is currently being done to support your child's academic performance and mental health during distance learning - by whom - and do you feel like these efforts are making a change (good, bad or indifferent) and why?

3. What do you think should be done to support your child's academic performance and mental health during distance learning?

4. What do you think are the challenges to supporting your child's academic performance and

mental health during distance learning?

5. Is there anything else that you would like to say about your child's academic performance and mental health during distance learning?

Student interview

1. How do you feel about distance learning?

2. Have you noticed any differences in your academic performance from in-person teaching to distance learning teaching?

3. Are you teachers providing more homework than they did when school was in person?

4. How would you describe your current mental health status?

5. What do you think can be done to help improve academic performance and bring awareness to mental health issues due to distance learning?

6. Is there anything else you'd like to say about distance learning and its impact on you?

Procedure

Participants were interviewed. All interviews were done individually. Face-to-Face interviews took less than one hour, were audio-recorded (with participant consent), and took place in the interviewer's home. 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 were scheduled at the convenience of the interviewee.

Data Analysis

Transcribed interviews were coded and analyzed for emergent themes.

Results

For this Capstone Project, four parents, and three students were interviewed to see what

they think could be done to improve academic performance and mental health issues due to

distance learning. This is important because a students' academic performance and mental health

status are very important in becoming strong and well off individuals. 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: cost,

effectiveness, and time. Cost is already a huge factor given that schools are not given the

necessary funds needed to run a school since students' are schooling from home. With teachers

making very little money as it is, having to reach into their own pocket to provide their students

with necessary materials to provide an effective lesson plan through distance learning can be

stressful. Effectiveness is important because it will analyze all possibilities of success. Lastly,

time is necessary because it will tell us how long it will take to reach students' that have been

affected and are possibly falling behind due to distance learning. Based on the evaluation of each

Action Option an action will be recommended and justified.

Table 1

Evaluation of Action Options

	Cost	Effectiveness	Time
Allowing more access to resources	Medium	High	Medium
Hiring a school psychologist	High	High	High
More engaging lessons	Medium	High	Low-Medium

Access to Resources

Having access to resources continues to be expressed through each interview. Allowing students to be able to reach out to either teachers or counselors more often can be very effective in the students' overall academic performance and their mental health status. Parents stressed how distance learning has negatively affected their child's academic performance. Furthermore, this data coincided with literature on the impacts distance learning has on students. As one interviewee stated, "my child has many problems and challenges due to distance learning. My main concern is that her grades have dropped drastically since the start of the pandemic" (Molly, personal communication, April 7, 2021). Another interviewee named Lavender stated the following "his academic performance was negatively and positively impacted due to distance learning. His teacher didn't put much effort and didn't work towards his personal goals (he's on an IEP), luckily I am also a teacher and I now had plenty of time to work with him on his needs. At home he managed to improve his reading skills, time management and life skills (ex. morning routine, learning how to cook and clean). My concerns were and have been that his IEP has not properly been implemented, and his core teacher does a very poor job keeping students engaged. I've noticed he's more engaged and participates in his general education class which is a lot harder than his special education class. The school also does a poor job supporting the teacher

and constantly moves students and schedules around. Safe to say my concerns are in regards to

the school's poor job. His mental health has improved during distance learning. Prior to covid, he

was dealing with a lot of bullying, it was so bad he would ask if he could be placed in home

school. During covid we didn't have to deal with bullying, and I had time to teach him ways to

cope with his emotions, his occupational therapist has also been extremely helpful". The big

problem is the impacts and trauma of these recent events may eventually exacerbate

long-standing opportunity gaps (Kuhfeld et al., 2020). Given the circumstances this pandemic

has caused, granting access to resources has not been easy. There are many students struggling

trying to adjust to this new teaching style. According to Frenette, Frank, and Deng (2019),

having a stable and reliable internet access can still hinder a student's academic performance.

This is because it also depends on the device(s) that child(ren) are using. Not having the right

device to facilitate their learning can make online learning ineffective; this may then cause their

academic performance to drop. One parent stated that the WiFi in their household has not been

strong enough to allow everyone the proper access. Due to this some of her children could not

get their work done or homework turned in on time (Sally, personal communication, April 10,

2021). The literature also reveals that 1 in 20 households where children are under the age of 18

do not have the funds to provide them with reliable internet access (as cited in Frenetter et al.

(2019).

　　　　　After examining both the literature research and interview data it is evident that providing

access to key resources can have a positive impact on a students' overall academic performance

and mental health status. Having reliable internet access is the key component to a students'

academic performance during this online schooling phase. The cost of providing each child with

access to the internet is not as much as we may think. Currently some school districts have

parked hotspot buses in certain low income areas. This has given many students a stronger connection to the internet and they are able to access class without worrying about losing connection. That in itself has shown to be very beneficial and effective in the students' academic performance. The time it takes to provide these hotspot buses is low to medium. Drivers park about 7 a.m. and pick up at 7 p.m.. Nonetheless, this is only available for school days which are Monday through Friday and not including holidays.

Hiring a School Psychologist

The second option would be for the school to hire a school psychologist that focuses on the students' issues with distance learning, providing awareness to the COVID-19 pandemic and being a go-to person. Most schools do not have a therapist on site, so teachers, counselors, and parents have been trying to do their best to provide the necessary resources for the students. According to Stringer (2020), many psychologists who specialize in education fear that students will suffer psychologically due to the continuous loss of access to friends, teachers, and routines associated with going to a physical campus. Research also indicates that the school environment is important for academic motivation and social development, and many students rely on schools for mental health care (Stringer, 2020). One interviewee stated that she continues to come across her daughter being stressed out and crying because she does not know how to do her homework (Rose, personal communication, April 15, 2021). A student interviewee stated the following when asked about her mental health status due to distance learning "distance learning has caused a negative shift in my mental health status. I have become a lot more stressed and overwhelmed with the amount of homework and not being able to effectively communicate with my teacher and classmates'" (Doe, personal communication, April 15, 2021). A school psychologist would help limit those feelings of stress and hopefully keep students engaged in their academics.

The cost to implement this option solely depends on the school district's budget. Schools with high budgets will not have an issue with hiring an on-site psychologist, whereas low-income schools will face difficulties hiring an on-site psychologist. The total expenditures for public elementary and secondary schools in the United States in 2016-2017 amounted to $739 billion or $14,439 for public school students enrolled in fall (in constant 2017-2018 dollars) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) current occupational outlook handbook (2018-2019), the median national annual salary for a school psychologist is $73,270. In addition to the cost of hiring an on-site psychologist , the school will have different expenses if other materials are needed and not provided by the psychologist. The effectiveness of this option will depend on the psychologist and how well they can connect with the students', parents and staff. The psychologist would have to create a trustworthy bond with the students. Creating such bonds can lead to good and healthy relationships and keep students' academics from dropping. Giving the students a place to freely express their feelings and get proper help, can help decrease stress levels and increase self-esteem. The school psychologist can provide education to school staff, parents, and students. It would take some time to implement this option. The school district would have to conduct interviews to make sure they hire the most qualified applicant. It would also take some time to promote student motivation and engagement.

Engaging Lessons

The final action option would be to have teachers and administrators develop more engaging lessons. By doing so this would help students remain focused and engaged in lessons, which in turn would keep their academics up and their mental health from declining. One student interviewee stated that currently she is struggling with using digital math, science, and

reading. She went on to explain that if teachers can make these less complicated to understand and more engaging lessons, she would not be struggling as much as she currently is (Jane, personal communication, April 15, 2021). There are 11 influential categories of learning, eight involve social-emotional influences: classroom management, parental support, student- teacher interactions, social- behavioral attributes, motivational- effective attributes, the peer group, school culture, and classroom climate (Greenberg et al., 2003). Those eight categories are great examples and implementing them in the classroom can lead to prosperous educational outcomes. Another student interviewee went on to say, "I think teachers need to stop putting pressure on us because many of us are having a hard time and this stops our effort in wanting to learn" (May, personal communication, April 17, 2021.) When teachers stop putting pressure on students and provide them with less work that is more engaging, students would not feel like giving up. A parent stated, "academically my daughters have a problem with distance learning. Her grades were better when she attended classes in person. When you see her attending class online in bed, I don't feel like she is taking her classes seriously. Students tend to get lazy with no supervision so it's a challenge keeping them interested when they have so many distractions at home" (Molly, personal communication, April 16, 2021). With so many distractions keeping students less engaged in their studies it is far more evident that teachers need to do better at providing more engaging lessons to help keep students focused on their academics rather than something else.

The cost to implementing more engaging lessons throughout the entirety of distance learning is medium. Teachers and administrators can easily talk to the students to see what they would like to see in the classroom curriculum and how they can be more motivated to stay engaged. Incorporating student involvement can have major positive reinforcement in their

academics. The effectiveness of implementing this action open is high. Allowing for more engaging lessons can only motivate students to succeed and teachers can actually see improvement. The time to provide more engaging lessons is low. Finding more engaging lessons to incorporate into a teacher's lesson plan should not take up too much time, especially after talking to students to see what type of lessons they would like to be doing. The only time I see that can hinder this option into the classroom is possibly having to get administrator approval.

Conclusion

After analyzing the three potential action options it is recommended that option three, providing more engaging lessons, serves as the most cost efficient, the most effective way to keep students motivated and engaged, and will take the least amount of time to implement and see change and improvement in many students' academic performance and mental health.

Concessions. With this recommendation, it is also important to address a concession in favor of the other two options not chosen. Option one has the potential to be a viable option as well. Some important concessions that need to be addressed in favor of option one would be that by providing accessible resources that allow students to be able to reach out to either teachers or counselors more often can be very effective in the students' overall academic performance and their mental health status. Option two also has the potential to be a viable action option. Some important concessions about this option that need to be addressed is that hiring a school psychologist serves as a long-term solution in combating mental health issues. Giving the students a place to freely express their feelings and get proper help, can help decrease stress levels and increase self-esteem. The school psychologist can provide education to school staff, parents, and students. It would take some time to implement this option.

Limitations. There are two important limitations to discuss in this research. The first limitation is the lack of concrete cost to provide more engaging lessons throughout the entirety of the school year. It can be guessed or estimated on how much it would cost, but every school is different, and every school's population can vary. This is a limitation because while one school has the funds to provide all teachers with the proper resources, other schools are unable to do so. The second limitation within this research that is important to recognize includes the incomplete data and the lack of evidence on the effectiveness of providing students with more engaging and motivating lessons.

Potential negative outcomes. There are possible negative outcomes to consider in this action option. For example, providing more engaging lessons will not guarantee that students' will actually do the work or be motivated. This can cause teachers to feel more pressure from parents as to why their child is not improving in their academics. In addition, while teachers can only do so much within their power to keep students engaged and motivated they can lose sight of why they became teachers to begin with.

Conclusion. Distance learning has caused many academic strains on our students and it is becoming a major issue. Despite all limitations and potential negative outcomes, I still believe that action option three, providing more engaging lessons, is the best action option to keep students engaged and motivated in their academics. This action option has the strongest effectiveness of all three action plans. Allowing students to voice their opinions on what they would like to learn, would help keep them motivated with their schooling. Additionally, this allows teachers to build stronger relationships with students and parents. Building this relationship allows parents to reach out to teachers to see what they can do at home to help keep their child motivated and on the right track to success. This action option rises above the others

as the best solution moving forward. Together, we can make a difference and help our students

become motivated, engaged and pave the way for successful individuals.

Action Documentation

Since the start of the pandemic no one really knew the negative impacts it would cause in

the long run; especially for our students. Distance learning has displaced many students

academically and mentally. The COVID-19 pandemic forced all schools to close and drastically

change to distance learning beginning March 2020. This drastic change caused my students to

lose out on the proper education and the opportunity to build student-teacher relationships. This

has become an issue of concern as research suggests that being more engaged can help keep

students motivated. After researching the literature and conducting several interviews with two

parents, one parent teacher and three students, three action options emerged. The first action

option was to allow more access to resources such as being able to get incontact with teachers or

counselors if needed for both students and parents. The second action option is to hire a school

psychologist to allow students to express themselves. The third and final action option was to

provide more engaging lessons throughout the school to help keep students motivated and

engaged. The action option that I implemented was action option three providing more engaging

lessons. This action option was the only one that would help keep students engaged and improve

their academics and mental health. Continuing forward with this recommendation I wrote two

letters, one addressed to the parents and one addressed to the students. These letters were

carefully written with the considerations based on the research done and responses given by the

interviewers. The letters included the action option chosen with tips to help parents navigate

remote learning and examples of posters that can be hung up in the study room/area to keep the

students motivated. The letter to the students suggested for the students to use their voice to give

options to teachers on material. So far, I have yet to hear any response from the stakeholders.

Dear Parents

First and foremost I would like to thank you for taking the time to answer interview questions and providing me with your thoughts, opinions and suggestions. I have gained my insights that helped me construct a thorough research project. Through the literature review and data analysis collected on what can be done to help keep students' academics and mental health from declining, I would like to suggest the following: providing more engaging lessons at home that will help keep the student motivated and less stressed. Possibly reaching out to the teacher to see what you can do at home that can easily keep the student motivated and engaged. Also, putting up supportive posters in their study area can create a welcoming atmosphere. Below you will find tips for getting you through remote learning. You will also find sample photos of possible posters that can be displayed in their study area.

Tips:

Sample motivational poster examples:

In closing, I would like to say it was an absolute pleasure and privilege to work with you and get your feedback. Again, I thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Guadalupe Gonzalez

Image 1. Screenshot of the letter sent to the parents that include suggestions and examples in how to keep students engaged and motivated in their academics.

Dear Students,

First and foremost I would like to thank you for taking the time to answer interview questions and providing me with your thoughts, opinions and suggestions. I have gained my insights that helped me construct a thorough research project. Through the literature review and data analysis collected on what can be done to help keep your academics and mental health from declining, I would like to suggest the following: asking teachers to provide more engaging lesson plans. Use your voice to express what you would like to learn and how you would like to learn it. Navigating through remote learning can be challenging however, when you bring these concerns to your instructor you both can create lesson plans that can be instising and motivate you to learn. Do not be afraid to speak up because not all of us learn the same and implanting a different style of teaching can be rewarding for everyone involved. Nonetheless, I would like to say it was an absolute pleasure and privilege to work with you and get your feedback. Again, I thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Guadalupe Gonzalez

Image 2. Screenshot of the letter sent to the students with suggestions on how to keep them motivated and engaged in their academics.

Critical Reflection

Entering my senior year and my LS 400: *Senior Capstone* course, I had no idea what to expect. Especially with it being conducted virtually, all I could do was become stressed. I am more of a hands-on learner and love learning from my classmates and teachers in person. Nonetheless, after the first couple of weeks my professor reassured us that she will guide us every step of the way throughout this project. When told we are able to choose a topic that interests us and one that we felt was important made it a lot less stressful for me. Being a student myself trying to navigate through distance learning and the pandemic while trying to keep my grades up without stressing has come with many challenges. For that reason, I chose to focus on the challenges many students face such as academic performance and mental health status caused by distance learning. What surprised me the most was that many parents did not have to worry about their child's grades prior to the drastic transition to distance learning. Some of the modifications I had to make was conducting interviews face to face rather than over zoom or email. This allowed me to read body language and rephrase questions that some did not fully understand. Conducting the interviews face to face along with the literature provided me with a positive outcome and allowed me to properly and respectively come up with my three action options. Also, allowing the students to be open and free with their thoughts, options, and suggestions showed me that giving them a voice can go a long way in the right direction. Through this capstone project I learned that as a teacher, parent and student there will always be challenges but with those challenges come motivating ways to overcome them.

Synthesis and Integration

During my time here at California State University, Monterey Bay as an undergraduate student has been at times stressful but nothing short of rewarding. The Liberal Studies (LS) MLOs, the required coursework, and this Action Research Project have had a positive and knowledge-filled impact on me and provided me with the essential qualities that will help guide me throughout my professional career. MLO 1: Developing Educator, I have gained the proper skills to think, write, and speak critically not only in regards to my action project but also when it comes to the responsibilities of a future California public educator. Through the Service Learning (SL) courses offered as a Liberal studies major I have developed a deeper value of diversity and multiculturalism. Also, through the SL courses I acquired new technology skills. Especially, during this challenging time doing remote learning I was able to navigate new technology tools to help keep my students engaged. Through this action project and talking with stakeholders we all want to advocate for an overall more engaging and equality curriculum. Lastly, in regards to MLO 5: Subject Matter Generalist, the LS coursework has provided me with all the tools and education needed to become a successful teacher. As I move forward into the Masters Credential program I need to remain focused and always pause to tell myself why I chose to be a teacher in the first place. Understanding that every student has a voice and learns differently from each other will help me be the best teacher I aspire to be.

References

#HealthyAtHome. (n.d.). Retrieved from

https://www.who.int/campaigns/connecting-the-world-to-combat-coronavirus/healthyatho

me/healthyathome---mental-health

Berg, Geesje Van Den. "Context Matters: Student Experiences Of Interaction In Open Distance

Learning." *Turkish Online Journal of Distance Education*, 2020, pp. 223–236.,

doi:10.17718/tojde.803411.

Brennan, D. S. (2021, February 03). COVID-19 Students' mental health deteriorating during

pandemic. *Grand Haven Tribune*. Retrieved March 03, 2021, from

https://www.grandhaventribune.com/news/health_care/students-mental-health-deteriorati

ng-during-pandemic/article_5883c440-6ae9-5d69-bfd3-0ff28b04d733.html.

Frenette, M., Frank, K., & Deng, Z. (2019). *School closures and the online preparedness of*

children during the COVID-19 pandemic. Statistics Canada = Statistique Canada.

Friedman, J. (2020, May 04). The challenges of pivoting to online classes and how to tackle

them. Retrieved March 05, 2021, from

https://www.usnews.com/education/best-colleges/articles/how-to-overcome-challenges-of

-online-classes-due-to-coronavirus

Gallagher, H. A., Cottingham, B., EdResearch for Recovery Project, Annenberg Institute for

School Reform at Brown University, Results for America, & Stanford University, P. A. for

C. E. (PACE). (2020). Improving the Quality of Distance and Blended Learning. Brief No.

8. In *EdResearch for Recovery Project*. EdResearch for Recovery Project.

Golberstein, E., Wen, H., & Miller, B. F. (2020). Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) and

Mental Health for Children and Adolescents. *JAMA Pediatrics, 174*(9), 819.

doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2020.1456

Greenberg, M. T., Weissberg, R. P., O'brien, M. U., Zins, J. E., Fredericks, L., Resnik, H., &
Elias, M. J. (2003). Enhancing school-based prevention and youth development through
coordinated social, emotional, and academic learning. *American Psychologist, 58*(6-7),
466-474. doi:10.1037/0003-066x.58.6-7.466

Kelleher, I., & Hulleman, C. (2020, August 21). The science of keeping Kids ENGAGED-EVEN
from home. Retrieved March 05, 2021, from
https://www.edutopia.org/article/science-keeping-kids-engaged-even-home

Kessler, R. C., Amminger, G. P., Aguilar-Gaxiola, S., Alonso, J., Lee, S., & ??st??n, T. B.
(2007). Age of onset of mental disorders: A review of recent literature. *Current Opinion in
Psychiatry, 20*(4), 359-364. doi:10.1097/yco.0b013e32816ebc8c

Kuhfeld, M., Soland, J., Tarasawa, B., Johnson, A., Ruzek, E., & Liu, J. (2020). Projecting the
Potential Impact of COVID-19 School Closures on Academic Achievement. *Educational
Researcher, 49*(8), 549-565. doi:10.3102/0013189x20965918

Redden, E. (2021, March 01). Www.chegg.com. Retrieved March 03, 2021, from
https://www.chegg.com/about/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Chegg.org-global-student-surv
ey-2021.pdf

Stringer, H. (2020). Zoom school's mental health toll on kids. *PsycEXTRA Dataset*.
doi:10.1037/e509522020-001

Things to Know about the COVID-19 Pandemic. (n.d.). Retrieved from
https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/your-health/need-to-know.html