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Background

The abrupt onset of the COVID-19 pandemic drastically altered and effected California's K-12 education system and its students. The forced closure of public schools across the state caused a major disruption to academic learning environments. Millions of students were mandated to switch from traditional, in-person learning to fully remote classrooms for the first time. Students all across California and across the country, were mandated to learn and complete coursework from home. Prior to the pandemic, there was already a [concern for the growing achievement gap among primary and secondary students in California](#). The drastic shift in learning environments for students caused a new wave of issues to arise for California's K-12 education system.

Obstacles

The virtual learning environment was new for both students and teachers. The rapid shift in such a short period of time to virtual learning made it incredibly difficult to adjust and navigate for students. Primary and secondary students had a difficult time creating and participating in their virtual classrooms from home because their surrounding environments were often distracting. A middle school science teacher from Sacramento City Unified School District (SCUSD) shared that often it was difficult for his students to concentrate during lessons. Students would often either turn off their cameras, become distracted by other siblings, or working on off-topic tasks. Being able to keep students' attention in a remote setting made it difficult for teachers to keep up with their lesson plans and accomplish learning goals.

Not only were students struggling to adjust to a new environments, but also had to learn how to navigate new technology and online software programs they needed for school, such as Zoom. Both students and teachers received very little guidance when it came to learning how to properly operate and utilize necessary softwares. The lack of knowledge around such programs made virtual learning much more frustrating and time consuming when new tech issues would arise. [Although students in California received laptops from their school districts](#), students continued to have issues with technology. Students often had issues having a strong, stable internet connection and the quality of the laptops provided were sometimes a problem. School districts attempted to help alleviate some of these struggles by setting up mobile internet hotspots for their students and generally having laptop replacements available if necessary. Students would often still encounter these issues when remote throughout the academic school year.

Once students were able to return to school in-person full time, students continued to encounter problems with adjusting to being back in school. A high school senior, who was in 8th grade when the pandemic began, shared that their transition from remote learning back to in-person was a very hard transition. They expressed that they had trouble adjusting to the new in-person curriculum that was different from what they had been working on remotely. Additionally, the grading scale they felt was different from what they had been used to online. When they returned in-person as a high school student, their first semester grades declined slightly due the transition period. Despite being able to return to school in-person, students' academic progress across California had been slowed down by effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Recommendations

In order to get California students back on track academically and to help them meet state achievement goals, immediate state funding is necessary. The state of California should [continue to invest in primary and secondary education](#) resources needed to help students meet state standards. Specifically, to emphasize funding that will support school districts with a high number of socio-economically disadvantaged students and with students not meeting academic thresholds.