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From Form Crisis to Come Back: Reviving Education in the Era of COVID-19

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Abstract

The outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020 had an unprecedented impact on education worldwide. The researcher will use what they have learned to find ways in which we can help students who are falling behind in their education. Learning loss caused by COVID-19 is crucial because it has real, lasting consequences for students, and it's essential to address these issues to ensure their continued success in education. Based on a comprehensive analysis of diverse data sources, including academic literature and interviews, three potential action options emerged to address the ongoing negative repercussions of COVID-19 on upper elementary school students. Based on an analysis of the interviews and the relevant research literature, the researcher used what they learned to implement an action that responds to the focus issue in a way that inspires, informs, or involves a particular audience.

From Crisis to Come Back: Reviving Education in the Era of COVID-19

Setting The Stage

The impact of Covid on students has been significant, affecting various aspects of their lives. This includes disruptions to education with school closures, transition to online learning, challenges with access to technology and the internet, mental health concerns due to isolation and uncertainty, and missed social and extracurricular activities. Many students have also faced financial hardships, job losses, and struggles to maintain motivation and engagement in their studies. As a current student, COVID-19 impacted my senior year of high school and first years of college. From personal experience, COVID has directly impacted my grades, attendance, and motivation at school. I felt as though I was not learning anything. It was not only a learning experience for me but for the teachers as well. Initially, teachers struggled with lectures and assignments and often gave grace periods for assignments. I found this made me lazier and unmotivated to turn in assignments. I can not imagine how, if, as a young adult, I was not able to focus on an online classroom, how an elementary student could focus and learn.

While I was doing service learning at an elementary school in Salinas, California, the teacher explained that since COVID, she has had the most challenging time teaching students. Not only are these new challenges to academics, but they are also emotional and behavioral challenges that she has never faced before. This teacher has been teaching for 30+ years and has always enjoyed her job, though she has found it difficult recently. Elementary students have been affected by COVID-19 in several ways. School closures have disrupted their routines and social interactions, potentially leading to feelings of loneliness and isolation. Transitioning to online learning has presented challenges regarding technology access, attention span, and learning engagement, as young children may need direct teacher guidance to focus or understand the material. Additionally, COVID-related stress and anxiety from the pandemic's uncertainties may impact students' emotional well-being. Due to the transition to online learning, students have faced a significant loss in their education. What intrigued me by this topic Is how much has changed regarding learning and teaching. Yet, what modifications have been made to prepare teachers for learning after Covid?

During Covid, I babysat two boys who, at the time, went to a private school in the Monterey area. These boys had never been online before and were in younger grades, one in primary grades. While on Zoom for class, there were so many distractions around the boys. They would constantly fidget with toys or pay attention to their pets, doing anything they could besides paying attention to the teacher. Witnessing this, I saw that the boys were missing out on what would be crucial learning in a class. The teacher constantly had to redirect students' attention to the screen, but it was inevitable. There was only so much she could do.

Seeing this struggle for students and teachers made me more interested in this topic to see how we can compensate for those lost years of learning. Students are missing their milestones of development, not only emotionally but also in their academic careers. Students are then required to meet the following grade-level standards, and it's an ongoing loop of needing to learn new material and not knowing old material. Teaching a class of 25+ kids is hard enough, but imagine having all those students struggling to meet state standards. How much harder does that make a teacher's job?

Literature Synthesis

In March 2020, the coronavirus rapidly spread across the United States. COVID-19 strained health care, caused economic downturns, and forced widespread closure of schools, leading to remote learning and altered social interactions. Human Rights Watch (2021) found that "Since the start of the pandemic, 74.7 million people have lost work, with the majority of jobs lost in industries that pay below-average wages. Many who lost work and income are running out of money and savings. In January, some 24 million adults reported experiencing hunger, and more than six million said they feared being evicted or foreclosed on in the next two months due to their inability to make housing payments. By contrast, higher-income people have been relatively unscathed economically. Despite the worst economic contraction since the Great Depression…" (P. 5)

In response to the pandemic, schools and educational institutions worldwide closed their physical campuses to prevent the spread of the virus among students and staff. These closures disrupted in-person learning and prompted a shift to remote or online education for millions of

students. Many teachers were left to tackle this new learning method on their own. Facing new obstacles, large class sizes, and increased stress levels.

K-12 students have also significantly declined attendance rates since returning to in-person education. Before the pandemic, attendance was moderate, though in recent years, absences have increased by 2.6 percent. (Alferes, 2022) Enrollment has declined by roughly 1.2 million students during 2021, mainly due to the shift to online learning. (pinto, 2023) The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) correlated students with low testing scores to having higher absences in class and are more likely to fall behind academically.

Many students faced challenges adapting to online learning; problems arose with technology, learning motivation, and weakened interaction skills. As schools transitioned to virtual learning due to the pandemic, students have had a direct decline in academic success. Evidence suggests that there is no apparent recovery to this decline. (Pinto, 2023) One of the primary concerns for teachers is addressing the significant learning loss experienced by many students during the pandemic. (Moscoviz, 2022) Educators must create a safe and supportive classroom environment where students feel comfortable expressing their emotions and discussing their experiences. (Shepard, 2023)

Educators must assess where their students are academically, identify gaps in learning, and implement targeted interventions to help students catch up. This may require adjusting curriculum pacing, providing additional support, and offering remedial instruction to ensure that all students have the opportunity to succeed. (sheshadari, 2023) While remote learning accelerated the adoption of technology in education, many teachers are now faced with the challenge of integrating digital tools effectively into their in-person instruction. Professional development and ongoing support are essential to help teachers develop the skills and confidence to integrate technology into their teaching practice effectively. (Winston, 2021)

Some schools may continue to offer hybrid learning options post-pandemic, presenting teachers with the challenge of simultaneously instructing students in the classroom and those participating remotely. Educators must find creative ways to effectively engage both groups of students, leveraging technology to facilitate collaboration and interaction across physical and virtual spaces. This may require innovative instructional strategies, flexible scheduling, and differentiated approaches to meet the needs of all learners. (cooper, 2017)

The pandemic has highlighted disparities in education access, including access to technology, internet connectivity, and academic support services. Teachers must be vigilant in addressing these inequities and ensuring all students have the resources and support they need to succeed. This may involve advocating for increased funding for underserved schools, providing targeted interventions for students at risk of falling behind, and partnering with community organizations to address systemic barriers to learning.

Finally, it's essential to acknowledge the impact of the pandemic on teacher well-being. Educators have faced unprecedented challenges and uncertainties, often working long hours in high-stress environments. Schools must prioritize teachers' mental health and well-being by providing access to resources such as counseling services, professional development opportunities focused on self-care, and supportive leadership that values and acknowledges the contributions of educators. (Barnum, 2023) Collaboration and communication among educators, administrators, families, and community stakeholders are critical in navigating these challenges. By working together, we can support teachers in their efforts to address the diverse needs of students and create inclusive, supportive learning environments that promote academic achievement and well-being for all.

Why is it an Issue?

The disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly affected various aspects of life, and education is no exception. As students lost crucial learning opportunities due to closures and remote learning, several significant problems have arisen, each with repercussions.(Moscoviz, 2022) The loss of two years of learning time has widened educational inequalities. Students from marginalized backgrounds, including those from low-income families, communities of color, and those with disabilities, have been disproportionately affected. (Healthy School Campaign, 2023) These students often lack access to necessary resources like high-speed internet, computers, or quiet study spaces, hindering their ability to engage effectively in remote learning. Consequently, the gap between them and their more privileged peers has widened, exacerbating disparities in academic achievement and opportunity. (tyner, 2023)

The interruption in learning has adversely affected students' academic progress and achievement. The two years lost represent a significant portion of their educational journey,

particularly for those in critical stages of development, such as early childhood and adolescence. (Aphabeticalorder, 2023) Students acquire fundamental skills and knowledge that form the basis for future learning during this time. (CORRAL et al., 2023) Missing out on these foundational elements can have long-term consequences, potentially leading to academic struggles, lower educational attainment, and reduced opportunities for higher education and employment.

Furthermore, the social and emotional well-being of students has been compromised. Schools play a vital role in providing academic instruction, socialization, emotional support, and access to essential services like meals and counseling. (Melton et al., 2023)The isolation from prolonged periods of remote learning has deprived students of crucial interactions with peers and educators, impacting their mental health and social development. Many students have experienced increased feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and depression, further hindering their ability to learn and thrive academically. (Aphabeticalorder, 2023)

Additionally, the loss of learning time has implications beyond the academic realm. Education fosters critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity—skills essential for navigating an increasingly complex and uncertain world. By missing two years of learning opportunities, students may lack the skills needed to adapt to future challenges, hindering their ability to succeed in a rapidly evolving global landscape. The impact of lost learning is not limited to students alone but extends to educators and educational systems. (Aphabeticalorder, 2023) Teachers have faced immense challenges adapting to remote instruction, often navigating technological barriers, student disengagement, and increased workloads. The disruption caused by the pandemic has highlighted pre-existing issues within educational systems, including insufficient funding, inadequate support for educators, and disparities in access to resources and technology. (Barnum, 2023)

Addressing the problems stemming from learning loss during the COVID-19 pandemic requires a multifaceted approach. It involves prioritizing equity in education by addressing the needs of marginalized students, providing targeted support and resources to help them catch up, and implementing strategies to mitigate the widening achievement gap. Investments in mental health services, social-emotional learning initiatives, and community partnerships are essential to supporting students' overall well-being and resilience. Moving forward, it is crucial to learn from

the challenges posed by the pandemic and enact policies and practices that prioritize the educational needs of all students. (McGee, 2021) By doing so, we can work towards building a more equitable, resilient, and inclusive education system that ensures every student has the opportunity to thrive and reach their full potential, regardless of the challenges they may face.

What has and/or should be done

Addressing the learning loss resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic requires a comprehensive and multifaceted approach involving various stakeholders, including educators, policymakers, families, and community organizations. Several strategies have been implemented or proposed to mitigate the impact of learning loss and support students in catching up academically. Schools have been utilizing assessment tools to identify areas of learning loss and assess students' academic progress. Diagnostic assessments help educators understand the specific needs of individual students and tailor instruction accordingly. These assessments provide valuable data to inform instructional planning and targeted interventions. (Sarakatsannis, et al., 2023) Schools have been implementing targeted interventions to support students who have fallen behind academically. This may include small-group instruction, tutoring, after-school programs, and summer learning opportunities focused on remediation and skill-building.

By addressing learning gaps early and providing personalized support, schools can help students catch up to their peers.(Evaristo, 2023) Some schools have extended the school day or academic year to provide students with additional learning opportunities. Extended learning time allows for more instructional hours and targeted support for students who need it most. This approach can mitigate the impact of learning loss by giving students more time to engage in academic instruction and enrichment activities. High-quality instruction is essential for addressing learning loss and promoting academic growth. Schools should prioritize evidence-based instructional practices that are proven effective, such as explicit instruction, differentiated instruction, and formative assessment. (Sarakatsannis et al., 2023)

Professional development opportunities should be provided to educators to enhance their instructional skills and support their efforts to meet the diverse needs of students. (Grover, 2023) In addition to academic support, students may also need social-emotional support to cope with their challenges during the pandemic. Schools should prioritize students' social and emotional

well-being by providing access to counseling services, implementing social-emotional learning (SEL) programs, and creating a positive and supportive school climate. Family and community engagement are crucial for supporting students' academic success and well-being. Schools should involve families and community organizations in efforts to address learning loss by providing resources, workshops, and opportunities for collaboration. Engaging families as partners in education can help create a supportive network of caregivers, educators, and community members working together to support student learning. (Evaristo, 2023)

It is essential to ensure equitable access to resources and support services for all students, particularly those from marginalized backgrounds who may be disproportionately affected by learning loss. Schools should prioritize equity in resource allocation, providing additional support to schools and communities with the greatest needs. This may include funding for technology, internet access, instructional materials, and professional development. By implementing these strategies in a coordinated and collaborative manner, schools can effectively address learning loss and support students in catching up academically. However, it will require ongoing effort and investment from educators, policymakers, families, and communities to ensure that all students have the opportunity to succeed, regardless of the challenges they have faced during the pandemic.

Method

For this Capstone Project, I have researched and investigated how RAY Elementary fourth-grade teachers view the gap in academic skills due to the pandemic and remote 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 will use what they have learned to formulate an action that responds to the educational loss in a way that inspires, informs, or involves a particular audience.

Context

RAY Elementary School is located in south Salinas, CA. Salinas is a city located in Monterey County. It is known as the world's salad bowl due to its extensive agriculture and diverse population. The school's minority student enrollment is 92%. The student-teacher ratio is 23:1, which is better than the district's. The student population comprises 49% female students

and 51% male students. The school enrolls 63% economically disadvantaged students. Test scores at this school fall below the state average. This suggests that most students at this school may perform below grade level. 100% of teachers are certified, with 92% having more than three years of experience. 72% of students are low-income. 38% of students are English language learners. In the school year 2018-2019, the school scored 49.46% in ELA. In 2022-2023, that score dropped to 26.65%. Beyond academics, the school fosters a supportive community where students, teachers, and parents work together to create a positive learning environment. Monterey Park Elementary promotes parental involvement and engagement through various initiatives such as parent-teacher associations, volunteer programs, and community events, recognizing families' crucial role in a child's education. The school embraces technology as a tool for learning and communication, integrating digital resources and interactive platforms into the curriculum. This emphasis on digital literacy equips students with the skills they need to thrive in the digital age.

Participants and Participant Selection

The stakeholders who participated in this study are three fourth-grade female teachers. Two of the participants have been teachers for 20+ years. The third participant has been teaching for six years. Two out of three participants mainly taught third through fifth, whereas the third also taught lower primary grades.

Mrs. B. An Asian/Mexican female teacher of a fourth-grade class. She has been teaching for six years. She has taught fourth and fifth grade but wants to try younger grades. Mrs. B taught her class during COVID-19. She had just cleared her credentials the same year.

Mrs. K. A Vietnamese female fourth-grade teacher. She has been teaching for 23 years. Mrs. K has been teaching fourth grade for the last seven years. Mrs. K taught during the pandemic.

Mrs. T. A Mexican female teacher of a fourth-grade class. She has been teaching for 31 years. She has taught kindergarten through fifth grade. Fifth grade is her favorite to teach. Mrs. T taught during the pandemic.

Researcher

From personal experience, COVID has directly impacted my grades, attendance, and motivation at school. I felt as though I was not learning anything. It was not only a learning

experience for me, but for the teachers as well. Initially, teachers struggled with lectures and assignments and often gave grace periods for assignments. While I was doing service learning at an elementary school in Salinas, California, the teacher explained that since COVID, she has had the most challenging time teaching students. Not only are these new challenges to academics, but they are also emotional and behavioral challenges that she has never faced before. My relationship with this school makes this study more personal to me.

I have a different educational background from this elementary school's students. I went to an elementary school where the percentage of low-income students was very low. There were also no English Language learners at my school. My implicit biases may come from growing up in a different social class. This might impact my judgment on education loss, believing it may be the student's educational background or parental involvement.

Semi-Structured Interview and Survey Questions

What do you know about the learning gap due to the pandemic and remote learning?

What is currently being done to address the gap in education standards due to the pandemic and remote learning - by whom - and what are the strengths and weaknesses of these efforts?

What should be done about the loss of education during the pandemic?

What are the challenges to creating a change concerning recovering students from the two years lost during the pandemic?

Is there anything else you want to say about learning loss and/or the improvement since returning to school?

Have you noticed a difference in academic performance since COVID-19?
Have you had to alter your teaching style since the pandemic?
Have you received training for "how to teach post-pandemic"

Procedure[1]

Participants have been interviewed. All interviews were done individually. When it was not possible to interview participants in person, they were invited to complete a phone interview or paper and pencil survey of the same questions. Face-to-face interviews have taken less than one hour, are audio-recorded (with participant consent), and occur in Ray Elementary. A semi-structured interview format was used for face-to-face interviews to allow follow-up questions for unclear, exciting, or unexpected responses. All interviews/surveys have been scheduled at the convenience of the interviewee and should take approximately 20 minutes to complete.

For this Capstone Project, fourth-grade teachers were interviewed to see what they think could be done to improve the learning loss created by COVID-19. This is important because learning loss caused by COVID-19 is crucial. After all, it has real, lasting consequences for students, and it's essential to address these issues to ensure their continued success in education. Three themes emerged based on an analysis of the data and the relevant research literature (see Table 1). Evidence-based decision-making requires evaluating each potential Action Option by the following criteria: time, cost, and resources. These three criteria are all essential to my stakeholders, since they need more time or money. They also do not have access to extra resources. Based on the evaluation of each Action Option, an action will be recommended and justified.

Table 1

Evaluation of Action Options

	Time	Cost	effectiveness
Small-Group Instruction	High	Low	medium
Integrated Technology	Low	High	High
Parental Support Workshops via online resource	Low	Low	medium

Name for Emergent Theme/Action Option 1

stakeholders discussed how they place students into small groups at the same level of education, hoping they can build off each other. + Schools have been implementing targeted interventions to support students falling behind academically. This may include small-group instruction, tutoring, after-school programs, and summer learning opportunities focused on remediation and skill-building. By addressing learning gaps early and providing personalized support, schools can help students catch up to their peers. + Small Group Instruction

Name for Emergent Theme/Action Option 2

Stakeholders suggested that through technology, students can move at their own pace rather than with the rest of the class. Those behind focus more on their weaker areas, and those who excel can learn more. + Educators must find creative ways to effectively engage both groups of students, leveraging technology to facilitate collaboration and interaction across physical and virtual spaces. This may require innovative instructional strategies, flexible scheduling, and differentiated approaches to meet the needs of all learners. + Integrating technology

Name for Emergent Theme/Action Option 3

As the stakeholders discussed feeling overwhelmed in the classroom, they suggested having more parent help outside the classroom. This will not cut class time and help build a stronger foundation for learning. + . Family and community engagement are crucial for supporting students' academic success and well-being. Schools should involve families and community organizations in efforts to address learning loss by providing resources, workshops, and opportunities for collaboration. + Parental Support Workshops via online resource

Conclusion

Recommendation. Creating a parental support workshop via online resources is the best option for teachers. Not only is it low in cost and time, but it doesn't require extra materials and resources. This option does not take into class time, either.

. Be sure to identify important factors specific to the particular context that influenced your recommendation. Also, determine the values and priorities your recommendation reflects.]

Concessions. While the parent workshop is the best option for teachers, the other options also have significant strengths. Integrating technology allows students to complete assignments at their own pace. Small groups allow students to catch up together. A teacher can group students at the same academic level and assignments they can help each other on.

Limitations. While there are many advantages to parent workshops, there are also disadvantages. Parents may not look at the workshop. They may not implement the practices the workshop discusses. Another disadvantage is some parents may be too busy to help their children academically. This brings the child back to square one and could disadvantage those students whose parents are incorporating the workshop.

Potential negative outcomes. Adverse outcomes may be parental lack of involvement, Budget constraints, lack of additional funding, and limited access to additional resources; engaging parents and the community requires extra effort and coordination.

Conclusion. Interviews with fourth-grade teachers revealed three main themes for addressing learning loss, and these were evaluated based on time, cost, and resources. These criteria are essential as stakeholders have limited time, budget, and access to additional

resources. Despite the concessions, limitations, and potential adverse outcomes associated with the recommended action, the rationale for continuing support is as follows: Implementation may require reallocating existing resources or finding innovative solutions within current constraints. Initial investment in time, training, or materials may be high, and the results may not be immediately visible. The long-term benefits of addressing learning loss, such as improved academic performance and higher future educational attainment, outweigh the short-term costs. Investing in students' education now can prevent future remedial education or social services costs. Engaging parents and the community requires additional effort and coordination. However, involving parents and the community creates a supportive learning environment for students and increases the likelihood of sustained success. It also distributes the effort, making it more manageable for teachers and schools.

The interviews with fourth-grade teachers revealed three main themes for addressing learning loss, evaluated based on time, cost, and resources. These criteria are crucial because stakeholders face significant constraints in these areas. Despite the concessions, limitations, and potential adverse outcomes associated with the recommended action, the rationale for continuing support is reallocating existing resources or finding innovative solutions within current constraints. While challenging, it encourages creative problem-solving and efficient use of available resources. Investing in students' education at this stage acts as a preventive measure. Early intervention can mitigate the need for more intensive and expensive support later on, making it a cost-effective strategy in the long run. Despite the concessions, limitations, and potential adverse outcomes, the long-term advantages of addressing learning loss through these recommended actions justify the continued support. The initial challenges and investments are necessary to achieve significant and lasting improvements in students' academic success and overall well-being.

Action Documentation and Critical Reflection

1. Small-Group Instruction: Implement small-group instruction sessions targeting key concepts and skills identified through diagnostic assessments. These sessions will allow for personalized attention and tailored support.
2. Integrated Technology: Integrate educational technology tools and resources to supplement instruction, provide additional practice, and enhance student engagement both in class and remotely.
3. Parental Support Workshops via online resource: Conduct workshops or informational sessions for parents to guide how to support their child's learning at home effectively. Topics may include understanding academic standards, facilitating homework completion, and creating a conducive learning environment.

After interviewing the three teachers, I found three standard solutions that would effectively help revive students' education**.** The action plan I decided to go forth with is a parental support workshop via an online resource. By increasing parental involvement, this project anticipates significant improvements in student engagement, understanding, and academic achievement. The collaboration between teachers and parents will create a supportive learning environment that extends beyond the classroom, fostering student success and resilience in the face of learning challenges. This approach recognizes the crucial role of parental support in academic development and seeks to empower parents to become active partners in their child's education. Through practical and targeted interventions, this study aims to provide a model for addressing learning loss in fourth-grade classrooms post-COVID-19 while promoting collaboration between home and school environments.

https://sites.google.com/d/1jwhzpM3CNkUooRc0d2Taf3xhq5DdhcBx/p/14EcBhSXci2poBw6K6q2eeO42IPCYbTcs/edit

Action Research Project Documentation and Reflection

As the action for this research project, I have created a website with resources to help parents learn about specific ways to help their children succeed academically. There are resources for homework help, personalized assessment help, and emotional support for underachieving academics. I gathered information from my interview on what teachers collectively expressed as their concerns about how they might help students overcome the education loss due to COVID-19. What I found most surprising when creating this action plan was how little extra time teachers have to work on curriculum exercises with their students. The changes that I had to make were rather than having a parent workshop in person due to lack of time, I had to create an online resource that parents could access on their own. I needed modifications to incorporate different learning styles and ways for parents to determine what kind of learning style works best for their child. It's essential to make these changes because not all children learn the same, and if I had one specific way of learning, it might have been more difficult for parents to help their children.

With resources on emotional support, parents can better help their children cope with academic challenges and stress, potentially leading to improved mental health and well-being. Parents can learn about different learning styles and identify the most effective methods for their children, resulting in more tailored and effective learning strategies. I wish I had known at the start just how limited teachers' time is for working on curriculum exercises with their students. This insight would have helped plan more realistic and efficient support strategies. Understanding the importance of incorporating different learning styles earlier would have streamlined the development of resources to be more inclusive and effective from the start. Recognizing earlier how adequate online resources can be for reaching and assisting parents would have saved time planning in-person workshops, which eventually had to be converted to an online format anyway.

The next important step is to collect feedback from parents and teachers using the website to identify strengths and areas for improvement. Continuously update the website with new resources and information based on the latest educational research and user feedback. Increase awareness and usage of the website through various channels such as social media, school newsletters, and community events. Implement a system to track the website's impact on

students' academic performance and parental involvement and make adjustments as needed. Work closely with educators to ensure the resources align with current educational standards and practices and to gather their insights for further improvements. Develop additional resources on emotional and mental well-being, especially addressing post-COVID-19 educational challenges. I learned that I can adapt my plans effectively when faced with unforeseen challenges, such as shifting from in-person workshops to an online resource. The process highlighted my persistence and commitment to achieving the project's goals despite obstacles and needing modifications. I gained a more profound empathy for both teachers and parents, understanding their challenges and the importance of providing practical support

Critical Reflection

From this project, what I learned about myself is my leadership skills. For this project, I had to take on a leadership role and plan and execute the project. It has helped me develop project management skills, delegation, and decision-making. Through this project, I have also become more aware of my empathy and understanding. While designing a workshop to help parents navigate their children's educational journey. It has required me to understand the needs, challenges, and concerns and enhanced my empathy and ability to see situations differently. The positive impact of this workshop for parents and their children. It encouraged me to gain a sense of fulfillment and purpose toward working toward change and contributing to the educational development of others. I have found personal reward and reinforcement in my commitment to making a difference in the community.

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