Online Education during COVID-19

The coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) has had major impacts on our lifestyles across the nation. Social distancing requirements have changed how people live and nowhere is that more evident than in how school aged children are educated. As most schools close for the remainder of the scheduled 2020 school year, remote learning has become the primary method of teaching and learning.

Much has already been written concerning the challenges and available best practices of remote learning. Interviews with professional educators across the country have revealed key factors to be aware of regarding remote teaching.

Several news features have highlighted efforts of private sector and nonprofit organizations providing computers on which students can engage in online learning. Unfortunately, nearly one fifth of all students in the United States don't have internet access at their home creating a significant hurdle for remote learning. While discussions have taken place to include funding for small broad band providers in potential future virus relief bills to address connectivity challenges, attention has also been focused on challenges faced by home environments that are not supportive of online learning efforts.

To ensure efficient and effective remote learning on the scale currently required, peer-to-peer professional development is needed. Many teachers lack experience in how to translate class subject matter to an online platform. To expedite this manner of training, pairing teachers familiar with online instruction with those who are new to the method can offer key mentorship opportunities. Additionally, current efforts have highlighted that effective online learning depends upon teachers being able to continue direct interaction with students, as

well as the ability to tailor assignments to the needs of individual students. The ability of teachers to share empathy, confidence, and motivation are proving to be key factors to the success of online learning. Research also indicates that student success in online studies is impacted by their ability to develop a habit of regular participation and the ability to experience interactive sessions.

On the other end of the spectrum, educators have seen that [vulnerable students experience less success](#) with remote education. Based on this observation, teachers need freedom and flexibility to develop out-of-the-box approaches in order to meet the needs of their students. For example, students living in neighborhoods marred by gun violence and poverty, or those with disabilities, may require learning structures capable of offering flexibility of class content, assessments, and deadlines beyond standardized expectations. Details of class content and learning goals must be considered in conjunction with the priorities of students' access to meals, counselors, and a general sense of safety.

As schools move to provide online learning options, districts must move resources to finances remote learning plans. With unprecedented unemployment rates, local tax revenues are in decline leaving districts to face the potential of severe budget cuts. Remote learning is just one piece of a larger service puzzle districts must piece together to continue providing meals, access to learning tools, and counseling for students. Through conversations with students, educators, and families there is a clear need for the government to provide sustained funding and housing for low-income families to address student needs. In addition to state and local resources, emergency funding from the Federal Government would lend much needed financial aid to districts and families.

General opinion suggests that the pandemic will help assess the ways in which technology can aid learning, as well as an evaluation of what was lost through a lack of in-person teaching. In doing so, educators and policy makers have an opportunity to determine whether in-person teaching efforts have been optimally utilized in the past and how remote learning technology can be successfully used to promote student engagement. Educators support the idea that technology offers a way to make learning more student-centric and empower teachers.

In the post COVID-19 era, educators and policy makers must also assess and learn from the stark inequities that have been revealed. Vast differences in factors such as home life, neighborhood environment, and access to the Internet have taken a toll on students and their ability to continue educational efforts delivered remotely.