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**IST618 – Information Policy**

**Info Access & Affordability**

**Low Income & Education**

**Introduction**

The transition to online has been in full force since the early 2000’s and does not seem to be slowing up anytime soon. As we see the online platform being utilized more and more for essential and important needs, it is also important to make sure that the masses of people in different geographic, economic, etc. conditions have the ability and means to join the party. In failing to do so, many disenfranchised and less fortunate demographics will be at an extreme disadvantage, which will only lead to a higher widening in the economic situation for decades to come. To further elaborate, lower income families have already been at a disadvantage when it comes to quality of education, teacher availability, after school programs, etc. Seeing the uphill climb these individuals already face when competing with more well-off families, it has only become worse with the recent COVID-19 pandemic that has hit the country and the world. Many well-off school districts have been able to adapt somewhat successfully to providing online learning and providing some type of continuity in education. On the other hand, those in lower income areas have not been so fortunate due to lack of funds to provide substantial laptops and WIFI for online learning, as well as teacher availability being diminished due to the new teaching platform. In addition, parents’ abilities to make sure their children are staying on top of and attending the online learning when it is provided has been a struggle as many low-income parents do not have the ability to work from home and need to go to work during the day and need to leave the house. Low Income families’ difficulty with education in the current environment will be the focus throughout this paper.

**Support & Research**

Lower income school districts have already been subject to many disadvantages over the decades when it comes to educational resources. Whether it be lack of supplies, quality of teaching, discipline for students not attending classes and many other things has placed this demographic of students in an unfortunate position in the immediate moment and well into the future. Even before the pandemic hit low-income communities have needed additional assistance from federal, state, and local governments, which in most cases has not been provided. Barshay explains the widening inequality gap even before the pandemic hit,

*“In 2015, during the Obama administration, the federal education department issued a report that showed how the funding gap between rich and poor schools grew 44 percent over a decade between 2001-2 and 2011-12. That meant that the richest 25 percent of school districts spent $1,500 more per student, on average, than the poorest 25 percent of school districts.” (Barshay. 2020).*

This proves to show that even when necessary assistance was needed pre-pandemic and not delivered, to expect necessary assistance will arrive during the pandemic is wishful thinking and very unlikely. This will cause many less fortunate families to suffer at greater costs and further widen the gap with regards to unequal access to educational services.

In addition to poorer schools and communities having less funds to provide substantial resources for students to succeed, the ability for households to keep up with the technological advancements in learning has been difficult. Before technology was common in education, poorer communities struggled to provide the physical supplies, such as paper, pencils, books, paper, etc. With the addition new resources needed for education such as access to internet, a computer to complete schoolwork, etc., keeping up with the more well-off communities and schools has been an almost impossible task for many families.

While the first step is having basic access to the necessary resources to educate, the next step is having some direction for students to follow. This is a much more difficult task for those in lower income communities. In a lot of cases in these areas, families are single parent homes where the parent is not able to be around a lot. This leaves the responsibility on students to supervise themselves, which does not seem to promise. Warschauer provides perspective from a parent in New Delhi after her son was exposed to unsupervised education,

*“My son used to be doing very well in school, he used to concentrate on his homework, but now he spends all his free time playing computer games at the kiosk and his schoolwork is suffering." In short, parents and the community came to realize that "minimally invasive education" was, in practice, minimally effective education.” (Warshauer. 2002).*

This was an initiative to provide public access to computers and internet in a poorer community for less fortunate students to learn and experiment at their own pace without supervision. While students did learn skills from just utilizing a computer, when it came down to actual education, students failed to stay focused and were found to be distracted playing games.

Another area of concern, with the quick transition to online education, is the lack of physical student-to-student interaction and the effects that may have. While it may be an overlooked aspect, being in a classroom and socializing with peers at a young age instills social skills necessary for future life. As stated in an article provided by [www.childrens.com](http://www.childrens.com),

*“The number of children and teenagers seeking help for*[*anxiety*](https://www.childrens.com/specialties-services/conditions/anxiety)*or*[*depression*](https://www.childrens.com/specialties-services/conditions/depression)*during the pandemic is rising across the country. A study by the*[*Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)*](https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6945a3.htm)*found that the percentage of children ages 5-11 seeking mental health care at emergency departments in 2020 increased by 24% from 2019. For children ages 12-17, mental health-related emergency room visits increased 31% over the previous year.”*

These are astounding numbers that cannot be overlooked and should be of serious concern for regulators and parents. The future impact that can come from this lack of interaction is impossible to estimate but its obvious it will not be positive.

When it comes to how this issue can be resolved, it is not so simple. Different states, counties, districts, etc. have different policies and resources so some demographics are more well off than others. While it would be beneficial for government to provide additional assistance and resources for educational purposes, it seems unlikely in the current state of country.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, this is an issue that no one really knows what the consequences could be. The last time anything of this magnitude has occurred was in 1918. Disparities in access to online education was already a problem before this pandemic hit but has been much more magnified ever since. If no substantial action is taken by the federal government, there will be many communities and students that will be without access to necessary education, which will be devastating for their future.

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