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Virtually Left behind during the COVID-19 School Shutdown: A Study of U.S. Based English Language Learners' Learning Loss

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Abstract

The study investigated the effects of the COVID-19 global pandemic on the linguistic, cognitive, motivational, and self-regulatory behavior of ELLs and their parents. It identified challenges that middle and high school ELLs, in particular, faced with virtual instruction, as well as the cognitive, social, educational and psychological impact of the pandemic and pandemic-based instruction on this group. More specifically, this study examines whether and to what extent three U.S. public school districts that served--and continue to serve--a large number of ELLs attempted to not merely include, but also engage and empower their ESL students and families in the months immediately following the COVID-19 school closures in the spring of 2020. Dual-language theory and praxis (Collier & Thomas, 2004) undergirded the project design and methodology employed. Pandey's (2012) language-building-blocks framework was used to identify comprehensible input, interactional opportunities, and feedback provided in the data examined.

Findings point at unique challenges ELLs and their parents encountered in the school districts under focus in the United States, due in large part to the use of wholly-virtual and primarily written language exchanges between schools and students and their families. Most school administrators and instructors employed solely written communication with their students, including with ELLs resulting in limited and relatively fewer opportunities for ESL students to verbally interact and engage in more meaningful exchanges with their peers and instructional personnel. In addition, these students also received relatively limited or insufficient scaffolding or feedback, further delaying their language and literacy gains through formal schooling. This study highlights the need for verbally rich and linguistically inclusive communication between emergent language learners and schools via the use of overtly comprehensible and participatory language with ELLs and their care providers. On a positive note, teen participants reported non-schooling-based (verbal) language learning gains.

Keywords: Covid-19, ELL, ESL, Inclusive Communication, Building Block Framework, Online learning

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1. Introduction: Overview and Research Gap

The Institute of Education Sciences, a U.S. Department of Education subdivision shares that "an estimated three million students are missing from school as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic." Research suggests that ELLs constitute the largest group of students negatively impacted by the pandemic (COVID, 2021). Indeed, "learning loss" (Foust, 2021) has been exacerbated for many more students for a protracted period due to the lingering and presumably fairly long-lasting COVID-pandemic. While COVID-19-prompted learning loss has been widely reported, the full scale, breadth, and national impact of this loss of learning is still unclear. Through survey-based interviews, personal experiences of ELLs, parents and teachers are shared, in an attempt to shed light on the extent of this "loss," so that mitigation and accelerated learning strategies could be proposed, implemented, and tracked. As such, "learning loss" is arguably most starkly visible for low-income students, specifically Black and Hispanic students.

Noteworthy and inspiring examples of learning loss and resilience or learning gains (Baume, 2018) during the COVID-19 lockdown from linguistically challenged communities in the United States are also shared in this study. The language learning gains were, it should be noted, not the result of schooling or school-instituted initiatives, as will be discussed in the latter part of this paper.

2. Purpose & Scope

Given the COVID-virus-prompted school closures, we were presented with a perfect opportunity to evaluate our schools' success at engaging parents, including the parents and families of our most vulnerable students, namely, young and low-income ELLs. How so? A focus on school-related communication, that is, communication on school websites and/or district sites, as well as on social media outlets employed by area schools, as well as communication sent to families via electronic and other means, provided us with a picture of school-specific efforts to reach out to all families and students, and ELL families and students, in particular. Arguably, one of the most effective measures of an educational institution's efforts to continue instructing and assessing students is the technology mechanism(s) and messaging the school and its agents (i.e., teachers, staff, and others) employ to not merely reach families, but to involve and empower them. "Do the messages communicated and the tools employed inform, engage, and empower parents to stay engaged and help ensure continued language and content learning for the students in their care?" That is the central question investigated in this paper.

This paper examines how schools in three geographically different areas that serve high and rapidly-rising numbers of ELLs have been communicating with these students' parents/guardians following COVID-19-prompted school closures. The content (i.e., message(s), timeliness, customization, and/or relevance of the message), the organization (accessibility/ease of understanding), and language and/or

languages employed, as well as the communicative outlets or media utilized (mono-sensory or multisensory) are carefully examined to gauge these districts' commitment to EL learners and their families. The primary research questions investigated in the study reported here are listed below:

a. What forms of communication are school districts employing with their students/families?

b. What efforts, if any, are being made to reach "ELL" students/families? Are any communication outlets, communicative media, resources, and/or messages intended solely for ELL families/students? If so, what forms do they take, and why and how are they being utilized?

c. How successful are the communication mechanisms employed and the messages communicated in reaching EL students and families?

d. How successful are these communication mechanisms and messages in meeting the needs of ELL students (i.e., in ensuring their continued learning) and in reassuring students, parents and other family members in the areas under focus?

The primary objective of this paper is to illustrate discrepancies and gaps in efforts to engage and empower ELL families and students. The absence of a clear, targeted, and sustained plan to engage and empower ELL caregivers and (through them) ELL students, during the school closure period under focus at every one of the U.S. school districts under focus is noteworthy. The U.S. school districts under focus individually and collectively serve a relatively large number of ELLs. The present study employed a comparative mixed methods analysis; this paper compares the communication mechanisms and messages employed by schools in three states, specifically with their "ELL" students and families. By way of a pilot survey, the relative success of their efforts at providing their EL families and students access to pertinent information and continued learning is analyzed. The present study attempted to gauge selected schools' and districts' level of interest in involving parents and instructing students during the focal period through the communication mechanisms, modes, and messages they employed. The underlying hypothesis was that schools and/or districts vary in their level of commitment to ELLs, and that those that reach out to their ELLs through multilingual, multiparty, and multimodal communication (vs. mass communication intended for all parents/families) and those that utilize instructional tools and other resources targeted specifically at this group have prioritized the needs of this population.

By examining the communication mechanisms, modes, and messages employed by schools as well as ELL experts (i.e., trained educators and parents') responses, we get a relatively complete picture of an institution's commitment to each student and family; alongside their level of success at continued instruction, and much more.

3. Methodology

Data for the present study were gathered over a six-week period in the spring of 2020 during the national quarantine when virtually every public school was closed to minimize the spread of COVID-19. A mixed-methods approach was employed. Two sets of data were gathered and analyzed in the course of this study. The first (primary) set consisted of survey-based data. Surveys and institutional communication intended for students and families constituted the data for this study. In the survey component of the study reported here, ELL students, parents/caregivers, and trained educators were invited to share their insights and experience with Online classes offered at area schools (see Appendices A, B, and C). Participants were invited to share their views on the communication (i.e., key criteria such as timeliness, quality and relevance), instructional success, and the instructional tools (e.g., technology) and other mechanisms employed for virtual instruction. The primary data consisted of a three-part pilot survey (see Appendices A, B, and C) with three pivotal groups, namely, ELL students, parents, and trained educators. The student survey took the form of semi-structured face-to-face and Zoom-based-interviews, so that the nonverbal language of students could also be captured and considered (unlike in phone interviews). Elementary, middle, and high school ELL students were interviewed in person (with social distancing maintined) and, in the case of one student, via Zoom, and each student was asked the questions that appear in Appendix A. Parental consent was obtained prior to the student exchanges. Students were invited to rate their learning success and to share obstacles they have faced since schools closed due to COVID-19, and to offer recommendations.

The second part of the survey consisted of a parent/family questionnaire (see Appendix B), and the third part took the form of semi-focused interview questions with a judgement sample of trained educators, including ESL instructors, ESL support service personnel and liaisons, program administrators, and others who directly provide and oversee policy and district-level implementation of instruction and assessment for primarily ELLs (see Appendix C).These three audiences provided us with additional quantitative and qualitative data.

School-based communication pertaining to continuity of learning plans and updates for students and families at school districts in three geographically varied parts of the county the West, the Midwest and the East Coast was also researched over a six-week period, and constituted the secondary data for this study. This included communication and communicative media utilized by schools from March 20 through May 30, including email communication authored by public schools and/or authorized personnel, and intended for families and/or students in the geographic areas and corresponding school districts under focus, namely, Clarke County, Nevada, schools in Missouri, and schools in Howard County, Maryland.

The language building-blocks framework of cultural competency (Pandey, 2012) outlined in Figure 1 below was employed to analyze this non-survey-based data.

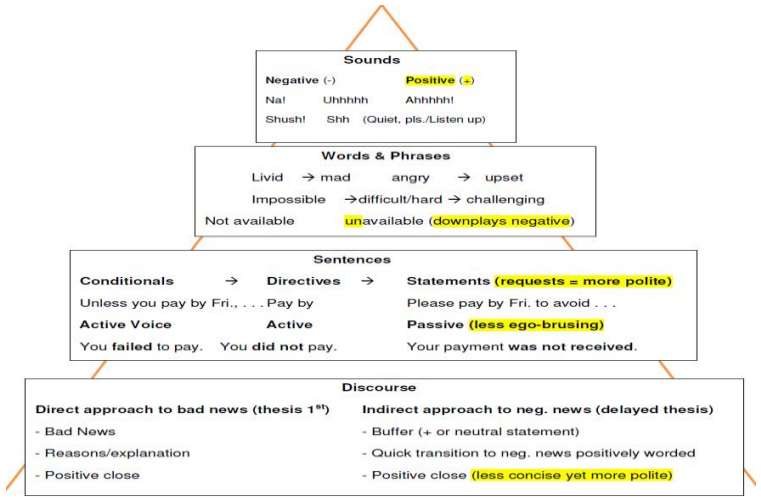

Fig. 1: Language Building Blocks Cultural Competency Model

This critical discourse framework was employed because it examines each unit of language and, as such, offers one of the most comprehensive analyses of language to date. Multimodal language as well as language building blocks that vary in size, starting with the smallest unit of language, sounds, at the pinnacle, to discourse--the functions and associated sequence of language--are analyzed in this framework, level by level and their level of positivity or negativity gauged on a cline. Arguably, on each level of language in this pyramid that charts language units according to their size, the positivity or politeness of each language building block increases from left to right, on a cline. Highlighted segments in the pyramid are meant to emphasize polite language structures. At the top, phonetic (i.e., phoneme or sound and para- or suprasegmental/pitch, tone and intonation) level, for instance, "Na" and no" are neither as positive nor as polite as a relatively non-judgmental "uh" or "ah!" (arguably congratulatory in its message). Similarly, "sh" and "shush" are not as positive as the options presented on the right side of these examples on the sound cline at the top of this pyramid, namely "Quiet please," "Listen up!" or simply maintaining silence until the audience gives the speaker their undivided attention. At the lexical level, this cline is replicated, with "livid" being less positive than "mad" and "angry," with "upset" being the most polite and professional of these choices. At the syntactic level, conditionals have the potential to sound like threats and directives are not as polite as indirect requests communicated via statements. For example, "Please play by Friday to avoid eviction" is less threatening and more polite or face-saving than "Unless you pay by Friday, you will be evicted" and "Pay by Friday or risk eviction." This focus on language that varies in denotation, connotation, and politeness

is consistent across the language spectrum, as outlined in Figure 1. In the present study, positive language use was considered evidence of caring or empathy.

4. Limitations

Phone calls and personal messages to parents and ELL students and educators with Face Book and/or Linked In accounts might have ensured greater participation in the survey segment of the study reported here. Time constraints, including restricted communication by phone with educators and administrators during the crisis when the time-sensitive study reported here was conducted--precluded participation of a representative sample of trained educators, and of a more diverse pool of ELL parents and students. Trained educators were contacted twice via email, two weeks apart, with a second email reminder sent out two to three weeks after the initial request for participation. Of the 150 educator surveys sent out, the survey response rate from this group was a mere nine percent. The International Achievement Liaison for one of the area high schools responded to our initial email (request for their expertise) with the following message: "I have forwarded your email to my supervisor and am awaiting a response." The low response rate of trained educators could be attributed to unforeseen administrative control, suggesting that educators at this school district are likely restricted even as regards choice of instructional resources, course format and delivery, and contact with students and families, among other areas. The sender not only demands that the survey be retracted, she asks that she be copied in the follow-up email requested of the researcher. This message also excludes from the district's approval process any survey that is missing "a university approved IRB." The time-sensitive nature of the study and institutional closure made it virtually impossible for the researchers to obtain the mandated university approval within the allotted time frame.

5. Findings from the Student Survey

The present study affirms our hypothesis that the vast majority of "ELLs" and their families, particularly low-income families, have been struggling with remote instruction (see Appendix A for the raw data and links to the audio files). Given that ten percent of our school-age children (roughly five million) have been negatively impacted by the COVID-closures, this is quite a grim picture.

Of the students that participated in the pilot survey (see Appendix A and Table 1), all but one of them identified Spanish as their home and primary language. Only one of these students, whose home language was Korean, was from a middle-income home; the rest all came from households with a median income of twenty thousand dollars. While students' sentiments varied in the first week following the school closure, most shared that they felt "sad" or "very sad" a month after face-to-face instruction ended, and they all shared that they felt uneasy, stressed, "nervous," or anxious a couple of days prior to the start of Online instruction because they did not know what to expect or

because they did not receive their device. Pseudonyms are employed here to facilitate the discussion for easier identification and analysis of respondents' experiences.

Age + Grade	Gender & home language	# & ages of additional children in household	Item 1	Item 2	Item 6	Item 7	Item 8 (Most challenging classes)
5 Pre-K Dave	M	2 (7, 11)	sad	Very sad	Not enough	No	English
7 3rd Belen	F (Span.)	2 (4 & 11)	sad	Very sad	Not enough	No	English
11 5th Louis	M (Span.)	2 (4 & 7)	happy	sad			English
12 6th Bryan	M (Span.)	3 (4, 17, 19)	V. happy	V. happy ("no homework")	Not enough	"Not really"	Science, math, geog., English, ELA
13 8th Dan	M	2 (3 & 17)	Both happy & sad	Very sad	Not enough	Na	ELA
13.5 8th Trish	F (Span.)	3 (5 months, 2, & 17)		Very sad	Not enough	No	ELA
14 8th Seong	F (Korean)		Sad	V. sad	Not enough	"Not really"	English, ELA
17 10th Jennifer	F (Span.)	2 (3 & 14)	Not happy, some sad	happy	Not a lot; it's not helpful	No	Algebra, APS (advanced physical science), & sometimes U.S. Govt.
17 11th Angel	F (Span.)	3 (4, 12, 19)	Sad	Not happy	Not enough	Na	English Math, Science
17 11th Carla	F (Span.)	1 (12 months old)	"Ni sad, ni happy"	Happy (because she could sleep in)	"Nada" (nonverbal) stopped attending	"No, it's difficult"	English Geometry Biology,
17 11th Roberto	M (Span.)	2 (5 months, 2, 13)	Very happy	More happy "I never liked school"	Yeah	"Yeah—it's easier"	Geometry "stopped attending" yet still passing

Table 1: Student Participants & Responses to Selected Survey Questions

As regards item 4, only two of the 11 students (ages 11 and 17) reported that at least one teacher had contacted them via phone and/or text, namely, their ESL teacher. The 11-year-old's ESL teacher called him at least once during the month-long school closure period to check up on him and to reassure him, and to make sure his father/family had received the email sent to parents outlining the plans for remote instruction. This student shared that this teacher understood and spoke their native language, namely, Spanish, and that by contacting him, she showed that she "really cares" about her students. One of the three high school students who participated in the present study reported that when her ESL teacher called her the weekend after school closed, she felt reassured and "special," and that this teacher has continued to call and text her and has even had food sent to her home. "She is so nice and always worries about me," she declared. When asked how she felt when this teacher reached out to her personally, she responded, "I feel like I'm part of her."

Three students shared that their school counselor had contacted them via text message. Their counselor is a bilingual Korean-English speaker, and while she does not speak their language, she understands many words because so many ELL and special needs students at her school speak Spanish, and she has been increasingly exposed to Spanish, particularly in the last four years as the schools' Hispanic population has grown by 23 percent. These students shared that her text messages were in English and they urged them to contact her if they needed help with their classes. While none of them responded with texts or phone calls, they appreciated receiving her texts and described her texts as evidence of "caring."

5.1 Insufficient Instructional Contact Hours & Relatively Non-Engaging Communication Tools

All but one student reported that they had learned little to nothing since online instruction began (see responses to survey item 6 in Table 1). When asked why, they all noted that the online classes were too few in number per school day and too short in length. They mentioned or hinted at a watered down (Online) curriculum. Jennifer shared that she had expected the Online schedule to look more like the face-to-face schedule. Conversations with these students made it clear that, in the view of 10 out of 11, not enough classes are being offered during the school day, and throughout the week. All students reported having no classes on at least one weekday, unlike when school was in session. Most reported not having classes on Fridays, and the more motivated students reported finding this relatively limited-class-schedule and fewer-contact-hour (Online) delivery to be not challenging enough and, as such, particularly problematic. In general, students found their class schedules and the online instructional contact hours to be insufficient, and they noted that their instructional contact mechanisms were not as effective as they could be.

Not surprisingly, their response to this question (item 6) was matched by their response to item 7; none of them reported having the same opportunities to hear and speak or use English as when face-to-face instruction was offered. The Korean student, Seong, was the only student who reported having access to weekly tutoring in English both before and after school closure. Her interview was, in fact, conducted over Zoom, following a weekly tutoring session she had with an eleventh grader. She shared that her parents had contacted a local church for ESL service offerings and that a high schooler who lived in that area had arranged for her classmate and her to offer tutoring to this student and two other Korean students. Despite this additional weekly (90-minute-long) English language assistance that she was getting, she shared that she would "like more opportunities to hear and speak English, more ESL classes, and more phone calls with my friends" and she noted that the phone calls "should be required by my teacher and also I can do this."

5.2 Language Barriers and Limited English Proficiency during Remote Learning

All the student respondents self-assessed their English skills as relatively limited or weak and identified language (i.e., English) as their biggest hurdle to full participation in the online sessions. In addition to difficulties students noted that they experienced with understanding class sessions (which average 45 minutes in the three locations under focus) and with fully comprehending designated weekly course modules- including readings, and homework materials), all participants identified English and "ELA" or "ESOL" (the names employed at some schools) as their most challenging classes, attesting to the increased language barriers they have experienced since area schools closed. This is hardly surprisingly. "El inglés es mi problema!" shared 17-year-old Carla, who is at risk of dropping out of high school. "No las clases (i.e., not the classes themselves) . . . es que yo no se mucho inglés y yo no entiendo mis clases" she continued. She arrived from Honduras a year ago, and when her father abandoned her mother and her baby sister a few months after they arrived in Maryland, she was emotionally distraught and she had to make taking her of her mother and sister and working as her top priorities. Her participation in online instruction has been filled with obstacles, including technology. She does not consider herself to be computer savvy, and she does not have Wi-Fi access.

5.3 Technology

All three 17-year-olds reported not having access to technology devices for the first week of class. With the help of her ESL teacher, one was able to pick up a computer from her school in time for the second week of class. The other student (Carla) gave up and stopped attending class. Initially she attempted to access class (i.e., Canvas) using her phone, but when her minutes expired, even that became challenging. "Ahora no puedo," she shared when we exchanged ideas on her friend's patio in early June of 2020. "I don't understand (how to use) the computer" she hesitantly reported on her third exchange with the researcher (after she had warmed up to her), and "I don't have Wi-Fi." Almost 90% of the student (and parent) participants in Howard County reported receiving their technology devices late and, as such, being unable to attend remote class sessions for three to five weeks. "My Mom was so worried when our computers didn't arrive," 12-year-old Dan shared.

5.4 Boredom, Lack of Motivation and the Missing Personal Touch

"I'm so bored at home, so I wanna go back school!," shared 13-year-old Dan. All students reported feeling relatively unmotivated in the online classes and once schools closed. "It's hard to feel motivated when the schedule isn't challenging," noted 17-year-old Jennifer. Only student, Roberto, was satisfied with his online classes. He proudly announced "School and I don't get along," and repeatedly shared that he disliked school. "It's easier," he responded when prodded for his thoughts on online instruction. When asked to identify his most challenging online class, he mentioned geometry. "I've stopped

attending," he continued. "Anyway, I'm passing that class." His response suggests that not all students are expected to work as hard as when school was in session in order to pass their Online classes. Missing class does not appear to have any consequences. Whether this is the message schools intend to communicate is however, unclear. 90% of the student and parent participants shared that they preferred spoken and face-to-face interaction. Tech challenges and Carla's limited comprehension of the course materials and assignments that her instructors uploaded on Canvas forced her to stop attending class altogether. She shared that, while some teachers had attempted to assist her via Google Meet after classes ended, at 2 p.m., she didn't understand them because none of her teachers, not even her ESL teacher understands and/or speaks Spanish, so the only way they can really help her is through an interpreter (which has not happened so far) or if they explain things to her visually (i.e., face-to-face--at her home is her preferred learning style, even if it would mean meeting outdoors and maintaining social distance, as we did in the course of our exchange) to replicate as best as possible the instructional-learning mechanisms that has worked when school was in session. Carla was not the only student who reported feeling relatively unmotivated since her school closed. "Right now I just care about my brother. . . I don't know how I can help him," reported 17-year-old Jennifer. She shared that one of the most worrisome things to her was that he had stopped attending his classes. "I think that he just get lazy . . . to get into the computer" and that he preferred to "play on his phone." When asked whether she had shared her concerns with her parents, she responded, "They know that." She later shared that they too do not know what to do to motivate him. So these parents, who work long hours and who are essential workers are themselves uncertain on how best to help their children during this school closure period. "Online, nobody checks to make sure you are listening and paying attention!" she lamented. "You could turn on your computer and walk away, and they (teachers) wouldn't even know, much less care" shared another student.

5.5 Sometimes I don't know something that I don't know

Not knowing what they do not know or understand, and being embarrassed about their (English) language skills are obstacles practically every ESL student mentioned experiencing whether directly or indirectly. "Sometimes I don't know something that I don't know" wrote 12-year-old Bryan in a self-reflection that the researcher asked him to write a week after his mother had contacted her for help with her children's continued learning.

His write-up is eye-opening on multiple levels. How so? His use of phonetic spellings visibly different from conventional spellings and potentially hard-to-decode for many--suggests that he is either accustomed to seeing written script look like it sounds (as is the case in Spanish) or that his literacy skills are limited. Follow-up exchanges with family members (including his parents) suggest that the latter is indeed the case. Brayan was eight when he started school in the U.S.

and he shared that he had had minimal exposure to writing in Spanish in his home country, Honduras. Oral in-class responses are the norm, and students are assigned little to no homework in the early grades. Bryan's low rating of his Online instructional experience at his Maryland-based school is eye-opening; that he would give his school a mere 5 out of a 10 when it comes to instruction and instructional assistance is quite telling. All except the kindergartner reported feeling embarrassed about asking questions even when their instructors asked if anyone had questions. Asking for help with comprehension and/or homework is even harder, according to all student respondents, except the five and seven-year-old.

5.6 Peer Support & Self-Motivation save the Day

Findings from exchanges with ESL students illustrate that students who reside in households with other students have been faring a lot better academically and socio-emotionally than those like Carla and Trish who have no at-home peer support. Findings also showed that when it comes to online instruction and learning, students who share the same home language have been helping classmates and friends who have relatively limited English skills by providing audio and written translations during their class meetings. 13-year-old Dan, originally from El Savador, shared that he has two friends who arrived from El Salvador just recently and since none of their teachers speaks and/or understands Spanish, he has been providing them with audio translations and explanations via WhatsApp and also through Google Translate on Canvas.

"Aveces chatiamos" (we sometimes chat) shared 12-year-old Trish, referring to Snapchat exchanges with her friends as the only way she has been able to use "some English" on her own, and of her own accord since her school closed. "But it's not enough and not the same" she shared. Indeed, tech exchanges have not been the same for her as being there in school and talking with and getting help from her classmates, friends and teachers five days a week. "Es difícil" (It's difficult) she repeatedly stated in both English and Spanish throughout every exchange. 13-year-old Bryan shared that if not for his daily exchanges with his best friend Dominic, he would not have had any opportunity to speak or write in English in the seven weeks since schools have closed.

Exchanges with students also revealed that there are clear benefits to multi-student households, and this plus point of peer support is most pronounced in multifamily setups. Students and parents shared that siblings, cousins and/or non-biologically related students in the same household and, in two cases, close friends who shared many classes, periodically shared devices, practiced speaking English and at least one additional language, and knocked heads and co-instructed each otherhowever briefly in other subject areas, as well. These same-grade and cross-grade pairs frequently help each other with access to online modules, and homework, as does Louis with his seven-year-old cousin,

Belen. Belen's device was, in her mother's words "mas de tarde" (more than late), so she used his device until hers arrived.

One special needs ESL student participant shared that she was embarrassed and therefore hesitant to ask her 12-year-old sibling for help with her homework because "I am older," she reported, suggesting that, in her mind, older siblings should not be asking younger siblings for help. For this reason, she preferred to contact one of the researchers for help comprehending and completing classwork and growing her spoken English. She shared that reading and writing were particularly problematic for her so she reached out to the researcher in question via WhatsApp and proposed that they communicate primarily via phone calls and audio messages (i.e., no written messages).

In addition to the frequent lack of understanding reported by every student, lack of motivation was another major challenge many students experienced, including two non-ESL students (14 and 16). Both are the researchers' children who volunteered to share their insights. "It's like talking to a wall; none of my classmates respond when my teacher asks questions. It's like they've given up or have gone back to bed or that they're in the pool or at a picnic we'll never really know 'cause they don't have to turn their cameras and speakers on!" shared the 14-year-old after her e-class ended just 15 minutes after it officially began. "I ended up answering most of the questions and I could tell my teacher really appreciated that I did; he even said "Thank you."

"I don't know what to do to motivate my brother," 17-year-old Jennifer lamented, referring to her 13-year-old brother Dan who had missed at least three classes the week we spoke. She was concerned that he would stop checking in and attending classes. "He tells us that he's done but I think he's just lazy and prefers to be on his phone," she shared. If Dan stops attending class, the continued learning of his two classmates (lower-level "ELLs") that rely on him to make sense of their classes and of their homework will be substantially jeopardized, as well, resulting in a negative chain reaction. In a follow-up exchange we scheduled with Dan to inquire about this matter and about his friend circle and to motivate him to complete the semester to the best of his abilities he explained that Wi-Fi and communication problems had barred him from attending some classes. He shared a message he had received from his ESL instructor titled "A gentle reminder." "We missed you in class today" was how this message in just English opened. Dan revealed that all his friends are "Hispanic" because "at least" he can "communicate with them;" like most of the students we talked to, he is self-conscious about his English and "shy." "I have trouble making friends with anyone who speaks only English," he hesitantly shared, clearly embarrassed about his English.

All the student respondents unanimously shared that the interactivity and peer support they had at school was visibly absent in the online instructional mode employed by their schools. Peer support was found to account for many ELL student respondents' contentment and feelings of academic success. 75 % of the respondents reported

having at least one peer advocate. These included siblings, and other biologically related members who live in the same household or within walking distance, and who are also enrolled at their school. 12-year-old Brian reported that his close "Italian" friend Dominic helped him with homework and even with securing a device. Their families had no idea that remote instruction was to start a month after schools closed because their mother had not seen the emails the school had sent her. This was because she rarely checked email prior to the COVID-induced school closure, even though she had established an account when their families had moved into their apartment complex some five years ago. It wasn't until her two school age children's schools contacted her by phone after they had been absent Online for over two weeks that she learned that classes had resumed. Then began the rush for a device. Her friend, a Dreamer, helped her access her email messages and contacted the schools to request devices, but they didn't arrive until over a week later. Louis' classmate and best friend, Dominic expedited his device receipt. In Louis' words, "Dominic asked my teacher for me and my teacher sent me a device in a few days." Eighty percent of the student participants were self-motivated and this helped them to find ways to ensure that they continued to have a steady and sustained stream of comprehensible input (see Crawford & Krashen, 2015) and interaction in English. For instance, 11-year-old Louis who had had just under a year of classroom-based English instruction by the time this study was conducted proposed and successfully tried out what he termed the "English challenge." His seven-year-old cousin, Belen and him formed a pact to communicate in English for 24-hours, and they initiated and have been following through with this "challenge." It has helped them grow their English skills and, in Belen's case, her Spanish skills, as well. How so? She reported that at her babysitter's she speaks primarily in English, so when her cousin Louis proposed "the English Challenge," she began to "think of the other (Spanish-only-or-mostly Spanish-speech days) as her "Spanish Challenge days." The extent to which their co-facilitated instruction and learning ensured a mix of the third vital language-literacy ingredient, namely, feedback, is unclear. Their reports and the relative ease with which they both responded, in English, suggests that the "English Challenge" they instituted has indeed enhanced their fluency in English.

5.7 Effectiveness of the materials: No More Non- ESL-Friendly Resources

Findings suggest that relevant resources are not always being used to instruct ESL students. For example, 12-year-old Bryan was assigned a weekly word-building program. The narrator in the sample audio clip that he played for the researcher shared that the word "fantastic" is "a fantastic word" because it has "a short a, a short i, and a closed syllable." The researcher had trouble making sense of this and could not understand how this explanation constitutes a viable one, so it isn't surprising that Bryan was clueless about the point of this exercise. For his final reading class assignment, he had to identify any word or words with rising intonation (i.e., higher stress or emphasis) in a sentence by

way of a visual marker, yet he did not understand the instructions and could not explain the objective of the exercise to the researcher. He reported that all students had to do these exercises and shared that some "make no sense." Bryan shared that nobody checked their work or checked in to be sure they understood what needed to be done. All that matters is whether or not students put in the allotted time. "They check to make sure you do 20 or more minutes," he shared. "What happens if you don't?" asked the researcher. "They send you an email." Bryan shared that sometimes his friends or his mother's friends help him complete them but the extent to which helpers' completing these and/or other assigned work constitutes evidence of each ELL student's having learned what was intended is debatable. Could it be that some of these exercises are not catered to ELL students? So if online instruction fails, it's not for lack of technology or apps or programs per se; but for lack of relevant resources and individualized instruction.

5.8 Additional Obstacles to Student Learning

Stress caused by the obstacles shared and by the uncertainty surrounding school re-opening has caused many students to give up. Some students have had to work to help out their families and their online instruction schedules are much more conducive to employment (the only plus point of online instruction shared). Some shared that working has, in fact, been more English-instructional, motivating, and economically advantageous than sitting at home and taking the classes their schools have been offering. As such, at least two teenagers have been drawn to full-time work. Both were quickly promoted (one to head cashier and one to Manager) at their respective places of work (McDonald's and Checker's), and they felt appreciated, needed, and validated when they were recognized through their relatively quick promotion, so not surprisingly, they have found work to be much more rewarding. This new or greater allegiance to her workplace might explain why one of these teenagers, namely, Carla recently stopped attending (remote) classes altogether. She shared that at least she gets to hear English at work, and that since she has to use English, working has helped her hear and practice English daily and much more effectively than Online instruction has, and work has even grown her self-confidence. "En mi trabajo yo trato mas, porque soy cajera!" (at my work I try harder because I'm a cashier) she shared excitedly with a hint of a smile. It is worth noting that the only time she smiled and showed any excitement during our exchanges was when she talked about work.

She shared that additional obstacles to her continued learning include her daily babysitting responsibility and her work schedule. She has to work to help her single mother (who works part-time) and her 11.5-month-old sister to pay their rent and other bills, and she has to be at work by 3p.m. Her second and final class usually ends around 2:15p.m. That has left her with a very small window to get to work; she has had to get her baby sister ready and to drop her off at her aunt's (who gets home from work at 2:40 p.m.). She has to walk about 10

mins to get there on the days that her mother works, and she has to walk to work another 15 minutes. “Maybe next year” she responded when the researcher who interviewed her outlined the advantages of a high school diploma in her efforts to coax Carla to resume her schooling. Yet, if her school continues to offer the same kind of (relatively incomplete, ineffective, and unengaging) instruction as it is presently offering, Carla is unlikely to return, she noted.

In regards to recommendations for any or all of their teachers, the last survey item in the present study, all students offered at least one suggestion.

Their recommendations are summarized below:

I. More classes and more frequent meetings (at least 2 or 3 times a week for each content/subject area) and each should be at least 1.5 hours in length, and preferably two hours long.

II. Longer class sessions (70-90 minutes per meeting recommended vs. 45 minutes)

III. More ESL small group and/or pair meetings, preferably longer than 45 minutes each, and more than once a week to allow for both frequent and sustained access to the English language and support services.

IV. At least one weekly one-on-one meeting with each student (averaging 10 minutes of audio- and/or video interaction to allow for customized, individualized instruction—which each ESL student participant stated would be less intimidating than large group interactions)

As regards the first recommendation, HCPSS student participants shared that 45-minute session over four out of seven days a week is simply insufficient to cover the material for so many classes and to offer in-depth coverage. 45 minutes are also insufficient to ensure that all students comprehend what is being shared, particularly ESL students who frequently need additional time to process information, to formulate questions, and to muster the courage to participate and/or to ask questions.

As regards the third recommendation, currently only one 45-minute session is offered online by ESL instructors and support staff at the largest school district under focus. In general, the schools and districts that have made a concerted effort to reach out to their ESL students and families have done one or more of the following and, as such, have been relatively more successful at engaging and empowering this group of students and their families:

I. Not merely permitted but encouraged their instructors and support staff to reach out to students and families early on and continuously

II. Permitted and encouraged instructors and support staff to reach out to their students and families in their home/heritage languages

III. Permitted and encouraged their instructors and support staff to reach out to their students and families via phone and texts, and not just through email and other (electronic) written media

IV. Have emphasized parent engagement and made their content relatively accessible (using multiple techniques, e.g., a parent portal that is associated with their phone numbers)

V. Have offered free wi-fi

VI. Have provided and emphasized homework completion as an important (practice) segment of learning

VII. Have offered one-on-one and group tutoring

VIII. Have utilized interactive technologies such as Flip grid to ensure that their ESL students are receiving a sustained stream of English, are continually interacting in English with at least one other individual whose English proficiency is higher than theirs and that their students are receiving continued feedback—both direct and indirect, in order to make necessary adjustments to their speech and/or literacy

IX. Have offered printouts or content packets (with activities or homework) at accessible sites, for pick up by families

X. Have conferred or periodically confer with parents/caregivers and students to plan viable and fruitful cross-grade, and/or cross-age homework and conversational and/or literacy partnerships in the same households or residential communities (e.g., Town and Country weekly Conversation Tables could be held in the parking lot of the leasing office or at a playground. With a bit of collaboration between instructors and, in some cases, across schools, (i.e., instructional planning across grades and even across schools), siblings could be enlisted to work with each other, even if they are in different schools.

XI. Have offered additional services to families such a health and nutrition services, and

XII. Have attempted to make these services more accessible to ESL students and families by utilizing more than just English (alone) to publicize them. Multimodal and Bilingual/Multilingual and translingual communication are absolutely essential. Local other-language radio stations could be tapped to assist in getting the word out as well as for soliciting and sharing ideas on what has worked for some families.

6. ELL Parents' Views on Virtual Instruction

Semi-focused exchanges with Spanish-speaking ELL parents (see Appendix B) were conducted almost entirely in Spanish face-to-face

(outdoors) or via WhatsApp video conferencing. Frustration was the most palpable sentiment that all the ESL parents shared in their exchanges with us. All parents all shared that their children's continued learning was their top priority. Most of the low-income parents interviewed shared that they had completed "le basico" (i.e., sixth grade) in their home countries. It is worth noting that, in written texts, the Spanish-speaking parent respondents consistently employ spelling pronunciation; in short, they spell the way they speak. Note, for instance, that "hacer" (to make) is spelled "aser" by one parent and "haser" by another.

All the mothers shared that they had had to run around quite a bit to locate "libros" (books) and/or materials to keep their elementary and middle school children busy and learning for the two to four weeks before virtual instruction was offered by their children's schools. During this time, parents had received no communication from their children's schools. They found this lack of communication to be appalling and most identified it as a challenge. When the Hispanic parent respondents were asked whether their children's education was the primary responsibility of the mothers in their households, all the parents, both males and females shared that this was indeed the case since the families had emigrated to the U.S. The reason for this, the three fathers that participated shared was that the males typically work longer hours and farther away from home (as construction, lawn and other unskilled laborers and their livelihoods require them to work early and late hours (typically before and after school) across county and state lines so that they can pay the rent and other bills and provide as best as they can (their primary objective) for their families, and ensure that are "comodo" (comfortable). All the parents worked full-time in either the food industry or construction.

6.1 Ellos (Schools and Trained Educators) are not doing enough

Parents unanimously shared that schools and trained educators are simply not doing enough. "Challenge them!" one parent announced. "Why aren't they checking on the students by phone, and more often by email and by text, and why haven't they bothered to contact the parents weekly and in a language we understand? It shouldn't be that difficult? Isn't that the responsibility of a school?" Lack of instructor and student motivation was mentioned by all the parent respondents as a major obstacle to successful online instruction and learning. "It's like they have just (all) given up," one parent shared, referring to the schools, teachers, and students. The general consensus among parents was that their children had not learned enough since schools had closed and since Online instruction began. All the parents expressed grave disappointment at what they described as the school's and most teachers' general lack of interest in these (ESL) students and their education. Each shared that they expected a lot more from the schools and from every single teacher and not just a single committed ESL teacher and Counselor. "Quiero que ellos luchar para obtener le mejor educación para ser alguien y no solo exitosos!" (I want them to fight to

get the best education to be someone and not just successful) declared one father. "What are they getting paid for?" one parent asked, referring to teachers and school administrators. "For Forty-five to ninety minutes of contact time?" he continued. "It's a joke!" he continued, referring to what he described as a half-hearted attempt at continuity of learning.

6.2 Primary Challenges Faced by Low-Income ESL Parents

6.2.1 Technology

One father shared that the cost of Internet was prohibitive in his County. The difficulty of getting their home connected in a timely manner was another obstacle he shared that his family had experienced. He expressed great dissatisfaction at being given the runaround by Internet providers in his area. He shared that his friends that live in Catonsville, under five miles away in neighboring Baltimore County were able to secure Internet access for a reasonable monthly cost of ten dollars ($10), but that Internet companies were charging them over five times as much. "Eso es discrimination," he declared, visibly angered by this corporate monopoly. He noted that the differences in the areas and schools were not enough to warrant such a huge price difference. His family is paying "mas de cincuenta dollares mensual" (more than fifty dollars monthly), he shared. "Y solo para 45 or 90 minutes por solo cuatro dias?" "Qual es el function?" (i.e., What's the point of getting and paying for Internet when you have so few class contact hours?).

95 percent of the parent respondents reported that not having Google-Meet-compatible devices and or not receiving their devices from their children's schools on time posed a major problem because their children missed over a week of classes and this psychological strain, compounded by the parents' intensive and (Corona-conducive) work made their parents feel helpless and left them and their children emotionally drained. "Tenia mucho stress porque comenzo classes mas tarde porque no recibi su computadora," reported a 39-year-old parent. One parent stated that she was so "preocupada" about not receiving her seven-year-old's device that she borrowed money to purchase a device but could not find a computer (she does not have a credit or debit card because she has been unable to secure an ID card since her National ID contains another person's photo and her attempts to get the problem resolved through her Embassy have been unsuccessful) so she settled for a tablet at Walmart, but the tablet did not work to access Google Meets, even though she successfully shared the hotspot Wi-Fi from her phone. According to her 11-year-old nephew, who also lives with her, "no era competente" (i.e., it wasn't a compatible device and it didn't have enough RAM). She shared that unreliable Wi-Fi at their apartment has been a constant source of stress. Most days, she is successful when she attempts to "compartir" (i.e., share) Wi-Fi from her telephone to her daughter's device, but there have been days when her hotspot quota has been rapidly deleted or the device sharing hasn't worked. Not being accustomed to checking email, not having or as frequently using email,

and not being as comfortable with written Spanish as with oral Spanish was a problem every Spanish-speaking parent reported.

6.2.2 The i-Phone Craze

Speaking of technology, one parent shared that he was still getting to know his 13-year-old son. He has been trying to build a relationship of trust and mutual respect with his son for the last three years since they were reunited after a long 10-year separation, which has taken a toll (see Author 2104a). His son recently manipulated him into purchasing for him an i-Phone. "Me explica que es mejor y bueno para accessor sus clases" (He told me it's the best and good for accessing his classes), the father shared. He saved up and spent close to five hundred dollars to make his son happy by getting him his phone of choice, and shared that he regretted his decision because thei-Phone turned out to be a great learning distraction. Instead of accessing class in a timely manner and using his phone as the learning tool it was intended to be, his son started playing free video and other games on his phone and got addicted to his device.

6.3 English Language & Literacy

"Solo Inglés utilizan!" 13-year-old Dan's father announced, referring to the language employed by his children's school. He noted that using only or primarily English with ESL parents is inconsiderate and problematic. "Tienes que ser bilingual! (They need to be bilingual") he announced. That his wife would receive messages only in English and that too, never oral or audio messages but only written email and an occasional written text from the school Counselor was indicative of the schools' lack of caring. "Ellos no le importa los estudiantes ni nosotros!" he declared (They don't care about the students and us) If they did, they would, at the very least, communicate through a translator and periodically communicate with the families. He noted that when his wife received written messages in English, she would have to wait until either her 13-year-old or her 17-year-old would help her translate the messages and that this would prolong the communication with the parents. At least if they bothered to send a written message in Spanish, she could decode it faster and on time, he proposed. He noted that fortunately, at least one of the written messages from his children's schools (between late March and June 14) had been in Spanish. He could not recall whether the middle or the high school had sent the message.

"Como yo no conosco (mucho) inglís," a parent shared, echoing a challenge that 99 percent of parent respondents shared. Not understanding English well and not speak it made more parents feel unready to help their children continue to learn as best as they should be, most shared. Many confided that written communication even in Spanish—was challenging for them, and for their children, so the mostly-written communication sent by area schools (via email and occasionally, too via written text messages) was hard to decode. Many schools assume that if parents self-report that their home language is X,

Y, or Z, that they must be literate in these languages. That is hasty on our part. Even to assume that speakers of Latinate languages would have an easier time with the mostly Roman-based script employed in written English is presumptuous.

6.4 Contracting & Compartiring Corona Increased Household Expenses

Two parents reported contracting Corona and how the high fever and body aches and fear of their families and children (both have toddlers and teens) contracting the virus made May a painful month in which they felt minimally helpful to their children and families as regards their breadwinning, parenting, educational motivation/academic and child-raising responsibilities). They both shared with teary voices how their families had being socially isolated and ostracized when word got around as it quickly does in the Latino community that these mothers "tienen Corona" (have Corona). The stigma had a negative impact on their school-age children; they shared that their children acted out more and seemed to resent them during that period. The added economic burden of losing work hours (they both received half a day's pay for three days) for the 14 days that they stayed at home was a challenge they both shared. In addition, two parent respondents mentioned that they had spent an average of $80 purchasing a device and that their expenses had gone up by an average of $54 a month because they have had to pay for access to the Internet.

In our phone exchange the following day, she shared her schooling concerns. What worried her the most was that she had not heard from her child's school over two weeks after schools had closed, and she sought help so that her child could participate in online classes. She had made multiple trips (during her 30-minute lunch break) but "estaba cerado" (it was closed) and she did not see anyone on site that she could ask. I asked if she had checked her email. She said she rarely used email. She also shared that her family had limited Internet access. We shared and translated for her the school's website information. It listed the weekly schedule and class times and modules for each grade. Luckily, her daughter's school also shared a few weekly lessons on a local television station, and this was listed on the school's website. If this mother had not taken the initiative to advocate for her child by reaching out for help, many more weeks might have passed by before her child would have received lessons.

6.5 Not Knowing How to Proceed

Once schools shut their doors in mid-March, most turned their backs on parents; they left behind and left out many academically unprepared educators, namely, parents. Most of the parent respondents come from cultures where the charge of schooling is assigned to the instructor, with little to no interference from the parent. Parent involvement has a different meaning in every (sub) culture. Not knowing how to be an academic educator and not merely a breadwinner and motivator has been a challenge many parents shared that they were unprepared for. A

parent (referred to here as Denora) contacted one of the researchers and offered to pay for weekly English lessons so that she could help her elementary school children. Her third grader had been doing very poorly even prior to the school closure, she shared, largely because he didn't understand) Ingles." Yet when she had requested a meeting in February with his teacher, the wait time for an interpreter was about a month. This is because her child's school does not allow for volunteer interpreters. Parents have to communicate directly with the Office of International Students (not through proxies) and only the services of contracted interpreters hired by the school can be employed, creating a protracted and unduly long wait period. That meeting never took place after schools closed. On April 2, 16 days after schools had closed, she responded to one of the researcher's inquiry about whether or not she had received any communication from her children's school regarding the districts' plans for remote instruction and how to secure a device for her children. She mentions that her husband told her (that the schools would begin teaching virtually and in a follow-up call she stated that he had heard this from a friend at work who had received an email in English from the school) and she asks what she needs to do to get the tablets: "que tengo que haser (sic) para obtenerla."

6.6 A WhatsApp Parent Support Group

One parent of a 13-year-old who arrived from Honduras a little over a year ago shared that many mothers had formed a "grupo" on WhatsApp to support each other and share information regarding their children schooling. Her 8th-grader's device arrived over a week late, so both she and her child were stressed. Being part of this group helped reassure her, she shared.

17-year-old Jennifer who reported getting a great deal of language and emotional support from her ESL instructor proposed a comprehensive three-part plan of action (see her response to the last student survey item): "I would contact the parents first and see that, if my children is (sic) doing the work. My second thing is like checking one-on-one (with) my students to see if they are doing the work and sending a (text) message to see if they are understanding the title(s) or the system that we are trying to teach, so that they can do well in the future."

When prodded for details on her last-mentioned recommendation, she mention one-on-one texting, if calling is burdensome for teachers and/or support staff. She also proposed (in a follow-up exchange) that the teachers collaborate more and ":must talk to the ESL teacher" and that ESL teachers must attend (content) classes or at least have access to the content so that can ask more pointed questions and help each student with language tied to specific lessons.

This student's imprompt response acknowledges the role of parents as educational front liners, and of family support in successful student learning. That a 17-year-old recognizes that parents and siblings (and/or other students in the home) must be more fully engaged in the

educational process in order to ensure that every student is learning as best as they can is noteworthy. We would do well to heed her advice.

7. Educator's Insights

All of the ESL educators who took time to respond to our request for their feedback reported feeling overwhelmed and overworked. All but one responded via email and one opted for a phone interview. Most shared that they are responsible for an average of 45 ESL students, and many have to assist other students, as well, and to attend one to two weekly ESL meetings (averaging 45 minutes) and additional staff trainings and/or meetings. In fact, 90 percent of the educators with whom we dialoged shared that many trained educators, primarily content teachers, had been spending more time training on remote instruction than actually teaching and assessing learning.

A MO-based elementary school ELL Specialist shared that her program serves 275 ESL students and that she had used primarily phone calls and written text messages to reach out to her students during the school closure period. Her objective has been "to inform, reassure, and inquire about technology in home." She noted that her administrators have not dedicated specific communication outlets, resources, and/or messages solely for ELLs. She recommended Talking Points as a useful communication and/or learning tools for ESL students and/or families, particularly K-4 and low-level ELL. Regarding the last question, namely, challenges, encountered in reaching ESL students and/or their families and solutions they would propose, she responded:

> *Calling students on 3-way calls to leave a message with an interpreter and give them a time to I will call back again with the interpreter so they feel comfortable picking up, getting online learning set up with 3-way calls, helping them understand that students should do what they can and not worry about what they can't and parents not knowing how to help them.*

Two Nevada-based ESL educators (one a middle school and the other a high school instructor) shared that they had contacted their ESL students via phone calls, texts, and audio messages through WhatsApp. A third ESL educator, from Maryland, shared that WhatsApp had been the most effective and is, in fact, the preferred and most popular choice of her students and families

Both the Las Vegas-based educators have had considerable success with engaging and empowering their students when they employed Flip Grid, an interaction-engendering app that allows for short 90-minute video clips that can easily be uploaded using a code the teachers send to their students. They highly recommended this. 98% of the educators surveyed reported feeling relatively isolated in their efforts to engage their students and families. All 10 ESL educators shared that while they had been successful at contacting (i.e., reaching) almost every student and/or parent, they had not been as effective as they would like to have

been in meeting the needs of their students and families. The vast majority reported that since schools had closed, they had been unsuccessful in meeting the needs of their students and families. "On a scale of 1-5, with 5 being highly successful, I would say a 2 when it comes to meeting their needs and probably a 4 when it comes to making contact with them," responded one teacher. The vast majority shared that they felt constrained by lack of administrative support and oversight, and the added obstacles that their students and they themselves faced and still face.

Some educators shared that many teachers, mostly content area teachers had become laissez faire and contented with doing the barest minimum. "As long as they get paid, that's all that matters to some teachers," he noted. "Some would prefer not to return to school because then they would actually have to work for their money," another teacher shared. She was convinced that the ESL and Special needs teachers are the most burdened and, in her view, generally the most committed to their students and families.

A Maryland-based educator shared that she has been more involved with her K-1 ESL students, since they need more help. "Before school closed, we emailed the students and their parents—depending on whose email addresses they had on file. With the older students, they are generally more invested, so they don't require as much monitoring." They have her "cell" and know how to reach her. She messages them from time to time. Her school (district) has not been using or encouraging use of any tech tools specifically for this population, and she shared that she found that disconcerting. "They do have "ESL weekly" trainings every Monday and they have been "very helpful," she shared. The ESL teachers (3 teachers, 2 para teachers) at her school also convene once a week (via Google Meet) to exchange ideas.

Student and parent exchanges from the present study revealed that caring teachers can make all the difference. In every instance in which a teacher went out of their way to help reach and/or empower their "ELLs," these teachers were consistently ELA teachers. Many have extended more than just language and academic support to their students. This is hardly surprising, given that most ESL and/or language instructors are have at least some training in sociolinguistics. As such, they tend to be culturally sensitive, empathetic, and inclusive. Many are well-traveled, bilingual and/or advocates of bilingualism.

All but one of the educator respondents from Maryland shared that their hands are "tied" due to bureaucratic regulations beyond their control. "We are discouraged from contacting students by phone!" reported one middle school teacher, her voice one of consternation. "They (the administration) told us not to share our number--essentially. We were told it was up to us; we were encouraged to block our number," she continued. Shortly before the start of remote instruction and until now, this teacher has been calling and messaging her students and the parents with whom she has established a "relationship." Lately,

she shared, she has been "messaging more and calling less." "I speak Spanish, so I'm drawn to this community. I'm from South America so I understand the culture" and her Spanish speaking ESL students excitedly reported that she called them, suggesting that personal phone calls and texting were more impactful and personally reassuring and that they related to her for this reason and also because she spoke their language. This teacher shared that she likes using phone calls and audio texts for the following reasons:

i. they are "faster"

ii. "I don't have to translate content"

iii. "I have (Spanish-speaking students that speak pretty well but they can't read and/or write, so at least this way" (i.e., via calls and audio messaging). I know this way they understand what is being shared."

iv. My ESL students like the phone calls and messages.

This teacher identified additional challenges that she has faced, many of which were echoed by other respondents and outlined below:

Attendance has dropped dramatically. "It varies from 30-60%," shared 80% of respondents and "it's actually declined since Online instruction started," shared one respondent. One kindergartner "disappeared" altogether and his teacher was unsuccessful in reaching the family. She did call and "leave a message" but she hasn't messaged them because, as she reported "I don't know the family as well. I don't text that family. I don't really have a relationship with this family. My calls went to a voice mail."

8. Teacher Challenges

"It gets tiring. I put a lot of time and effort for week after week" reported a Maryland-based teacher. She has even gone to at least one student's home to show her student how to access Google Meet, and even checks into "some (content) classes" but some students have simply stopped putting in the effort, in her view. She shared how she has called, messaged and continually made every effort to encourage this one student but she still didn't attend class. She would still be sleeping at 10a.m. when she's call her and her first remote class started at 10a.m. "They've got to have some personal responsibility, as well" she shared. So, in the case of this student, this teacher got frustrated and felt that her efforts had been in vain. "So I've backed off now," she shared. (So when students give up, even caring teachers can give up)

"I know of a student whose computer got there four weeks late and even after it was supposed to get there, they had to go pick it up" so that put them "behind by another month," shared one Maryland-based teacher. Devices received late and internet access issues were a "problem" initially, particularly for ELLs in Howard County schools (Maryland) but "they have been resolved for the most part," shared a teacher in a follow-up exchange in early June, 2020.

Tied to online delivery is what we would call "The literacy challenge" that this instructor noted that most of her literacy-using students experienced. "We can't do reading and writing effectively. It's just not the same as being there and helping in person," she shared. "We have identified some apps and other tech programs but not all are effective," she continued.

In one teacher's experience, her ELL students and families have simply not been as forthright about their needs. "I wish they'd be more honest" about what's stopping them from attending every ESOL and/or content class." Another challenge she identified is what we term here "the Family/Community Connection" challenge. Her school has two designated Family Liaisons, but "they are technically the Chinese and Korean liaisons; neither speaks Spanish" so when and if they ever reach out to these students and their families, "they have to do so through an interpretation and that's simply just not the same."

The Uncertainty challenge: this challenge is one of not having sufficient information from the school administrator side regarding plans for these (ELL) students and their families. Not knowing what is going to happen in the summer and/or fall to these students, since the ELL offerings typically offered every summer have been canceled was a challenges most ESL educators shared. Not knowing the consequence on their progress, of not attending or not completing to a satisfactory level their courses for the rest of this semester were additional challenges identified. "I think we are going to repeat the quarter in the fall, but I don't know," shared one teacher.

Whether and to what extent content teachers have been collaborating with ESL teachers to ease comprehension and engagement of their ESL students is unclear. The present study suggests that such collaboration, if any, has been minimally evident.

9. Analysis of Non-Survey-Based Data: Findings & Discussion

As regards the non-survey-based data sample, schools in the Las Vegas area had some of the most ELL-inclusive and parent-engaging communication on their Website and other documents, followed by schools in Missouri. Each of the school districts had varied start dates for remote instruction. While most schools in Nevada started classes just a week following the end of face-to-face delivery, HCPSS in Maryland did not offer e-instruction for a full month following the mandated closure, and began with High School students first, followed by elementary and middle school student instruction a week later, on April 20. Most public schools in Missouri began offering remote instruction two weeks after the mid-March closure. Some might argue that the lag time in instructional delivery could be interpreted as evidence of these districts' varied levels of commitment to their students. The communication these institutions and/or their representatives employed with parents/guardians and students could be analyzed for timeliness, purpose (to inform, to engage, to empower), language (informative, engaging, empowering- i.e., evidencing

compassion, care, and commitment to student success). Of the districts under focus, Clark County Schools were the first to offer remote instruction—just a week following school closures. They offered students free Wi-Fi via their school buses, which would park for at least two hours in residential areas to allow students to access online resources and to complete any practice and mandatory assignments.

A comparison of the language that two districts employ on their web pages (all accessed on May 20, 2020) reveals notable differences that suggest different levels of parent/family engagement which could be categorized into three groups based on their linguistic function: that of informing versus involving versus empowering parents/families.

Take a look at the Maryland-based school page titled "Supporting Instruction at Home" (https://www.hcpss.org/health/coron avirus/supporting-instruction/). The term "families" is only used twice on this parent/family page, so the intended audience is only mentioned indirectly. The singular form "family" is employed twice, and the term "family member" only once. No headings or tabs with the word "family." No tab, heading or content dedicated to the theme of information for families is visible--in the headings and in the body of the message, so parents and/or families are not overtly identified as the intended readers. Theoretically the target readership is parents, as evidenced by the descriptive phase "your child's teachers" employed in the fourth line, as well as in the pronouns "you," "yourself" and "I" that are employed to refer to the reader--presumably to parents (i.e., based on their usage or the context of use). Interestingly, while the word "instruction" is employed and constitutes a section heading, the associated term "assessment" is not used. Arguably this page is intended to help parents assume the roles and responsibilities of teaching sans quantitative assessment. Some might argue that this is contrary to outcomes-oriented instructional practices. In contrast, the home page of Columbia Public Schools in Missouri includes "ParentLink." This parent-first title promptly spells out the importance of parents in this school district's educational mission. Additionally, on this web page, the seventh tab on the home page menu titled "Quick Links" opens by announcing that "Columbia Public Schools' messaging system allows parents and guardians to receive school messages via phone, text, e-mail and mobile app." The multimodal messaging employed with parents/guardians during the COVID-19 school closure is noteworthy. Contrast this with the primarily email-based communication employed with parents/guardians in the Howard County Public School System (HCPSS) in Maryland. Below is an email message (Fig. 13) that school administrators sent out on April 1 to the families of their 59,000 students via email in Howard County, Maryland (HoCo, hereafter):

Please complete the Student Technology Survey in English, using the Chinese, Korean and Spanish language translations as reference. If you need support in filling out the survey, please contact the Call Center:

Chinese: 410–313–5920

Korean: 410–313–1592

Spanish: 410–313–1591

For assistance in all other languages, please contact Monica Ranta at 410–313–7102.
Encuesta de Tecnología Estudiantil

Por favor, complete la encuesta sobre tecnología en inglés [HCPSS Student Technology Survey] utilizando las traducciones como referencia. Si necesita asistencia para completarla, por favor, comuníquese con el centro de llamadas. Español: 410-313-1591

学生技术设个调查

请参照中文翻译件，用英文填写技术问卷调查 [HCPSS Student Technology Survey]。. . .

테크놀로지 이용을 위한 설문조사 [HCPSS Student Technology Survey]는 번역문을 . . .

Fig. 13: HoCo Student Technology Survey (https://www.hcpss. org/health/coronavirus/devices/?fbclid=IwAR03b78u9OOFnv Tp_luyUAWti-ZM-6CeLd9Y4oMEXGnn3Qh4eC1xWiWgQJw)

Note that the survey title and the title of the communication sent out do not clarify the needs-assessment nature of the survey; namely, that the intent is to determine if a family needs a device. Moreover, the survey taker is asked to provide their responses “en inglés.” This use-English-only-to-respond mandate is arguably both baffling and linguistically exclusive to ELL families. How likely are parents to complete this survey when they are required to respond only in English? The accuracy of online translators further muddies the waters.

Furthermore, parents must have e-mail access and an e-mail account to see this note from the ninth largest school district. When schools/teachers send (important) messages to students/families solely or primarily via email, especially during the national quarantine, we exclude a huge segment of our community. We are assuming that parents have access to email and an email account that they necessarily use and that everyone reads one or more languages and/or specific languages that they might have (self)reported as knowing (e.g., Spanish) and, in the case of the Maryland schools under focus, administrators are asking adults who are already self-conscious about their English and/or literacy and educational skills (among other skills) to complete a technology survey "en inglés," and this could be quite anxiety-inducing, not to mention time-consuming, cumbersome, and disconcerting.

Columbia Public Schools’ home page contains both a “Families Portal” tab and a “Families” tab. The former leads to a password-based entry

point for parents/guardians while the latter leads to more information for families. The ninth menu item or tab refers browsers to "Procedures for Identifying and Assessing English Language Learners (ELL) Children." However, whether these procedures apply to qualifying middle and high school students is unclear. The HCPSS does not provide tabs or links using any of these or synonymous keywords, namely, ELL or equivalent terms (e.g., ESL, Emergent Learner(s), Bilingual Students), "Parent" and "Families." The first tab or quick link is titled "Languages" and it leads to a sub-page titled "languages." However, unlike what some parents might expect, this page does not translate the web page and sub-pages into additional languages, despite the following announcement under the heading "English": "We are fortunate to enroll students representing 117 different languages." This pages merely links parents to the district's "International Student and Family Services" division and shares phone numbers for translation services in just four languages, namely, Spanish, Korean, Chinese, and Chinese.

In contrast, the home page of Clark County School District in NV is overtly linguistically, as well as student-and parent-inclusive. Under the "Trending" box that's center stage on this page, the parent portal is the first link and it's titled "Campus Parent/Student Information." This page leads to a Parent/Student Information page. The "Parent" tab lists a variety of resources, including FACES, which stands for "Family and Community Engagement Services" and is also accessible through the "Community" Tab and information is provided in multiple languages.

10. Recommendations

Online instruction needs to be more rigorous and visibly student-and-parent engaging and empowering. Some students, parents, and trained educators have spoken, and it is time to hear them, and to make necessary changes. We could begin by addressing the challenges that respondents in the present study shared. While they might not be applicable to students in every single school district, and a customized needs assessment would be needed to identify challenges at individual schools and/or districts, we should at least give some thought to how to better meet the needs of our "ELLs" and our special needs students and families.

10.1 Provide Genuine Student Family Support and Linguistic Inclusion

Genuine student and family support and linguistic inclusion generally work in tandem. Administrators, instructors and support staff must also make an effort to bilingualize instruction and communication with parents and students not only to ease comprehension and to fortify relationships, but to engage and empower (see Author, 2018, 2017, 2010, 2014). Consistent bilingual messaging was not apparent in the web page of none of the schools under focus in the present study. Arguably, use of even a single word from a student's idiolect (i.e., individual language including mannerisms) could positively impact the

instructional-learning dynamic (Author, 2015b). Indeed, this simple step, of providing input that is genuinely comprehensible to each student, is more likely to motivate each student and family, so that they pay (closer) attention, and actually feel like they matter, and are more likely to want to participate. Translanguaging by students and educators has also been shown to significantly improve learning outcomes (Canagarajah, 2013, Author 2013). This practice is a sure way to empower ESL and special needs students and parents. How so? Students and parents are less likely to tune out when they understand what is being shared. Monitoring each student's receipt and incorporation of feedback (both direct and indirect) is another essential step advised.

Family professional development facilitated by ELL parents and/or other family and community advocates in home languages and or bilingual mode must be prioritized. These would be vital learning opportunities for trained educators and program administrators

We need to remember that one size doesn't fit all. Differentiated instruction requires individualized attention, and use of instructional strategies and accommodations. Educators need to try to check in weekly with each ESL and/or special needs student, and also with each family. This practice will likely engender and yield team support and enhanced learning outcomes. Just because the vast majority of American residents are accustomed to written communication and enjoy the flexibility that e-communication affords them (e.g., of accessing written media their own time, and revisiting e-messages any number of times--some of the plus points of written communication), and writing creates a paper trail that most administrative institutions require does not mean that written communication is as comprehensible and accessible to every student and families.

In the present study, Spanish-speaking participants consistently shared that written communication, including email and Canvas announcements, for example, are arguably harder and more challenging for students and even parents to access and fully comprehend, and not-as-motivating. Many students reported that their Online classes during the spring, 2020 COVID-19 school closure period were relatively formal, distancing, and, in many cases, off-putting. Keeping subtle and not-so-subtle differences in (sub) cultural communication and learning styles in mind, we need to be more linguistically responsive and to utilize more oral and visual (tech) tools to engage and empower parents/families and students. Language researchers have consistently advised exposing language learners to rich spoken language. Oral language is necessary fodder; it constitutes an essential language-literacy ingredient, namely, comprehensible input. Oral language is also a natural precursor to written language, and spoken language is arguably much more engaging than written language.

10.2 Monitor Language Literacy Essentials

Research shows that students need three vital ingredients to grow their language and literacy skills, namely, a sustained stream of language that makes sense to them (i.e., comprehensible input or CI), opportunities to use the language (i.e., lots of interaction), and opportunities to receive and implement feedback both direct and indirect (Pandey, 2014b, 2012). Realistically, 45 minutes with six or more ESL students each arguably with varied skill sets--leaves little time for periodic and comprehensive comprehension checks, and for peer-peer and/or even student-teacher interaction. Is sufficient time available for feedback provision and integration of feedback? Follow-up through one-on-one exchanges or observations of students interacting with assigned partners is essential, as is careful tracking of their receipt and integration of feedback across the language building blocks spectrum sounds (i.e., pronunciation and paralinguistic elements; appropriate use of word and sentence-level stress, intonation, and of proper tone and pitch); words and idioms (technically "words" and particularly confounding for ESL students), phrases, clauses, sentences, and discourse structures. Through carefully planned assignments and strategic pairings and groupings, ESL instructors and support staff could indeed ensure that each and every ESL student receives all three ingredients in a sustained fashion. How so? They could divide the class up to create peer chat partners (for listening and speaking) and arrange for both in-class and external writing and reading mentors who would be required to periodically check in with students via telephone and/or video, and teachers could randomly monitor these sessions (via three-way calls, or camera-off Zoom and/or Google meet participation) and/or by asking students to record and email their exchanges via the Voice Memo feature on most smart phones and/or some other mechanism, such as Flip grid. Both the assigned peer tutors/mentors and the ESL students could be invited to periodically share a written or audio file via email and/or Canvas, outlining what they learned from each session and identifying areas of improvement, so that they get into the habit of summarizing and evaluating (i.e., growing their critical thinking skills). In short, peer tutoring could be used to fruitfully engage all parties and enhance the communication (spoken and written), critical thinking, and literacy (reading and writing) skills of each and every student. ESL students would have the necessary interaction time, plus such mandated sessions would allow ample time for feedback provision and integration of feedback. To empower each student, the mandated exchanges and tutoring could go beyond language. For instance, ESL teachers could work with content area teachers to identify the most suitable math and science (bi) weekly pairs and groups, vs. art and humanities pairs or groups. ESL students with similar or visibly advanced content area skills could be paired with non-ESL students who could offer their enhanced English skills in return, so that each student would be bringing something to the table.

Clearly such pairings and groupings would require more planning on the part of the instructors, but the outcomes would very likely be more in line with instructional learning objectives. Periodically changing the student pairings and groupings would further diversify this experience and allow for students to learn to work with more and different classmates. This in turn, would force them to get out of their comfort zone (visible in student- or self-selected groupings as opposed to instructor-selected pairings and groupings), while in turn enhancing their confidence and communication skills, among others. To guide them with successfully attaining the outcomes desired, students could be provided with checklists. Examples are provided in Appendices D & E.

The linguistic movement or advancement of ELL students is ensured when at least four vital spokes are part of their instructional/learning wheel, namely:

i. CI

ii. interaction

iii. feedback receipt must be timely, meaningful (i.e., must make sense), and sustained

iv. feedback incorporation must be effective and timely for acquisition (unconscious) and/or learning (a conscious process).

Additional spokes include motivation (self- and external), mental state (the lower a student's anxiety, the more conducive to language acquisition or conscious learning), instructional style (i.e., how engaging an instructor is and often, the more animated and interactive a teacher, the more likely the student is to pay attention to what they are trying to convey), approach to teaching (activities and examples-infused, student-oriented, learned-facilitated vs. lecture-heavy).

10.3 Observe & Listen to Students & Cater to Individual Needs

The present study suggests that we need to listen to our students more closely, and this includes inviting their input via weekly audio or other student feedback that we request and encourage. We also need to observe them when we and other instructional aides (e.g., peers, parents, siblings and school support staff) interact with them. The nonverbal language components such as facial expression, posture and body language are essential for impactful exchanges. Then and only then can we cater to their individual needs.

What Bryan shared in his written reflection is very likely what many other ESL students are experiencing around the country. "Sometimes I don't know something that I don't know" (i.e., I sometimes don't know what I don't know), he wrote. His writing is a call to action, and while his spelling, mechanics, grammar, and handwriting reflect the language and literacy challenges he faces, his message is clear, loud, and powerful.

The following are additional recommendations for all teachers and support staff:

Support ELL and special needs instructors and support staff since they are some of the most burdened. Content teachers can assist with ELLs and can be trained as needed, as most have or are likely to have (in the near future) at least one ELL in their classes

Invite ESL teachers or trained ESL support staff and/or volunteers to attend content classes or make class recordings available for them to view individually and with their students, so they can monitor each ESL student's understanding and their level of engagement, and assist each with comprehension via, for instance, the private chat feature on Zoom, and/or through simultaneous phone calls or audio messaging via WhatsApp. Participants consistently shared that WhatsApp was the preferred communication platform, and it only requires Wi-Fi connectivity and does not use up minutes, which is an added plus. These language aides could then offer customized and differentiated one-or-one or pair or small-group follow-up sessions and pay closer attention to each student's receipt of CI, interaction and the time that they get to communicate, as well as feedback received and/or incorporated. For instance, for those Special needs students who have trouble processing written text (i.e., reading and writing), they could employ audio messaging

Incorporate pair or small group work. Assign ELL students buddies from their grade or another and strategically pair students to ensure two-way instruction of specific content

Don't just give students busy work or no work; teach them responsibility, put them in charge of their own education, and provide them with proper guidance (i.e., check in with them individually).

Assign ELL-relevant videos (or other visual aides) and audio material daily and to cover non-instructional days (e.g., Friday to Sunday in HCPSS, Maryland) to ensure that ELL students have a steady stream to CI, and create thoughtful and relevant activities to ensure that they get to interact with the content and apply key concepts under focus as comprehension is generally greatly facilitated and often accelerated through interactive and application-oriented tasks

Similarly, team up with other colleagues (much like IEP teams coordinate and engage to work to enhance the learning of special needs students) to ensure that these students get lots of feedback and on a sustained basis from both content instructors and ESL instructors and/or support staff. One of the challenges is that when homework completion isn't required, ELL students in particular do not uniformly have the opportunity to receive feedback

Follow up with these students to ensure that they understood the feedback you shared in writing and/or through other means or have an ELL specialist assist you with this.

Engage with and empower parents so that this in turn will empower students. How so? When we connect with parents and make a genuine effort (e.g. by getting to know them, learning much more about each student's interests and needs, their learning styles and their and their parent's learning objectives, finding out who resides in our students' homes and communities, what challenges they face (e.g., restricted learning space, physical noise, chores/distractions, social isolation, among others), we can make more informed decisions and can offer more relevant and customized instruction and work with parents to tap the resources available in student's homes, social contact circles, and in their immediate neighborhoods, including siblings, other family members, neighbors, friends, and advocates.=

Enlist the help of parents with monitoring each student's access to these vital language-literacy ingredients. This can be done in a number of ways. Parents or siblings could be invited to monitor each student's language-literacy growth via a tracker or checklist and to send a brief daily audio or email file with their observations to the ESL teacher who can then work with the parents to make necessary changes.

Enlist the help of parents with recording students while they are taking class or while they are interacting with siblings and others (which parents could oversee).

Counselors should routinely check in with each ESL and/or special needs student daily or at a minimum weekly. It would help if they speak or at least understand the student's home languages. If not, they should be encouraged to attend Survival language classes and/or enlist the help of interpreters, particularly other students who know these languages and who attend the same school (i.e., mentors).

Instituting a student mentorship program (by language and grade and/or subject area) at every school would be immensely helpful to all students, particularly ESL students.

One of the student participants in the present study shared that while it was helpful to receive an emailed overview of the modules to be covered at the start of each week, he recommended providing ESL students with an additional list of focus areas before each session, as well. He also recommended that teachers follow up with each student via phone or a video-based medium to check on their understanding and ability to apply what they discussed in each session. "This, to me is how you can tell if a student learns what you talk about in the Google Meets part," this 13-year old shared. Instructors could also spell out learning objectives or outcomes before and after each session, so that students are constantly reminded of key constructs and other content to pay close attention to, and instructors and students are on the same page. In general, while ESL students reported receiving some comprehensible input (CI) in English through classroom materials/ resources and weekly sessions, all of the participants reported, needing many more opportunities to use English, and to receive and incorporate feedback. To reduce their instructional burden, and to enhance and

diversify the CI that ESL students are exposed to, course instructors could plan their courses in such a way as to allow all students multiple opportunities for interaction and feedback. For example, feedback could be invited from multiple sources, including peers, volunteers, and support staff.

10.4 Employ Relevant Resources and Genuinely Interactive Technology

Instructors and support staff must carefully select resources and technology because not all resources are meaningful and relevant, and not all tech platforms are truly interactive and ELL- and/or special needs-student-engaging. Flip grid and other audio- and video-based instructional apps could and should be utilized by instructors to track via brief 90-second video segments that students can submit relatively easily—each student's interactivity, and to assess the nature, quality, and frequency of the feedback they receive from assigned buddies/peer tutors and others. Even the voice memo feature on most smart phones could be used to engage students and peers. All students could be required to engage in and periodically record clips of their peer interactions using voice memos, Google Meets, Zoom, FaceTime, and/or WhatsApp's audio messaging, and to share clips with their instructors. The topics for these interactions (most of which will be in English--with the potential for translanguaging) could be open or assigned. Instructions to students could read as follows: "After reading "No Food is Healthy, Not Even Kale," and/or viewing the TED talk titled "Gut Health," discuss with your assigned partner the author's main point and support points/reasons proffered and video-record your partner sharing what they consider to be strengths and weaknesses in these resources. Next, videotape yourself as you offer them recommendations. Pay close attention to their delivery (including their pronunciation, their tone of voice, pitch and intonation, word choice, sentence structure, organization of ideas and the informational content. Record their reactions to your recommendations, as well and upload at least one video clip each (i.e., 1.5 minutes per participant) onto Flip grid by 5p.m. today."

10.5 Integrate Peer Exchanges

Peer exchanges are essential to student learning. Instructors and support staff should make every effort to incorporate pair or groupwork into every class session and assignment. This is because peer exchanges help most students learn better and faster (Briggs, 2013). They have also been found to motivate most students because students can see that they are not alone, and what their classmates say verbally and nonverbally speaks volumes to them. By routinely assigning each ESL student one or more peer mentors/tutors and/or by creating weekly student groups or partnerships, all students would get to interact with their peers on a sustained basis. Genuine (self-initiated as opposed to brief instructor-prompted) interaction is an essential element on learning at all levels, pre-K through college and beyond. The current set-up does not encourage this. Dan shared that only one teacher had

assigned a group activity and that his classmates and him were invited to record themselves and upload the audio file onto canvas only once in the course of the eight weeks of Online instruction. He shared that these were the only two assignments (the group and individual recording) that he enjoyed and he clearly found them to be more self- and peer-motivating and interactive than the assignments his classmates and him are routinely assigned. While some students and families have taken the initiative to interact with selected classmates and other friends through (group) chats via Snapchat, Face Time, WhatsApp, and Zoom outlets, and a few ESL families (all middle to high income) have reached out to religious organizations to continue to receive Online ESL tutoring for their children once or twice a week, the vast majority of low-income ESL students' language needs have been minimally met in the three school districts under focus. Based on our limited data, Clark County Schools appeared to be quite well positioned to ensure continuity of learning for their ELLs. Of the three school districts under focus in the present study, this particular one serves the largest number of ELLs mostly Hispanic and Spanish-speaking. It also has the largest number of bilingual and Spanish-speaking employees, and designated Parent and Family Engagement specialists at every school. As part of their professional development, employees are offered Survival Spanish and even Certification-oriented Spanish language classes with commensurate salary increases offered as an incentive (Lantz, personal communication). These hallmarks are correlate-able and noteworthy.

10.6 Employ Multimodal & Multilingual Communication

As regards communicating with families, multimodal and multilingual communication are highly recommended, so that parents who are unaccustomed to email or who might not use email have the benefit of constant communication via text messages, and all parents/caregivers are clear about expectations, learning format, delivery mechanisms, subject areas, instructional times, deliverables, timelines, and assessment mechanisms. In the case of the HOCO communication aimed at informing families about plans for "continuity of learning," to hear the content and to determine its accessibility, the researchers called the numbers listed for specific language groups on the evening of April 2 (after hours), and left their number on the Spanish-line voice service in case they need more volunteers to reach out to families. No call for volunteers or a link for language translators is provided

Instructor self-reflection is very helpful for planning and assessment purposes, so instituting an electronic system that would allow for educators to continually and quickly share their reflections on each student with team members involved in ensuring maximal student learning (e.g., content teachers, ESL instructors, para teachers and parents) would be beneficial for all parties and particularly ESL and special needs students. The record feature on most smart phones, for instance, could be helpful in this regard. Files could be saved and instantly saved with all parties via text and/or email and they could be accessed by recipients on their own time and such reflections and sharing would both prompt and enable greater collaboration and more

timely and effective intervention Periodically convening focus groups consisting of parents, students, and educators at individual schools--via Zoom or Google Meets and Online groups, such as WhatsApp chat groups would be immensely beneficial in enhancing services to ESL students and families. Timely resource creation and resource sharing could be one of the outcomes. Given that ESL instructors and support staff reported feeling overwhelmed and overworked in all the school districts under focus (and we can extrapolate that this is a problem nationally) and many are unable to attend every single content class, recording classes would be helpful. Then instructors, para-teachers and other support staff and even parents or assigned mentors and partners could access these lessons, mine key words and other language (e.g., sentence structures) and associated content, and work with ESL students to ensure that they understand key concepts in each and every content class. This approach would allow for them to check on each student's comprehension (i.e., what parts they did or didn't understand) and would be more effective and comprehensive than simply asking a student if they understood the lesson and/or whether they had any questions. Google Hangouts' record feature, while not 100 percent accurate could be employed during class sessions (with chat-based edits shared by instructors when errors in the captions are glaring or when they limit or interfere with comprehension). This way, students would also be steadily exposed to print and would get into the habit of reading and would find themselves having to engage in faster eye movement and could, in fact, acquire speed reading skills to keep up with the 'moving' screen. The ESL educators who participated in the present study identified reading and writing as the biggest learning/language challenges for their ESL students, so a sustained source of comprehensible input (i.e., print) would be helpful, and ESL students could be prompted to type in the chat bar and to steadily increase their literacy habits consciously and unconsciously so that they begin to see and use written English more and more, and teachers can respond by providing direct or indirect feedback in the form of corrections to spelling and sentences (e.g., grammar) and punctuation through private chat (as in Canvas) and/or through Track Changes in Word. Track Changes also allows for audio comments, so these can be inserted, as well.

11. Directions for Future Research

Follow-up studies that examine social media postings by schools and educators, including parents, would be helpful. A look at students' social media postings during the COVID-19 school closure period could also be eye-opening.

Research on the role played by family and community engagement specialists where available during this crisis-induced school closure would be helpful for instructional planning purposes. Clark County Schools in Las Vegas, NV, for instance, has a Family and Community Engagement Services Division. Family and community support staff have a variety of designations and roles. In HoCo, Maryland, the term Hispanic Liaisons is employed, yet many schools with sizeable

Hispanic populations do not have a Hispanic Liaison. Parent and Family representatives must be hired and/or volunteers solicited and obtained in the interim for all "ELLs." On the policy and federal funding front, Title III funding must be increased and certainly not discontinued, as is the case in the present President's proposed educational budget for fiscal year 2020. According to the non-profit UnidosUS, "The English learner (EL) population grew by 11.35% between 2009 and 2016, but Title III funding the only federal funding stream dedicated to the teaching of ELs has decreased by 9.4% since 2009." "Latinos are overrepresented among ELs, making up nearly 4 million English learners in K-12 public schools," she continues. "In order to ensure that millions of Latino students are not denied a high-quality education and inhibited from contributing to the United States economy, Title III funding must increase" (e-mail from Kendall Evans, dated June 9). Income disparities and their impact should be studied, as income does appear to impact students' access to English language and other academic and social support services. For instance, in the present study, only one student, the single respondent from a middle-income home (with a household income of over $90,000) was receiving weekly English tutoring, as well as tutoring in two academic subjects and she had access to these support services even prior to the COVID-induced school closure. In short, by virtue of advocacy from her middle-income parents and her community, she is relatively well-positioned academically, and she arguably has a greater chance of satisfactorily and successfully completing her courses, and will very likely continue to steadily grow her English language and very likely too, additional skills through the summer of 2020 given that she will continue to receive instructional help, unlike the other (low-income) students who participated in the present study.

12. Funding & Policy

Advocacy in the educational policy realm is also needed. If the U.S. House of Representatives were to add an additional one billion dollars in Title II funding to the COVID CARES Act package, we might have adequate funding to cater to this growing segment of our school-age population, namely ELLs. Funding could eb used for PD and to hire Family and Community liaisons and other key educators as opposed to schools and instructors would need to ensure that they collaborate with students and their families to effectively ascertain each family's needs and to be responsive. They could conduct a needs assessment and a follow-up survey to gauge success. Inviting feedback from more area students and families would be helpful and essential. Given that the instructional and learning onus is now more visibly shared by trained educators and parents, trust-building and collaboration between these groups is essential.

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Appendix A: Student Survey (N = 11)

Selected audio files can be accessed at: https://soundcloud.com/pandey-interview/sets/students-interviews

1. Describe your sentiments one week after school closed (ecstatic/very happy, happy, neither happy nor sad, both happy and sad, sad, very sad, other)
2. Describe your sentiments one month after school closed (ecstatic/very happy, happy, neither happy nor sad, both happy and sad, sad, very sad, other)
3. Describe your sentiments 2-3 days before remote classes started
4. Did your school send instructions?
5. Through what media? (email, text, phone calls, other)
6. How much do you believe you have learned through remote classes? [not enough, a little, a lot]
7. Have you had the same or similar opportunities to hear and practice English since school closed? Yes No:___, Why or why not? comments:
8. What have been your most difficult or challenging classes and why?
9. Do you turn your camera on or off during class, and why?
10. If you were your subject areas and your ESL teacher, what would you do differently? Any recommendations for any or all of your teachers?

Appendix B: Parent Survey (N = 10)

Link to selected audio files: https://soundcloud.com/pandey-interview/sets/esl-parent-interviews

1. Gender: ___ male; ___ female
2. Age: ___under 18; ____18-25; ___26-35; ___over 36
3. Total monthly household income during the quarantine: __under $2,000 a month; __$2,000 to 3,000; over $3,000___
4. Family designation or role of person completing this survey: ___parent; ___student; ___other [please specify]

5. Your highest level of schooling: ___ elementary; ___ high school; ___some college; __finished college
6. The language you use most frequently to communicate with your children and other residents:
7. Other languages heard, understood, and/or used in your home:
8. Total number of children living in your household, and their ages:
9. Do additional adults live in your home? __ Yes; ___no. If so, how many? __2; __3; __ more than 3
10. Which of the following best describes the type of work you do: ___services; ___farming;__office work; __ other (please specify type of work: ____)
11. Are you working during the quarantine? __ Yes; ___no
12. Has your child(ren) had opportunities to practice hearing or speaking English during the quarantine? __ Yes; ___no
13. Has your child(ren) learned anything during the quarantine? __ Yes; ___no
14. How have you been trying to help your child continue learning during this quarantine? __ Yes; ___no. If you answered "yes," please share what you have been teaching your child(ren) and/or how you have tried to help them continue to learn: _____
15. Did your child's school or teacher contact you/your family during the quarantine? __ Yes; ___no
16. If "yes," what language did your child's school and/or teacher use to contact you during the quarantine? _____
17. Has your child's school/teacher provided you with information or guidelines to help your child(ren) continue learning during this quarantine? ___ yes; ___ no
18. Please rate the timeliness of the messages you received from your child's school following school closures: Poor (1) Fair (2) Good (3) Excellent (4)
19. Please rate the quality of the communication you have received from your child's school during the quarantine?

    Poor (1) Fair (2) Good (3) Excellent (4)
20. Please rate the value of the information you have received from your child's school or teacher during the quarantine

Not at all useful (1) somewhat useful (2) useful (3) very useful (4)

21. Did you find the communication you received from your child's school or teacher during the quarantine reassuring? __ Yes; ___no
22. Which of the following mechanisms did your child's school use to reach you (check all that apply)?

____Phone calls ____written text messages ___Audio texts on Whatsapp ___Email

___Postal Mail ____home visit(s) ___Other [please specify____]

23. Which of these mechanisms or what additional forms of communication would you like your child's school or teacher to use (please list here in order of preference)? _____
24. Has your child been assigned any homework during this quarantine? ___ yes; ___ no

25. Would you like your child to be assigned homework during the quarantine? ___ yes; ___ no
26. Would you like your child's teacher to check in with or connect with your child during this quarantine? ___ yes; ___ no
27. Using what platform? (check all that apply) ____Phone calls ____written text messages ___Audio texts on Whatsapp ___Email ___Postal Mail ____home visit(s) ___Other [please specify____
28. Is your child ready for remote learning? ___yes; ___no
29. What obstacles or challenges is your child and/or family experiencing with non-face-to-face instruction (check all that apply): ___ no tablet or computer; ___ limited quiet space; ___ other (pls. specify)
30. Did your child's school or teacher offer to provide your child(ren) with a learning device (e.g., tablet or computer) during this quarantine? ___ yes; ___ no
31. Please rate your level of anxiety as regards your child's education during this quarantine?

    Not at all worried/anxious (1) Somewhat anxious (2) Anxious (3) Highly anxious (4)
32. Please rate each child's level of anxiety as regards school work or learning during this quarantine?

    Not at all worried/anxious (1) Somewhat anxious (2) Anxious (3) Highly anxious (4)
33. If you have an elementary school child and a middle and/or high schooler, are you more worried about any one child's continued learning? ___ yes; ___ no. If you responded "yes," please explain why:_____

Please share additional comments or recommendations for your child's teacher or school here:

Appendix C: Educator (Instructor & Administrator) Survey

(N = 13)

Directions: Please take a few minutes to respond to these questions. Your feedback will be used to enhance school communication and student success everywhere. Thank you kindly!

1. What is your job title and/or role and approximately how many ELLs do you serve directly or indirectly?
2. What forms of communication are you currently using or planning to employ with your students/families during this COVID-19 school closure period?
3. Have your ELL students and/or families been contacted? If so, how and what has been your primary reason for reaching them (e.g. to inform them, to inspire them, to . . .), and how soon after schools closed did you contact them?
4. How successful have you been at meeting their needs?
5. Are any communication outlets, communicative media/resources, and/or messages intended solely for your EL families/students? If so, what forms do they take (e.g., web pages, email messages, phone calls, texts, specific apps), and why and how are they being utilized?
6. How successful are these individual communication mechanisms or platforms in reaching and/or empowering EL students and families? Would you recommend one or more tools?

7. In your experience, how valuable are these communication mechanisms, and the messages that they are being used to communicate in meeting the needs of EL students (i.e., in supporting their continued learning) and in reassuring students, parents and other family members in the areas under focus?
8. In your opinion, how successful have you been in reaching and/or meeting the needs of your ELL students during this quarantine-imposed school closure period?
9. What challenges, if any, have you encountered in reaching your ELL students/families, and what are some solutions you would propose?

We would like to thank and acknowledge your contributions in publications and other outcomes (e.g., PD sessions) resulting from this survey. Please share your name if you are willing to be officially recognized.

Appendix D: Pandey's Sample Language Trackers for Teachers, Parents, & Other Care Providers of Infants & Toddlers

This tool can be modified to monitor the language and literacy progress of any language learner.

Date: ____ Child's name & age: _____

Language(s) the child hears &/or uses:_____

Time of day (Circle): morning, lunchtime, afternoon, evening, night

Location (e.g., classroom, playground, home, friend's house, at community event):

1. Is the infant/toddler hearing conversations or spoken language? Yes__No____
2. Does s/he respond to spoken language or visuals (i.e., turns head or eyes) ?: Yes ___; No ___;
3. Does s/he show that they follow the conversation or exchange? (e.g., through responsive actions, like head nods, or through eye movements, and/or other signals?): Yes ___; No ____
4. Is anyone interacting with your infant? Yes__No____ Who?___ Age of person? ____How? _____For how long? (minutes/hours): _____
5. List all individuals that typically interact with the infant, & their estimated ages: e,g., Alex (boy, 9)
6. Does the infant appear to be equally responsive to each person in the exchange? Yes__No____ Explain (e.g., they get more excited and make more noises when they see or hear ___):
7. Who asks the infant the most questions? __a child __one or more adults __nobody
8. Does anyone try to get your infant to make noises and/or respond in other ways? Yes__No____ How so ? Explain (e.g., by providing the correct pronunciation for wawa/agua → Waa'teR!)
9. Which of the following best describes the kind of language (including nonverbal) that one or more interactors uses with your infant? (feel free to select more than one)

Uses mostly nonverbal lang./signals (mime &/or gestures): ___

Uses mostly statements, many of which invite participation:

Uses mostly directives (e.g., stand up, sit on the rug, clap/raise your hands):

Uses mostly music or songs and encourages participation (through speech or gestures):

Allows the child to lead through signals or talk, & responds when appropriate:

Uses mostly sounds and varied intonation (e.g. kissing smacking, farting, "peek-a-boo"):

Asks many yes-no questions___ Asks many Wh- Questions___

Asks many rhetorical Qs (no answer required)___ Asks many tag Qs (e.g., don't you?)_____

Other (e.g., hums, sings, plays music, dances and awaits infant's reactions, etc. pls. specify):

10. Identify the kinds of questions, if any, used by any adult(s) interacting with the child:

Yes-no Questions___Wh-Questions __ Rhetorical Qs ___ Tag Qs ____Indirect Qs ("I wish . . .")

11. Describe the language(s) the infant uses: (e.g., gestures and some Spanish words—no, mio!)
12. Circle all language you observe the infant using:

    ___Nonverbal signals (e.g., , drawing, frowning, smiling, laughing, crying, running to initiate a chase, screaming, nodding, pointing, pulling— to show something, etc.):___ sounds; __words __phrases (2 or more words used for an idea; e.g., No- mio for It's mine!) __ self-initiated turns (e.g., Mama? inviting participation of person identified, for example). Other [pls. specify]: ____
13. Does the infant observe eye movements and/or turn-taking rules (for joining and/or leaving a conversation? (e.g., wait for a suitable opportunity to interject, allow for their peer or another speaker to finish talking, and/or show that they follow)?: Yes ___; No ____ ; Unable to determine:
14. Do you spot any written language in the observation space? (e.g., letters, words, pictures of family and friends, books) Yes__No____ Does anyone draw attention to written language? Yes__No____
15. Does anyone draw the infant's attention to written lang. ? Yes__No____
16. Does the child have an opportunity to USE their primary language (e.g., a language used in their homes) Yes ___; No ____Unclear ___
17. Does the infant have an opportunity to hear and/or USE another lang. (e.g., English)? Yes ___; No ____ Through what means? (e.g., a TV program, a video clip, a song, a video game, etc.)
18. Does anyone correct the infant? Yes ___; No___; NA
19. How does the infant respond to the feedback they receive? (e.g., well/they promptly modify their lang./behavior; not well/they ignore the feedback or implement it incorrectly:___; unclear_____)
20. Who provides the infant with the most constructive feedback, and how do you determine this?____
21. Could you use your observations to plan future pairings and groupings? Yes ___; No___ How?
22. List any new sounds the infant hears (e.g., "s" in "treasure"):
23. Does anyone interacting with the infant emphasize specific sounds? Yes__No____ If so, how? __
24. List sounds and/or other language forms that the infant appears to have difficulty either following or enunciating:

25. List the language (e.g., Spanish) and language forms (e.g. sounds) the infant uses:
26. List any phrases and/or longer language building blocks that the infant uses in this exchange:
27. Does the infant initiate interaction (using nonverbal signals or lang. that invites participation, such as participation-eliciting intonation, a question or a directive)? Yes__No____If so, list examples:

Name, age, and title of person completing this form (e.g., teacher, teaching aide, Mom, cousin, friend, age 32)

Start & end timed of observation or estimated length of observation: