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Examining the Impact of COVID-19 on Education

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Examining the Impact of COVID-19 on Education

Introduction

The hardships of a world-wide pandemic is not without precedent. The infamous Spanish Flu, which was first discovered in 1918, lasted around 2 years and was proportionally more deadly than the current statistics from the COVID-19 pandemic. At its peak, the Spanish Flu infected around 40 percent of the global population and killed an estimated 50 million people. The labelling of the 1918 pandemic as the Spanish Flu came about because Spain was one of the only countries to report about the illness during World War I. Additionally, the king of Spain, Alfonso XIII, was one of the first major leaders to be infected with the flu. In a similar vein, although considered controversial, some have dubbed the COVID-19 pandemic as the “Chinese Virus” or the “China Flu.”

In many ways, the citizenry of the United States reacted to the 1918 Spanish Flu in similar fashions to the current preventative measures taking place. Most urban communities temporarily closed their K-12 public schools in order to combat the advancing flu. Other similarities between the Spanish Flu and COVID-19 include quarantines, bans on public gatherings, and the use of face coverings.

We examine three important questions about how COVID-19 has affected education.

Question #1: How has COVID-19 affected student learning?

Research has consistently revealed student learning loss as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Data reveals that students made little-to-no progress while learning from home. At the beginning of the 2020-21 school year just 40% of students K-12 were in districts that did not offer any in-person instruction. By the end of the year, more than 98% of students had access to some form of in-person learning ranging from hybrid to five days a week.

Schools and teachers have been struggling to adopt online based solutions for instruction. When students are learning from home, there is a loss of several key teaching methods such as group work, and student-centered activities. While attempts are made to replicate these activities remotely, they are often viewed as a poor substitute for in-person activities. Remote learning typically consists of lessons that are more teacher-focused, leading to students not being able to delve into application-level learning. This limits an important feature that has been shown to help students retain knowledge needed for standardized tests.

Student test results from the Ohio Department of Education, as reported by [CNBC News](#), have demonstrated on average that scores from grades 5-8 and high school were about fifteen points behind in math and eight points behind in reading compared with students from previous years.

A study conducted by [Education Week](#) shows that for grades K-4, learning loss also occurred. According to the study, learning loss and achievement was due to student struggles with reliance on technology and the disrupted style of virtual lesson delivery. For Kindergarten, less school readiness in general was noted due to lower rates of preschool enrollment and socialization during the COVID-19 outbreak. Critical learning loss was also noted in a recent conversation we had with local kindergarten teachers. Many comment that students coming into the 2021-2022 school year are farther behind due to loss of preschool and are now teaching the alphabet differently than in past years.

Question #2: How have the relationships between teachers and families changed since the COVID-19 pandemic?

A key aspect of teaching is that teachers have a good relationship with their students' families. Teachers across the country have been expressing their concerns and difficulties with establishing these relationships over a computer screen. Many teachers “[are struggling to get to know students and families they’ve never met in real life.](#)” The COVID-19 pandemic has limited opportunities for teachers to connect with families, and at the same time teachers have felt as though they are under a microscope due to remote learning. Maloy notes that some teachers “have been confronted by angry parents when their interactive whiteboards have malfunctioned [another] teacher [received] a call from a parent who simply wanted her to know that, from what he had seen, he wasn’t impressed” (Maloy). Likewise, there are families that have little-to-no technology and have a hard time reading emails, going on zoom, and checking up on their children’s school work. This is the first time for teachers to have eyes in the classroom and families are not observing them under ideal conditions.

Question #3: How has the workload for teachers changed due to COVID-19?

The workload for teachers has increased considerably since COVID-19. The “second school year post-pandemic, [an overwhelming majority \(85%\)](#) of our respondents indicated that they are still teaching at least partially online.” According to [Sykes Enterprises](#), teachers are spending at least one extra hour each day doing additional responsibilities due to the pandemic. Teachers have had to learn new techniques and adapt their planning to accommodate issues relating to technology, equity issues, and new health and safety protocols. With the increased workload, it is important for teachers to find a balance and maintain adequate self-care. It is important to make a schedule for the workload and to incorporate breaks within the schedule to minimize the chance of burnout.

As teaching workloads increase, workloads for staff members have increased as well. [Education Support Professionals](#) (ESPs) are also experiencing increased workloads. Their workdays continue to expand as schools move from virtual instruction to various hybrid models. Custodians disinfect high touch surfaces multiple times a day and deep clean every night, school nurses take temperatures and manage isolation rooms, and social workers and school psychologists address trauma and growing needs for more mental health support. Increased workloads for those in the educational system represent significant costs to their well-being.

Conclusion/Parting Thoughts:

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all areas of society. Education has been particularly hard hit. The pandemic has created multiple negative effects that have impacted the quality of education. Students are experiencing learning loss in the classroom which has resulted in lower content retainment and assessment scores relating to various subject areas. Teachers are having a harder time forging beneficial relationships with their students’ families. Educators have felt increased pressure due to workloads, pandemic protocols, student absences, and problems associated with remote and hybrid learning. All of these factors have had an enormous effect on the education system, which teachers will continue to address in the coming years.