Identifying "Missing" Students Amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

This poster examines the report of 3 million "missing" children, or rather unaccounted for U.S. students, who experienced educational disruption during the COVID-19 pandemic. As school personnel work to address academic, social, and behavioral needs resulting from this disruption, having a clear understanding of the demographics of the unaccounted for students is of paramount importance to school psychologists. By understanding the challenges experienced by the students that faced educational disruption, school psychologists will be able to improve advocacy and services in future practice. Education and training for school psychologists centered on the unique needs of the "missing" children is necessary in order to properly advocate for their well-being and success. Training for school psychologists must include evidence-based practices to address the needs of the 'missing' children, including the implementation of Tier 2 services, improved access to virtual learning environments, and career-focused curriculum.

Who are the "missing" students?

Background

- As schools began to close in March of 2020, there was a quick transition to virtual options to keep students engaged in learning and to protect students from COVID-19.
- Many children stopped engaging in academic instructional activities due to lack of technological resources, school programming, and instructional strategies (Domina et al., 2021).
- In the fall of 2020, media outlets reported **3 million *missing*** children. This number references the Bellwether report, a study that sought to investigate the number and demographics of students that experienced prolonged educational disruption.

Demographics

- Those most likely to lose access to education disproportionately included children who are more likely to experience school challenges in the US: **unhomed, lower levels of English proficiency, and disabilities** (BEP, 2021).
- However, some students that experienced significant educational disruption were left out of the estimated 3 million students. These students included those in **rural communities** and children that experience **high-mobility** and students from a **lower SES.**

3 Million Kids — October 2020 / High Risk: Child Care Responsibilities, Domestic Violence in Homes, Foster Care, English Language Learners (ELL), Death, Low SES (Lack of Technology), Juvenile Detention / Alternative Settings, Disabilities, Unhomed, Mobility

What challenges were experienced by the students that faced educational disruption?
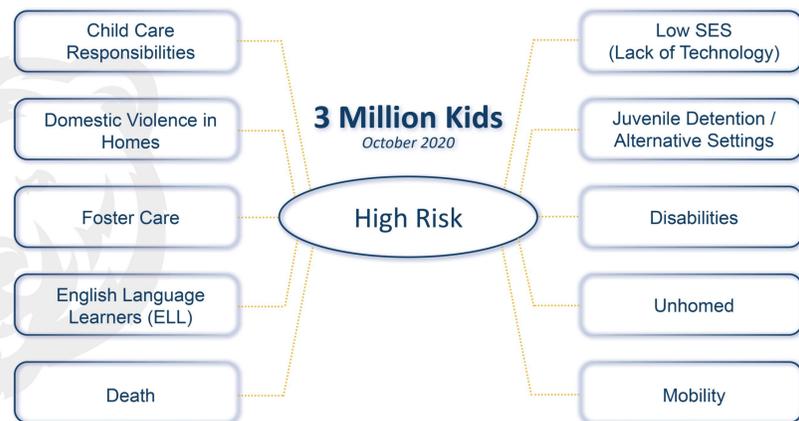
Low SES Students:
- Lower access to technology when compared to higher SES students (Wainer et al., 2015).
- More likely to struggle with food insecurities, have decreased access to healthcare, and were more likely to get sick with or die from COVID-19 (Perez-Escamilla et al., 2020; Blundell et al., 2020).
- More likely to have parents still working outside of the home, possibly leading to less academic motivation due to lack of parental assistance when compared to their classmates (Klootwijk et.al., 2021; Gould & Shierholz, 2020)

Children of High Mobility:
- Those with insecure housing situations struggled to find WiFi and were attempting to utilize community centers and libraries for their school requirements (McInnes et.al, 2013).
- Increased risk for COVID-19 infection, which added to this population's decreased mental health and physical health during this year (Perl, 2020).

English Language Learners and Immigrant Populations:
- Students who have limited English proficiency are less likely to have the technology necessary for successful online learning (Wainer et al., 2015)
- Families with limited language proficiencies had a harder time accessing information regarding their school's plans and expectations (Santiago et al., 2021).
- With larger family units, multiple students in the same household trying to access virtual school (Ross et al., 2020).

Rural Populations:
- Lack of teacher-student contact (United States Department of Education, 2021).
- More obstacles accessing Broadband than residents in urban areas (Lai & Widmar, 2020),
- Limited internet provider options (Lai & Widmar, 2020).

Students with Disabilities:
- Lack of access to paraprofessional support and various accommodations in the online setting (Masi et al., 2021).
- Varied success of distance learning, video call modification to direct treatment interventions was met with varied success, for others it was ineffective (Rodriguez, 2020)

How can we remediate learning loss experienced by affected students through intervention?

Accelerated Learning Programs
- fast-track second-chance programs provide opportunities to complete formal education, enabling out-of-school children and youth to catch up with other students (Page et al., 2021)

High Dosage Tutoring
- One on one support
- Meets student where they are – connects this to what is happening in class
- Suggested tutors: teachers, paraprofessionals, recent grads; Not suggested: parents or volunteers
- Posible partnerships with universities to leverage tutors/programming; credit for tutoring (Dorn et al., 2021)

Extended School Days
- Extended School Day/Year
- Accelerated learning with targeted instruction

Exposure to grade-level content
- Disparities fueled by teaching practices
- Critical to keep students immersed in grade-level content
- Reteaching" earlier content can reinforce low expectations and create a cycle of underachievement
- Exposure to grade level content with scaffolding (Saline et al, 2020)

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