Irene Koundouroudas

My advocacy issue is to gather the resources needed to make virtual learning as effective and useful to students as possible. Keeping children safe during this pandemic must be the number priority of every family. Keeping children safe during the Coronavirus pandemic while making sure they still receive the quality education that they deserve is challenging. It has already been shown that the reopening of schools has led to an increase in infections, which has prompted the re-closing of schools. From a health perspective, the concern is that if the schools are open, there is no way to guarantee that a student won't get infected, and then spread that infection within their community. For now the safest place for children to receive their education is their home. That is why it is so important for virtual learning to be as good as it can be.

This is an issue that affects school age children, their families, and the communities these families live in. If the quality of education that children receive during this pandemic is of lesser value, or incomplete the effects could be devastating. They need the kind of education that will prepare them for their futures, no matter how uncertain or unexpected that future may be. Until testing becomes a regular occurrence for all, and a vaccine has been proven to work, reopening schools is taking a huge risk. The safest way to educate children during this crisis is to educate them at home

However, homeschooling requires a huge commitment of time and effort from parents. It requires parents to teach lessons, assign homework, administer and grade tests, all while keeping within the Department of Education standards and curriculum. This is daunting for most

parents.The learning needs to be the responsibility of qualified educators who have been licensed and trained to do this task. Many schools since the shutdown have instilled some sort of virtual learning component in order to meet the educational needs of their students to varying degrees of success.

Government and school officials need to consult with experts in the field of virtual technology and distance learning to be made aware of the best tools at their disposal. Teachers should also have training for the new challenges presented by a virtual teaching environment. It is imperative that resources be given to virtual learning so for as long as it is needed it will offer the best kind of education it can to students.

Research Source Summaries:

Source #1 - Cathy Li; Farah Lalani; World Economics Forum, *The Rise of Online Learning During the Covid-19 Pandemic…*

https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/coronavirus-education-global-covid19-online-digital-learning/

The article details the increase in online learning since the Coronavirus has forced the shutdown of schools. "Globally over 1.2 billion children are out of the classroom." That is a staggering number of students no longer able to attend a physical school building. Tech companies are now racing to come up with new technology to cater to this new consumer market. "Whether it is language apps, virtual tutoring, video conferencing tools, or online learning software, there has been a significant surge in usage since COVID-19." The article also asserts that this model of learning may still be around after the pandemic is over. "Research

suggests that online learning has been shown to increase retention of information, and take less time, meaning the changes coronavirus have caused might be here to stay."

There are challenges that need to be overcome if this is to be the future of education. "Some students without reliable internet access and/or technology struggle to participate in digital learning,,, whilst virtually all 15-year-olds from a privileged background said they had a computer to work on, nearly 25% of those from disadvantaged backgrounds did not."

This article supports the idea that virtual learning is the main way that students are learning now and for the foreseeable future. There are challenges to be overcome to make it a more effective tool for learning. Correcting the technology gap between schools will become more important than ever to ensure that every student has access to this new type of learning.

Source #2 - Farah, Kareem, Edutopia.org, 4 Tips for Teachers Shifting to Teaching Online,

https://www.edutopia.org/article/4-tips-supporting-learning-home

The article is written by Kareem Farah, an educator with experience in distance learning, who shares what he has learned. He has created The Modern Classrooms Project, which helps other educators become better "distance teachers."

He has four tips for teachers who have never done this type of teaching before. The first is that "simplicity is key." Activities should have very clear instructions, and be able to be done utilizing only one or two resources. Educators need to be pushed how "they can be leaner and more concise with their delivery of new information."

The second tip is to "Establish a Digital Home Base." A single digital platform that students can visit for the most recent and up-to-date information is vital. Students need to feel comfortable going to the same place to access the same tools. "The farther away you are from your students, the more important it is to cultivate stability and practice norms."

The third tip is to "Prioritize longer, student-driven assignments and tasks that buy you time to keep planning future units" Focus on building toward long-term projects where students have a clear set of checkpoints and deadlines that need to be met.

The fourth tip is to create "Individual touchpoints." It is the human connection that the students will miss the most. "While it can be tempting to focus on content in your distance learning assignments and instructional videos, what matters more is creating structures for personalized touchpoints with your students." You can create these touchpoints through emails, video messages, phone calls, comments on shared documents, etc.

This article points out how prevalent virtual learning is and how necessary it will be for teachers to have the proper training to be able to excel in this new environment.

Resources:

1) Cathy Li; Farah Lalani; World Economics Forum, *The Rise of Online Learning During the Covid-19 Pandemic*…

https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/04/coronavirus-education-global-covid19-online-digital-learning/

2) Farah, Kareem, *4 Tips for Teachers Shifting to Teaching Online*, Edutopia.org, March 20, 2020

https://www.edutopia.org/article/4-tips-supporting-learning-home

3. Advocacy actions and Commentary:

1. <u>Small advocacy action:</u> *Explain what type of advocacy and action is needed by* **you** *to bring your issue to the attention of the target audience.*

   This is an issue that appears daily in the news, so it isn't about bringing the issue to the attention of the public. It is more about getting families used to the idea that schools may not be opening for a while and their children need to receive the best education possible under difficult circumstances. Their safest option is to be schooled at home using modern technologies and trained educators. Both of these resources require funds and research.

2. <u>Large advocacy action:</u> *Write about a reasonable action that could be taken by the target audience to address the issue. In addition, explain how different stakeholders (teachers, school leaders, parents, children, other community members) could be affected and/or play a role.*

   There needs to be constant communication between educators, parents and students offering feedback, tips and their experiences with virtual learning. New technologies and teaching strategies can be discussed, with parents and students weighing in how effective these strategies will be.

3. <u>Commentary:</u> *Write a concluding paragraph about why you chose this issue to advocate for. Why is this issue personally meaningful to you? How does this topic impact you as an early childhood educator?*

   As a future educator, I can't think of an issue more important than ensuring that the quality of education received by children is not compromised because of the shutdown of schools. Resources must be given to make virtual learning as good as it can be for as long as it is being used.