

# Chapter 4

## Recognizing the Inequalities in Remote Learning Education

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The COVID-19 pandemic has altered the instructional approach in K-12 and institutions of higher education to be almost solely online. The challenges for schools at the beginning of the pandemic were immense. Schools faced issues such as not having a plan for families to access WiFi, students not having one-to-one devices at home, parents working at home without anyone to help students log in, special education population/disabled students unable to acquire adequate learning services, and students in poverty or experiencing homelessness who were helpless to quarantine and did not know where their next meal would come from. The closing of school doors exacerbated the historical and pervasive educational inequities and generational implications within marginalized communities. Given the tense relationships and not-great experiences with an education that many marginalized families have had, remote learning progression was a rocky one.*

### **PRELUDE**

Among 501 school district superintendents from across the country who responded to a survey, 83% said that it was difficult to provide special education services equitably during remote learning (Barum & Bryan, 2020). However, the quick switch to distance learning has validated the existence of vast and unrelenting inequities in educational opportunities. When education is provided through online or remote learning only, it is not always accessible to all, meaning it denies education to some, creating an even more inequitable system with a “vulnerable class” (García & Weiss, 2017, p. 2). In the case of Plyler v Doe (1982), Justice Blackmun noted:

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*When a state provides education to some and denies it to others, it immediately and inevitably creates class distinctions of a type fundamentally inconsistent with (the purposes of the Equal Protection Clause because) an uneducated child is denied even the opportunity to achieve. When those children are members of an identifiable class, the state has created a separable and identifiable underclass. (p.2)*

It has become a common understanding in the research community that students transition into schools, not from a blank slate, but from a biased and unequal society. Ladson-Billings (2006) argued that it is more like an education debt, or “damage done to particular communities by the historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral decisions and policies that characterize our society” (p.1).

More than ever, leaders in education must continually strive to create cultural competency within the school community and ensure equity. According to West Ed (2014), equity in education can be viewed through multiple lenses: fairness, inclusion, and justice. This concept of equity will be addressed as it relates to fairness and inclusion, which means that each student or family has access to quality education and can participate, regardless of race, socioeconomic status, linguistic diversity or culture (OECD, 2012). This chapter examines equity in education amidst the COVID-19 pandemic from the perspectives of educators and leaders mainly in Peoria Public School District 150, also included is Head Start schools in Peoria II, Chicago Public Schools, and Houston University Graduate School cohort, members from across five states and Canada, and their views of how school may look differently once it reopens.

## **INTRODUCTION**

If there is one single positive point to make concerning the COVID-19 pandemic, it is that education has finally received its proper recognition. School districts have struggled to create effective plans to support all learning. Parents have struggled to implement this plan in nontraditional settings, and many have not had access to the tools or resources or have not had the wherewithal necessary to make the transition successful. Students at home have complicated parents’ already critical economic situations because they must now provide education and additional meals that schools once offered. Child advocates are worried about the COVID-19 pandemic’s effect on youth stuck at home with their abusers (Ingram, 2020). The knowledge that a safe place for many students is not always home, but, most often, is school. A troubling fact for many educators since the presence of the pandemic. Besides, social isolation and the fear over the viral threat have escalated opportunities for abuse or increased trauma. In a study on how hurricane Harvey affected families that had already been exposed to violence and child abuse, results displayed that stress associated with the disaster led to higher rates of both domestic violence and child abuse during and after the storm (Abramson, 2020). Despite the media alleging a decrease in abuse reporting, many educators in this research fear the causes for this have very little to do with the abuser being less abusive, but more with fewer reporting from schools due to the closures.

According to psychologists, children are among the most vulnerable to abuse during the pandemic, even children of parents with excellent behavior management skills (Abramson, 2020). However, for victims of domestic violence, adding to the count children that are exposed to it, being home and safe do not correlate— and the unprecedented stress of the pandemic could breed unsafety in homes where violence may not have been an issue before (Abramson, 2020). Research shows that increased stress levels among parents are often a major predictor of physical abuse and neglect. Children are experiencing stress and uncertainty about world changes, especially related to the school closures and reopening.

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