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**We're in this Together: Addressing the Struggle of Online Learning for Students with
Special Needs**

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Abstract

The focus of this Capstone Project is on addressing the struggle for special needs students with online learning. The Covid-19 Pandemic has impacted 100% of learners forced into online learning. Students with special needs were also required to follow this same model of learning on their own. However, the challenge for these students is they were previously used to having constant assistance from their teachers and paraeducators with every task they did in the classroom. With online learning generally leaving students with special needs without needed support, they have been struggling. Some families have been trying to be their support at home, but with little outreach or support, this has made it even more difficult for these students. According to the scholarly literature, students with special needs require differentiated methods of instruction to fully engage and benefit from instruction. While it has been no choice to conduct online learning for special needs students at home, an argument has been made that lack of equity has contributed to the challenge to participate at all in online learning. Upon interviewing two special education teachers and one family member of a special needs student, three themes emerged as ways to address the issue presented. Based on the data, an action was chosen as the most effective option to assist special needs students and their families as they are continuing to learn through distance learning.

We're in this Together: Addressing the Struggle of Online Learning for Students with Special Needs

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused many struggles for families of students with disabilities during a new mode of instruction: online learning. Without the proper support such as training videos, behavior management training, and other helpful meetings that could be beneficial to support the parents trying to assist their students, it has been difficult to make this change. Not only are students suffering from this challenging transition, but so are parents. Along with the struggles of assisting students with computer applications, parents are having to multi-task when other issues arise, like behaviors. I am witnessing this happen firsthand to my nephew Landon¹ who suffers from autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and is doing his best to adapt to online learning. Moreover, I have noticed significant changes in Landon, as he has been less active, having significantly more negative behaviors, and is regressing academically. This is due to the challenge of trying to adapt, along with services such as speech therapy and behavior therapy he is missing out on because of distance learning.

My nephew Landon, who is seven years old, attends a local elementary school in Solomon City and is placed in a classroom with students with disabilities along with the support staff of the credentialed special education teacher, para professional assistants, and a one on one behavior specialist. Landon was diagnosed with autism about three years ago. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is best defined as referring to a broad range of conditions characterized by challenges with social skills, repetitive behaviors, speech, and nonverbal communication. With these challenges he is facing as a student with autism spectrum disorder, it has been discouraging

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

and challenging for his mother and family to try to model the rigorous interventions and services he was previously receiving from in person learning.

Students with autism benefit from exercise, as it helps to limit negative behaviors and elevate their overall mood. With in person learning, Landon was a part of an adapted physical education class, where he was able to practice his social skills and be physically active, which supported his mood during the school day. Landon is suffering an educational disadvantage where remote instruction and reinforcements are very difficult over a computer screen. In addition, to the benefits of being active, the social experiences associated with being a part of an adapted physical education setting allowed him to be engaged with his peers. The social benefit of this class has helped him in the past , but now he is losing his social skills and resorts to ASD tendencies of preferring to be alone.

Landon faces the struggle of aggressive behaviors as many individuals with autism spectrum disorders do. In fact, I witnessed a fairly sad event that happened between Landon and my five-year-old son Ian, just two months after the shutdown of schools almost a year ago. In this event, my son was followed in the bathroom by Landon, who locked the door behind them. While I thought my son went into the bathroom alone and Landon stayed in his room to play, I noticed that I had not heard the children's voices. I quickly realized that Landon was not in his room so I rushed to knock on the bathroom door. I could hear Landon laughing and my son screaming at the top of his lungs. A few minutes had passed while I continued knocking, and Landon finally opened the door, hysterically laughing while my son was still screaming and seated on the toilet. When my son calmed down, he told me his eyes hurt, and with the odor in the air I realized that my son was sprayed in the eyes with hair spray by Landon. In regard to this behavior, it would have been addressed and possibly mentioned to the behavioral therapist or his

teacher to fix the issue. Landon had no remorse, or feelings to the event besides it being humorous. I worry forward that these types of behaviors could lead to worse ones down the road as a cause of his ASD. When students are in school, behaviors such as this one could be prevented if he was fully stimulated in school allowing his mood to be better. Behaviors such as those I have witnessed, cause more worry as I have seen him suffer from the little engagement he is getting from online learning.

Prior to the pandemic, students with disabilities received a planned curriculum designed to challenge their diverse learning styles with in person learning. I have noticed that my nephew Landon has regressed academically because of the shift to online learning. He is less engaged in reading books at home, struggling with math , and is regressing in speech. While Landon's mom does her best to support her son with online classes, there is a struggle to keep him engaged and Landon resorts to reaching for a tablet often and this causes him to be less attentive throughout his day. Landon used to receive services of speech therapy, occupational therapy, and one-on-one behavior intervention in school, however with the shut down orders in place, he has dwindled down to the few hours a day of instruction via online ZOOM, and behavioral therapy only a few times a week via ZOOM.

Autistic children require first hand interventions in person from highly trained professionals in person through an engaged learning environment. To have to depend on parents and grandparents to implement the environment they once had at school, is a lot to ask. With the impacts of COVID-19 for a year now, Landon and his mother have faced the challenges of online learning which are impacted daily because of his disability. In addition, these challenges have only caused more stress on both of them. Landons' family is learning as they go about his disorder. I have witnessed that their lack of knowledge about autism has greatly affected the

support he needs for online learning. It has further been tiresome and stressful for his family which causes them to unintentionally respond in a negative way when he is struggling with his disability. Unfortunately, without the services offered in person or even at all, students such as Landon with severe disabilities are suffering each day that they are at home and not in a setting they need to be active and thriving (successful). This issue of students with disabilities not receiving necessary support through online instruction continues to send them on a downward spiral to negative behaviors. This ultimately creates regression to any improvement they had prior to online learning.

Literature Synthesis & Integration: The Need for Accessible Support during Online Learning

The COVID-19 Pandemic has impacted students worldwide and schools have been closed. It was noted by Iyegar (2021) that 58% of the population by May of 2020 was out of school due to school closures. This has forced learners to take fully online instruction. Students with special needs have been affected as they require assistance from their teachers and their paraeducators who are their supports in the classroom. While instruction has been online, they have been without their instructors and have been struggling. Reliable support from trained educators has always been a need. Therefore, online learning has interrupted this support to the special needs population resulting in confusion and frustration. Additionally, parents have tried to supplement this support, but with little guidance, it has made it even more difficult.

What is the problem?

Special needs students routinely require access to assistance with their studies in a classroom setting. Petretto et al. (2020) comments that students need reasonable accommodations and support from other school professionals such as specialized teachers,

educators, and psychologists, yet home confinement limits this kind of needed professional contact. It was mentioned by Howard et al. (2020) that accurately identifying developmental disabilities, including intellectual disability (ID) and autism spectrum disorder (ASD), is critical to linking affected individuals to appropriate services. With the lack of needed support of professionals it has been a huge shift for students and families with special needs who have relied on the support that they always had prior to the Pandemic. In support Petretto et al. (2020) says that students with special educational needs may need extra help during all learning phases. Online learning has left them to be educationally disadvantaged with this shift into fully online learning. It was emphasized by Howard et al. (2021) that it is continually of critical importance of linking students with disabilities to appropriate educational intervention services. Also, there has always been a need to differentiate instruction for this diverse population. "With millions of children out of school, education needs to reinvent itself" (Iyengar, 2021). Additionally, families who have had no choice but to attempt to supplement as support for their students during online learning. In support of this issue, Iyengar (2021) mentioned that Parents have been assisting to facilitate the learning process for their students even more so now than ever before. Though some families have been able to sub in and assist their students, there are still gaps that they cannot fill because the task is out of their hands with the little support they have had in doing so to try to help their students reach their teachers virtually. "Even if teachers pay a huge amount of attention to children needs within the "Distance learning" modality, it is not very simple for them to have a clear awareness of their students' needs in every moment, and all the burden is, again, placed on family members" (Petretto et al, 2020). Families have been doing their best to work through these challenges of facilitating their students' learning, but that does not mean it is not stressful.

Why is it an issue?

Students with disabilities are at high risk for student regression while we are in a current shutdown of schools due to the Covid-19 pandemic. In a recent study, Nelson (2020) stated, “adolescents and young adults with Down Syndrome may experience functional deterioration, an apparent regression of cognitive ability that is characterized by reduced speech and psychomotor activity and a loss of autonomy and daily skills.” Functional deterioration or regression has always been a factor in special education classrooms. For this reason, exposure to an inclusive and specialized classroom environment has always been necessary for students to excel. However, with the shift to online learning, and the loss of this needed classroom environment, students are not on track in their learning levels since the shift into online learning. Iyengar (2021) expressed that students upon returning to schools due to the Pandemic closures are likely to be behind in their learning levels. Students with disabilities have suffered through the frustrations of distance learning and this has caused them to decline in making progress through distance learning.

Lack of internet access has been a struggle in the attempt to execute an online mode of instruction. “Not every child has a device and/or an internet connection, due increasing economic disparities and to the digital divide.” (Richard et al., 2021). The lack of access to the internet has caused students to simply not connect to their classes. Many families were at a loss for what to do during these uncertain times. Some schools distributed wifi hotspots to families, but with the high speed of online applications, this was only a temporary fix. Further stated in this article by Richards et al. (2021) it was said that “Online learning during the pandemic has exposed the extent of internet access disparities among students.” With the issue of not connecting to online classes because of lack of resources like the internet, distance learning has posed a roadblock to

the teachers trying to establish some type of learning environment and educational setting for their students. “But almost a year later, with no end in sight for virtual learning, millions of students still lack reliably fast internet or a working computer” (Richards et al., 2021). Without the proper tools to execute distance learning successfully, students are suffering a disadvantage that is out of reach.

What should be done?

Students need some type of support to access their online classes in confidence. “The school system to be flexible and incorporate community-driven parental engagement with project-based and experiential learning” (Iyengar, 2021). Since parents have become their co-facilitators to assist their students, they need the support of being trained to perform this role from school districts. Parents should be trained to navigate online application systems that students are using such as zoom and google classroom. Students with disabilities currently need access to the best support while home due to school closures. It should be emphasized that sites are continuing to follow Individualized Education Program plans for their students with disabilities. When services can be offered remotely, they should be implemented into student’s schedules. Visual schedules should be given to students and families as they navigate through distance learning. Additionally, there should be more support and training available to family members who may find them useful. When it is safe, students should be allowed to attend small cohorts to get some exposure to the peers and teachers.

Students need to be provided the reliable tools that they need to access their classes online. This includes reliable internet access for all students and families regardless of location, and income. Additionally, students with special needs should have access to reliable computers that can handle online applications like zoom and google classroom. This issue with the digital

divide is not going away, it has always existed. It should be acknowledged now to reach families in need in case schools continue online or into a model that is part time at home and part time at school. This is important because conducting online classes has shown us that we can do so much more when we utilize our resources, however if these resources are not available, how can lead by example to instil a confident connection through distance learning for families.

Conclusion

Overall, there are several issues that our schools can address the disadvantages that have been emphasized by online learning. Richards et al. (2020) mentions that “Distance learning necessitates a huge family support, both for learning and for the use of devices and learning platforms.” Our students with disabilities are regressing in their academic levels at a high rate due to school closures. In addition students with special needs require that access to support be constantly and consistently available to them. This was further emphasized by Petretto et al (2020) when they stated that “children with special educational needs, which are about 10% of the school-aged population, may need an extra-help during all learning phases.” While distance learning has been applying some kind of curriculum for students with disabilities, it has been difficult to learn through a screen for many special needs students. When considering the necessary support that students with disabilities need, it should be emphasized that measures should be enforced in a way that students and parents are supported. “They also have the right to benefit from "accessible" learning materials and learning platforms, in agreement with the Convention of the United Nations of the Rights of People with Disabilities and other specific national laws on inclusion” (Petretto et al, 2020). Therefore, a solution to the struggle of support for students and families needs to be addressed to be able to successfully attempt online learning.

Method

For this Capstone Project, the researcher investigated how three participants living in the Monterey County region view Special Education students who have been struggling with online learning and the negative effects of not receiving essential services they previously received from in-person learning and what they think could be done to improve it. Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature, the researcher used what they have learned to formulate an action that responds to helping our students succeed in a way that inspired, informed, or involved a particular audience.

Context

This research took place through online interviews via zoom with all participants from Maysi County. My first interviewee Sean Sullivan is a Special Education teacher from Red City. Sullivan is a teacher for a community-based classroom at Maysi Adult school. Maysi Adult school is a Transition Program for individuals 18-22 years of age with moderate/severe special needs and community-based instruction refers to the focus of field trips as a whole class activity, culmination to activity or unit based on IEP goals, and exposure to Practical life skills. According to the 2019-2020 SARC report for Maysi Ocean School District that this school is a part of, 4.8% of their population are students with disabilities.

My second interviewee is a Special Education teacher from a Green Star School District at Sunny Elementary School. Sunny Elementary is in Green City with 571 students enrolled in grades K-6 according to the 2018-2019 SARC report. Additionally, 18% of this population are students with disabilities, 43% are English Learners, and 86% are socioeconomically disadvantaged.

My third participant is a sister to a student with disabilities. Her brother attends an Adult Transition Program in Blue City. This program is a post-high school community-based program specifically created to support special needs students transition to adulthood. After students graduate the program supports this group of students to shift into independent living as well as job pathways as they move into adulthood.

Participants and Participant Selection

I invited stakeholders with experience in Special Education which includes two teachers, one male, one female, and one female family member of a student. The mean age of the participants was thirty years old. All participants are of Hispanic descent. The three participants all are former CSUMB alumni. This group of prospective participants was invited to participate because of their relevant influence and experience with special education.

Sean Sullivan. A Hispanic high school Special Education teacher who teaches at a moderate/severe level. He has 6 years of experience as a special education paraeducator and four years of experience as a credentialed teacher. Sullivan has been an instructor for four years in the severe/moderate setting.

Sofia White. A middle school Hispanic Special Education teacher who teaches at a moderate/severe level. She has three years of experience as a paraeducator and four years as a credentialed teacher.

Mandy Potts. A sister of a student with disabilities. She has experience as a paraeducator and is now a social worker for Child Protective Services. She has sat in on all of her brother's IEP (Individualized Education Plan) meetings and advocates for her parents who have limited English proficiency as well as her brother who is nonverbal.

Researcher. This topic is personally meaningful to me as I have ten years of experience as a paraeducator and plan to teach special education. I share the same interest in participating in education for special needs students. My experience in education has led me to the path of wanting to teach to make a difference in the lives of students and promote positivity and inclusion. My training in supporting students inside the classroom, outside of the classroom with community-based instruction, and communications with parent concerns of their students have shown me that this is the work that motivates me. With the impacts that COVID-19 has brought to families of students with disabilities, I aim to acknowledge effective ways to address the struggles with online learning and the negative effects of not receiving essential services they previously received from in-person learning.

Semi-Structured Interview and Survey Questions

Interview Questions for Sean Sullivan and Sofia White

1. What do you know about essential services for students with disabilities? What are you most excited about when it comes to the benefits services provide for students with disabilities?
2. What services are available if any such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, behavioral therapy?
3. What is currently being done to implement (or improve?) the services for students with disabilities - by whom - and what are the strengths and weaknesses of these efforts?
4. What do you think should be done to implement the services for students with disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic?
5. What do you think are the challenges for families to implement (or improve?) the services for students with disabilities?
6. Do you currently have students simply not participating in distance learning because of the challenges?
7. How can students with severe special needs participate in services or distance learning if they are not capable of maneuvering computers and zoom meetings?
8. Are state-mandated tests such as ELPAC (English Language Proficiency Assessment for California or the VCCALPS- Ventura County Comprehensive Alternate Language Proficiency) still being administered during the shut down of schools?
9. Would you be open to returning to teaching students in small groups if this were an option?
10. What are your concerns about the population of special needs students who have regressed, and what interventions can you explain are in place either now or upon returning to school?

Interview Questions for Michelle Potts

1. What is your background and connection to special education?
2. How has online learning changed the way your student learns?
3. Has your student noticeably changed or regressed in his academics?
4. Does your student need help with navigating online instruction?
5. Is there any lack of services that your student is not receiving because of the impacts of COVID-19?
6. Should your student be offered to return in person, what are your thoughts to this consideration?
7. Have you and your family received any training from his school in aims to best support your student?
8. How is online learning affecting your student?
9. What thoughts do you have that would offer to promote better supports for your student now, and in the future for returning to school?

Procedure

Participants were interviewed. All participants were recruited because of their connections to special education. All interviews were done individually. All interviews were invited to meet via zoom. Online zoom interviews took less than one hour and were audio and video recorded (with participant consent). A semi-structured interview format was used for zoom interviews, to allow for follow-up questions to unclear, interesting, or unexpected responses. No compensation was required for all participants. All interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the interviewee and took approximately thirty minutes to complete.

Data Analysis

Transcribed interviews were coded and analyzed for emergent themes.

Results

For this Capstone Project, two special education school teachers and a family member of a special needs student were interviewed to see what they think could be done to improve the struggle of their students with online learning. This is important because students with special needs are at high risk for regression. Iyengar (2021) stated that many children upon returning are likely to lag in their learning levels. Regression in special needs students can happen when students take breaks such as in summer vacations, and with this pandemic spanning out over an entire year, students have lost learning skills as a result of not being in their special education classrooms. An interviewee said that she saw her brother being successful in his special education classroom with the support of staff and therapeutic services he was receiving before the Pandemic, however the moment these services were removed, she significantly noticed him regress (M. Potts, personal communication, April 20, 2021). Based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research of literature three themes emerged (see Table 1). Evidence-based decision-making required evaluating each potential Action Option by the following criteria: time; reach; and effectiveness. The effectiveness of distance learning is important to consider as many students with special needs no longer have the constant support they need and are now struggling with learning through a screen. Also, effectiveness is crucial because student engagement ensures that students are being offered education although online. Effectiveness is additionally critical as special needs students are adhering to an IEP. Time is an important factor that is working against teachers because they have to work longer hours to prepare lessons for each level of needs and IEPs with the additive applications of distance learning. An interviewee said that she has to group her students by English Language Acquisition and math levels and prepare printed packets every week (S.White, personal communication, April 20, 2021). Additionally,

teachers have had to perfect these differentiated methods of teaching in such little time, and expectations to deliver are high. Reach is additionally a vital criterion because it has been difficult to grasp students online because of difficulties in connecting. Based on the evaluation of each Action Option an action will be recommended and justified.

Table 1

Evaluation of Action Options

	Time required	Reach	Effectiveness
Lack of Equity- Parent Support	High	High	Medium
Methodical Connections/ Differentiated instruction	High	Medium	Medium
Be Flexible: Reduction of Community Based Learning Activities	High	Low	Low

Lack of Equity

After discussing with teachers and a family of students in special education, the lack of equity was an issue with distance learning and was expressed in each interview. As one interviewee conquered, “Many students suffer to obtain adequate internet access. Many times hotspots are not enough for resource-heavy programs that may enhance learning experiences but due to connection difficulties, students become lost or fall behind as the lesson carries on”

(S.White, personal communication, April 1, 2021). Distance learning and educational equity both began with an emphasis on access, on providing underserved students with increased access to education (Patricia B. Campbell, & Jennifer Storo,1996). While lack of equity issues emerged across interviews, it has been commonly noted that teachers and students are doing their best to execute online instruction.

Students with special needs require a lot of assistance completing school tasks, and online learning has been a challenge without help by their side. An interviewee said, “Online learning has taken a toll on my brother’s frustration level because it has removed face-to-face contact and teacher support, (M. Potts, personal communication, April 21, 2021). With parents being the main supporters of assisting their students in online learning as a vital necessity, it has been a challenge without much guidance. An interviewee mentioned, “My brother’s school did not provide me appropriate training in the sense of knowing what to expect during distance learning. It would have been beneficial to have a meeting with the teacher and go over things to access and expect during online learning, (M. Potts, personal communication, April 21, 2021).

The action option to offer parents and families at home support and training would be sufficient to help to gain more online engagement as parents would be experts in understanding how they can best support their students. “Parents have become co-facilitators in their children’s learning process more than ever before” (Iyengar, 2021). The time it would take to help parents with virtual training and workshops would be medium as these may be repetitive pieces of training that both school employees and teachers have taken upon the sudden shift into a virtual learning environment. The reach is high along with effectiveness as this could get students to be more engaged with trained parent assistance, instead of guessing to help students get connected or not at all because of the high need for assistance for their special needs students. Equity plays

heavily as a common barrier of tech support such as internet, wifi, and computer access which can be scarce for many lower-income families. One interviewee expressed that out of her whole class, she has consistently had two students simply not connect at all online due to equity issues, (S.White, personal communication, April 20, 2021). While there is a gap of understanding how to access online classes as a result of equity issues, there is also the challenge of parents who work during the school day and cannot assist the needed support that their students with special needs have. Some families expect their siblings who are also in online instruction to help in proxy, but this is not enough as students with special needs need side-by-side help for the entire class duration. This issue was further expressed by another interviewee who explained that it is challenging for families who work and might be expecting other siblings also in distance learning to assist their special needs siblings, (J. Sullivan, personal communication, April 1, 2021). Students with disabilities need consistent and reliable support in any learning environment, especially in online learning.

Methodical Connections/Small Group

Another theme that emerged from the interviews with teachers was methodical connections. It has been a challenge for teachers to change their methods of delivering instruction to students through an online model, yet teachers are doing their best. In special education, differentiated instruction is crucial because students have different levels of abilities in subjects like math and English. With essential services such as occupational therapy and speech therapy still being necessary if required by a student's IEP, the means to deliver the same amount of minutes is still happening through online meetings (S. White, personal communication, April 20, 2021). With the mode of delivering instruction online, teachers have had to be creative in delivering material such as in small groups. The method of teaching in small

groups in breakout rooms has been more effective and less distracting. One interviewee expressed the option of utilizing breakout rooms in small groups has worked to her advantage to have students stay on task, (S. White, personal communication, April 20, 2021).

Be Flexible: Reduction of Community Based Learning Activities

With the shift to all online learning, special education students have had to shift from weekly community-based learning activities to none at all. Community-based instruction is used for special needs students who need instruction on life skills and functional academic skills. This has been a challenge for students who have community goals in their IEPs. One interviewee expressed that it has been challenging to deliver lessons when most of his class's IEP goals require going into the community, shopping, and working in stores. (J. Sullivan, personal communication, April 1, 2021). Instead of weekly community-based outings, Sullivan (2021) has had to be creative in doing documents like tallying up a receipt to pay for groceries or a food bill online through different online games and documents. While teachers have had to make shifts in the ways to deliver instruction, it has been an all-around expectation to be flexible in the way learning is happening. For special needs students who were used to going out every week, even multiple times a week, this has been a severe disturbance to their learning schedule. Another interviewee expressed that the willingness to be flexible has shown her student how much growth can be made when the efforts are there.

Conclusion

Of all the three action options given, I recommend that equity is considered in student households to ensure students have what they need to be successful in online learning and the eventual return to full in-person learning. Additionally, parents should have a better understanding and be trained to assist their special needs students with the different online

applications that are now required to deliver instruction virtually. Based on the literature and the data collected in the interviewing process, I am confident that this is the best solution to better support special needs students who are struggling with online learning. This section will discuss the concessions, limitations, and possible negative outcomes that this action option may entail.

Concessions. While I chose equity and parent support as the best action option, the other two action options have considerable strengths as well. For instance, the action option of methodical connections allows the instructor to deliver instruction according to what they feel suits their students best. Also, the option of remaining flexible is a considerable option as the pandemic has shown us, we are very limited to being out in the community as we are heightening our risk for exposure to COVID-19.

Limitations. While choosing parent support as my recommended action option seems to be the best choice, there are still limitations to recognize as well. The COVID-19 Pandemic has already changed many norms that parents were used to, and it is constantly changing. Therefore, time becomes a factor because it could take much time to prepare such training for parents at home. Additionally, effectiveness could be an issue for parents who are not computer literate with applications such as zoom or google hangouts which are used every day for online learning. Time is also an issue for parents who work during the school day and cannot participate in training or be at home while their students are needing to be connected in online learning. With CBI being inaccessible to instructors and teachers have had to adapt and redesign ways to still expose their students to aspects of what CBI has given them such as being able to pay for their groceries.

Potential negative outcomes. There are possible negative outcomes to consider with the selected action option. Though equity becomes an issue to how involved parents can be with

their students' learning, it doesn't change the deeper struggles a family is facing at home.

Therefore, challenges such as not having proper speed internet connections to support video in online learning which may be required, may not be accessed because it is simply out of the budget for parents with lower income. So, parent support for distance learning to support their students may be unreachable without proper equipment or internet access.

Conclusion. Despite all limitations or potential negative outcomes, I still recommend parent support as the best action option to support special needs students with their struggle in online learning. This action option has the strongest reach of all action options. Reaching parents to support student learning at home during the Pandemic is necessary to ensure students will have the support they need to connect with their instructors online. It should be emphasized that parents with students with special needs are seen as a priority group to engage with to enforce distance learning applications that teachers are working hard to prepare. With schools under much uncertainty because of the COVID-19 Pandemic, we can be ready if online learning extends, or if schools return with part-time in-person learning. This is a time that it is crucial to reach parents and connect with them to support students to engage fully in online learning if possible. Exposure to lessons continued to online learning will help reduce the amount of regression that students may have when they do return to school and this will also save time as goals according to their IEP's can be reached, instead of repeated. I believe that taking the time to help parents become aware of the struggles of online learning will open up a door for more opportunities for success for their students with special needs. This will further empower students to want to engage in online line learning and that we are all learning together as this Pandemic has forced us to make this shift in the delivery of instruction that students with disabilities are struggling with. Correspondingly, parent support will make teacher's jobs easier

to deliver the lessons to their students as they will not have to take the extra time to try to connect with families who are not connecting or doing poorly in their classes.

Action Documentation and Critical Reflection

The lack of equity in the homes of students has been an ongoing issue this entire pandemic as students were forced into online learning. Students with special needs were especially affected because they were used to accessing support by their teachers and paraeducators in a face-to-face setting whenever they needed to complete classwork and activities. Online instruction for this population of learners has been difficult because these households did not have internet access, computer devices, hotspots, and prior knowledge of manipulating computer applications that are needed to access classes online. Additionally, parents who are the main support at home, have become, by default, the assistance that their students need, but are failing to follow through because they have not been trained to use these applications of online classes. It is also important to address that most parents have to work during the school day and cannot be there to support their students. The literature studied points to the result that the lack of equity in homes is an issue because this leads to students not being competently able to connect to classes at all, which ultimately they suffer from regressing in their skills such as academics, or behaviors which are written in their IEPs. After researching the literature and conducting three interviews with individuals that associate with special needs students three action options emerged. The first action option addresses the lack of equity in lower-income households which are needing support and training on online applications needed to access online classrooms. The second action option is for teachers to strategically be created at reaching their students as students with special needs need differentiated methods of instruction. The third action option requires teachers to be open-minded when preparing and delivering instruction that may need to be tailored as things such as community-based outings are not

accessible due to the pandemic. Addressing the lack of equity to better support families and their students was the recommended action option. For my action (see Figure 1) I have created a flyer to be posted for families needing support and training in online applications and I posted this at a local radio station in my hometown to be read if they have time. Additionally, I created a social media platform to also show that this issue of students with disabilities struggling in online learning because of lack of equity needs to be addressed. My flyer is asking for families needing assistance in online learning such as in zoom or google classroom to follow my social media as I intend to post various tips to support parents and students in online learning.

Figure 1. Poster to Radio Station for Parents

ARE YOUR STUDENTS STRUGGLING IN
ONLINE LEARNING?

CALLING ALL PARENTS

Parents, do you need tips to help
assist your students online with
ZOOM and **Google classroom**?
Follow my Instagram below for help

Students with special needs? Follow the instagram:
Specialneedsawareness2021 for more tips on how to
engage in online learning for your students!

#WEREINTHISTOGETHER

Action Research Project Documentation and Reflection

Beginning the semester I did not know what to expect from my Senior Capstone LS 400 project. I was motivated to choose a topic of personal meaning and this sparked my interest in pursuing a topic addressing special needs students. This topic is meaningful to me as I was a

former paraeducator for ten years, which motivated me to further my education with the goal of becoming a special education teacher. I chose to keep my topic close to home as I interviewed teachers and a family member with a special needs sibling in my county. What surprised me was that commonalities across interviews aligned smoothly with what message I was wanting to convey through my project. So far, I have not heard back from the radio station I posted my flyer at, but I did create a social media account as well to see if I could get any later responses of interest. I myself, have a good knowledge of navigating zoom, google meets, and google classroom and in my current position as a school clerk, I have assisted families but I am one person, and this needs to happen school-wide over the various school districts should remote instruction continue. I did have to modify questions as I interviewed teachers and a family member and I still saw emergent themes through my data collected. What I know now that I wished I'd have known from the start was to trust my actions as suggestions to schools and to also acknowledge that this pandemic has put our schools and communities into a constantly changing environment so remaining calm and trusting the system set in place is necessary. My next steps for me as a future teacher are to keep in mind the issues that emerged through instruction and remain flexible to these issues. What I learned about myself through this project is that I care deeply for families suffering educational disadvantages and I aim to advocate for the families of my future students to spark change.

Synthesis and Integration

My time spent as an undergraduate student in the Liberal Studies program at CSUMB has been challenging, motivating, and rewarding. The required coursework, Liberal Studies (LS) MLOs, and this action research project have shaped me to embrace what I have learned and this has driven me to excel in my professional development as a student and a future educator. Looking at MLO 1: Developing Educator I have acquired the initiative and confidence to

advocate in a professional manner by speaking my voice, developing in my writing, and research skills that helped foster the development of my project and apply my perspectives of Education as a future teacher in California. My project helped me to sort out my ideas, and use the help of professionals in the area I aim to teach in to conduct my research. Addressing MLO 5: Subject Matter Generalist, I recognize and appreciate the knowledge I have gained in my major of Liberal Studies to successfully complete a coherent depth of study in my research conducted. By analyzing my data and literature I have been inspired to gain a deeper understanding and knowledge in fostering learning through teaching. As I move forward into my next steps as an educator, I take with me my experiences, passions, and motivations that helped me complete my undergraduate degree and gain academic achievement and distinction in my major of Liberal Studies. I aim to move forward with an open mind and positive attitude to further my education to become an educator that will embrace and empower the minds of my future students.

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