

Virtual Coffeehouse Session 2
eLearning and Accessibility in Quarantine
February 25, 2021

TRANSCRIPTION

Je' Nobia Smith

So with that, let us jump into our conversation for today, I would actually like to start with you, Renita. So, based on your experience as a mother with students with disabilities, in addition to your involvement and research on mothers navigating the systems, with their children with disabilities, what are your thoughts on disability supports for students during this pandemic? And, even what do you think parents and students need to be successful at this time?

Renita Evans

Wow, that is such a great question. Um, so COVID, mothers, education, and digital. So, for me, first of all, thank you for having this really important conversation. My research, like you said, really does focus on curating sacred spaces for mothers and families. But I do focus on tools and resources external to school. And in COVID, I've been really forced to reimagine sort of what habitual patterns of thinking and learning actually looks and moves like, because so long, I've depended on kind of school to kind of service that. So COVID has really forced me to do a hard left in life as a mother and kind of reshape my conversation, as home has now turned into both a place for learning a place for refuge. And also just a space where we try to represent safety and love. So, I've had to filter all of those things into this environment. So, for me, as a mother of six-- and I have two with a disability, one that's verbal, one that's nonverbal. I've been dependent-- been dependent upon resources with my community, with

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family, both generationally related, and those three or four doors down, and also individuals actually housed within the school system, to be kind of my eyes and ears to help me kind of navigate.

And so, my thoughts during this conversation, and just as I experience here, I'm going to also do a disclaimer, I have a lot of animals here so, if you hear things in the background, I do apologize. But that's kind of my new reality. But anyway, back to my question. I found the virtual space and using my home as a way for mothers and families to kind of just reconvene and just openly discuss without filter, what this experience has been like to them. How can we be a resource to each other really lean on each other? And this really started as kind of a vent of frustration, when we were all forced to one day to just stay home. None of us knew what to do in this virtual environment. So, I became really dependent upon family and school family to kind of help fill voids. And so, for me, Google Hangout has kind of been my virtual space to connect with other parents for us to share and bounce ideas off of each other. For some of us, it's been where's the power button? But for some of us, it's been how do I turn the mic on? And for others of us, it's been learning to navigate homework assignments that are sent digitally. How do we make that information and the questions relatable, and accessible not just to us, but to our children? So that's kind of been one of the areas of concern and really having those thoughtful conversations.

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But then further, how do the teachers see this information? And how do I have this dialogue? So, there was this virtual, there was this virtual space where I knew I needed to have a conversation with the teacher, but the teacher wasn't really responding to me. So how do I reach out to her? So again, this has been, again, a space of trial and error. And I found that leaning on other parents and people in my community, and also kind of leaning on the resources that as COVID, as we learn more about it. And as I think special education as an umbrella learns more about this digital space, they begin to put more resources out. I live in Indiana so for me, that's going to be different the resources that are available, and what that looks like, depending on where you're located. Just really getting familiar with what those resources are and how to navigate them. And being comfortable with saying, I don't know, who do I reach out to?

So, for me, just being patient with myself, patient with the school, maybe not so patient with my kids sometimes. But it's really been a place where I've thrived and learned how to really leverage technology, and really get in the driver's seat of what experiences-- direct and indirect learning experiences-- my children have by asking those sorts of questions, and being okay with saying, *Okay, I don't know, and what is what is this? How do I get to there?* And just being open and honest about what I think is helpful about those learning experiences and what's not accessible and what's, you know, my personal preferences, learning to separate those. So that's kind of been

(Re)Claim, (Re)Vitalize, (Re)Imagine, & (Re)Commit
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what's been helpful to me, and also what's been successful for my children. I'm not going to have an eight- hour or seven-hour school day, for me, it's been, we're going to have a four-hour school day, we're going to get these things accomplished, and really helping myself as a mother and as an educator, to be okay with not getting all my boxes checked. And being okay with that but knowing that that goal for the day was met. And just one day at a time. And that's really what's been working for me not to look at the big picture, but really just taking small bites, and learning something from every day.

Je' Nobia Smith

Thank you so much, Renita. I really pull on some of the things that you said in terms of, maybe we can't do eight hours right now, but four hours is what we can give and how we can get our goals accomplished. But also the idea that sometimes we don't know and sometimes it can be very difficult to get in touch with the school or to get in touch or locate resources and locate people to figure out what your next steps are and the frustration in that. So I definitely hear you in parts of your story as you're explaining that to us. At this time. I would like to actually open up to the entire room. All of you are able to weigh in on this either, If you have a response or questions for Renita or perhaps you would like to address the question itself but at this time, this is the floor for you.

[Pause]

Renita Evans

And while we're waiting, one thing I do, I would like to add, I mentioned before that, you know, I kind of use my land and

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my farm as kind of a place to heal. And you know, it's alternative. It's an alternative way to learning science, math, putting all those things together and creating a space that's different and unique outside of the traditional face to face environment. And that's been so helpful. I see a question. Oh, is that to everyone?

Je' Nobia Smith

Yes. Erin asks, in the chat: *I'm wondering what the role of your child's special education teacher, sorry, your child's special education teacher has been during distance learning?* Bruce asks, Oh, go ahead.

Renita Evans

No, go ahead. You're fine.

Je' Nobia Smith

Bruce also asked us, or says, *As a special educator, I've been amazed at how much our parents have supported us and other parents in this difficult time.*

Renita Evans

Yeah. You know, and, you know, one of the one of the things that absolutely have found, as an aha moment is sometimes just the change of environment forces us to kind of revisit some of our habitual patterns that we've just kind of done just out of being in a certain space and place, and how space and place does play a role in how we receive information. And so I look at this as kind of an interrupted blessing. For me, it's a little bit of a disruption, but it's kind of put me back in the driver's seat, and then better communication with my

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children's school, work out some goals, IEP plans, and kind of revise and rework what is successful for us and being able to draw that line of what success actually looks like, as I am in the driver's seat. Maybe not in the traditional sense in the way that it would have been, but really being able to draw that new line, and work with the school as a resource to create new lines of success. And really being able to focus on ability and strengths and things that work well, as my children are individual. Sometimes, educators may not have the time or the resource to span across what works well for everyone. So as a result, they have to try to work in broad strokes, and then, you know, curtail their messages per individual as it comes. So this has definitely been at least I'm going to look at this as a great sort of blessing in disguise on my end, and at least for my family, as well.

Nickie Coomer

You know, Renita, just to comment on something that you said just a moment ago, and what Bruce has said in the chat, in terms of collaboration with teachers, what I really appreciate about what you said is kind of the repositioning or I'm just gonna say, a reclaiming of a certain power as a parent to act as the expert for your child again. Which is not something that I think parents are often afforded when we think about traditional brick and mortar schooling. But now when you're in this place, and you're acting in them in a role that looks different, right, and there's a different power dynamic, being able to, again, be the, or be the expertise on your child.

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Renita Evans

Yes. Yeah. And it's, it plays out in different ways for different people. And I believe that all of our experiences are shaped very different by broader constructs. But for me, having children who are, quote, unquote, normal. And then some who have an emphasis, more emphasis that are different and are separated from others in a traditional environment. Now I'm in a place where I can put everyone in one room, and I can meet them where they are, and use the teacher, leverage that knowledge, leverage-- leverage the tools and resources to what works here for me locally. And that's been a great resource. And you know, for the-- for today, we went out and we pick some apples and pick some greens and we use that to do, to do our grocery shopping and use math. So it's been a very unique way to kind of bridge everyday practicalities with what we learned in school. But doing in a sense from doing it at home, and then learning to cook with it. So, measurements and all of those things. So, it's kind of reinforced and re-engaged different ways and aspects of what math and science look like at home and how you use it every day. You just don't call it math and science. So again, I welcome this opportunity and there's a community of mothers here and we gather virtually and face to face and we just lean on each other support. And in some cases, our teachers actually show up in these virtual spaces just to kind of hear, because they themselves are going through it as well. So let's not leave out their stories as well, as educators, they have to educate, while

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also having their own children at home and kind of their own priorities. So, this has definitely been unique.

Je' Nobia Smith

Thank you, Renita, we have a comment from Deb, who says *Math is everywhere. Thanks for making that connection with your children at home.* And I'd like to circle back too, to Erin's comment, that I'm wondering what the role of your special education teacher has been during distance learning. And so, I don't know this question can go to the entire room, or anyone who may have experience with this, but, um, what, like, in what ways do we, do we leverage special education teachers? Because it sounds like, and correct me if I'm wrong Renita, that you've been interacting with quote "content area" teachers, perhaps in order to get some of these materials. But I do wonder what is the role of the special education teacher while we are in this virtual space, and how can we use-- leverage them as a resource, as we are trying to continue our students' education, either in hybrid or virtually.

Renita Evans

I don't want to overtake the room. So, I'm waiting for others to respond. But if no one is responding, or while we're waiting for someone to respond, for me, that role is different for everyone. So, for me, I look at myself as being sort of a surrogate to the learning experience. Because with me comes my experience and then with the educator/special educator, they bring a very unique experience. So, the role for the special educator, at least in my, in my experience, here via COVID, has been two things. It's been one, first has been an

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advocate, and two, it's been a collaborator. And then kind of in the middle of those things, we all know is, you know, falling within the guidelines of policy.

So, we've been really threading, how those two things kind of work together, while staying within, you know, the expectations and guidelines of IEP and 504. So, it's been great to kind of be innovative. I think this has been a space to really be innovative, and really create an IEP that's unique to now and also work with parents who may not have as much freedom. So, for me, because of COVID I'm no longer in the role that I was in, but being a stay at home mom now has put me in a position to be sort of a community mother to others, whose parents do have to go to work. So not everyone's experience is mine. But how can I be a surrogate or you know, a better community member to help those who are maybe not in that situation, and give them a leg up or hand up, because not everyone is sitting at home. So just being mindful that everyone's situation is not mine, and lend a helping hand to those I'm in the position to do so for in this space.

Je' Nobia Smith

Thank you. Anyone else? And feel free to leverage the chat for your responses or also come off of mute if you would like.

Mariana Barquet

Hi, everyone. My name is Mariana Barquet, I work with the Hispanic community that has deaf and hard of hearing children in Indiana. I'm just working with this community and I'm a native from Mexico, the biggest challenge has been the

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huge gap in technological knowledge of these families, just to be able to turn on a computer, let alone follow up the classes in a language that is not their own. But just to even be able to be you know, know how to use a tablet. So I was wondering if anyone here would have any idea in your resource that maybe has some type of support for these families. A lot of them don't even read Spanish. So, it has to be something very visual. I was wondering if anyone has any experience with this.

Renita Evans

And where are you located again? I'm sorry.

Mariana Barquet

I cover the state of Indiana

Renita Evans

Um, I've looked at a section earlier now if I can locate it, I will pop it in the chat. But I want to say that there was a resource that went up today from school of higher education for here in Indiana, about technology, free resources, free training, and free webinars to technology that's unique to Indiana. So if I locate that, I will certainly do that. And Nikki may have put it in there in the chat. That may be it.

Nickie Coomer

I put in a different resource, but I'll add the resource that you're talking about Renita. And just to mirror back, I think Mariana's question just around how, you know, when we're talking about teaching to our most marginalized and our most disenfranchised students and populations, like how can we make sure that we're reaching the intersections, or students

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who live intersecting not only identities, but contexts that are going to impact not only how students may be learning how they access learning how they access skills, speaking of being a parent, at home and go, but, um, you know, but thinking through accessing technology and making technology, or even going beyond technology and thinking through how students and families are able to participate meaningfully.

Je' Nobia Smith

Thank you, Nickie, thank you, Mariana, for your question. And we have a lot of resources in the chat at this point. So please feel free to have a look at those for everyone. Nicole says we have we have had some ESL teachers who are doing driveway visits to help with tech and translation for families. We have had, we have done a lot of visuals for our pre-K students and families in order to help with language and cognition barriers. Anyone else who would like to share our ask a question, or would like to respond to the question that we have here? Particularly what disability supports for students do we think we need to address in order for students to be successful? Seena asks, *I wonder how districts' IT and technology directors have been leveraged to provide the supports to families. Does anyone have experience with this?* And Renita, It could be you, Dr. Mueller, it could be you.

Nicole Andrews

So, our district did have a tech line for families. But again, one of our biggest barriers is we typically don't do things that are culturally relevant or responsive for our families. Nor do we

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always have the language supports available. So that was something that continued to come up. However, we tried to combat that as often as possible with, if we knew of a family that was calling for supports, we would just do it directly. So we would first call the interpreter and then have the interpreter call the language line or the tech line with the family. It wasn't always possible, it was hard to schedule. So these are things that just continue to cause a lot of harm, and distrust, I think between families in our system. But it was one step. So we did, we did leverage some of our it in tech folks to just have a family line. So, it's still up and running, parents can call. And then most of our schools, whether it's admin, or teachers, all of us have tried to utilize as many home visits as possible.

And it is simple as just coming in and showing them with the iPad. This is where you turn it on. Here's how you get to Google Classroom. But things change here, because as you all know, we're Midwest. So Minnesota, um, you know, we get that cold weather, and it's hard to do those things outdoors. It's hard to meet with families. But if we can get people set up with how to do a Google Meet first, then we can really start to get things moving. If we can get one family connected with how to set up a Google Meet. From then on, we can kind of start walking them through the rest of the process. So that's kind of been our goal. As we learn this process. The first thing we do with families that are new and now that our buildings are opened up a little bit more is have them come in and learn how to do a Google Meet and kind of set one up while we're

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while they're finishing registration even and then that way they know the process. So if we do go back into DL, or if they need to have a meeting with a teacher that's that can't happen in a building at least are available to do that.

Je' Nobia Smith

Thank you, Nicole for sharing your experience. All right. With that, I would like to move us to our next question. So, this is for Dr. Mueller, you have said that the accommodations that have been made in response to COVID-19 are access points that the disabled community has long advocated for, can you please share how access considerations for COVID-19 can be extended into the future? Did she get disconnected?

Dr. Carlyn Mueller

Okay, can you hear me okay? Okay. From my phone, this is great. My computer just decides like, I mean, everyday at three o'clock, that's done for the day. And it's three o'clock. So here we are. Sorry about that. I'm gonna jump right in now. So, thank you so much for having me. Sorry about the technical difficulties. So, I'm gonna start off actually by talking about an incredible disability advocate, and activist, Alice Wong, who is the founder of the Disability Visibility Project. and someone who's done a lot of thinking around this exact issue.

And she frames disabled people as modern-day oracles who know even before the pandemic and knew before the pandemic, the ways that systems are not designed for people

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with disabilities, and can also cause a lot of harm, right. In the pandemic, she talks about a couple of examples of this healthcare rationing and a shortage of ventilators. That's times when if we let people with disabilities lead the fight and the policy and the response to this pandemic, things could have been different because of people with disabilities, have deep experience with doctors with navigating the medical industrial complex with all these systems, right, that we know a lot about, because we've been through it.

I'm a person with cerebral palsy and a learning disability. So, I've sort of been keeping a mental list of all the other things that during this time, I feel like I've been advocating for since the beginning of time, but that suddenly like was widely available to everybody. So, thinking about curbside food pickup, obviously asynchronous or virtual courses and higher education, telehealth visits with my doctor, virtual museum events or social activities. This is a really good example of Alice Wong thinking about people with disabilities as modern-day oracles because it means that people have been advocating for these kinds of accommodations in their own lives for so long. And we're able to predict the exact way the system would break down that would require us to meet all of these things, right? So that prediction piece, and those-- that's sort of suggesting solutions to how to fix a system that we know a lot about, because we've been through it and navigate it all the time.

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So, I think my sort of response to this is, my focus has been making sure collectively that people who are most marginalized by our systems, leading and changing those systems, so that we can build a new world after the pandemic. That it's going to be more responsive and more just and more caring. So, some ways that I've been thinking about that, about a future past the pandemic, that centers disabled people as the experts that they are, I want us to hold on to all the ways that our system sort of flipped to meet the needs of able-bodied people who needed to stay home, and simultaneously name all the ways that the world got a lot harder for people with disabilities.

Sort of simultaneously and at the same time, I'd like to understand the experiences of families of kids with disabilities. What does it look like to answer parent and family and student concerns about providing instruction that works for all students from the beginning of our post pandemic world, right? How can you take these lessons learned and push them into our system in a new way? How do we continue to offer virtual learning that meets the needs of students who might feel marginalized by our current educational environments as they are? How can we think about virtual socializing, which is a way that people with disabilities have always built community solidarity as fundamental for relationships with youth now as well. So those are just a couple of the things that I've been thinking about. I would love to talk with folks here about in more depth to and really

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keeping people with disabilities at the center, as the experts and leading that change. I'm gonna mute my phone. Okay.

Nickie Coomer

Thank you so much, Dr. Mueller. That was I just to mirror back a few of the points that you made, you know, before opening it up to our participants to comment on, I just want to-- I really appreciate you referencing Alice Wong's work, I put links in the chat to the Disability Visibility Project. And then and then also this idea of thinking about people with disabilities as modern-day oracles and really thinking through, just like you said, and thanks for sharing your personal experience. But these, let's say, mechanisms for accessibility that disabled folks have had to advocate for, but then all of a sudden became more prominent for able bodied people, while at the same time, and I'm using your exact words, making things harder for, for the people, for disabled people and members of the disabled community.

When I think about that, in terms of K 12, schooling, and when I think about that, in terms of kids with disabilities that are having to sit through virtual learning, what comes to my mind are the examples of schools that sort of took what happens in the eight hour, six to eight hours brick and mortar school day, and tried to put that in, you know, into a structure through a computer in a way that is very inaccessible to many children. And I think about actually, I think about a [newsletter](#) that the Map Center published, I want to say back in the fall around, rather than thinking about learning and accessibility of learning, it seems that there have been districts that really

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instead considered virtual schooling, more through policy that looked a lot more like discipline and surveillance. And it did.

Dr. Carlyn Mueller

I was just gonna say that same pieces that were just trying to replicate all of the discipline structures that are marginalizing kids at school, and marginalize them further in their own homes. And like that, that requires I think, what that-- what that teaches us, is like, what the priorities are of school as it is right now. Right? And that this moment, if nothing else, is a moment to pause and say, like, *What are we doing? And for who, right?* Yes, I'm glad you reference that. That was good. Also, I should say, Alice Bong has a book based on that website that I don't know if that's the link, you put in the chat. But she is a, like, sort of compilation of essays by disabled people is also called Disability Visibility essays, something, something that there's a subtitle, but it's really good, you should buy it. That's the other thing.

Nickie Coomer

That's great. I will put a link in the chat. I actually do. I did buy that book. And it is great. Um, so thank you for bringing that up. And thank you for sharing that. And I yeah, absolutely. In terms of thinking about just like shoving these structures in that further marginalized kids, not even in school, but even in their own homes. And when we get to the reimagining part of what this looks like after the pandemic, really, how can schools just like you said, How can schools instead think through learning in terms of accessibility in terms of the things that districts have--have had to figure out how to do like

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providing technology or making technology accessible to families? You know, making those types of-- making those types of access points is baked into the system, right, rather than these extra--extra considerations? So thank you so much for that, and I will put a link to the book. I know that folks may need a minute or two to think about this conversation, but we would love to hear from our participants. So please in the chat or through your mic, or we're ready to hear for you.

Robert Hollingsworth

I like to make a comment. You know, when we first started with the online program, I don't know about any other school, but we're, our school we, we seem to have like a full load we, you know, we're taking notes and, and putting things in, you know, afterwards we had to put things in a file, you know, for what we did, and it was just so much, you know, things that we did. But on top of that, you had to learn the material. And you seem to didn't really have time to, to almost do anything else. And we were doing so much that um, everybody got behind, you know, seems like everyone was getting behind. So I think that maybe we tried to start out, you know, too fast, you know, I think we're just doing a little bit too much, instead of just taking it gradually and starting out and see where we're at. So I think specially the-- the special ed kids, you know, they definitely, you know, took a, you know, hurt them the most.

Nickie Coomer

Thank you, Robert. You know, I just kind of want to mirror back a few things you said, and then tell you something that I

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really agree with that you said, in terms of, you know, kind of moving too fast and kind of doing the most and not really taking advantage of I think, what was the fertile moment to really rethink how schools consider learning and what we are, yeah, what we as a society, really, and then what schools as institutional structures, the learning, you know, that gets valued, versus the learning that gets not valued, right? Or that the learning that we even ask kids to kind of leave at the door when they come into schools. I think --I'm gonna-- Angela Valenzuela describes as a subtractive schooling, right? How we ask kids to leave pieces of themselves at home, so they can come to school and be schooled. So as schools, we're making the shift to virtual learning, right? And kind of thinking, well, how can we replicate this? How can we replicate this? How can we replicate this?

And what are the pieces that we now need to craft in a digital space? Instead of thinking through okay, well, let's go back and really start fundamental at like, fundamentally think about, what is the learning that we value? And how can we make sure that we're accessing that the learning that is happening in kids everyday lives, like Renita was saying, we went to the grocery store, we did measuring, we picked? What did you say Renita?-- that we picked greens and you know, picking actual vegetables from the garden. But really schools thinking about how to take the learning that does happen in kids lives, and bring that into a virtual space into into a collective learning space even? I think that I don't think that moment has passed.

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But I am Look, I am wondering, like Dr. Mueller was referencing, you know, what happens next, you know, how can we take this space of reimagining and then turn it into a material, material policy, and then also practices for teachers? Thank you so much for sharing your thoughts.

Renita Evans

I would like to say I think one of the things that we are seeing in schools, we are also starting to see that transformation, kind of present itself, kind of outside of the school context. So when you look at work life balances, I think this now has forced some workplaces to have to reassess. What does it look like to truly be at home and be productive, and people have done well and been able to balance, you know, their work with their own personal lives in terms of parents with children, to the extent that some hearing. And so Salesforce is not even coming back to downtown Indianapolis at all. So those parents will be completely at home. So now, what does that look like in terms of the school, creating balance and having that set structure? And it not violate that space of education work? What does that balance look like? So, I think this is also kind of cataclysmically creating this environment of what is a productive space to work, both for children and for parents. It's been a challenge.

Je' Nobia Smith

Absolutely, Renita. And sorry, Nickie, and I'm also thinking about your, your comments, Robert, and also putting in, framing it with what Dr. Mueller shared. Being so much and so fast and having to, you feel like you don't have enough time to

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get to every single thing that has to be done. And for me, I think about the conversation about accessibility and how it's been reactive instead of proactive as Professor Mueller's work shows and as she's gone into the, the disability community has been advocating for these changes for a very, very, very long time. And had we been responsive in those days, we could have had opportunities to structurally interweave all of these various points of accessibility into our everyday experience. Our daily lives for every student not just students with disabilities or who have identified as having disabilities. But for every student, we could have carefully woven these into our fabric so that we wouldn't be playing catch up right now in every space, because now everyone has to deal with special education or everyone has to work with these spaces, and everyone has to make these considerations now. And so, had we been proactive instead of reactive, we wouldn't, part of that would be alleviated. Not everything. Right? But part of that would be alleviated I feel.

And so just thinking about this question regarding how can we extend into the future? I am personally a bit concerned. I would be, I think I'd be I wouldn't be genuine if I didn't say I'm personally concerned that once, once we are back in person in courses, that a lot of these structures will just be snatched away from us, like they're gonna snatch the tablecloth away and say, okay, well, we're back in person now, everything is fine. We don't need this anymore. And so, it's something I dread. And it's something that I think about very seriously is

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that, to your point, Dr. Mueller, all of these were provided because able-bodied people were inconvenienced, and not because of the real, deeply embedded systemic need for all people and disabled people. So, since this was a response, and often times from a response, very closely geared to capitalism, we see that they're doing what's effective and cost-effective for them right now. And then that, all of those protections, or all of those services may, or are at risk when we come back to in person.

Dr. Carlyn Mueller

Oh, oh, sorry. I don't know who that was. Oh, is that Nickie? Okay. I'm gonna just really quickly just to add on, I, early on in the pandemic, like this was like, April, there was a list going around on Twitter of all of the workplace accommodations that people had advocated for in the past, folks with disabilities, and that were suddenly available to, and literally people were keeping a catalogue and a list with this exact point in mind is that when this ends in a year, and they revert back to "no we can't make individual level accommodations for single people," right like, that, they have the record of it, of it working for them, one, and like that they had done in the past two. And, again, this is the Oracle piece of like, the foresight to need a, like, need a list and need it in writing at the beginning of this whole thing when you know, all this is happening. So that's just I mean, I think there's a lot of folks worried about that exact point. And, and I am too.

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You know, and I think that part of-- part of what's going to be necessary moving forward is going to have to be an intentional disruption of those folks who understand, you know, how the shift right from schooling as we knew it, knew it to schooling, as we know it to what schooling could be moving forward, is going to have to disrupt this idea that a normal schooling experience, one should exist, and then two does exist, because I think moving forward schools, again, in the space of reimagining and I might be a little bit more of an eternal optimist than Je' Nobia. I don't know, though. I'm a, you know, I like to think of myself as an uncynical, as uncynically impassioned, let's say, but I wanted, but I am hoping, though, that moving forward with enough disruption and advocacy of what, of this idea that a normal even exists, we can move schooling into a place where accommodations are thought of at the forefront. And I think there's a lot of research, right that that supports that. Even learning research, research that has been taken up, I think, by special education, in terms of Universal Design for Learning, but I think could be used more and more and more in, you know, from a research perspective and curriculum and instruction and then from a policy and practice space, just in terms of designing lessons with accommodations in mind from the outset.

And I don't mean to oversimplify, I really I know that that sounds, I am in this moment. And I don't mean to, but I do want to emphasize that I think, again, you know, as we're on this call with policymakers, practitioners, as we work together

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with state education agencies and local education agencies, you know, when we push into the spaces of multiple marginalization, as James was, you know, attesting to in the chat, I think we can get into those spaces of disruption and hopefully move forward. Right? In thinking about Designing Instruction, you know, from the outset with accessibility in mind and then also, thinking about the many, many ways learning happens both ways In and out of school and, and, really rethinking and disrupting the ways that again, schools as institutions assign value to different types of learning. So, yeah. Amanda wrote in the chat, I want to bring this up. Well, we'll start to James wrote in the chat. He shared his experience around as a person who speaks Spanish and also as a person with cerebral palsy, that the struggles are magnified in these, at these intersections. And so as an educator and interpreter, he attempts to really connect and emphasize to students that everyone has various struggles, both inside and outside the classroom. And then Amanda writes in the chat, and that one of the biggest glaring issues on top of what Robert had stated earlier of supporting is the glaring issue of supporting and following IEP with a combination of modifications, as brought to light, the need to follow these 100%.

And some teachers are realizing more how that is impacting students when they don't. And then also followed up with that hoping because it has been brought to the forefront that this will continue to be consistent working process to support

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students on IEPs and 504's. Thanks so much for sharing, Amanda. And I just want to say too, I think IEP s and 504's are very, you know, important artifacts of education. And then also though, you know, in developing and implementing and adhering to IEP s and 504's, there has to be a in schools a cultural commitment to accessible learning, so that teachers don't think of IEP is 504 is, you know, and these legal artifacts of special education as, as just things that they have to follow and implement. But instead of really getting at what are the best ways that I can represent the material that students need to learn through multiple means. And then Seena asks in the chat as well, how can we as educators and family community members resist the compulsion to return to quote unquote, normal, and instead reimagine school environments that are universally designed for everyone? And Nicole says, as well, I think we have to continue to push the narrative that normal never existed for marginalized students. Thank you that emphasis? Thank you. Yes. Emphasis added. But I think that it's a very, very important point that Nicole and Seena make in terms of normal never did exist. So how can we move to this reimagination.

Erin Toninato

So this is Erin, there are a couple people on here that are special education directors, myself included in our states. And I think we're coming to the realization that as schools are returning to, in person learning versus distance learning, there are going to be some families who are going to choose to remain in distance learning and perhaps have an online option

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through their district. And I think we're trying to figure out because special education teachers who are going to be in the building all day serving students who are in the building all day, can't also have that additional responsibility of meeting the needs of the students who have chosen the families that have chosen to remain and some kind of online learning distance learning program. So we're trying to figure out that that's a real possibility of going forward. And what that might look like, as a district or individual districts, how they can support both systems kind of running parallel, and give up all of the students meet the needs that that are that are being presented. So that's a real possibility that I feel like that we want to be on the front end of and not trying to catch up on like we did when we one day, we're in school, and I was sitting, everybody was out of school, and we were all trying to figure it out and had connection issues and access issues. And so I think we're trying to think ahead that that's really likely to happen, and how we're going to be proactive as we move forward.

Nickie Coomer

Thank you, Erin. I'm going to open it up to the room. Even though my I'll restate your question first, just as schools have situations where they, schools have to offer both a virtual option as well as an in person option. You know, how do schools balance and manage personnel capacity? As well as I would say, maybe even knowledge around design, instructional design

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Erin Toninato

Yeah, equitable service, I think is really a big question.

Nickie Coomer

Thank you. So I'll And that to the room, if anybody would like to comment, or has any insight that you might be able to share, or has experienced that?

Matt Johnson

Yeah, we've experienced a little bit of that, that has we've gone from starting out in person, then go into fully virtual, then a hybrid approach now, and moving back to in person again. So that's kind of where my, actually, my kids are going through that. And our we've had a lot of working with, worked with a lot of districts going through those things, one of the big pieces is really not losing that technology connection, you know, that we have, we have access to those pieces. If the students have access at home, we can continue to connect with students through those means. So, a lot of the group worthwhile instructions happening on both and in person and virtually at same time. So it's, it's trying to you know, the student may not be able to participate in person, but they can't that technology's there for them to participate virtually at the same time, in sequence with what they are in sync with the group. So that I don't know if that helps any. But that's one thing that we've that's been successful so far.

Je' Nobia Smith

Thanks, Matt.

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Nickie Coomer

Thank you. And I wonder, too, in terms of synchronous and asynchronous learning, something that Dr. Mueller had mentioned, was advocating for asynchronous options. So, Dr. Mueller, do you want to speak to that a little bit? Um,

Dr. Carlyn Mueller

Now, I'm never getting too many things. Okay. So, so I wonder, I don't know. I've lost who asked the question originally. I think it was Erin. And Matt. I'm curious, actually, if there's a, if you had heard from parents why they're choosing to stay online? versus like, Is it a short-term thing until they're like, as a health reason? Or is there some other larger like, longer structural term or thing that they were, that that people are talking about?

Bruce Kulwicki

I can chime in here.

Dr. Carlyn Mueller

Yeah.

Bruce Kulwicki

I am the special education director in Harrison County, Southern Indiana. We've got what we hear a lot of it's a rural community. They are in blended families with folks that are up in age, maybe have health conditions, and they're afraid of their students coming to school and exposing loved ones at home. Some of the things that have happened over the course of our year; we've started and have been in session since the beginning of the school year. But have had some closures. Because we couldn't staff, too many staff going out we had to close schools temporarily, and go all virtual, but

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we've made strides to ensure that those students with the greatest disabilities and need the most services can still come on those days and make sure that they're allowed to come in and access what we what we provide for them. And it's a lot of therapies and things like that, that just can happen virtual.

Dr. Carlyn Mueller

Right. Right.

Bruce Kulwicki

So, about that, and we got no pushback from our teachers or staff about that, and everybody was cooperative. And parents were appreciative. But that's, that's just one example of some things that we've heard and trying to, to. We just, I mean, I solidly believe that in-person is better. And particularly when we're trying to meet goals and IEPs and provide services without getting tied up in all those legal obstacles,

Dr. Carlyn Mueller

Right, all the structural pieces that are making in- person the way that you do it. Right, right.

Bruce Kulwicki

We've done a really good job in our staff should be commended. But that's, that's what we hear some of the things that when, you know, other things, and another thing I'm seeing that I don't think it's good. But I you know, typical year I do a lot of manifestation determinations because of discipline for for students on the other end of the need spectrum. Not doing those this year, because a lot of those kids that don't didn't really like to be at school created some

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discipline issues when they were here, aren't here. I don't think kids are doing any better. Yeah, so I worry about that a lot, too.

Dr. Carlyn Mueller

It's a really, it's a really complex thing, because I. So the piece about online, asynchronous, and for me in- person, in particular, and I think I've heard this a lot at the higher level, more specifically is that it often opens up a way that they can interact with learning at their own pace, in their own in their own environments, where they're, you know, they can, you know, do it on their own time and think about it in their own kind of way. So I've heard that feedback a lot from people but you get; when you start to run up and as you're saying, I think it was Bruce, when you run up on all these other structures, the paperwork pieces and the intervention pieces and all the ways that the legal system is structured to work to make teaching look a certain make learning look a certain way, like it forces us to go right back into the school building. Right?

So how can we think about online as an opportunity to have students be leading that process and parents and families be leading that process as opposed to the sort of legal what's required of us leading that process? And I know that that's, like a really, that's a really like, highfalutin thing to wonder about and think about, because there are so many structural reality pieces. But for me, as a person with a disability to be in the driver's seat, like would mean everything right, it has meant everything. So how can you make that structure, make

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that happen more for kids? That's my Nickie, that's my like, wild thought.

Nickie Coomer

Thank you, Dr. Mueller. And I know, but I will say to in terms, it does take again, we're in this space of reimagining, yes, rethinking about how parents and how really, parents and stakeholders may, you know, what ideas may come from them. And I'll share a personal experience as well. And this is before we move to close, but, you know, my own son is autistic. And he, the move to virtual schooling was actually awesome in the beginning. And, Bruce, it may be some of what you said, you know, my son may have been one of those manifestation meetings eventually. And so the move to virtual learning was kind of fun, because it was like, we could do what we needed to do in the first two hours of the day. And then he could spend the rest of the day diving into his own interest in terms of social stuff. And I'll thank Je' Nobia Smith for her guidance in this to notice emerging research as an educational technology. And so Je' Nobia Smith guided me towards thinking about social, virtual social spaces, where she is socializing with other kids in a virtual way and playing, you know, playing games and learning different skills in these virtual spaces.

What got really, really hard was when schools switched from that, like responsive space of his school, in particular, into okay, meet on Zoom from 10, to 10:40, worksheets, show the worksheets, you know, Zoom from 11, to 11:40, do the

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worksheets, then it got really hard. And then it got it, it, it was changed. So I think to have an opportunity to interact with special ed directors. And this always feels like a very big deal for me. So thank you so much for being here. But in order to interact with special ed directors, and to be able to say, asynchronous learning, just is not going to look like synchronous learning. And in terms of equity, I think rethinking about what equity means, because equity doesn't have to mean the same. Right? And so measuring instead, what, you know, having parents add to what learning is happening, how are you conceptualizing the learning that's happening?

Talk us through how you're thinking about what your child is doing? And then for school fit, you know, and then schools working through Okay, so what does this look like legally, structurally? How do we measure this? What is the data that, you know, we're going to that we that we need to gather from this, and to move it into those structures? Or to, you know, as Dr. Mueller said, the highfalutin thing, rewrite the structures. So but, kind of using the space for that. So thank you so much, Erin, for your question. Bruce, thank you for your input. Thank you, everybody who has participated in the chat or just being here listening, we appreciate you so much. We are a little bit over time, already. We are hosting more of these. So just stay tuned. We hope to see you at the next ones. I believe we have the monthly till August. Is that right? Am I right about that Je' Nobia?

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Je' Nobia Smith

Yes, that is correct. And I definitely want to extend our thanks to Renita. And Carlyn, thank you so much for bringing in your experiences and your expertise in the space. And thank you for just taking time to get us started today so that we can engage in this powerful dialogue and just start to chip away at some of these issues. So thank you.

Nickie Coomer

Thank you very much. All right. And we have just a few more shares for you. So cheers if you brought a coffee with you. Cheers. And I have a water bottle with me. But also, please, if you're not already follow us on our social media. We are on Facebook and Twitter. And soon Tik Tok if I have anything to say about it. No, I'm just kidding. We are on Facebook and Twitter. You can find us at the Great Lakes Equity Center slash Midwest & Plains Equity Assistance Center on Facebook, as well as GreatLakesEAC. So GreatLakesEAC on Twitter. You can also search our hashtag, which is MAPEquity. If you would like to answer the question on any of your social media, how are you going to use what you learn here today, please do use our hashtag so we can find it, like it, share it and respond. We also have coming up soon, we have actually our first episode of our vodcast, the 20-minute talk, has been released. And we have five more episodes coming out in the coming month. So please check it out. You will see my face on there, as well as Dr. Kyser's, but truly these episodes we talk with practitioners in brief 20 minute segments. Feel free to use them for your own personal growth, share them with your staff

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and faculty, friends and colleagues. And we hope that you enjoy them, and that you learn something from them.

Je' Nobia Smith

Thank you, Nickie. We also have an event coming up on March 11. For our Equilearn Virtual Roundtable, the Lakota language and culture in an elementary classroom, facilitated by Map Center equity fellow Jami Stone, featuring special guests Matthew Rama and Tamera Miyasato. So please take some time to visit our site. And maybe Nickie, can you put that in the chat? So that that's available. And please feel free to register for our upcoming events if you would like to continue to connect with the MAP Center after this. Finally, we would love to have your feedback and we take your feedback in order to inform our next sessions. So if you could please take our post session questionnaire, we will put that link in the chat as well. Again, thank you so much, everyone for joining us this afternoon. And we hope that you have learned something today that you can take with you. Thank you so much to all of those who engaged in the conversation today and had some very powerful shares, and as we brainstorm and thought a bit about what this environment is going to look like for us in the future and our children. Thank you so much.