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Battling Two Pandemics: The Intersection of Covid-19 and Systemic Racism in San Antonio Schools

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my parents, ancestors, and community. Also to hope of a greater and better world.

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ABSTRACT

In this thesis, I investigate educators' experiences and observations of structural inequities during the switch to online teaching and learning amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. Through interviews with ten educators in the city of San Antonio, Texas, I analyzed the COVID-19 pandemic through an equity lens, specifically highlighting the ways in which it is transforming access to education for underserved students. Through this study, I find that the digital divide is still a salient issue in society, and that students of color and/or from low socioeconomic backgrounds are pushed out of schools by external structural forces that further marginalize their community. This study highlights the need to develop more culturally competent curricula, prepare critically conscious educators, and take a holistic approach to the education of the next generations.

INTRODUCTION

The path toward a more equitable education system is long overdue due. History has demonstrated that inequalities in education are a result of a racially motivated and explicit public policy whose effects endure today (Donato 1997). Youth of color from lower-income households face challenges in the school environment where their dropout rates are relatively high, and many schools have been slow to develop culturally sensitive programs of assistance and interventions (Perez Huber et al. 2015). When a global pandemic is added to the equation, students who are better positioned in society will do better than those who experience less privilege due to their socioeconomic status. Income achievement gaps have grown over the past several decades, and achievement gaps between black and white students remain large and troubling. Black and Latinx students are more than three times as likely as Whites to be in high poverty schools and 12 times as likely to be in schools where almost everyone is poor (Orfield and Lee 2005). High poverty schools may also have downward-leveling norms and less rigorous curriculum (Harris 2010; Willms 2010), as well as poorer facilities than low poverty schools. Moreover, schoolmates in high poverty schools will be, on average, less resourced and lower achieving than peers in low poverty schools (Reardon 2016). Taken together, this literature suggests that Black and Latinx students are exposed to higher rates of school poverty than their white counterparts and that these racial differences in exposure to school poverty are consequential for educational inequality (Fahle et al. 2020).

The U.S. education system was not built to deal with extended shutdowns like those imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. School closures compound inequities that

disproportionately affect children who are already at a disadvantage due to their racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, cultural and/or linguistic backgrounds or experiences (Van Lancker and Parolin 2020). Although teachers, administrators, and parents have worked hard to keep learning alive, these efforts tend to fall short in their attempt to provide quality education for their students. Among the most affected by the school shutdowns are low-income, Black and Latinx students (Dorn et al. 2020). Projecting race-based gaps would require knowledge of how factors like trauma and job loss would affect racial minority groups differentially (Kuhfeld et al. 2020). These different impacts are very likely since there are higher rates of COVID-19 infections and deaths in the African American community (Bouie 2020). Furthermore, the economic downturn has been particularly damaging for Black and Latinx parents who are less likely to be able to work from home during the pandemic (Cerullo 2020; Krogstad et al. 2020). Additionally, the trauma caused by police shootings of African Americans and the subsequent nationwide protests might themselves interact with any COVID-19-induced trauma to affect students' achievement in complicated ways (Kuhfeld et al. 2020). For school-aged children, the detrimental effects of stress are especially formidable, impeding their physical, social, emotional, and academic development (Terrasi and Crain de Galarce 2017). Moreover, students from low-income households are less likely to have access to high-quality remote learning or to a conducive learning environment such as a quiet space with minimal distractions, their own devices that they do not need to share with other members of their household, high-speed internet, and parental academic supervision or support (Dorn et al. 2020). The cancellation of important educational milestones and events, such as graduation ceremonies, extracurricular events, and sports, further pose a challenge in that it reduces academic motivation, hurt academic performance and general

levels of engagement that may lead to an even higher dropout rate for the Latinx student population (Dorn et. al, 2020). In these areas, the biggest concern is that children have lost access to feeding programs that provided them with some level of nourishment. Furthermore, the longer these children stay out-of-school, the less likely they are to return as they may be required to perform household chores or labour (Bozkurt et al 2020).

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the intersection of structural racism, social risk factors, and health. Data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on COVID-19 infection and mortality rates show high incidence in specific geographic regions (Edge and Walker 2020). Furthermore, it has been hypothesized that increased exposure to COVID-19 among Black Americans is attributable to greater representation in service occupations and a greater likelihood of living in inner cities with high population density (Edge and Walker 2020). When high-rates of infection are reported in urban areas that house minority populations, school administrators are forced to shut down neighborhood schools which can be a detriment to the already identified U.S. academic achievement gap. The persistence of the U.S. academic-achievement gap is troubling. The possibility that COVID-19 could make it worse deserves focused attention. The aim of this qualitative study is two-fold. Firstly, it attempts to call attention to the lasting discrepancies in educational attainment for minority students. Secondly, it analyzes the COVID-19 pandemic through an equity lens, specifically highlighting the ways in which it is transforming access to education for underserved students. The COVID-19 pandemic had wide ranging effects on many people's working lives. This, of course includes teachers, with many having to quickly develop online material and adjust to teaching their students in a remote setting. This study focuses on teacher's experiences during this period

of adjusting to a "crisis-teaching-mode." A great deal of research has already been conducted studying wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g. Fancourt et al., 2020; Pierce et al., 2020), illustrating how it has impacted the mental health and wellbeing of various groups. Yet there has been little consideration given specifically to how this unusual period has 1) affected teachers, and 2) honed into their observations of the systemic barriers that impede educational success for their students from lower-income backgrounds that they teach. In this project, I conduct in-depth interviews with 10 educators who shared their own particular set of challenges, especially in the early stages of the pandemic. The following research questions that will guide this study:

1) How has the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated inequities in education?
2) How have educators experienced and responded to the switch to online teaching and learning?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Road toward E-quality: The Digital Divide

Technology is important to student learning. The impact of the internet, video conferencing, and other communication platforms on education and in every aspect of our community is profound. Access to the information available from cyberspace is crucial because information can be used in everyday life for education, business transactions, personal communication, information gathering, job searches and career development (Block 2010). Lloyd Morrisett, former president of the Markle Foundation, coined the term digital divide to mean "a discrepancy in access to technology resources between socioeconomic groups"

(Hoffman and Novak 1999). People excluded or segregated from access to information technology are also excluded from many other social goods. Thorsen defines the digital divide as "a popular term for the cultural barrier of people who do not have access to technology and the Internet or the ability to use them effectively if they are available" (2006: 11). This includes not just access to technology, but also access to computer skills training, information technology, various economic opportunities, and the ability to fully participate in culture and democracy. There remains a "digital divide" based on race/Hispanic origin, income, location (central city and rural areas), and other demographic characteristics. The lower socioeconomic and minority groups continue to fall further behind the more affluent population (Sarkodie-Mensah 2000: 23). For instance, students from lower-income brackets are less likely than students in upper-income brackets to enjoy high-speed internet access from home (Gorski 2005). It is important to remember that access is still a barrier for many distance learners. This is effectively shutting them out of the opportunity to connect with the rest of the world, engage and participate as a lifelong student.

The digital divide has been observed for over two decades and it's prevalence is still relevant today (Chandra et al. 2020). Combining the most recent 2018 data from the U.S. Census Bureau and the National Center for Education Statistics, Chandra et. al (2020) show that before the pandemic, an estimated 15 million to 16 million K–12 public school students lived in households without an internet connection or a device adequate for distance learning, representing 30 percent of all public K–12 students. Of these students, approximately 9 million live in households that have neither an adequate connection nor an adequate device for distance home learning. The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates this problem, causing an

unprecedented disruption in the U.S. educational system. Nearly all U.S. public schools closed in March of this year, driving more than 50 million students to transition to full-time distance learning from home. Nationwide, 99 percent of public schools have high-speed broadband access, but distance learning from home presents many challenges, with the potential for significant inequities given internet and device gaps (Chandra et. al 2020). An interactive map shows that the student digital divide is a major problem across all 50 states (Common Sense Media 2021). The digital divide affects every type of community, but it is more pronounced in rural communities and for Black, Latinx, and Native American households; 18 percent of white households lack broadband, but 26 percent of Latinx, 30 percent of Black and 35 percent of Native American student households lack adequate home internet access. In rural communities, 37 percent of students are without a home broadband connection compared with 25 percent in suburban households and 21 percent in urban areas. The top 10 states with the largest absolute number of disconnected students comprise approximately 50 percent of the overall need, with Texas, California and Florida having the largest populations of students without internet connectivity. In Texas, 1,828,917 students and 48,049 teachers lack adequate internet access. Up to 1,339,459 students and 11,577 teachers are without the technology and devices at home to support distance learning. About 66% of the students who lack access are Black, Latinx, or Native American (Common Sense Media 2021).

Virtual/Distance Learning

The 1980s and 1990s represented a period of intense innovation and expansion in e-learning and networking throughout public schooling as well as in tertiary, professional,

workplace, and adult education (Harasim 2006). However, the very genesis of e-learning as based on human collaboration in knowledge work and innovation, can be traced to the development of network communication in the later 1960s. Educational adoption of computer networking began in the mid-1970s, following closely upon the very invention of packet-switched networks in 1969 and of e-mail and computer conferencing in 1971 (Hafner and Lyon 1996; Hiltz and Turoff 1978). Virtual schooling, like classroom schooling, has had limited success in some situations. In an online environment, students may feel isolated, parents may have concerns about children's social development, students with language difficulties may experience a disadvantage in a text heavy online environment, and subjects requiring physical demonstrations of skill such as music, physical education, or foreign language may not be practical in a technology-mediated setting (Cavanaugh et al. 2004). For example, Bond (2002) found that distance between tutor and learner in an online instrumental music program has negative effects on performance quality, student engagement, and development and refinement of skills and knowledge. While distance learning was viewed as beneficial for providing the opportunity for elementary school students to learn a foreign language, Conzemius and Sandrock (report that "the optimal learning situation still involves the physical presence of a teacher" (2003: 47). Virtual school students show less improvement than those in conventional schools in listening and speaking skills (Barker and Wendel 2001). Highly technical subjects such as mathematics and science have also proven to be difficult to teach well online. The Alberta Online Consortium evaluated student performance on end-of-year exams among virtual school students across the province, and found that virtual school student scores in mathematics at

grades 3, 6, 9, and 12, and the sciences at grades 6 and 9 lagged significantly behind scores of nonvirtual school students (Schollie 2001).

A primary characteristic that sets successful distance learners apart from their classroom-based counterparts is their autonomy (Keegan 1996) and greater student responsibility (Wedemeyer 1981). By the time they reach higher education, most adults have acquired a degree of autonomy in learning, but younger students need to be scaffolded as part of the distance education experience. Virtual school teachers must be adept at helping children acquire the skills of autonomous learning, including self-regulation. Adult learners more closely approach expertise in the subjects they study and in knowing how to learn, due to their long experience with the concepts and with meta-cognition, whereas children are relative novices. This distinction is important because experts organize and interpret information very differently from novices, and these differences affect learners' abilities to remember and solve problems (Bransford, Brown, and Cocking 1999), and their ability to learn independently. Expert learners have better developed metacognition, a characteristic that children develop gradually. Younger students are different from adult learners because they need more supervision, fewer and simpler instructions, and a more extensive reinforcement system than older students. One factor warranting special consideration in assessing the effectiveness of virtual schooling is teacher quality. In classrooms, teacher effectiveness is a strong determiner of differences in student learning, far outweighing differences in class size and heterogeneity (Darling-Hammond 2000).

Effective online programs for young learners include frequent teacher contact with students and parents, lessons divided into short segments, mastery sequences so student progress can grow in stages, and rewards for learning such as multimedia praise and printable stickers or

certificates (Cavanaugh et. al 2004). Another ways that young students are different from adult learners is that young students are still undergoing Piaget's stages of cognitive development, in particular preoperational (2 to 7 years), concrete operational (7 to 11 years), and formal operational (11 years to adulthood) outline the phases in development toward adulthood (Cavanaugh et. al 2004). The stages offer pedagogical guidance for delivering effective web based education, which should focus on the major accomplishments of learners in these stages. Each stage is characterized by the emergence of new abilities and ways of processing information (Slavin 2003: 30), which necessitates specialized instructional approaches and attention to each child's development. Since adults have progressed through these stages of cognitive development, delivery of web based education at the adult level need not concentrate on methods that help the learner develop these cognitive skills (Cavanaugh et. al 2004).

School Interruptions

Although scientific debate is ongoing with regard to the effectiveness of school closures on virus transmission, the fact that schools closed for an extended period of time during the COVID-19 pandemic could have detrimental social and health consequences for children living in poverty, and are likely to exacerbate existing inequalities (Van Lancker and Parolin 2020). The pandemic initiated an extensive, sudden and dramatic digital transformation in society. The pandemic forced everyone to take an extraordinary digital leap in the basic education of children as well. This required significant adjustments not only from children and their teachers, but also from their families and school administrations. A great burden was placed also on children and their families who suddenly had to possess a variety of skills, competencies and resources to

thrive in the COVID-19 new normalcy (Iivari, Sharma, and Ventä-Olkkonen 2020). There are two mechanisms through which school closures will affect poor children in the U.S. and Europe. The first is food insecurity. For many students living in poverty, schools are not only a place for learning but also for eating healthily. Research shows that school lunch is associated with improvements in academic performance, whereas food insecurity (including irregular or unhealthy diets) is associated with low educational attainment and substantial risks to the physical health and mental wellbeing of children (Schwarts, Ellen, and Rothbart 2020). Second, research suggests that non-school factors are a primary source of inequalities in educational outcomes. The gap in mathematical and literacy skills between children from lower and higher socioeconomic backgrounds often widens during the school holiday period (Alexander, Entwisle, and Olson 2007). The summer holiday in most American schools is estimated to contribute to a loss in academic achievement equivalent to one month of education for children with low socioeconomic status; however, this effect is not observed for children with higher socioeconomic status (Harris et al. 1996). Moreover, summer holidays are also associated with a setback in mental health and wellbeing for children and adolescents (Morgan et al. 2019).

Although the current school closures imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic differ from summer holidays in that learning is expected to continue digitally, the closures are likely to widen the learning gap between children from lower-income and higher-income families (Van Lancker and Parolin 2020). Children from low-income households live in conditions that make homeschooling difficult. Online learning environments usually require computers and a reliable internet connection and students from lower-income brackets are less likely than students in upper-income brackets to enjoy high-speed internet access from home (Gorski 2005). All of

these sociological factors are important to take into account when analyzing how the COVID-19

pandemic has magnified pre-existing socioeconomic and political disparities within the

education system, especially for the most vulnerable and marginalized populations.

Systemic Inequities in Education

The American educational system systematically underserves minority students (Garcia

2011). Historically, Texas has funded its schools inequitably, impacting predominately

latinx-serving districts and schools generationally (Aleman 2007). Inconsistencies with

experienced, high-quality teachers have relegated Latinas/os, and other students of color in Texas

to chronically disproportionate educational outcomes (Valenzuela 2016). Heiling and

Darling-Hammond (2008) looked at how students progressed through high school and how many

actually made it to graduation by following three entering ninth grade cohorts over a 4-year

period. They found that for each cohort, African Americans and Latinos showed the steepest loss

between the 9th and 10th grades, given that 50% to 55% of the freshman class did not progress

on time, as compared to 30% to 35% of Whites and Asian Americans (Heiling and

Darling-Hammond 2008). Minority and low-income students in urban settings are most likely to

find themselves in classrooms staffed by inadequately prepared, inexperienced, and ill-qualified

teachers because funding inequities, distributions of local power, labor market conditions, and

dysfunctional hiring practices conspire to produce teacher shortages of which they bear the brunt

(Darling-Hammond 2001). By every measure of qualifications, unqualified and underprepared

teachers continue to be found disproportionately in schools serving greater numbers of

low-income or minority students (NCES 1997a). In 1994, just over 20% of newly hired public

school teachers were hired without having met regular certification requirements (NCTAF 1997). The vast majority of these teachers were assigned to the most disadvantaged schools in the central city and poor rural school districts. In "Closing the Divide: What Teachers and Administrators Can Do to Help Black Students Reach Their Reading Potential," Robert Dreeben (1987) described the results of his study of reading instruction and outcomes for 300 black and white first graders across seven schools in the Chicago area. He found that differences in reading outcomes among students were almost entirely explained not by socioeconomic status or race, but by the quality of instruction the students received. This study also found that the quality of instruction received by African-American students was, on average, much lower than that received by white students, thus creating a racial gap in aggregate achievement at the end of first grade. In fact, the highest ability group in Dreeben's (1987) sample was in a school in a low-income, African-American neighborhood. These students, though, learned less during first grade than their lower-aptitude white counterparts because their teacher was unable to provide the quality instruction this talented group deserved.

Valencia (2008) outlines how federal and state policies enable the separation of youth based on race and language; how students of color attended schools in dilapidated buildings and have less quality teachers; and how teachers and administrators with deficit views of and low expectations for Mexican American children hindered their success. Critical race scholarship that uses U.S. Census data to construct a visual representation of educational attainment levels for Latina/o and Chicana/o students in comparison with other ethnic groups across the nation (Perez Huber et al. 2016; Solorzano et al. 2005; Yosso and Solorzano 2006) reveals that this population falls behind their white counterparts in their levels of educational attainment. Multiple factors

contribute to these disparities among both groups such as unequal K-12 school conditions, failure of the community college academic transfer function, limited baccalaureate opportunities, and educational isolation and alienation in graduate school (Yosso and Solorzano 2006). In terms of K-12 school conditions, rather than addressing structural inequities along the K-12 pipeline, schools continue to rely on standardized curriculum and high-stakes assessments, which yield statistically unreliable, inappropriate measures of student knowledge (Yosso and Solorzano 2006).

It is pertinent to think critically about what is occurring in the middle school to high school transition period for students of color and/or from low-socioeconomic backgrounds. School transitions, particularly between middle school and high school, have shown to be challenging for young adolescents (Barber & Olsen, 2004). Changes in school structure, class sizes, teacher support, and academic expectations of students contribute to the already stressful developmental phase teenagers experience generally (Barber and Olsen 2004). For minority students, this transition may be further exacerbated by stereotype expectations of their academic abilities (or perceived lack thereof) and their receiving schools' level of cultural competence (Holcomb-McCoy, 2007). One of the challenges to effectively educating students of color is the tendency to use pity as a moral basis for lowering expectations for student learning (LadsonBillings, 2009; Landsman, 2004; Zembylas, 2013). This sense of pity can stem from feeling sorry for students' social and economic circumstances, and the consequent belief that students should be exempt from learning with rigor (Knesting & Waldron, 2006). Some students might initially perceive teacher pity as a form of sympathy, thereby internalizing an attitude that learning is optional or unattainable due to this perceived disadvantage. However, these

seemingly well-intended messages have been shown to negatively influence students'

self-perceptions and result in low academic achievement (Graham and Taylor 2016). This cycle

can then result in the self-fulfilling prophecy of lowered expectations (Liou and Rotheram-Fuller

2016).

Although the life challenges of young people of color in this country have very real

consequences on students' motivation to learn (Bandura 1986), fixating on these challenges

without attempting to address them at a systemic level can create a glass ceiling that hinders their

academic achievement. Valencia (1997; 2019) describes the *deficit thinking model* as an

endogenous theory—posting that students who fail in school do so because of internal deficits.

The consistent and problematic ideology of "blaming the victim" is reinforced by school

personnel's internal biases and stereotypes which in turn leads to a school culture of

low-expectations and barriers to learning that keep students of color from thriving (Blankstein

and Noguera 2016). Not surprisingly, researchers regard such an approach as counterintuitive to

expectancy efforts to address achievement disparities across race and class (Liou and

Rotheram-Fuller 2016; Milner 2007; Weinstein 2002). Consistent with Freire's (2000)

scholarship, these compassionate intentions result in the reduction of learning; rather than

address and challenge the oppressive systemic and societal structures that students of color face,

these attitudes create a false sense of generosity on the part of the teacher. To counteract this, one

of the key components of high-expectation practices is teacher caring (Delpit 2012)**,** which

contributes to students' perception of the trustworthiness of the teacher (Gregory and Weinstein,

2008). Valenzuela (1999) referred to teacher caring as providing students with the resources that

utilize their prior knowledge and existing social capital as the foundation of education. Through

asset-based mind-sets, teachers utilize learning opportunities to maximize students' potential as a method of affirming and expanding upon their social capital and life trajectory (Rojas and Liou 2017). To prepare teachers to foster a social justice mind-set, they must not perceive teaching as a benevolent act—which Rojas and Liou (2017) refer to as the kind of well intended help that does not directly address students' needs and learning circumstances in ways that contribute to their positive self-perceptions and long-term educational outcomes. Rojas and Liou (2017) findings suggest that efforts to cultivate a pipeline of new teachers capable of making this commitment require deepening their knowledge of the role of racism, sexism, and economic exploitation in students' material realities, and students' daily experiences navigating those circumstances to do well in school.

The conditions that were in place before the COVID-19 pandemic (i.e. digital divide) increased school interruptions, and systemic inequities in education were already marginalizing students of color and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds. When the pandemic forced everyone to adjust to a new way of working and learning that required an increased access to technology and other resources, these conditions only exacerbated the inequality that was already present. This study addresses this issue and adds to the scholarship on systemic forces that impede students from achieving their full potential.

METHODS

To understand the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the education system in San Antonio, I designed this qualitative study that attempts to capture what educators think is the

impact of online learning on their students. I followed a qualitative approach to this study to explore the following questions:

1) How has the pandemic exacerbated inequities in education?
2) How have educators experienced and responded to the switch to online teaching and learning?

Data Collection

The primary source for data collection in this study consisted of in-depth interviews with educators from diverse districts throughout the San Antonio,Texas area. In this study, educators encompass school employees such as teachers, administrators, and instructional coaches from local public schools.

Participant Selection

Participants were selected from four public school districts and one private boarding school. The process of recruitment went as follows: I selected participants from those who volunteered themselves to participate in the interview via a publicly dispersed statement of request for participants (See Appendix A). The statement was dispersed to graduates of a master's at a private university in San Antonio. Twelve educators responded expressing interest in being interviewed. I was able to schedule and conduct ten interviews. Of the ten participants, most respondents were working in public schools with the exception of one participant, Mia, who worked at a private boarding school in the city; and Angela who was working at a high

school outside the state of Texas. Participants were not asked to specify age, gender identity, or racial/ethnic identity.

Interviews

The ten structured interviews I conducted with school employees focused on resource access, administrative support, and classroom environment during the COVID-19 pandemic. More information on participants' characteristics and the interview questions can be found in the appendix. All interviews followed the same format with each question asked in the same order. Interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes and were audio-recorded and transcribed digitally. I conducted all interviews between the months of October 2020 and January 2021 via phone calls or Zoom. Before starting each interview, I gained verbal permission from interviewees to record the audio. All information was stored in a password protected computer. Anonymity was preserved by assigning pseudonyms to each participant and their place of employment. Notes regarding tone of voice of interviewees or silences were noted in my journal and were used toward the end of the analysis phase. These details illuminated perceptions of teachers experiences while teaching during a pandemic.

Data Analysis

Qualitative data from interviews was coded using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). A codebook was developed containing themes that were relevant to the research questions of this study. The coded quotes were organized in a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet in thematically labeled "sheets." In each sheet, the data was organized in labeled columns and rows with

participant data (such as position in relation to the school e.g. teacher, administrator, or instructional coach and the school district they were working in). Examples of thematic codes included the following: discussion of teachers' observations of structural inequities such as poverty, students with disabilities, and or English learners; opinion on administrative support at their respective schools; discussion of technology issues encountered by students and their families; opinion on parent-teacher communication during the time of COVID-19; discussion of academic progress of students; and feelings of stress or anxiety from a teacher's perspective. Each theme was assigned a corresponding color that was used to highlight excerpts throughout the interview transcript. After attaining a transcription of each interview, I carefully read through and highlighted excerpts that included information relevant to the themes I developed in the codebook. For instance, if and when the interviewee mentioned a student experiencing issues with lack of technology, I would highlight the excerpt in the corresponding color that was assigned to the theme of technology. This process was repeated for all coded themes.

FINDINGS

This section is separated into three parts. The first analyzes interview data to show the patterns teachers noticed in their "classrooms" as they pertain to issues of equity, specifically, access to technology. The second section focuses on the increased responsibilities of students as a result of the economic downturn caused by the pandemic and their efforts to adequately manage their classwork while also tending to their siblings or family members at home. Finally, the last section focuses on educators' commitment to their students academic and personal success

during the pandemic while examining the ways in which they managed feelings of stress and anxiety.

Technology Accessibility

Participants conveyed multiple ways the pandemic affected structural inequities already in place in our educational system. The first and most obvious challenge was making sure all students had access to the technology necessary to support distance learning. Amy, a 7th grade teacher at Apple, said "The main challenge for us was that we didn't have a population [of students] that had computers...A lot of our students didn't have access to computers or Wi-Fi." Her point was reinforced by another participant who explained that, during the beginning stages of school closures, students found it difficult to have access to stable internet connections even when districts were trying their best to provide those resources. Victoria, an instructional coach at the Sunset school district said, "If somebody needed a hotspot, because they didn't have access to Wi-Fi, we made sure that they had that. Some kiddos had to⸺at first⸺ come and be in the parking lot by campus in order to pick up Wi-Fi." Meanwhile, the technology challenges that students and their families encountered while attending public school looked different at the private school. Mia, Dean of Students for the Upper School at Grandview, shared that "We also had issues with the kids' technology, but not like a public school does. All of our kids, for the most part, are pretty wealthy. So they had access to the internet and to computers." Although access to technology was not a principal issue at Grandview, Mia did mention that the international students matriculated at Grandview were having a difficult time, "It's been really,

really tough because we have some kids who have not been able to come back to the United States. China is not letting people come to the United States because of their belief that we don't have a handle on that appropriate situation." She continues,

> We have some students who are still in China trying to learn. They are not required to be in class. All the classes are recorded, so they have access to the recordings because for them it could be 2a.m. you know, or something. Some do come to class, but they're not required to. But we've got about...I'd say about half those kids are not succeeding. They're not doing their schoolwork. Some of that I think is simple immaturity, you know, they're just gaming all day and not doing anything. Some of it is really, I think, a lack of familiarity with the language. It's just hard. They're in China with their families. No one's there to practice English with and they have no one to help explain if they didn't quite get what the teacher was saying. And they're just falling behind.

> In this anecdote, Mia is articulating how affluent, well-resourced schools with little-to-no-working parents, are facing different types of challenges than the lower socio-economic status and poorly resourced schools that surround them.

> Another interesting finding among participants was their campus' solutions to address issues of technology inaccessibility while also trying to maximize student learning. Two participants shared that their respective campus spent a significant amount of time preparing physical copies of assignments for students and their families to pick up and complete on a weekly basis. Melanie, a 9th grade teacher at Apple, said "In the Spring, when [the pandemic] first happened, our first response was that we would have assignments that were kind of done asynchronously online, or we would print out packets that families would come and pick up if

they did not have a computer or device at home." Another interviewee, Beth, a middle school teacher at Apple, also mentioned the use of traditional paper-assignments for those students who did not have a device at home. She stated:

> I think one of the biggest challenges that the students that I work with face is access to technology, both actual devices and internet access. So in March, when we initially went online, we actually were sort of concurrently trying to have [assignments] online available for students who had access to devices, but we would also have to do everything as a printed copy. The students were turning in [assignments] on a weekly basis, and then I think it went to like, two or three week basis. And to be straight up honest, not a single one of those assignments was graded. [They were] recycled. But a lot of that was just to check who was turning stuff in so we at least knew who had engagement. But it was just too super daunting and we faced a lot of unknowns about like, how long do we need to quarantine these papers; we have multiple teachers teaching different subjects, so we had to take the packets aparts and give the assignments to the right teachers. I mean yeah, hours and hours.

These two participants highlight how, at the beginning of the pandemic, Apple went into "crisis teaching mode" and handled the issue of lack of technology access among its students by checking for engagement rather than learning through the use of physical paper assignments which can ultimately lead to a disparity in academic learning of "online" versus "paper" students. This situation put a lot of strain on teachers who were learning how to balance multiple teaching formats while also trying to keep themselves and their families safe during a global pandemic.

It became apparent very quickly that students enrolled in high-poverty school districts did not have the technology and devices at home to support distance learning. To combat this issue, districts managed to get devices on their students' hands to the best of their ability. Charles, 12th grade English teacher at Horizon, said, "The district has taken the steps of trying to give every kid a device and give them access to the internet. And I think that's admirable." This was echoed by another teacher who also showed pride in how her district tackled the issue, Alice, an 8th grade teacher at Promise, mentioned, "I know for a fact that every single student was able to pick up a laptop, and every single one of them got hotspots as well. And one of the things that [my district] did differently than other districts, was that we gave one device for each student as opposed to one device per household." As one can imagine, the increased demand for technology across the nation led to a shortage of devices that left districts struggling to meet those demands. Beth, a middle school teacher at Apple said,

> We gave out close to 750 Chromebooks to students, and we have like 950 kids normally attended to. So that's a large, large majority. We are down to about 15 devices, and we get new students. This is actually a discussion we had today about 'what do we do?' Because we have devices that have been on backorder since February. [Before COVID], we had planned to replace some of the devices that we have, and now we can't get them, you know, just supply and demand. So that's, that's kind of a concern.

While districts were trying their best to get students a device to support their distance learning, Wallace, a middle school teacher at Apple, noticed that "the pandemic has made it clear that if a student doesn't have the right technology, or the means of transportation, in some instances, to come to school, just to get a laptop, then they're at a loss. And that has happened to a couple of

students in my grade." This example demonstrates how there are other systemic forces in place that lead to disparities in academic achievement for students during the pandemic. Moreover, not only was digital access an issue but also levels of digital literacy[1] of the students and educators. Charles noticed that his students were not as "tech savvy" as he thought. He said, "I don't think every kid even though in this generation, Generation Z, they are technically digital natives." Alice also raised a similar concern by stating that "[My district] provided every single student a hotspot. But I think where we failed them, though, was that they needed some sort of guidance into navigating the systems that they work with." Amy also echoed the lack of digital savviness of students by saying,

> Kids this age are known for being so tech savvy, but they really don't know how to use a computer that well, or to the extent you think like a middle schooler would be able to. With a lot of our students, right, they don't have access to a computer at all. But we obviously go to the computer labs at school, but not as much as I think for a lot of these students that wouldn't normally have had such access to a computer. I think this [pandemic] is a positive event as it will kind of really improve their skill set and maybe make it a better equity thing. Now, these students would be skilled at the computer as far as kids that own laptops at home.

Not only were students having a difficult time navigating the platforms and technologies that came with the switch to online learning, but also educators. For instance, Victoria, an Instructional Coach at Sunset, mentioned that they "...were rolling out training every day, just for technology. Some teachers were responsive, and some teachers were just completely thrown for

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[1] Digital literacy means having the skills to live, learn, and work in a society where communication and access to information is increasingly through digital formats like internet platforms, social media, and mobile devices.

a loop." Similarly, another Instructional Coach at Horizon, Douglas, mentioned that his role which originally consists of coaching teachers in good teaching practices and good pedagogy, was modified to fit the needs of teachers who did not have as high digital literacy. He said:

> A lot of people immediately thought, 'Okay, well, now my computer won't turn on or my internet connection is not working or my student can't get online. Well, that's an issue with technology. Let's get the Academic Technology coach on board.' Well my role is really to coach and teach best practices of teaching. But a lot of teachers saw me as a troubleshooting person, kind of a help desk. And that was frustrating. But it was also like, 'Okay, well, my teachers are struggling, they need support. And if this is what they need support with, even though it's the worst part of my job, I've got to help them where they are because if I don't, they're gonna be floundering. Another way to look at it is, if my goal is to get them to be better at teaching, well, they're never going to get better at teaching if they don't have these basic skills. So I had to work on that."

These results show that technology accessibility was a huge hurdle for districts across San Antonio. Educators noticed that a significant portion of its students population did not have devices and internet access at home to support their learning. While the effort to make sure that at least every household has access to a device was successfully made, the other issues that arise while learning remotely do not stop there. In the next sections, I will discuss how the pandemic shone a light on other systemic barriers that get in the way of student success.

"Ghost Students:" From Top Students to Essential Workers

The economic downturn caused by the pandemic was no foreign issue in virtual classrooms. Participants affirmed that they had a difficult time keeping students engaged while teaching online for reasons ranging from lack of a quiet study space to having to seek employment. "Ghost Students" is a term being used by educators to refer to students who do not come to class whether that is virtually or in-person, and are not interacting with their teachers. Essentially, these are students that "disappear" and the reasons for that are explained by the following participants. For instance, Charles said:

> The hardest thing is keeping kids engaged. I have some students who show up and do the work and others who go completely missing. Some do not turn on their cameras, and we can't force them to turn on their cameras for equity purposes (i.e. broadband width, security, privacy), so it is hard to know if they are paying attention or need help. I can't see their faces. And so there's this level of detachment, you know.

Another educator expressed similar concerns in regards to student engagement. Alice added, "My top students, I lost them. And I lost them for many reasons, I lost some because they had to work because they needed to keep a job because their parents didn't have a job, or they lost their jobs. I lost them because they couldn't focus online." On a similar note, Yvette adds that she also noticed some students taking on job responsibilities outside of school. She said,

> One of the biggest equity issues that I see on my campus is we have students who are learning from home, and then who are working as well. Like I've run into my students at H-E-B, [a local grocery store], or I've run into my students at fast food restaurants. So a lot of times teachers are saying things like, ' oh, students aren't turning in their work.' But the thing is they're comparing a student who goes to school and then goes home and does

homework. And then a student who goes to school, goes to their job, isn't turning on their camera, because they're at their job, while they're also on the zoom… They're listening to the zoom on their headphones, but they're also at their job! And I think that learning from home is an opportunity for students to make more money for their families, or to get a job in those kinds of things. And if that is happening, we also need to adjust our expectation as teachers and know that like, we're not the center of the universe right now. Like we're not the center of their lives. And that's okay.

In the three quotes above, it is clear that educators are struggling to reconfigure their approach to teaching in the face of detachment while also changing their expectations of their students' academic performance. This is important because, considering that schools in the U.S. are the epitome of structural inequality, there are other factors that make learning from home impossible due to students bearing the costs of the economic downturn as a result of the pandemic that essentially push them out of school and into the workforce.

Another concern was how students were grappling with factors outside of school that were impeding their classroom engagement. Participants overwhelmingly mentioned that the students' learning environment at home played a huge role on whether or not they showed up to class. For instance, Amy, a seventh grade science teacher at Apple, affirmed that,

Having students learn at home is not an equal learning environment because some students have their own, quiet room, and have good enough internet to be able to like maintain connection for the morning. Whereas some students are, like, contained, distracted by all the other things going on in their house and don't have their own space to be able to learn and don't have to stay connected. And some don't have like parents at

home, to encourage them. Like they're still kids, they're not going to always be 100%

responsible.

This educator alludes to the difficulty students faced when trying to learn at home as not all

households have the resources or structures in place to support a healthy learning environment.

In a follow-up email after our interview, a separate educator, Victoria at Sunset, reached out to

add to her perspective on the challenge of students' lack of engagement. She states in her email,

There were a few points about inequity, especially in more challenged districts, like

SAISD. Even with the distribution of padlets to homes/families. We found that another

challenge for students in our community was having an effective learning space in their

homes. Many times you have multiple children sharing a room, or multiple families

living in the same house. It was difficult for many students to find a quiet, organized

space to work and engage on Zoom with their classes. Added to that, there were often

multiple students trying to do work or get on the wifi at the same time. I would assume

these were not as big an issue for the students in the North/Northeast sides of the city,

where many children have separate rooms, even a desk and school supplies at their

disposal. Lastly, many parents in our community work multiple jobs (many considered

essential) and aren't at home as much to provide academic support to their children, as

opposed to homes where parents were working from home, or a stay-at home parent was

present (like in my household) who had much more flexible schedules to assist students

with their asynchronous assignments.

Victoria was not the only interviewee noticing patterns of inequity among students participating

in online learning. Two teachers mentioned that their students are not only taking on job

responsibilities, but also that of caretakers. Beth said, "I have one little boy [student], he is forever telling me he has to come back, and in the chat he's like, 'What are we doing, miss? I had to go check on my sister.' And I think it must be him and his sister or maybe there are multiple siblings going on zoom." Similarly, Alice talked about some of her top students "dropping the ball" because they could not manage both learning from home and performing caretaking duties. She states:

> One particular girl that comes to mind has to watch her two little sisters, because mom and dad have to work. And so we're talking about a 13 year old watching her siblings, which is old enough but still, you know. But now she has to take care of them and she also has to take care of her work. And from some kids, I've heard that they don't have a space at home to work. So they rather be at school because they can actually sit down at a desk and work from a desk versus, you know, being in the kitchen.

As educators realized that a student's home environment played a significant role on whether or not they would engage in their learning. Solutions to address lack of engagement from students or even failing of classes became a priority. One participant, Melanie, finds that bringing students back to school as a solution to these challenges was problematic. She states,

> And I think also the disparity between like white students, and then black, brown and Indigenous students, is just exacerbated by this pandemic, as well. And I think that some of the solutions are also inherently problematic, like, having the students who don't have computers come back to campus. Okay, that's helpful. But also, you're also putting them at risk during a pandemic, right? And just because it's like taking away the choice for them.

Charles at Horizon experienced similar instances where he was astonished by the ways in which the district was prioritizing who gets to come back to in-person learning. He states:

> They asked us to call parents of students who were failing more than one class and essentially pressure those parents into getting their students to return to the campus. There was a script [we had to use], and it said 'this is what's best for your student if they're on campus,' and I remember thinking, Well there's a pandemic why would we pressure the most vulnerable populations… Kids who are failing multiple classes, I mean, they could be fairly for any number of reasons. Maybe someone is sick at home, maybe there's a language barrier, but it was part of the script, they wanted us to essentially nudge these parents of these students who are failing multiple classes, to have them return to campus. And I just, I was astonished by that. I didn't do that. I didn't read that part of the script. But it was strange to me that that was official in an email sent to us as something we needed to do. And I just thought that was weird.

The participants above show an increased awareness of the disparity between students who have all the structures in place to succeed in an online learning environment and those who unfortunately "disappear" due to the increased responsibilities outside of school or lack of resources.

On the other hand, one interviewee mentioned that this model of remote learning is working for some students, but also recognizes that it is not working for others. Douglas said:

> I think that this model is... it *is* working. So, there are many students that are successful in this model. You *can* be a successful learner in this model. But it requires a lot more internal motivation than the previous model. You can be successful in the previous model

with less internal motivation. Because you are going to the classes, you're seeing the students, you're seeing the teachers… In this model, for a student to be successful, they've got to get up, get logged on, pay attention, ask questions, respond. I mean, it's purely up to them to do all of that. We know students are being successful, but really, it's those students that were previously successful. I have no numbers to back this up, but I would be surprised if we have any examples of learners that were struggling before that are now being successful. I just don't think that that's going to be the case. I think more than likely we have a lot of learners that were kind of struggling before and now are doing very poorly in this environment because they do not have the structures in place, they don't have the internal motivation. Maybe there's atmospheric elements, whether it's family or Wi Fi. There's so many different elements. But I think there's a lot of people that are not being successful. And I do not think that that's isolated to any one school district or one state, I think this is the trend across the nation.

Douglass seems to understand the role of structural differences in student performance, but also seems to attribute these differences to internal motivation. Discussions of the internal motivational level of maturity of students to handle their academic responsibilities came apparent in Mia's interview, she said: "We've got about, I'd say about half [of the students in China] are not succeeding. They're not doing their schoolwork. Some of that I think is simple immaturity, you know, they're just gaming all day and not doing anything. Some of it is really, I think, a lack of familiarity with the language. It's just hard. They're in China with their families. No one's there to practice English with, no one to help explain if they didn't quite get what the teacher was saying. And they're just falling behind."

Opinions about whether or not the online learning environment is successful enough to fit the needs of all students were also discussed, and educators offered multiple perspectives. For Mia, the online learning environment was not effective especially for students living overseas. Wallace, a middle school teacher at Apple, said that the online school has "worked to some people's advantage, and it worked to some people's disadvantage." Wallace mentions that in the magnet program in which he teaches at, they do a lottery system where essentially it selects students from across the entire district and some come from really rich families. He said,

> Some kids are very affluent and they have the technology, but in some ways, it has leveled the playing field. Because even sometimes the kids with all the technology and all the access in the world just weren't doing the work. Kids who maybe had to borrow a laptop or struggled in other ways, it didn't matter if they showed up, because they did the work. This kind of shows that, in some ways, some kids were able to do better because they weren't worried about getting on a bus every morning at 6am to get all the way across town, to go to the school or whatever.

These different perspectives on what goes on in students' lives behind the scenes became much more salient during the pandemic as educators found themselves learning more things about students than they would have been able to before March of 2020. In some ways, it gave educators an avenue to learn more about the students whom they teach on a personal level and adjust their perceptions and expectations that they have about such students. This adjustment of perceptions on behalf of teachers is important to accomplish as life challenges of students of color have real consequences on students' motivation to learn in school (Bandura 1986).

Teachers as Superheroes

Educators were psychologically and emotionally challenged during the trying times of the pandemic. They were pushed in ways like never before where their workload seemed everlasting and their teaching practices were simply not up to par to meet the demands of online learning. In this section, I will highlight how educators felt throughout the switch to remote learning and how it affected them personally.

Feeling overwhelmed, stressed, or anxious were all overarching themes among participants. New and veteran teachers experienced feelings of doubt as they were learning to navigate a whole new way of teaching. Alice said,

> Whatever 19 years of experience has taught me, I had to put it away. I had to learn new ways of teaching. And, and not only teaching but reaching those kids because if not, then you lose some. I don't know where some of my students from last year ended up at. For them, they don't have, I guess, that outlet, you know, there's some students that find themselves, you know, at home all the time and not having to have an outlet to whatever might be happening in their life.

Alice also shared that her long career in teaching came to a halt and that affected her so much that she seeked counseling. She says, "I lived at school. That was practically my life. So going from that to shutting me down… I had to personally look for counseling. I had to start seeing a therapist because I was going crazy. Because where I shine the most was taken away from me. I had to find an outlet." The perseverance and resilience of teachers did not go unnoticed in this

study. Victoria mentioned how the whole teaching profession will be elevated because of this pandemic. She said, "I think it's made people see that this is hard work. Parents who were at home are realizing, 'Oh my gosh, I need to appreciate the teacher more.' So, I just hope that the profession will be elevated, a little bit more respected."

When asked about administrative support, educators seemed divided on whether or not they felt seen or heard by their administrators. Melanie expressed feelings of stress when administrators did not see her input as an asset, especially when it came to specific policies such as keeping students six feet apart, mask enforcement, and others. She said,

> I empathize and understand that this is a really difficult time for administrations because the same way that teachers were asked to come up with a new curriculum, overnight, administrators were asked to come up with new systems overnight, and all of the fear and all of the questions that the students have, that the families have, and that we as faculty members have, all of that was placed into the hands of administrators. And that's really difficult…On the other hand, it's been really frustrating as a teacher, because a lot of times, I feel like I am not included in the conversation for the solution… it's very, like, top down, the administrator will tell us what to do. And then they won't ask for a lot of input. And that's really frustrating for me as a teacher. I'm like, 'my classroom isn't big enough to space students even two feet apart.' And I know 14 year olds are not going to be able to wear a mask for eight hours a day. But because my input wasn't assessed, this ideal policy was put in place, and then the actual implementation was left into my hands.

Charles also shared that he had mixed feelings about the support on behalf of the administration. He shared:

On one hand, I feel like [administrators] get that we are stressed and we don't need more

burden. On the other hand, I feel like, and I don't know how much of this is directly the

admin or my campuses issue, or the district, or Texas… but on the other hand, there's so

much change daily. One example is taking attendance, taking attendance is such a hassle.

Because there's so many different ways that we were asked to do that and give kids credit

for being "present." Just yesterday, I got an email from an admin and it was a

contradictory message on the same topic. So I think this is one example of many,

distracted communication, constantly shifting priorities and shifting messages. At the

same time, I know they do care, and they do understand our situation, but it doesn't

always translate into the smoothest.

While most educators appeared angry, stressed, and anxious about the future education of their

students, they did not give up. A lot of educators expressed that they felt "proud to be a teacher."

They also showed pride in their respective districts and the resiliency of their students despite the

barriers they encountered. Mia said, "We learned that we have to be really reflective as a teacher

about how you change [things] and what really matters, because we can't teach all the content we

used to teach, we have to be wise when choosing what to teach and what matters, so I think those

are all very good things moving forward." Melanie also shared, "There has been a push for

creativity. Teachers everywhere are coming up with these incredible creative solutions to

problems and creative ways to keep students engaged, creative ways to keep students connected

to one another. I have just seen so many teachers share resources with one another and stay

connected, and all of those different things that I think are incredible. And I hope that the culture

of helping one another stays because I hadn't seen that before. I just think that that was amazing."

DISCUSSION

This paper examines the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on public and private schools in a predominantly minority community. I find that the subjects of my study一 contemporary educators一work alongside and on behalf of students of color because they recognize the racialized effects of a global pandemic. However, they often find themselves dealing with challenges beyond their control and that has caused educators to experience emotional and psychological problems. My analysis focuses on educators' observations of the structural inequities that were already entrenched in the education system long before the pandemic. Educators illustrated in this study held a nuanced and evolving clarity about how race and socioeconomic inequality function overtly and subtly in society and in schools. Participant's constant reference to their students' struggle with accessing technology and handling of responsibilities outside of school caused them to "drop the ball" or go completely missing, points to the disadvantage of minority communities who are less likely to have the structures in place to help them succeed academically. Moreover, the digital divide is still very prevalent today with Texas having 1,828,917 students without the technology and devices at home to support distance learning and about 66% of the students who lack access are Black, Latinx, or Native American (Common Sense Media 2021). Participants in this study confirmed this statistic by sharing that technology was a huge barrier in the switch to online learning, and that a significant portion of their student population did not have access to a device. For educators, their roles were altered in new ways which put a lot of pressure on them to demonstrate their abilities as an educator.

After conversing with all of these educators, I conclude that now is the time to change. This study highlighted the value of social emotional learning and it also highlights that, as a field, our focus is not where it needs to be. There is a need to connect with the child as a whole and know what is happening to students at home so that educators can accommodate them and lead them to success. Additionally, the ways in which the teaching profession is viewed as in society needs rethinking especially in the areas of teacher pay and teacher burnout. One of the biggest things I learned through this study is that racism is not a pandemic but rather endemic. Racism is woven into U.S. society and it is not unusual or new, it is us. Children of color face the most extreme hurdles to academic achievement so there is a need to address that systematically. Through our policy, there is potential to address issues of funding disparities, lack of culturally responsive curriculum and teachers, and issues of segregation.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study yielded robust findings, it has limitations. For instance, the direct student perspective is missing as talking to minors is not as feasible especially during the pandemic. There is a dire need to utilize new theoretical frameworks and center the voices of students themselves in this work. An additional limitation is that there is an overrepresentation of educators employed at Apple. Thus, carefully weighing study design options as it relates to the number of teachers represented from each district will likely yield a revised interpretation of the data. Furthermore, qualitative data takes on meaning by being viewed through a theoretical or explanatory lens. Qualitative data can, therefore, take on different meaning depending on the theoretical lens being used. While this prevents generalization, it creates a space for critical

analysis on the part of the researcher and rich description of what the data has to offer. This approach, however, is able to reveal complexity and uncover paths for future research.

By asking new sets of research questions about how students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, who may also identify as an emergent bilingual or a student with disabilities, navigate online learning is imperative as the virtual classroom poses many challenges for them (i.e. lack of support for students with a visual or auditory disability; and students who are unfamiliar with the English language or technology systems). Another area of research that this study calls for is addressing teacher burnout. Teachers, as the front-line workers in the education system, were tasked with quickly implementing new teaching practices in ways that promoted student learning while maximizing student safety during the COVID-19 pandemic. This begs the question of how can the system recover from the demands of teaching during a pandemic by also recognizing that preventing burnout is much easier and more desirable than trying to reverse it.

CONCLUSION

This research offers valuable insights to educational leaders and policymakers working with existing and future initiatives that seek to support students of color and/or from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Additionally, it is valuable for educational actors because it highlights the ways the participants identify and experience the implications of long-standing race and class inequality in our school system. Through this study, I find that the digital divide is still a salient issue in society, and that students of color and/or from low socioeconomic backgrounds are pushed out of schools by external structural forces that further marginalize their community. This study highlights the need to develop more culturally competent curricula,

prepare critically conscious educators, and take a holistic approach to the education of the next generation. The pandemic was more than just the move from classroom to computer screens. It tested basic ideas about instruction, attendance, testing, funding, the role of technology and the human connections that hold it all together. Moving forward, it is important we continue to think about how to evolve schooling so that all students, regardless of their background, get the most out of their education.

Appendix A

Publically Dispersed Statement:

Hello, my name is Diana Long and I am a senior at Trinity University studying Sociology and Education. I am writing a thesis about how the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequities in education. Interviews will take approximately 30-45 minutes and can be done over the phone or zoom. I extend the invitation to any teachers interested in speaking about their experiences teaching during these difficult times. Participants will retain complete anonymity and information collected will only be used for the purposes of this project and will not be shared with anyone outside the Sociology and Education Departments at Trinity. I appreciate your time and consideration. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Appendix B

Interview Guide:

1. Can you tell me more about your teaching background? How long have you been a teacher? What grades have you taught and currently teach?

2. What challenges have you encountered with the switch to online teaching? How have you overcome them?

3. Do you have support from the administration at your school? What does that look like?

4. What was done to help underprivileged students transition to online learning? Do you have any specific instances where students were struggling to have their needs met?

5. What is the demographic make-up of your class? Do you have English Learners in your classroom? Students with disabilities? How do you accommodate those students during online learning?

6. Would you say communication with parents is effective? What challenges are presented in terms of parent-teacher-student communication?

7. How do you see the equity gap growing as a result of the pandemic? What does this mean for economically disadvantaged students or students who were already falling behind compared to their peers? Do you think there are ways to prevent that from happening? If so, what are they?

8. What is something positive that you have experienced during these times? Where do you find the motivation to keep going despite how difficult things get?

9. Is there anything else you would like to say about this or any other matters?

Appendix C

Teacher Profiles

Charles: Charles has been a teacher for 15 years. He has taught 10th, 11th, and 12th grade English. At the time of the interview, Charles was teaching 12th grade English (on-level) and AP/Dual Credit English at Horizon.

Mia: Mia had another career upon graduating from her master's of arts in teaching program and decided to go back and teach after approximately ten years of being employed outside the field of education. When she returned, she taught 10th and 12th grade English at a high school in Apple. At the time of the interview, Mia was in her 10th year at Grandview, a private boarding school, and was working as both an 11th and 12th grade English (AP Literature) teacher and the Dean of Students for the Upper School.

Douglas: Douglas has a bachelor's degree in Mathematics and a master's degree in teaching. He began his teaching career at a middle school in Apple teaching eighth-grade mathematics. Douglas transitioned to Horizon two years later into an online geometry program that would serve a handful of students taking advanced mathematics. He worked as an online geometry instructor in this program for three years. At the time of the interview, Douglas was working as a Secondary Academic Technology coach. He refers to himself as a "teacher-coach" who coaches teachers on good academic instruction.

Alice: Alice has been a Spanish teacher for 20 years. She has only taught grades 9th through 12th at Promise, a low socioeconomic district. Alice says she relates to the issues she sees at Promise because of her background. At the time of the interview, she was teaching AP Spanish to 7th and 8th graders for the first time in her career, also at a middle school in Promise. She describes that the reason she transitioned into middle school was because of a new project they were working on at that middle school in the Promise district.

Melanie: Melanie graduated from her master's of arts in teaching program in 2019. At the time of the interview, she was in her second year teaching at the same school where she completed her master's internship at Apple. She was teaching 9th grade World Geography.

Victoria: Victoria has been in education for 20 years. Upon graduating from her master's program, she taught third grade for 11 years and special education for one year at a brand new school. Then, she moved to a different state and worked as a director of educational programs at a Children's Museum where she developed and ran an early math program. Upon her return to San Antonio, she was working as an instructional specialist, specializing in math, at Apple. At the time of the interview, she was working the same role but now at Sunset. In this role, she is assigned five campuses and normally travels throughout the week to work with teachers fresh out of college or who have moved grade levels on lesson planning or academic content. She also provides professional development to the district specifically on the first-grade math teachers.

Amy: Amy earned her master's degree in teaching in 2018. At the time of the interview, Amy was in her third year of teaching and was teaching seventh-grade science at a middle school in Apple.

Beth: Beth has been a teacher for 22 years. At the time of the interview, she was teaching eighth-grade science at a title-one middle school in Apple and was also serving as the instructional coach for her department. Her day is divided between teaching eighth-grade science and advising teachers on their professional practice. She described that most of her teaching career has been at that middle school, but she has also taught in Sunset before.

Wallace: Wallace has a bachelor's degree in Chinese studies. He graduated from a master of arts in teaching program in 2014. He has been an educator for six years and has taught Mandarin at the high school level. At the time of the interview, Wallace was in his second year of teaching a class called "technology applications" for a specialized technology magnet program at Apple.

Angela: Angela graduated from the master's of arts in teaching program in 1998. She immediately started teaching in San Antonio upon graduation. She taught for a year and then decided to move back to her home state. When she returned, she worked at an alternative highschool before finding her current position. At the time of the interview, she was working at a high school for her 20th year as a theatre and English teacher although she is also a certified speech teacher.

Table 1

District Demographics

District	White (%)	Black (%)	Hispanic or Latino (%)	Asian (%)	American Indian (%)	Pacific Islander (%)	Two or more races (%)	Median Household Income (US DLS)	Households with broadband internet (%)	Families with income below the poverty level (%)	Families with Food Stamp/SNAP benefits (%)
Apple	42	7	45	4	0	0	0	62,076	83.4	13.8	14
Horizon	30	7	57	4	0	0	2	62,250	86.8	12.9	17
Sunset	12	7	79	1	0	0	1	33,813	60.7	36.7	41.9
Promise	3	2	95	0	0	0	0	31,410	54.7	40.4	49.3
Grandview	51	6	32	9	0	0	2	*	*	*	*

Source: National Center for Education Statistics; *Note*: *= No data found.

Table 2

Interviewees by District and Role

Interviewee Role	Apple	Horizon	Sunset	Promise	Grandview	TOTAL
Teacher	3	1	0	1	0	5
Teacher and administrator	0	0	0	0	1	1
Teacher and Instructional Coach	1	0	0	0	0	1
Instructional coach	0	1	1	0	0	2
TOTAL	4	2	1	1	1	9

Note: this table does not include the interviewee from out of state whose role was a teacher.

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