

**VIII: In the Midst of Chaos: Schooling Experiences
During a Pandemic: *Circle of Support***
Equity Spotlight Podcast Series
Crystal Hill Morton, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Indiana

TRANSCRIPTION

Crystal M.: On March 19th 2020, COVID-19 forced schools to abruptly close and shift to online and hybrid learning, uprooting the lives of caregivers, students, and all school personnel. This podcast series will center the voices of caregivers, students, and school staff members as they discuss their online and hybrid learning experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through this podcast series, multiple stakeholders will gain first-hand insight into the various ways caregivers, students, and school staff members navigated and continue to navigate schooling during a pandemic.

Crystal M.: The goals of this podcast series are to provide stakeholders first-hand accounts of caregivers, students, and school staff members experiences during online and hybrid learning, and provide opportunities for stakeholders to better understand caregivers, students, and school staff members' challenges and triumphs so they can support caregivers, students, and school staff members during the continuing pandemic and beyond.

Crystal M.: We would like to thank the students, caregivers, and school staff members for taking the time to share their experiences with us. We appreciate you all.

[Transition Music]

Crystal M.: Can you describe your experience in your role in schools during COVID-19? That transition you made.

Support Staff: During COVID-19 when the students returned back to school, and I was primarily with fourth and fifth grade students in-person, and I work with students online, too. So I would get on the computer and assist with certain

Copyright © 2022 by Great Lakes Equity Center

The contents of this document were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education (Grant S004D110021). However, the content does not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and endorsement by the Federal Government should not be assumed.

VIII: In the Midst of Chaos: Schooling Experiences During a Pandemic: *Circle of Support* *Equity Spotlight Podcast Series*

Crystal Hill Morton, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Indiana

students, and then I would do in-person. It was very very stressful for my students. Especially my students that had certain IEPs. A lot of them's [sic] confidence really wasn't that high to begin with. And with COVID, I saw a lot of their confidence diminished even more so. Their parents were either unfamiliar with the different platforms that were being used, unfamiliar with how to just sign on to the platform. And then they're also uncomfortable with doing the work. So that made for a frustrated student and a frustrated parent.

Support Staff:

And so, what I tried to do was think of some ways that would be helpful to the parents during that time. And one way was just to give them my phone number, and for those where we had compatible devices, kind of FaceTime with them, and just literally write it, show it to them, how to line up numbers. And then also, fortunately for me, I had a great rapport with all of the teachers that I work with as well. So, I supported by, I can call parents for you, or perhaps you might want to look at teaching it from this perspective, or use this strategy without seeming I was trying to take over their classroom

Support Staff:

But it was, it was, it was very stressful for students, for parents, and in my opinion, for the teachers and staff as well. But what I found is the more creativity you could come up with, even if some methods work better than others, that was better than just kind of sitting back trying to see what was going to happen. You had to be very proactive in that. And personal calls, a personal touch, not a physical touch, but a text, first of all call, then a text message, versus just mass emails that were going out.

VIII: In the Midst of Chaos: Schooling Experiences During a Pandemic: *Circle of Support* *Equity Spotlight Podcast Series*

Crystal Hill Morton, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Indiana

- Crystal M.:** So, how do you...could you talk about your level of support that you receive being in this face-to-face space, having to support students online when they return to school?
- Support Staff:** I received very little support. As a matter of fact, I was proactive in going to the teachers that I work with to say, "Hey I do know about this platform. And so as a support staff person, I would like to support you in that manner." Because I could see it was going to be a lot for the teachers as well. It was not mandated that support staff have to get online and support. And for me, my coworkers that I work with, I encourage them like, "Hey, come sit down with me when I work with my group of students online, so I can show you, so you can work with your students."
- Support Staff:** Because I know the more pressure that you relieve off the next person, or the next group of people, the better it'll be for everybody. And so, as I began to get on the platform and move around and have, based off of my training in other areas in my life that I was able to bring to the school, then the teacher was able to work with me a little bit one-on-one as, doing it more specific the way she wanted to do it. Once she found out that I knew and understood the platform. and I wasn't just sitting back like, "Well, I don't know how, what you guys are going to do? But when you figure out, come and let me know as the support staff."
- Support Staff:** So, I was very proactive. And then once I showed that I knew a little bit about it prior to getting to work, then the teachers, the *teachers*, maybe instead of one teacher, I'll probably have more like five teachers who were engaging with me. And then that made me had to learn what this teacher's preference was on a platform, and what that teacher's preference was on

VIII: In the Midst of Chaos: Schooling Experiences During a Pandemic: *Circle of Support* *Equity Spotlight Podcast Series*

Crystal Hill Morton, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Indiana

the platform. And fortunately for all of us I was able to keep up, it was stressful in the beginning, and you just had to learn different strategies.

Support Staff: Like, some students couldn't do reading for 45 minutes. I had to tell them, "We're going to work for 15 minutes, you're going to set your timer, and, you know, come back." And so, then I had to find incentives to make students come back to get online. And some of those incentives where, "You know, we're coming back together. And so, when you get back to school..." just, you know, whatever that part took. But it was, it was, it was really...you really had to be self-motivated in order for it to work, because you're still continuing to build relationships. And then, I'm talking about students who have been enrolled in the school, and I had years to get to know, and get to know them.

Support Staff: Or at least one, one school year, at least one, you know, you have students, new students, who are enrolled and, just trying to build those relationships and helping the teacher online and with the telephone. I mean, it was difficult. One thing I will say: the school where I was working, the teachers, as well as the administrators, they welcomed my feedback. So, we were all kind of working together as a team. So, it wasn't like, "I think I can do it better like this," and they're like, "Well, no, it has to be done like that." They were really, you know, they said thank you, they appreciated it. And we roll with what we were coming up with.

Crystal M.: Could you talk a little bit about what was some of your greatest concerns on that time?

Support Staff: Keeping the parents encouraged. A lot of parents without COVID, and without hybrid, they don't feel like they have the capacity to help their

Copyright © 2022 by Great Lakes Equity Center

The contents of this document were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education (Grant S004D110021). However, the content does not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and endorsement by the Federal Government should not be assumed.

VIII: In the Midst of Chaos: Schooling Experiences During a Pandemic: *Circle of Support* *Equity Spotlight Podcast Series*

Crystal Hill Morton, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Indiana

students with their work. And then, keeping up with the schedule of when to go to specials Zoom, when to come back from lunch. That added onto their plate. And the school where I was, we had a lot of parents who were not working due to COVID. And so, they were trying to...they had financial situations going on that they would share, that they were afraid of.

Support Staff:

And then the other ones who were working, they were worried about sitting there with their student, with their child, and they are frontline workers. And so that made them uncomfortable as well. So, you had personal issues, and then you putting in their children [sic] taking assessments and tests, you know: it was a lot. So just to keep them encouraged, and even if it was just in the chat box like, "Mom/Dad, you're doing a good job, keep up the good work." Certain things that would typically take you, I don't know, 30 minutes to do online sometimes, I did them in two, 15-minute chunks.

Support Staff:

Not only for the student, but for the parent. More so for the parent as well. Hey, I get it. I understand that it's stressful. So, we can do this in two days instead of one day. Or what part of this platform are you uncomfortable with? Or sometimes it was just the camera, there were camera issues. "Do I have to keep this camera on? Just because I haven't had a chance to clean up," or "It's time for me to get something cooked for dinner." So, you just had to be flexible and be transparent. I was super-duper-duper transparent in letting them know it's okay.

Support Staff:

And your child will be educated to the best of our ability. Because whatever I see that I can do, I did it. And then certain things that needed to go specifically to the teacher, I made sure that, that went to the teacher as a verbal. Because we would, we would talk in the morning before school, and then we would talk probably 10 or 15 minutes after school. And then we put

Copyright © 2022 by Great Lakes Equity Center

The contents of this document were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education (Grant S004D110021). However, the content does not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and endorsement by the Federal Government should not be assumed.



VIII: In the Midst of Chaos: Schooling Experiences During a Pandemic: *Circle of Support* *Equity Spotlight Podcast Series*

Crystal Hill Morton, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Indiana



a checklist on the white board on certain things about certain students that had to get done, or it needed to be talked about. So just, just keeping that circle of communication going.

Center Announcer: This resource was brought to you by the Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center. To find out about other Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center resources, visit our website at www.greatlakesequity.org. To subscribe to our publications, click on the Subscribe to Our Publications link located on the Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center website.

The Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center, a project of the Great Lakes Equity Center, is funded by the U.S. Department of Education to provide technical assistance, resources, and professional learning opportunities related to equity, civil rights, and systemic school reform throughout the thirteen-state region.

The contents of this presentation were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. However, these contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government.

This product and its contents are provided to educators, local and state education agencies, and/or non-commercial entities for educational training purposes only. No part of this recording may be reproduced, or utilized in any form or in any means, electronic or mechanical, including recording or by any information storage and retrieval system without permission in writing from the Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center.

Finally, the Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center would like to thank the Indiana University School of Education Indianapolis at IUPUI, as well as Executive Director Dr. Kathleen King Thorius, Director of Operations Dr. Seena Skelton, and Associate Director Dr. Tiffany

Copyright © 2022 by Great Lakes Equity Center

The contents of this document were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education (Grant S004D110021). However, the content does not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and endorsement by the Federal Government should not be assumed.





VIII: In the Midst of Chaos: Schooling Experiences During a Pandemic: *Circle of Support*

Equity Spotlight Podcast Series

Crystal Hill Morton, MAP Center Equity Fellow – Indiana



IUPUI
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

Kyser, for their leadership and guidance in the development of all tools and resources to support the region.

[End of Audio]

Copyright © 2022 by Great Lakes Equity Center

The contents of this document were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education (Grant S004D110021). However, the content does not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and endorsement by the Federal Government should not be assumed.

A PROJECT OF 