

Project 1 – Interviews

The main research question for the interview is "What was the experience of educators during the Covid Pandemic?"

The interviewer asked the following questions during the interview session:

1. What is your role in your institution? How long have you been in that role? What age level do you work with?
2. How did your school respond to the covid pandemic and school closures?
3. How did your role change during the pandemic closures?
4. How did your interactions with teachers and students change during remote learning?
5. Do you think administration was supportive? What kind of aid or support did schools provide to prepare you for school closures?
6. Do you have any interesting, noteworthy, or particular experiences during the pandemic/ remote learning?
7. How do you see the next school year shaping up? Any major changes?

Gian Perez 0:02

Hello, how are you doing today? I'm fine. How are you? I'm well, thank you. Thank you for joining me. Thank you for being part of the research. Let me tell you a little bit about it. I'm looking into the experience of different educators, or people in the education field during the COVID pandemic. I want to highlight that all data and records will be kept confidential. And if the results of the study are published, the data that we present in the group form, and all names will not be shown. Do you have any questions for me? No, thank you for inviting me. Awesome. So let's start by telling me a little about yourself. What is your role in the education field?

Trish 0:52

Well, I work for the Jersey City Public School District, as a learning consultant on a child's study team. I've been in that role for about 11 years, and I generally work with the special education population. I am a case manager for about 45 students per year.

Unknown Speaker 1:17

Wow, what age level are the students that you work with?

Trish 1:22

I prefer High School. Overall, I've been in education for 35 years, 20 of those years, I was a classroom teacher. Two of those years, I was a part of a program that identifies special education students who met the criteria for declassification. And then shortly after that, I decided that I wanted to be on a child study team because I can help advocate for students with special needs more on a child study team.

Gian Perez 2:03

Wow, that's very good work. What is your background? What did you teach before, when you were in the classroom?

Trish 2:10

Oh, I taught it all. English, science, math, social studies. So I taught it all. And I prefer high school students. I'd like the idea of preparing high school students for either college or the work market. That's my passion. I like the little ones, but I prefer the high school students in ninth to 12th graders.

Gian Perez 2:34

That's very good. As a matter of fact, that's actually where I also started. And I like to be but right now I work in middle school. And I feel like that's a very good starting point as well. I like that you're in high school, and you taught it all that's great, and I'm sure in your 35 years of experience. You've seen all the many changes from both ends. Tell me a little bit more about that. How have you seen education change over the last few years?

Trish 3:04

I've seen education change tremendously from block scheduling, where this for 90 minute classes, to 45 minute classes and eight periods. They had an initiative a couple of years ago called a pretty end plan. And the ideology behind that plan is that if students stayed in classes longer than 45 minutes, they would gain more knowledge. It is an interesting concept if the resources were provided, they gave during that time was in the 90s they told teachers that they would have access to computers. So the classes would be blended you lecture then the

students would get on a computer's, it all sounds very great initially, but it never really surfaced. So that was a difficult program. Needless to say it went back to the eighth period. 45 minutes.

Unknown Speaker 4:11

Wow, wow. That's a lot of changes. Like I can't imagine going through all those things. Now, comparing that experience to what is happening now, how would you say that your school responded to COVID pandemic and the school closures?

Trish 4:30

I would say that my school was walking the fence on it. There were rumors circulating that we were going to go out for a week or we were going to go out for two weeks, or possibly even a month. And so each day teachers and students were preparing for the shutdown. And when I say preparing, I started taking some of my belongings home, just in case I wouldn't return. So along with those are my thought patterns and other teachers and staff administration to the same thing. And then when we got the final call from the state that the school was going to shut down, it was just so sudden. So I would say that my school really wasn't prepared unfortunately.

Gian Perez 5:23

Did the administration try to reach out or inform you of anything that was happening, or was it just very sudden?

Trish 5:33

yeah, the superintendent was very, very spot on, there were always constant emails from the superintendent of the school talking about the COVID pandemic, and it was comforting to have him reach out, and I know, the superintendent, he's a really nice guy. So he made me feel as though he's aware of the pandemic, and he's aware of his staff. So that was reassuring for me. But again, I think that once it started becoming a reality, that's when the administration started to become proactive.

Gian Perez 6:18

And what do you mean by proactive? Because I heard that you said it was very comforting. How much communication was there? and what was proactive about the take of your school?

Trish 6:31

Well, they started having more meetings and discussing and really being open about what what was going on, and what our new jobs will be, no one knew for sure what they would be, but we just kind of had to show up every day sign in through the district's website and be prepared to do your job, whatever that entailed.

Gian Perez 7:00

That sounds like it was a lot, You mentioned something about you weren't sure about what you were going to be doing exactly. And I want to know, how do you feel your role changed during the pandemic and the remote learning environment?

Trish 7:18

I think that my role became more challenging. In the sense that weekly, I had to reach out to parents and students for a wellness check to see how they were coping. Could I give them any assistance. If some students needed counseling services, I would make referrals. So I found it more challenging during that time than being actually in the building. Because in the building, I really didn't have to do wellness checks. So it was an added responsibility. And not only that,

you had to keep a daily log of when you contacted the parents and students. And that had to be put on the log as well, the phone number, the email address...

Gian Perez 8:16

and this is one day a week paying for each student. Yes. How do you feel about that? How do you feel about the weekly check-ins? Do you feel like it has any impact on students or on the parents?

Trish 8:30

I think it did, because I serve as a liaison for the parent and maybe the guidance counselor or the teacher. The parent will tell me, every time my student signs on, he's marked absent. Could you help me with that? So I would send an email and ask: "could you tell me what's going on?" Or I would look at their grades and progress. And then I would reach out to the parent and say, Are you aware that your student is failing? And the parent would oftentimes say, my son or daughter is having a difficult time with virtual learning, which was common, right? So I would try to think of interventions.

Gian Perez 9:26

Wow. So individualized plans for every student struggling,

Trish 9:31

yes. And I was trying to ask the teacher to consider giving the student makeup work? Or can they make it out? things like that. I found it to be more challenging because when I was in the building, my focus was basically on case management, and academic functioning as well.

Gian Perez 9:55

Oh, okay. So your role changed?

Trish 10:02

It expanded, Yes.

Gian Perez 10:03

Wow. So now you're having more communication with teachers, as you mentioned. And this is something that I'm very curious about, about the interaction between staff like the child study team like you, and teachers, and maybe teachers and students, but how has your interaction with teachers changed during the pandemic?

Trish 10:27

I think that my interaction with the teachers they have been when I hold meetings with parents, I need teachers to be present. And yes, I'm finding that teachers were willing to participate in zoom meetings, so that was a good thing And, I found that they were very concerned about some students, they would reach out and we would provide the support for the students. So I think it grew during the pandemic.

Gian Perez 11:10

Okay, so yeah, so do you think that you because you mentioned before that having to interact with the now in these wellness checks with the teachers and the students was challenging? Do you find that it was challenging Because now you had to have more communication with the teachers? Or was it a type of communication that you had to engage in?

Trish 11:31

Yeah, I had to have more communication with the teachers through zoom. So you have to be more visible. There were times when I was in the building, I wasn't as visible when I was in my office.

Gian Perez 11:46

Yeah, the phone?

Trish 11:48

Yes. So I had to be more visible. And then we had weekly meetings as well. So with the principal, we had our professional developments that way as well. Also, the weekly professional development, either weekly professional development, or just weekly meetings, just to touch bases to see how everyone is doing?

Gian Perez 12:18

Okay, so that seems very supportive. How do you think the support in your district, your school changed, did you feel like it improved?

Trish 12:27

Yes.

Gian Perez 12:28

How did it change?

Trish 12:31

To be honest with you, I think that the morale decreased during the pandemic. It was difficult to rally encouragement, the principal would try to do things like doing drive by's. We're here, everyone's here. We're supporting you, the team, the team members, but I think the morale went down with the attendance as well.

Gian Perez 13:05

So was this for teachers and students?

Trish 13:09

No, just students, I would say, shout out to the teachers, they were pretty accountable. But I think with the students' parents not being home to make sure that they're online, taking their classes. Students kind of thought that was an open invitation just to sleep later.

Gian Perez 13:32

Yeah. So now you're dealing with the students and you have this issue happening. Do these weekly check-ins, if you had found an issue like that, where the student was sleeping? How does that change in a pandemic? Because controlling attendance in the school is different than virtual in some way. How is administration handling attendance issues for the students that you do weekly check-ins on?

Trish 14:03

The Jersey City public school district has something, a credit recovery program called Seat Time. And it gives every student, whether special ed or not, an opportunity to meet before school before eight o'clock. That's when school starts at 830, so they will meet between eight

o'clock and 830 online to recover credits. That's an avenue that the district used to say, you don't have to fail. You can do seat time. So a very positive option. I like it.

Gian Perez 14:54

That's good support. So how about the Mental Health of students, the wellness of staff. How do you think your district handled that during the pandemic?

Trish 15:08

Wow, that's been very prevalent. When I do my weekly check-in, some students would tell me that they were depressed. And because I am a learning consultant, learning consultants do not counsel, we don't have a license to do that. So I would make referrals to counselors and say, parents need some counseling, can you reach out to them? So there are students reporting that they were depressed, students reporting that it was difficult for them, and I would make referrals. And they had weekly workshops for teachers. It was optional, if you wanted to do wellness, virtual yoga, and things like that. They were really good with that.

Gian Perez 16:05

That sounds very good. To keep up the high note on that. And to close off the interview, are there any interesting stories that have come up out of the whole experience during COVID closures? Any noteworthy or wacky stories, experiences that you have from the school that happened?

Trish 16:27

Well, it's all been very, very interesting. I think, the wackiest thing, and I won't even call it wacky, I think the most valuable thing that I've learned through virtual learning using zoom or Google Meet is to make sure your microphone is off when you're finished.

Gian Perez 16:55

Yes. Oh, yeah. What's coming out of that? You don't want to become a meme or something? Yes, let's check our mics. How do you see the next school year and shaping up? I know, your 12 month employee, right?

Trish 17:17

Yes, I am.

Gian Perez 17:18

So how do you feel like the new school year it's gonna start? What do you think will change, anything that you feel is going to be different?

Trish 17:27

I do. I think that it's going to be a rocky start. In the beginning, I think that the check-in that we have to do in the morning, we actually have an app that we use through the district website, that we have to do our screening through, and each student has to do that. And I think the nurse does the scanning of the temperature. And I think that's going to be an initial challenge for administration, getting the students in the building and getting the staff in the building. I think that there are some students who will not get vaccinated. And that would be a concern for me. Because what I do is face to face.

Gian Perez 18:26

Understandable.

Trish 18:27

Yes. Although I do have a plexiglass that I use, that still would be a concern for me. I think that getting staff and students acclimated back from eight to three pm. Those are the initial challenges that I see. But, we have a great principal. She's all about morale and she's very caring, and I think that she will do a good job.

Gian Perez 19:14

Well, thank you so much for your time. Thank you for joining me and sharing your experience. I wish you the best in the next school year. Any questions for me?

Trish 19:25

No, no, thank you for inviting me on for this interview. I found that very, very informative. And you made me think about a lot of things that could possibly happen in the fall of 2021. So thank you.

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>