Choosing Not to Participate: Cyber Truancy and Special Education

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Choosing Not to Participate: Cyber Truancy and Special Education

Elizabeth A. Popielarcheck

Dissertation submitted to the College of Education and Human Sciences at West Virginia University in partial fulfillment for the degree of Doctor of Education in Special Education

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Key Words: qualitative, special education, high school students, pandemic, COVID-19, online instruction, truancy

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Choosing Not to Participate: Cyber Truancy and Special Education

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This qualitative study investigated facilitators and barriers to participation in online instruction for students in grades 9-12 with a high incidence disability from the perspective of the student and adult in the home (AIH). Three AIH-student dyads participated in questionnaires and an online interview. The interviews were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and then analyzed using the six phases described by Braun and Clarke (2006). Eight categories that aligned with barriers and facilitators to participation were identified: communication, instruction in the home, role of the AIH, attendance, grading, teacher provided student support, overall quality of online learning experience, and suggestions. Categories were organized and presented to address barriers and facilitators from both the student and AIH perspectives. The findings provided insight on the online learning experiences of students in grades 9-12 with a high incidence disability (specific learning disability and other health impairment) from the perspective of the AIH and student. Implications for online education in grades 9-12 and truancy are discussed.
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Choosing Not to Participate: Cyber Truancy and Special Education

Earthquakes, floods, fires, and pandemics may thwart in-school instruction; however, when education is impeded, remote instruction poses a temporary solution (Baytiyeh, 2018). In the case of COVID-19 all 50 states resorted to some capacity of remote instruction (Munyan-Penney, 2020). Even as schools ventured to reopen in the midst of the pandemic, remote offerings continued for secondary education (Lieberman, 2020b).

The provision of education in the aftermath of a disaster, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, is not just a continuance of instruction. Studies have found that providing students opportunities to persevere in stressful situations, increases their levels of self-efficacy or beliefs in their own capabilities (Baytiyeh, 2018). Pajares (2002) found that students with higher levels of self-efficacy used more cognitive and metacognitive thinking skills. Moreover, students’ self-efficacy is correlated with higher levels of self-confidence, which affects their academic achievement and grades (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994).

Though online learning provides students the opportunity to exercise their self-efficacy and overcome the impediments to continuing their education in the wake of the pandemic, the enormity of self-discipline that online learning requires can be overwhelming (Tunison & Noonan, 2001) and student absenteeism has become a problem. The U.S. Department of Education (2019) noted that in 2015-2016 over 7 million students, or approximately 1 in 6 students, missed 15 or more days of school. However, this data predates COVID-19. Though exact numbers are not currently available, several sources estimate that the rate of absenteeism (the total number of days missed from school, including excused and unexcused absences in both online and brick-and-mortar settings) is significantly higher since the pandemic (Lieberman, 2020a; Korman et al., 2020; and Bell, 2020). This rise in absenteeism is concerning, especially in consideration that the American Academy of Pediatrics defines chronic absenteeism as missing more than 18 days of school annually (Korioth, 2019).
Researchers have investigated the definition, causes, and effects of absenteeism from school. Wilson et. al. (2008) developed three distinct definitions for absenteeism: absence, truancy, and absences condoned by the adult in the home (AIH). Absence was described as being away from school for any reason, authorized or unauthorized. Truancy was explained as an absence that was self-identified by the student to be for a reason that would not be approved by the teacher, and absences condoned by the AIH are those occasions where the AIH kept the student from attending school. For example, if the AIH allowed the student to stay home because it was their birthday.

The definition of truancy has been further defined in recent years. For example, Archambault et. al. (2013) described truancy as the “chronic lack of attendance without legitimate reason” (p. 3). Similar definitions of truancy include persistent and regular absence without reasonable grounds (Dickson & Hutchinson, 2010; Kearney, 2008). Finning et al. (2019) described truancy as poor school attendance due to anxiety and other mental health concerns. Other definitions focus on the cause of the truancy. Galloway (1985) described absenteeism as a result of the student's initiative. Meanwhile, Darmody et al. (2008) referred to chronic absenteeism as truancy and further described truancy as an anti-school behavior, which follows the theory set forth by Willis (2006) that students rebel against schools in the form of failure to complete assignments, disrupt class, and avoid attending school.

Regardless of definition used, truancy is associated with negative post-school outcomes. Generally, chronic absenteeism has been correlated with a decrease in academic performance and an increase in developing poor behaviors as teens, poor health as adults (Korioth, 2019), alcohol use (Barry et al., 2011), and criminal activity (Reid, 1999). Studies have shown that absenteeism is a risk factor or predictor of non-completion of secondary education in the general population and an inconsistent indicator of non-completion of secondary education for students with learning disabilities (Doren et al., 2014). Significantly, students with disabilities have a higher rate of chronic absenteeism than students without disabilities (Black & Zablotsky,
Furthermore, students with disabilities have a higher secondary education non-completion rate than their non-disabled counterparts; students with learning disability and emotional disturbance having higher rates of non-completion than any other disability category (Macmillan, 1991). In 1995, the rate of students with disabilities not completing secondary education was 14.6 percent compared to their non-disabled peers at 11.8 percent (National Center for Education Statistics, 1995). Students with learning disabilities had the highest secondary non-completion rate (17.6) than any other disability category; the aggregate dropout rate for other disabilities was 13.2 percent (National Center for Education Statistics, 1995).

Though overall secondary completion rates have improved since 1995, students with disabilities continue to have a higher non-completion rate than their peers without disabilities (Doren et al., 2014). This finding is consistent with a meta-analysis of over 75 studies conducted by Gubbels et al. (2019). Gubbels et al. reported that the most common risk factors among the studies for drop out included history of grade retention, experiencing learning difficulties, low academic achievement, truant behavior, and low parental involvement (2019).

Considerable research has been conducted on absenteeism in the context of the brick-and-mortar school (Gastic, 2008; Mazerolle et al., 2017; Galloway, 1985; Daromody et al., 2008; Archambault et al., 2013; Havik et al., 2015); however, limited research has been conducted on absenteeism in the virtual setting and specifically for those receiving special education services with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for a high incidence disability (specific learning disability (SLD) and other health impairment (OHI)). This limited research is partly due to the lack of a precise definition of what attendance is in remote instruction (Archambault et al., 2013) and the relative newness of the large-scale implementation of online learning support for special education services.

Additionally, limited research has been conducted on online education from the perspective of the AIH with children with disabilities (Burdette & Greer, 2014; Ziadat, 2021). The available research primarily employed surveys for quantitative analysis. In the study conducted
by Ziadat (2021), parents were asked to agree or disagree with statements regarding the effects of online instruction and their child’s disability. The data was then compared for statistical analysis among three different dimensions: parents’ perspective related to students with learning disabilities, parents’ perspective related to online learning platforms, and parents’ perspectives related to difficulties facing them. The results from this study revealed that the parents of students with learning disabilities in the areas of Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, Dysgraphia, Dyspraxia, Aphasia/Dysphasia, Auditory and visual processing problem, or more than one learning difficulty moderately (on a Likert scale of 1 to 5) perceived the effects of online learning on their children’s learning.

Burdette and Greer (2014) conducted surveys with parents of children with disabilities who received some component of their instruction online. The surveys addressed instruction and assessment, challenges, parent roles, and communication and support from the school. Their study discovered that parents found the most useful instructional methods used in online settings were video (82%), audio (77%), and games (71%). The least useful instructional methods in an online setting were social media (39%), lecture (16%), simulation (11%), discussion (10%), and games (9%). In the area of challenges, 34% percent of parents of high school students in the study indicated they did not experience any challenges in supporting their child’s online work. This study also discovered that challenges were closely linked to parents’ perceived roles in their child’s online instruction. Most parents in the study (59% to 77%) selected five of six potential roles. The five roles were summarized by the researchers as assisting their child with learning content, behavioral skills, and organizing work time. In the area of communication and support from the school, 27% of parents of high school students reported communicating with their child’s teacher less than one time per month or not all; 21% reported communicating one time per month; 19.2% reported communicating 2-3 times per month; 16.4% once a week; and 16.4% 2-3 times per week. Burdette and Greer (2014) suggested following up with parent interviews for future research.
Studies have been conducted to address the quality of online learning to include learning preferences for middle and high school students (Harvey et al., 2014), considerations for high school minority students (Kumi-Yegoah et al., 2018), high school students’ asynchronous participation (Lang, 2010), high school students’ synchronous learning (Beese, 2014), and virtual special education programs (Spitler et al., 2013). Beese (2014) indicated an attrition rate of 61.9% in participation for high school students engaged in synchronous online instruction, including individuals with a grade point average of more than 3.0. However, these studies do not qualitatively investigate why secondary students who receive special education services for a high incidence disability are choosing not to attend online instruction.

The significance of this study resonates with the heart. There is the old adage that when teachers teach to the heart, the mind will follow. Unfortunately, online instruction has resorted the teacher to an image on a computer screen that can be turned on and off with the click of a button. Yet, the person controlling the button is not the teacher, it is the student. The issue is not so much if the student has access to the teacher, it is whether the teacher has access to the student. A study that focuses on the heart of the issue, the student, and why they are choosing to disengage and not participate in their coursework, will provide insight on the root of the problem and enable stakeholders to target their strategies towards ameliorating chronic absenteeism in high school students receiving special education services for high incidence disabilities in online instruction.

The research questions for this proposed study include the following:

1. What are the factors that foster the consistent attendance of students in grades 9-12 receiving special education services in online instruction?
2. What are the factors that challenge the consistent attendance of students in grades 9-12 receiving special education services in online instruction?
3. What are students’ perspectives of the role of the AIH in their online instruction?
4. How did the AIH experience their role in their child’s online instruction?
Conceptual Framework

This study investigated attendance and truancy from the perspectives of students and AIHs. Participation in online instruction is part of attendance. This study explored the facilitators and barriers to online participation for students in grades 9-12 receiving special education services. This conceptual framework is woven from the theories used to analyze the data in addressing the barriers and facilitators to online participation.

Definition of Participation in Online Learning Environments

Participation in online instruction in this study refers to the student’s completion of assignments, communicating with teachers via email or in Google Classroom, and/or attending Google Meets. The student can engage in all these behaviors or some of these behaviors, but they are all considered forms of participation in online instruction. Secondary education is compulsory (Education Law Center, 2019). However, this study acknowledged that participation is an action (Lawrence & Fakuade, 2021); students can choose to participate or not to participate. This study viewed facilitators and barriers to student online participation from four disciplinary lenses: psychology, sociology, health, and special education.

Psychology

The disciplinary lens of psychology views human behavior from the cognitive constructs of the individual and individual preferences (Repko & Szostak, 2016). Based on the literature, motivation, self-efficacy, and self-confidence are cognitive constructs that are relevant to student online participation (Beek et al., 2020; Bayityeh, 2018; Pajares, 2002; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). The literature provides information about facilitators and barriers to participation from a psychological perspective.

Facilitators to participation. Beek et al. (2020) conducted a study on high school students’ participation in an online program to help them transition to college. They found that participation was influenced by the individual student’s motivation. In this study, motivation was measured on a Likert scale of 1-6 (1 not true) to (6 true). Students who were motivated logged
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into training units more than “unmotivated” students (Beek et al., 2020). Additionally, Geng (2022) investigated the relationship between learner self-efficacy and online participation. Participants ranged from age groups: 16-18, 19-21, 22-24, and 25 and above. Students in the age group 16-18 had a high self-efficacy rate (91%). The level of online learning self-efficacy is directly related to the student's confidence in participating in online instruction and their degree of completion of learning tasks (Geng, 2022). Students' self-efficacy is correlated with higher levels of self-confidence, which affects their academic achievement and grades (Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994).

Barriers to participation. Canning et al. (2019) examined the psychological and cognitive variables in student engagement and confidence in writing interventions at the post-secondary level. Struggling students became less interested in the course. Reasons for this perceived loss of interest included lost confidence about performance, self-doubt about preparedness, and decreased concern about doing well in the course.

Sociology

The disciplinary lens of sociology sees the world as a social construct: the relationship between people and society (Repko & Szostak, 2016). Based on the literature, a sense of community or feeling of belonging is relevant to online participation (Parker et al., 2021; Fox, 2017; Dryer et al., 2018). In the context of this study, the community is the relationship between the participants, participants' peers, and teachers. There are both facilitators and barriers to participation described in the sociological literature.

Facilitators to participation. Studies have found that a sense of community or a sense of belonging facilitates participation (Parker et al., 2021; Fox, 2017; Dryer et al., 2018). A sense of community can be promoted in the online setting by the educator's social presence. In other words, a sense of community can be developed by reassuring students they are interacting with real humans (Fox, 2017).
Barriers to participation. Studies have found that a perceived lack of community or sense of isolation is a barrier to online participation (Demir Kaymak & Horzum, 2022; George et al., 2021). George et al. (2021) conducted a survey study with 203 students in an online law school program. Forty percent of students felt not connected at all or a little connected to lecturers. Fifty-four percent of students felt not connected at all or a little bit connected to peers. They found students felt more disconnected from peers than they felt disconnected from their lecturers (George et al., 2021).

Health

The COVID-19 pandemic was the impetus for the widespread implementation of online instruction in 2020. In that context, the disciplinary lens of health is relevant to the conceptual framework of barriers and facilitators to online participation as it relates to COVID-19 and the option to participate online or face-to-face. During the 2020-2021 school year, students had the option of attending the featured school district on a hybrid schedule. (Please refer to Table A2 in the appendix.)

The Health Belief Model includes six key concepts that help predict actions people will take to prevent, to screen for, or to control illness conditions: perceived susceptibility, perceived severity, perceived benefits, perceived barriers, cues to action, and self-efficacy (Champion & Skinner, 2008). In the context of this study, the disease or condition of concern is COVID-19, therefore the descriptions of the key concepts highlight the disease of concern as COVID-19. Perceived susceptibility is one's perceived possibility of contracting COVID-19. Perceived severity is one’s perceived seriousness of COVID-19. Perceived benefit is one’s perceived efficacy of the recommended actions to reduce the likelihood of contracting COVID-19 or to reduce the seriousness of COVID-19. Perceived barrier is one’s perceived negative side effects of the recommended actions. Cues to action are cues in one’s environment that may trigger action such as a sneeze or a poster. Self-efficacy is the belief in one’s own actions to reduce the risk of getting COVID-19 (Champion & Skinner, 2008).
Facilitators to participation. Reeves et al. (2020) noted that some parents were concerned about the negative effects of the restrictions attending face-to-face (masks, social distancing, and reduced extracurricular activities) on their child’s education and preferred online learning options. Additionally, some parents expressed that their child had underlying health issues and COVID-19 was a risk they were not willing to take and preferred online learning options (Reeves et al., 2020).

Barriers to participation. Ravens-Sieberer et al. (2021) reported that German adolescents between 11 and 17 years-old felt burdened and found learning from home more difficult at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Some adolescents found the pandemic restrictions (quarantine) very stressful and worrisome (Brailovskaia & Margraf, 2020; Dvorsky, Breaux, & Becker, 2020).

Special Education

The disciplinary lens of special education views that education should be individualized or personalized for each individual learner to meet their specific needs (Rodriguez & Garro-Gil, 2015). The participants in this study each had an IEP that was intended to be implemented in the brick-and-mortar setting. The sudden transition to online instruction posed facilitators and barriers that were unique to online participation.

Facilitators to participation. Catalano et al. (2021) surveyed 300 K-12 teachers in New York state regarding the instructional tools they used during the COVID-19 pandemic. The teachers indicated that they provided the following accommodations for students with disabilities in the online setting: provided one-on-one support via phone or video conferencing, used different levels of learning materials, provided learning materials in different modalities, provided more time to complete assignments, and/or co-taught with a special education teacher.

Barriers to participation. Studies have shown that some schools do not have the technological supports needed to adequately deliver online instruction to students with disabilities (Burdette et al., 2013; Catalano et al., 2021). In the survey study conducted by
Catalano et al. (2021), 9% of the teachers surveyed reported that they did not employ any accommodations for students with disabilities.

In the next section, I describe my methodology for the study. Through the methodology, I will apply the conceptual framework for the study to collect and analyze the data to answer my research questions.

Methodology

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to acquire an in-depth insight on the barriers and facilitators of participation in online learning for high school students receiving learning support services with an Individualized Education Program (IEP) from the perspective of students and adults in the home (AIH). Therefore, a qualitative interview study design (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016) was used, with an interpretivist/constructivist epistemological orientation of the researcher. This approach was utilized because this framework allowed for the co-construction of meaning pertaining to a phenomenon of interest between the researcher and the participant rather than the theory emerging solely from the data (Mertens, 1999). In this study, the researcher was part of the research and could not be completely objective and removed from the research; the researcher’s perspective influenced the interpretation of the data provided by the participants (Schwandt, 1998). The researcher’s role was intentionally demarcated to reduce its impact on the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018); the researcher’s position, privilege, perspective, and interactions were acknowledged (Charmaz, 2014). Consistent with this methodological framework, some open-ended questions on barriers and facilitators to participation in online instruction were asked of participants, and participants’ responses were analyzed to identify categories in relation to the researcher’s background, experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and the literature.
Setting

Dyads (AIH and student) were recruited purposefully using convenience sampling techniques from an available pool of students who received learning supports in a rural high school in southwestern Pennsylvania (Creswell & Plano Clark 2011). The high school had about 340 students enrolled in its grades 9-12 program with about 40 students or approximately 12% of the student body, receiving learning support (IEP for a student with a primary disability category of SLD, OHI, or Autism). Since the start of the 2020-21 school year, this rural high school universally provided all students with Google Chromebooks equipped with touch screens and a stylus. The high school also provided synchronous online instruction during each student’s respective class periods using Google Classroom as the template or vehicle for delivery of online instruction during the initial shutdown in March 2020 and the 2020-2021 school year. Please refer to Table A2 for descriptions of the technology, schedule, and synchronous descriptions for each school year.

Participants

Twelve AIHs with a child in high school who received learning supports were contacted via phone ascertaining interest in participating in the study. If the AIH expressed interest, then the student was asked if they would be interested in participating. Both members of the dyad would need to participate, so if one member was not interested, then both members did not participate. Of the twelve dyads contacted, seven AIHs declined. Two AIHs expressed interest, but the students declined. Three AIHs and their high school child expressed interest in participating in the study. An informed consent form and cover letter were subsequently emailed to the AIHs and the students. The informed consent forms were reviewed via phone with the AIH and child. Participants had the option of signing the informed consent forms digitally; however, all three dyads opted to print and sign hard copies. Pseudonyms were used to identify participants to protect their identity and maintain confidentiality.

Profiles of Participant Dyads
**Victoria (student) and Valerie (AIH).** Victoria is a white, non-Hispanic, 15-year-old, ninth-grade student with an IEP (SLD in math, reading, and language arts) during the 2021-2022 school-year. Her learning support consisted of inclusion classes in English Language Arts and science. Her math supports were provided in a pull-out or resource room setting with a special education teacher. Victoria enjoys musical theater and youth group.

Valerie is a white, non-Hispanic, divorced mother of two 15-year-old daughters (both have an IEP) and one 16-year-old daughter. They have three cats and one dog. Prior to the COVID-19 quarantine period in 2020, the dyad enjoyed going places such as the movies and amusement parks.

**George (student) and Suzy (AIH).** George is a white, non-Hispanic, 15-year-old, 10th-grade student with an IEP (OHI) during the 2021-2022 school-year. His learning supports consisted of inclusion classes in math, English language arts, and science. George lives with his mother, father, younger sister, and adopted sibling and her baby (9-months old). George enjoys history, hands-on-activities, and welding. George stated that the COVID-19 pandemic did not really change their daily activities.

Suzy is a married mother of three school-age children ages: 16-years-old, 15-years old (George), and 11- years-old. The 16-year-old has a baby who is nine-months old and lives in the home. She also has two older children that have since graduated and moved away from home. Suzy indicated that she was able to see her children more during the quarantine period because she was not able to work for 3.5 months.

**Elysa (student) and Rachel (AIH).** Elysa is a white, non-Hispanic, 18-year-old, 12th-grade student with an IEP (SLD in reading and language arts) during the 2021-2022 school-year. Elysa received inclusion classes in English language arts her 10th grade year. However, during 11th and 12th grade, she received her education in the regular education setting with specially designed instruction monitored by the special education teacher and implemented by the regular education teacher. Elysa is a volunteer fire-fighter and earned her emergency
medical technician (EMT) certification during her senior year. Prior to COVID-19, Elysa described herself as quiet in school, but she knew she could stay behind after class and ask questions face-to-face. During the pandemic, she found the online schedule more challenging, and the emailing back and forth made it difficult for her to get the information she needed.

Rachel is a divorced mother of three. Her children are 18-years-old (Elysa), 20-years-old, and 24-years-old. During the initial shutdown, Elysa was in 10th grade, and Rachel’s middle child was in 12th grade doing online instruction from home. The eldest child was in college, but all three children were and still are living together in the same home. Rachel has worked as a paraprofessional and is currently a bus driver for the neighboring school district Elysa attends.

**Role of the Researcher**

The researcher in this study is a special education teacher with over 11 years of teaching experience in grades K-12 (6 years K-6 emotional support, 2 years of experience with grades 6-12 emotional support/partial program, and 3 years of experience with 9-12 grade learning support, as well as an adjunct professor in the special education department of a higher-education institute with online instructional components for 4 years. The researcher also has 4 years prior experience (before COVID-19 pandemic) teaching cyber courses for grades 3-12 in the featured school district’s cyber academy.

The researcher also has an established rapport with the participants, both AIH and students, in the study. The researcher is not directly responsible for grading the student’s assignments; however, the researcher is currently co-teaching or co-taught at least one of the student’s classes.

**Data Collection**

This study abided by standard ethical considerations in educational and psychological research in that informed consent was obtained at three levels (school, AIH, and student), pseudonyms and the right to withdraw from participation in the study was exercised. Additionally, this study took into consideration the intrusiveness of this research. The researcher
collected data and conducted interviews at times that did not conflict with instruction and were convenient to the participants.

**Instrument Development**

This study employed semi-structured interviews, attendance records, and questionnaires to investigate barriers and facilitators of participation of students in grades 9-12 who receive special education services in online instruction. Semi-structured interviews and questionnaires were used to investigate factors that facilitate or present barriers to consistent attendance and challenges to consistent attendance and the perceived role of the AIH as it applies to the student’s online instruction. The questionnaires and interview protocols included items that related to online learning experiences, grades, attendance, interaction with peers, interactions with teachers, and communication. Attendance records were used to assess rate of attendance and as a comparison to responses from the semi-structured interviews and questionnaires.

**Questionnaire.** Two questionnaires, student and AIH, were created using Qualtrics software, version XM (2022) for this study. The questions created for the student questionnaire and AIH questionnaire were based on the literature review, which indicated a need for a more thorough examination of the factors and challenges to consistent attendance from the perspective of the student and AIH. The questions were then reviewed by experts in the field for quality assurance and subsequently pilot tested.

The student questionnaire questions were vetted in a pilot study with an 11-year-old, an 8-year-old, and a 17-year-old student. The questions were presented orally to the 11-year-old, 5th grade student first. The student was asked to verbally respond to the questions. Questions that had to be clarified and/or elicited an irrelevant response, were promptly revised. Revised questions that did not require clarification and elicited a relevant response were kept. Revised questions that required clarification and/or elicited an irrelevant response, were promptly revised and continued the revision process until clarification was not needed and/or a relevant response was attained. The questionnaire was then piloted with an 8-year-old, 3rd grade student using the
same process. Questions that had to be clarified, were promptly revised, and were subject to the vetting process described above. Revised questions that did not require clarification and elicited a relevant response were kept. The questionnaire was then piloted with the 17-year-old student who received learning supports using the same process described above for revising questions.

The questions included in the questionnaire pertained to participation in online instruction, communication with teachers, and attendance. Responses to these questions were intended to provide a general description of students’ educational experiences, which can be further clarified using the semi-structured interview. For example, one of the questions from the questionnaire asks students, “Do you feel confident that if you asked your teachers for help on your assignments, you would get the help you need?” The students have the choice of responding with “Yes,” “No,” or “Sometimes.” For further clarification, this question is followed up in the semi-structured interview protocol using the following question: “Do you feel confident that if you asked your teachers for help on your assignments, you would get the help you need? You responded ________ to the question. Please explain.”

Not all questions from the questionnaire were directly followed-up in the interview protocol in this manner. For example, one of the questions in the questionnaire asked students, “Prior to March 2020, have you taken online classes?” The students selected from “Yes” or “No.” The question was then readdressed by the semi-structured protocol, “Before Covid-19, what was your experience with online learning? Have you ever taken a class or did a training that was completely online? When did you do this? What was the training about?”

The questions from the AIH questionnaire were vetted in a pilot study with an AIH who has a 17-year-old son in the 11th grade who has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and received instruction online. The questions were presented in print and verbally to the AIH. The AIH was asked to verbally respond to the questions. Questions that had to be clarified and/or elicited an irrelevant response, were promptly revised. Revised questions that did not require
clarification and elicited a relevant response were kept. Revised questions that required clarification and/or elicited an irrelevant response, were promptly revised, and the revision process continued until clarification was not needed and/or a relevant response was attained.

The questions included in the questionnaire pertained to participation in online instruction, communication with teachers, and attendance. Responses to these questions were intended to provide a general description of students’ educational experiences from the AIH’s perspective, which can be further clarified using the semi-structured interview. For example, one of the questions from the questionnaire asked the AIH, “Describe the level of involvement you think adults in the home need to have in their high school student’s online education?” The AIH had the choice of responding with “Very Involved,” “Moderately Involved,” “Low Involvement,” or “No Involvement.” For further clarification, this question is followed up in the semi-structured interview protocol used the following question: “What role do you play in your high school child’s online instruction?”

The Qualtrics software, version XM (2022) survey (AIH and student questionnaires) was sent via email to each respective participant. The questionnaire was completed using the same pseudonym used for the participant’s attendance record and interview so that the researcher could triangulate the data between the interview, attendance records, and the questionnaire. The questionnaires were used in data triangulation to determine if similar findings were yielded in the semi-structured interviews and attendance records. For example, the first question on the questionnaire asked the students, “Prior to March, 2020, have you taken online classes?” The student responded by selecting “yes” or “no.” Follow-up questions based on responses may occur. In this case, the follow-up question is, “If your answer to question 1 was yes, how many years did you take online classes?” The options to select from were: less than 1 year, 1 year, 2-3 years, and 4 or more. Responses from the questionnaire could be followed-up in the semi-structured interview for further clarification if needed and were used for data triangulation. See Appendix C and Appendix D for questionnaire questions.
Semi-structured interview protocols. The semi-structured interview protocol was selected as a primary means of data collection because it would provide the opportunity to document verbal data on the perspectives and experiences of AIHs and high school students who receive special education services (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2018; Fontana & Frey, 2005). The semi-structured interview enabled more thorough exploration of the special education students’ views, feelings, and experiences in online instruction in the context of facilitators and barriers to their participation. Moreover, semi-structured interviews are widely used and are a vetted data collection method in educational and psychological research (Banister, 2011; Mueller & Buckley, 2014).

Two distinct semi-structured interviews, student and AIH, were created for this study. The questions created for the student semi-structured interview and AIH semi-structured interview were based on the literature review, which indicated a need for a more thorough examination of the challenges to consistent attendance from the perspective of the student and AIH. The questions, through examination of the variables that either facilitated or prevented consistent participation, were then reviewed by experts in the field for quality assurance and subsequently pilot tested with a dyad consisting of an AIH and a student in the 11th grade who had an IEP.

The student semi-structured interview protocol was developed by generating primary questions and potential follow-up questions to help elicit responses that fully address the research questions. Primary and follow-up questions were vetted in a pilot study by first asking an 11-year-old, 5th grade student the questions. Questions were checked for clarity by asking the student to verbally respond to the questions. Questions that had to be clarified, were promptly revised, and were subject to the vetting process described above. Revised questions that did not require clarification and elicited a relevant response were kept. The revised semi-structured interview protocol was then piloted with an eight-year-old, 3rd grade student using the same process. Questions that had to be clarified, were promptly revised, and were subject to
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the vetting process described above. Revised questions that did not require clarification and elicited a relevant response were kept.

The interview questions were then piloted with a 17-year-old, 11th grade student who had an IEP and received special education services in an online setting. Questions that had to be clarified were promptly revised and asked again to ensure clarity. Questions that did not require clarification and elicited a relevant response were kept.

The interview questions were initially piloted with students in grades 3 and 5 to promote general comprehensibility of the questions. Questions that are comprehensible to a 3rd and a 5th grade student will likely be understood by students in grades in 9-12 who receive special education services and who have a reading and listening comprehension that is below grade level.

The AIH semi-structured interview protocol was developed by generating primary questions and potential follow-up questions to help elicit responses that fully address the research questions. Primary and follow-up questions were vetted in a pilot study by asking an AIH who has a 17-year-old son in the 11th grade who has an Individualized Education Program (IEP) and received instruction online. Questions were checked for clarity by asking the AIH to verbally respond to the questions. Questions that had to be clarified were promptly revised and asked again to ensure clarity. Questions that did not require clarification and elicited a relevant response were kept.

Forty-five minutes were allotted for each interview; however, more or less time was permitted depending on the participant’s responses. The interviews were conducted one-on-one with the participant using Zoom and recorded with cameras and audio. The interview was conducted using the semi-structured interview protocol. Some of the questions in the protocol were open-ended, and the interview was conducted as a conversation with follow-up questions to clarify and/or elicit additional information as needed. For example, based on the participants’
responses, the researcher may ask, “Can you tell me more about that?” See Appendix B and Appendix E for the interview protocol questions.

All three dyads completed the interviews from their homes in the evening after school hours. Victoria and her mother, Valerie, were seated next to each other during one another’s interviews. Victoria’s interview was conducted first, followed by her mother’s. They remained in this position for the duration of both, the student and AIH interviews. George and his mother, Suzy, were also seated side-by-side for the student interview. George’s interview was conducted first. He chose to leave the room when his mother’s interview was conducted. Elysa and her mother, Rachel, conducted their interviews in the same room, seated side-by-side for the entire duration of both interviews. Rachel’s interview was conducted first, followed by Elysa’s. Rachel added additional comments at the end of Elysa’s interview.

**Researcher journal.** As an integral part of the data collection process, the researcher maintained a journal of anecdotal notes during and after each interview. The researcher made notes regarding the interview process, comfort level of the participants, and anything out of the ordinary. For example, the researcher made a note if the participant stated something in the interview that was contradictory to a response made on the questionnaire. The journal was then used to further strengthen the credibility of the data collection process by providing transparency and another point of comparison in triangulation with the interview, questionnaire, and attendance records.

**Attendance records.** With AIH consent, attendance records were obtained for the school years 2018-2019, 2019-2020, and 2020-2021 from the school district’s office. Attendance rates were calculated by dividing the number of days present by the total number of days of school. Attendance records were compared to the responses from the questionnaires and interviews for consistency in reporting attendance, barriers, and facilitators. Please refer to Table A3 for attendance rates.
Data Analysis

Coding commenced after each interview was recorded, transcribed, and member checked for accuracy. The transcripts were coded by two coders and categories and definitions were discussed to ensure that the essence of the participant’s insights were accurately documented.

The data was coded using the six phases described by Braun and Clarke (2006) as a guide in developing codes and associated categories: (1) data familiarization, (2) generation of initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) report production. The thinking process and analysis was more organic with line-by-line coding. The codes were collapsed to find categories that were generally aligned with facilitators and barriers to participation in online learning as described in the conceptual framework. The conceptual framework outlined the barriers and facilitators to online participation through the four disciplinary lenses (psychology, sociology, health, and special education).

Open coding was used to group the data into smaller segments with descriptive codes and broad categories (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Codes were sorted into primary categories and subcategories by aggregating codes with similar features and setting apart those codes that were unique (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014).

The initial codes included communication email, communication phone, communication Google classroom/private message, communication Google Meet/Zoom, ease of communication with teachers, challenges to communication with teachers, communication response times, adult in the home role, people in the room during online instruction, available assistance from within the home, attendance procedures, number of daily Google Meets, length of Google Meet/Zoom session, accessing assignments, attendance, truancy, caring attitude, office hours, teacher encouragement, teacher inconsistencies, student motivation, quality of online experience, peer interactions, online
learning experience prior to COVID-19 government shutdown, and suggestions. Some of the codes fell into more than one code category. For example, some of the attendance procedures described were inconsistent among the teachers, therefore these responses were coded under two categories: attendance procedures and teacher inconsistencies.

Facilitators to participation were initially defined as aspects of online instruction from home that contributed to participation in Google Meets, Zoom Meetings, homework, and assignments online. Through further data analysis, this category encompassed the codes student motivation, favorite classes, and online learning experience prior to COVID-19 government shutdown. Barriers to participation were initially defined as aspects of online instruction from home that contributed to lack of/late participation in Google Meets, Zoom Meetings, homework, and assignments online. This category was later broadened to include the code least favorite classes. Some codes were ambiguous or fell into both barriers and facilitators. Please refer to Table A1 for codes and categories.

Eight categories were generated and defined by aggregating the interview data: communication, instruction in the home, the role of the AIH, attendance, grading, teacher provided student support, overall quality of online learning experience, and suggestions. Communication included different forms of communication identified during the interviews (email, phone, Google Classroom private message, and Google Meet/Zoom), ease of communication with teachers, challenges to communication with teachers, and communication response times. Instruction in the home and the role of the AIH included people that were present in the same room with the student at the time of instruction, assistance that was available to the student in the home, and the physical location where the student completed aspects of online instruction. Attendance included the procedures teachers used for tracking attendance, concerns regarding truancy, attendance procedures, number of daily Google Meets students were required to attend, the length of Google Meet/Zoom sessions, descriptions of accessing assignments regardless of
attendance status of Google Meet/Zoom session, and perceived rate of attendance by AIH and/or student. Grading included perceived passing grades students could earn by not attending Google Meets, perceived (by AIH and/or student) procedures teachers used to grade assignments, and resubmission of assignments to attain a higher grade. Teacher provided student support included support provided to students from teachers during instruction and non-instructional times. Codes for this category also included office hours, caring attitude, teacher encouragement, teacher availability outside of class time, and teacher availability during class time. Overall quality of online learning experience included peer interactions, teacher inconsistencies, and quality of online learning experiences. Suggestions included the suggestions students and AIHs made to improve online learning education from their perspectives. Please refer to Table A1 for codes and associated categories.

Triangulation of the data was conducted by checking different data sources: interview data, questionnaires, attendance records, and researcher journal. The findings from the different data sources were contrasted and compared for similarities. Data with similar findings were validated in this process (Arksey & Knight, 1999; Bloor, 1997; Holloway, 1997). The names included in the extracts presented in the results section that follows are pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

**Results**

**Communication**

Prior to the government shutdown in March 2020, all three students in this study participated in their instruction face-to-face. Elysa recalled that she was quiet in school, but she knew that if she had questions, she could stay behind after class and ask the teacher. Online instruction changed the dynamic of communication between students and teachers and created barriers and facilitators to student participation in their online instruction.
**Barriers to Participation (Student Perspective)**

Students could communicate with their teachers during their class instruction via Google Meet or Zoom meeting; however, two of the three students admitted that they did not regularly attend their live class sessions. Moreover, the quality of communication was impeded by the prohibited student use of cameras and limited use of microphones. The predominant use of communication among all three students with their teachers was email followed second by students posting private comments on the assignments in Google Classroom. The challenges to communication also stemmed from perceived negative attitudes. Elysa noted that some of the teachers felt that the students were only missing their class and took offense; however, she did not state how this was demonstrated.

**Barriers to Participation (AIH Perspective)**

Challenges to communication were not limited to students. A common complaint among all three AIHs was the lack of communication. There were some classes the AIHs did not receive any information via email or automated emails through Google Classroom. All three reported that they were comfortable emailing their child’s teachers; however, they felt the communication was one-sided. The AIH had to seek information regarding their child’s online assignments, grades, and attendance. The information was not regularly provided by all the teachers. Rachel noted that some teachers sent what appeared to be automated emails from Google Classroom; however, she did not receive them from all of Elysa’s classes. Likewise, Suzy indicated that she was invited to some of George’s Google Classrooms but not all of them. Generally, all three AIHs expressed that the lack of direct communication made it difficult for them to ensure their child was participating in their required assignments and live sessions.

**Facilitators to Participation (Student Perspective)**

Though there were challenges to communication, teacher availability, response times, and ease of communication helped facilitate student participation. All three students
acknowledged that their teachers were available to help them during and outside of class time. Elysa stated, “Some of them [teachers] even emailed you back after school hours. I know two of my teachers would always email me right back.” Generally, all three students acknowledged that the average response time, depending on when the email was initiated, was between two and twenty-four hours. Ease of communication looked different for all three students. Victoria described communication with her teachers as easy because she could send an email or post a private comment in Google Classroom. George expressed that some teachers were easier to communicate with when “you get along with them better.” Elysa focused more on empathy on the teacher’s part when she said, “Some of the teachers also have children and they understand the point of view, like the motivation to get them [kids] on there [online].”

Facilitators to Participation (AIH Perspective)

Generally, communication was a weak point for all three AIHs in online learning instruction. Communication was inconsistent. Rachel expressed that the automated emails from Google Classroom were helpful, but she only received them for some of her daughter’s classes. Likewise, Valerie noted that some teachers were “there all the time to communicate with you and others I feel are just, you know, they get on say what they have to say and get off.”

Instruction in the Home

Prior to the COVID-19 shutdown in March 2020, all three students in this study attended school face-to-face and received their instruction in the brick-and-mortar classroom. That instructional setting changed to the student’s home, and in that process facilitators and barriers to participation in online instruction emerged.

Barriers to Participation (Student Perspective)

The instructional setting posed its own set of challenges. George admitted, “I was failing because I wouldn’t wake up and do Zoom classes because I was at home. So, in
my mindset, every day was a weekend.” Elysa shared similar challenges, “But like online, you have to get onto the computer, open it up, then be able to meet the teacher. It was more of not wanting to even get onto the computer and having to do all that.”

**Barriers to Participation (AIH Perspective)**

During the second year (2020-2021), all three AIHs that were interviewed returned to work. George’s dad was home for the latter part of the second year. He did hands-on activities with George, but it was not explicitly expressed during the interviews that he worked with him on his academics. Suzy and Rachel noted that their child’s attendance decreased during the second year (2020-2021) when they returned to work. George received a truancy notice that same year. Valerie noted that Victoria would not participate on a few occasions due to medical appointments, illness, and internet connection issues.

**Facilitators to Participation (Student Perspective)**

Victoria was intrinsically motivated to participate by earning good grades. This was a significant motivator for Victoria. She did not have perfect attendance, but she only missed her live sessions (Google Meets/Zoom meetings) due to medical appointments, illness, or internet connection issues. Victoria primarily worked on her assignments at the dining room table, so her mom could help her if she needed it. Elysa worked primarily on her Google Meets in her bedroom, so she had privacy; but she would do her homework downstairs or outside. If Elysa needed help, she would sometimes meet with her brother in his room to obtain his help.

**Facilitators to Participation (AIH Perspective)**

During the initial shutdown, all AIHs were quarantined at home and were not working. They were present in the home to help and provide prompts to engage in instruction as needed. Moreover, there were several supports within the home that served as facilitators to participation: physical location away from distractions when working online, older siblings that could help, and AIH available to help. For example, George
primarily did his Google Meets in his bedroom to limit distractions, but he also worked on his assignments in the kitchen at times so his mom could help him.

**Role of the AlH**

All three AlHs in this study expressed the desire to help their children if they needed it. They all universally acknowledged the independent nature of online instruction, and they expected their children to be responsible and participate. However, some dyads struggled with participation more than others. Undefined roles were placed on the student and AlH in online instruction. All three students generally accepted that their role in their instruction was to participate in daily Google Meets and complete assignments posted in Google Classroom. However, all three students had varying preferences of AlH involvement.

**Barriers to Participation (Student Perspective)**

George did not consistently participate in his online instruction during the first and second years of the shutdown. George perceived his mother’s role to “tell me to do it.” However, he also wanted his mother to be less involved because “she rides me.”

**Barriers to Participation (AlH Perspective)**

Suzy struggled to get George to participate. She stated, “I tried to be active. But at the same time, my schedule. His… unwillingness to do it kind of played into it too, so I would not be as active as I'd like to have been.” Elysa also suffered from poor attendance her second year. Rachel went back to work, and she described her role as more of a checking in, “For the most part, she is independent and will do it on her own. She doesn't need a lot of outside help, so I was more of the making sure it got done and what needed to be done.”

**Facilitators to Participation (Student Perspective)**

Victoria was primarily independent in her coursework. If she needed help, she knew she could ask her mom; however, she was comfortable with emailing her teachers
as needed. Elysa’s participation decreased during the second year when her mother
returned to work. Elysa admitted to sleeping in and missing her Google Meets in the
morning; however, she eventually worked on her assignments out of guilt because she
didn’t want to disappoint her mother who was recovering from breast cancer. “I didn't
wanna like, disappoint her [points to her mom] or let her down. So, I try to get them all in,
but I would end up overwhelming myself 'cause. I have so much homework to get in.”

**Facilitators to Participation (AIH Perspective)**

The AIH provided encouragement, reminders, and check-ins on assignments and
grades to help promote active participation and completion of schoolwork. These
reminders seemed essential as Suzy commented, “He wouldn’t get out of bed. That was
definitely a number one. Or if we weren't here to make him, he just didn't do it.” Rachel
recalled calling Elysa on the phone while she was at work to remind her to get out of bed,
“I would be calling the house like, ‘You need to wake up. You need to get online.’ So, that
first period class was a struggle.” Valerie described her role as I help them with any
questions that they have. If they need help getting hold of the teacher, I will do that.
Making sure that they're sending the emails over when they don't understand something
until they understand, you know, until they get the right answer that they need to finish that
assignment.

**Attendance**

During the first year of the government shutdown, the featured school district
based attendance on participation in Google Meets/Zoom meetings and completion of
assignments. During the second year of the government shutdown (2020-2021) the school
district changed to a hybrid schedule which was consistent throughout the school year.
The student body was split into two groups alphabetically. Group A attended Monday and
Tuesday face-to-face and participated on Thursday and Friday synchronously online.
Group B attended Thursday and Friday face-to-face and participated on Monday and
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Tuesday synchronously online. Wednesdays were designated as a cleaning day, no students attended face-to-face. Wednesdays were used for office hours, where teachers were available during class time via Google Meet to address student questions synchronously. The third school year (2021-2022) was the first time students had the opportunity to attend school Monday through Friday face-to-face since March 2020. Students still had the option of attending virtually, however, not all classes offered were synchronous.

Each student had about 4-5 Google Meets they were required to attend each day. Four of the five classes were their core classes (English language arts, math, science, and history). The remaining class(es) would have been an elective course such as but not limited to musical theater or Spanish. During the initial shutdown in March 2020, the Google Meets would have been held during the same scheduled time when they were face-to-face. During the hybrid year, the students’ schedules were the same face-to-face and virtually. The classes were taught synchronously, so students who were learning from home could participate live with their classmates who were receiving instruction face-to-face. Google Meets were described from students as ranging from as few as 15 minutes to less than an hour long.

**Barriers to Participation (Student Perspective)**

George indicated that his teachers used a Google Form to track attendance. He also noted that if he completed his assignments, but missed the Google Meet, he was marked absent. There was also some confusion about attendance for class versus the whole day. Elysa stated,

> I don't know honestly how he [math teacher] did that. But we were told like that that [Google Meets] would be part of our attendance. So, I'm sure he marked us absent that day. But it was like first thing in the morning. So, I don't know if we were absent for the morning and then like present for the rest of the day.
**Barriers to Participation (AIH Perspective)**

The confusion regarding attendance procedures experienced by the students were shared by the AIHs. Suzy stated, “This is one of those. I'm not so happy about... Although he completed the work and turned it in that day... if he forgot to hit that check mark button, he was absent... which I totally disagreed with that.” Rachel was not sure how the Google Meets worked regarding attendance. “I never knew how that worked...I never received the phone calls or the text messages like we get now... Normally, if she would miss a day, I get that notification right away. I don't know how that all works.”

In addition to the confusion regarding attendance procedures, scheduling posed a barrier to attendance. George had difficulty getting out of bed in the morning, and Suzy’s work schedule prevented her from being home to wake him up and ensure that he was logging in. Likewise, Rachel had to call Elysa on her way home from work to wake her in the morning, so she did not miss her math class.

**Facilitators to Participation (Student Perspective)**

Victoria had the best attendance rate among all three student participants. She indicated that her teachers took attendance by participation in Google Meets and checking for completed assignments. If for some reason she missed a Google Meet, all she needed to do was email the teacher explaining why she missed the Google Meet, and she would be marked present.

**Facilitators to Participation (AIH Perspective)**

Valerie described Victoria’s attendance as good. Victoria was intrinsically motivated to participate in her assignments and Google Meets because she was concerned about earning good grades. However, if she missed a Google Meet, “She would have to send a thing over that it was a communication issue, and email that she was online and she was working on the assignment. And she would be marked present.” The email was unique to Victoria and Valerie
because the other two dyads did not mention emailing the teacher to explain lack of participation in a Google Meet.

**Grading**

During the first year of the government shutdown, the students had already completed two full quarters of the 2019-2020 school year. However, the third quarter was a combination of grades taken from assignments and tests completed face-to-face prior to the shutdown and assignments and tests completed online. During the second year of the shutdown (2020-2021), students were participating face-to-face and remotely. Grades were based on performance of student submissions (tests and assignments).

**Barriers to Participation (Student Perspective)**

Students were asked in the questionnaire and in the interview if they felt they could earn passing grades in math, English language arts, science, and history if they missed their Google Meets. “Maybe” was the common response for Victoria and Elysa for all four subjects. Victoria mentioned that she could maybe earn a passing grade in history because her teacher provided study guides in Google Classroom. Elysa indicated maybe she could pass history because the work was more independent. She also indicated that she could maybe earn a passing grade in math without attending the Google Meet because although she may have benefited from the help provided, she would have to do the work on her own. George responded “yes” to being able to earn a passing grade in all his classes without attending the Google Meet because he just had to read and answer the questions. George had the lowest rate of attendance, and he received a truancy notice. The perception shared by all three students that one could possibly pass class without attending class (participating in Google Meets) was a barrier to participation.

**Barriers to Participation (AIH Perspective)**

One of the poignant comments came from Suzy as she expressed frustration when talking about grades and her limited role as a parent, “I felt like I couldn't be part of it
enough, so it kind of in a sense makes you feel like a failure as a parent, especially whenever your kids grades are failing. It just it makes it harder. It was a big stress point for me with that.” Stress regarding grades was not unique to Suzy and George. Rachel described that she was fearful that Elysa’s “horrible” grades would prevent her from graduating.

In addition to the limited role the AIH has in improving their child’s grades and participation, grades and missing assignments were not updated regularly, which made tracking of assignment completion and grades challenging. Valerie referenced her Alma parent account, which is the featured school district’s student information system for grades, attendance, and schedules. Valerie used the Alma account to determine if her child had missing assignments. When she checked her child’s Google Classroom account, she noticed discrepancies between what was posted in Google Classroom and in Alma. Valerie emailed Victoria’s teachers regarding those discrepancies and was told not to go by Alma because it was not regularly updated. This made it especially challenging for the parent to determine which assignments the student needed to work on. This further limited the AIH’s ability to effectively check on their child’s progress toward assignment completion in their classes.

Facilitators to Participation (Student Perspective)

Victoria indicated that her assignments were graded “mostly by completion.” She seemed confident in her response; however, George shared a similar response but with less confidence, “Completion I guess.” Elysa perceived the teachers to grade assignments with leniency. “Some of them are very lenient with it and like just by the time we got it in or even if they were turned in late, they didn't take much of it off.” The perceived leniency with assignments and grades could be considered a barrier as students were afforded less accountability for their work ethic and attendance. However, when taken into consideration that students perceived they could earn passing grades without attending the Google
Meets, the emphasis on completing assignments for attendance and grades suggests that it is more of a facilitator than a barrier to participation.

**Facilitators to Participation (AIH Perspective)**

Valerie identified grades as a motivator for Victoria to participate in her instruction. However, the consequence of school due to failing classes served as an incentive for George. Suzy described how grades became a sore point between her and her son:

> When we discuss grades and stuff, he gets very defensive...’Cause I told him. I said, ‘I know you’re gonna end up having to go to summer school if you don’t let me help you.’ And he just gets really upset. And he’s like, ‘No, my grades are good and I’ll bring them up.’ And so it's definitely a struggling point still... with him.

George’s pledge to bring his grades up is a facilitator to participation. Elysa had failing grades too, however, it was not a source of contention in her relationship with her mother. Rachel was recovering from breast cancer, and Elysa was experiencing depression. She was motivated to improve her grades to avoid disappointing her mom. In George’s and Elysa’s cases the desire to improve grades, albeit for different reasons, were facilitators to their participation.

**Teacher Provided Student Support**

All three students had an IEP, so they were provided supports online through their specially designed instruction (SDI); however, the teacher provided student supports described in this section encompass a caring attitude, teacher encouragement, perceived teacher availability during and outside of class, and office hours.

**Barriers to Participation (Student Perspective)**

Elysa poignantly encapsulated her frustration about the need for help and support when she said,

> It was just so new to everyone, that we also had eight classes to get through with them, and like how they all taught so much differently, and how we had to, like pick
up on all of it. We had to be able to handle it all. That we didn't have, like the
motivation and help. Some of them went to school and taught, like we didn't have
that motivation like get us up out of bed and like they got to do that. We are just
like stuck at home still doing it. So, it's like more of like you're at home all of those
hours and then... But they were still able to get out, like, go to school and teach
stuff, but. It was more of like... I will say like communicate with every kid, but like I
understand that there was a lot more than just like the schooling part of it that like
we were all going through.

Elysa expressed the frustration of having to handle all the stresses of online learning,
which at times also included fighting the negative image teachers conveyed to students
regarding their participation. Elysa stated, “Some of the teachers like I don't wanna say
they think that they're the only class that we had, but some of the teachers definitely think
we're only like skipping their class or not turning assignments for them.” The lack of
empathy and negative perception posed as barriers to participation.

**Barriers to Participation (AIH Perspective)**

Some of the barriers to participation shared by AIHs were lack of enthusiasm, brief
lessons, and limited interest conveyed by the teachers. Suzy noted, “Some of them [teachers]
had the approach... Well, we're just gonna do it and get it done.” That sentiment was similarly
expressed by Valerie when she said, “Some teachers were very enthusiastic, would ask them if
they had any questions, how they were doing. And other ones they would be on for five or 10
minutes. Explain the lesson. Get off.” Rachel provided a potential explanation for why some
teachers showed less of a caring attitude than others when she said, “I think our teachers were
overwhelmed. So, I don't necessarily feel that they had a level of interest because I mean they
said this was something we all had to learn through.”

**Facilitators to Participation (Student Perspective)**

All three students expressed that their teachers were available during and outside
of class times via email. The students did not universally take advantage of this availability; however, this support facilitated participation as students felt help was available from their teacher if they needed it. Some of the students felt encouraged by teacher reminders of consequences if they did not participate. George, for example, was told by his technical schoolteachers, “If we didn’t do it, it will go as days that we missed. We’d have to go and do more, do more in-person days.”

*Facilitators to Participation (AIH Perspective)*

All three AIHs indicated that they, along with their child’s teachers, provided encouragement. Valerie described teacher encouragement as “telling her [Victoria] she has to get her work done if she wants to get a good grade. And they would tell her, if you get on, you’ll understand it more, you know, just very encouraging.” All three AIHs shared at least one example of a teacher they felt showed a caring attitude. They shared examples of teachers that followed up with students on assignments, displayed enthusiasm while teaching, offered help, or made themselves available for questions during Google Meets.

*Overall Quality of Online Learning Experience*

When the data was analyzed, several descriptions overlapped with other categories. Overall quality of online learning experience was no exception, and it could have easily encompassed all the data collected because each experience can influence the overall quality of online learning experiences perceived by students and AIHs. This section intentionally narrowed its focus on peer interactions, teacher inconsistencies, and responses specific to quality of online learning experiences.

*Barriers to Participation (Student Perspective)*

COVID-19 prevented face-to-face interactions, and synchronous classes with fellow peers had the potential to reunite classmates; however, due to technological limitations and classroom policies, students were prohibited from using their cameras and had limited access to their microphones during Google Meets and Zoom meetings. Elysa
stated, “Yeah, most of our online classes… all of our cameras are off like our mikes were muted, no one talks but the teacher.” All three students experienced the limited peer interactions; however, they expressed uniquely different impediments to the quality of their online learning experiences. Victoria noted that the quality of her internet connection impeded the quality of her online learning experience. Her least favorite part of the online experience was “the lagging; the not being able to connect to the Internet. Sometimes having to wait a whole day for a response.” George did not see the “worth” in his online education, and he especially did not like his assignments. He elaborated, “’Cause if I wasn't there… if I wasn't in the building, then why would I do it at my house?” Elysa’s assessment on the quality of her online experience showed reflection as she acknowledged the apparent gaps in her education:

I definitely feel that there is a lot we could have been, I don't want to say taught more, but there is like through the two years… Now being in class, the teachers have to go back on certain things because we didn't get like a full grasp on it. Just like missing a lot of chunks of stuff we didn't do. Like in our ELA class. I know we like stopped on a book and we didn't end up getting to finish that.

**Barriers to Participation (AIH Perspective)**

Teacher inconsistencies occurred in the areas of attendance procedures, grading procedures, communication (all three previously discussed) and Google Meets. Suzy shared concerns regarding the inconsistencies in Google Meet requirements, length, and purpose when she stated,

Certain classes were different, so like one class would be like a 20 minute one. Another class could be like 30 minutes. It just seemed to vary. Some teachers wanted them on more, others, not so much. So, I found that some teachers, when they had the Google Meet, they had nothing else for them… like as far as resources. So, I found that to be a little bit of a struggling point.
Limited participation was another barrier to the quality of instruction. Suzy described George's online learning experience as “not good because he wouldn't put the effort in.” Similarly, Rachel described Elysa’s online experience as “so-so” for similar reasons.

Not so much that it was anything on the district side. I would lean more to because she did not participate at the level she probably should have… it was a daily struggle to get her to do the work.

*Facilitators to Participation (Student Perspective)*

All three students shared distinctly different facilitators to online learning. Victoria described that she was able to interact with her peers via the chat feature. She weighed the quality of her online learning experience on the quality of her internet connection. “It varies depending on my internet connection. Like, sometimes it’s really good. And sometimes it was really bad.” George expressed that he liked the opportunity to get his “assignments done all at once.” Elysa commented, “When I did do the classes, I liked just like being on my own. Like having that time just to focus on it.”

*Facilitators to Participation (AIH Perspective)*

All three AIHs expressed unique, positive features of online learning. Valerie felt that the overall quality of Victoria’s online learning experience was good, and she particularly liked the Google Meets because “they’re so used to connecting with the teacher. That's who they need to be seeing. They need to be in the classroom, seeing him or her, whoever it may be.” Suzy expressed an appreciation for the extra think time and limited distractions when she said,

I wanna say I felt that they could learn more from it. For instance, like the ELA class, I mean, they're not bound by sitting in a 45-minute class that gives them more time to really think about the assignment and put effort to it. You know, and not only that, like for math with problems, they're not bound by thinking… oh, I
gotta hurry up and get this done. They have that time to where they don't gotta worry about getting to the next class. Or the distraction of their friends.

Valerie and Suzy described positive aspects of the academic learning piece. Rachel expressed regrets. Elysa opted to do 100% online learning for the first and second quarters of the 2020-2021 school year, and Rachel wished that she had her attend face-to-face with the hybrid schedule. She initially liked the online learning because nobody really knew what was going to be happening with COVID-19 and you know, so for health reasons, because of myself going through my breast cancer. That was one reason I was happy.”

Suggestions

Each participant provided suggestions to help improve online learning experiences. These suggestions are organized by student and AIH are presented in chronological order by grade. Victoria suggested that teachers have more Google Meets because “hearing the teachers explain it just makes it better for me to remember what to do.” George suggested that teachers make instruction more entertaining by incorporating video games. Elysa stated,

I feel like if they were more interactive with us and like... Had us show more into the like Zoom meetings 'cause I know like you can like share your own screen and like be able to like do that kind of stuff. If they have us do more like that kind of stuff, and like have the kids be able to like show him that like what we're doing and stuff, it would have been better for all of us. Kind of like what we're doing at school if someone goes up to the board and does it. It just would’ve been more interactive with us instead of like most of us falling asleep during the class time.

In addition to the students’ suggestions, the AIHs recommended resources for parents to aid in improving the quality of online instruction for their child. Valerie focused on improvements that could be made for students specifically with IEPs when she said,
I think they need more Google Meets. I think the classes should be all live for them. And some kids do very well with just the instruction, but when you have a child that has a learning disability, they really need that face to face, whether it be online or in person, because they understand it more. Like if you type it out and they're reading it, they may not understand the reading part of it. But when the teacher is actually speaking to them and explaining it, it's easier for them to understand what they're supposed to do. Suzy’s suggestion was in the context of her son missing Google Meets and missing instruction. Due to her schedule, she was not available to sit with him during instruction, so she missed the context of the lesson as well. She suggested that the teacher provide pre-recorded videos that could be viewed outside of class time, so the student did not completely miss his chance to engage in his instruction, and she would be better able to help him as needed. Rachel’s suggestions focused on communication from the teachers with the students and to the parents.

Maybe not so much more like Google Meets, but more like personal emails or whatever to try and check in, or something on the lines of that kind of a thing… to motivate the kids to keep on moving forward, and there may have been, you know, several teachers that did that, but from my experience with the ones that she had, I don’t think a lot of them did.

She also suggested the need for communication to the parents when she said,

Not so much to the kids, but like to the parents or guardians like send that like, ‘Hey, you know, these are things that are going on…’ And I know that takes a lot to do that for every single student, but you know, maybe do it for just the students that may be struggling to keep those grades up or not turning assignments in. And I know it's hard, you know, for all of them as well.
Discussion

The COVID-19 pandemic prompted the need for widespread online instruction. With little time to prepare, students, AIHs, teachers, and administrators transitioned from the traditional brick-and-mortar school to an unfamiliar online setting with its own set of unique challenges yet to be discovered. One of the first challenges to emerge was the lack of student participation and attendance (Bell, 2020; Korman et al., 2020; Lieberman, 2020a). Prior studies reported that students with chronic absenteeism are at greater risk for developing poor behaviors as teens, poor health as adults (Korioth, 2019), alcohol use (Barry et al., 2011), and criminal activity (Reid, 1999). Significantly, students with disabilities have a higher rate of chronic absenteeism than students without disabilities (Black & Zablotsky, 2018). Gaining insight into why absent behavior was occurring, especially for students with a high occurrence disability (SLD and OHI) in the online setting was timely and relevant.

Prior studies that had focused on attendance were generally limited to brick-and-mortar classrooms (Dickson & Hutchinson, 2010; Kearney, 2008; Finning et al., 2019). Limited research had been conducted on absenteeism in an online setting and specifically for those receiving special education services with an IEP for a high incidence disability (SLD and OHI). This limited research is partly due to the lack of a precise definition of what attendance is in online instruction (Archambault et al., 2013). Furthermore, previous studies on online education from the perspective of the AIH with children with disabilities were limited to quantitative analysis of surveys (Burdette & Greer, 2014; Ziadat, 2021). They were generally limited to instruction, communication, and special education learning needs in an online setting but did not address attendance and participation concerns. This study attempted to fill this gap in the literature by focusing on barriers and facilitators to participation in the online setting from the perspective of the AIH and student in grades 9-12 with a high incidence disability (SLD and OHI).
The imprecise definition of attendance in online instruction in the literature resonated in the inconsistencies in the attendance procedures experienced by the participants in this study. All three students attended the same school, yet all three described differences in being marked present for class. Victoria explained that she had to attend the Google Meet/Zoom meeting to be marked present; however, if she could not attend, then she would just email the teacher and she would be marked present. George and Elysa did not describe the possibility of emailing the teacher to avoid being marked absent. George indicated that he had to attend his Google Meets, but he was also under the impression that he would be marked present if he completed the work. However, this attendance procedure was inconsistently applied. As described in the results, George had experienced an occasion where he turned in the work, and he was still marked absent. Elysa shared that she believed she had to attend her Google Meets, but she was not sure if she was marked absent for that specific class or if she was marked absent for the entire day.

Inconsistent attendance procedures between classes added to the confusion and frustration experienced by AIHs and students, especially when consequences were involved. George received a truancy letter in January 2021. Typically, in a brick-and-mortar setting, truancy notices are punitive in nature in Pennsylvania. Families could pay a fine and appear in court (Pennsylvania Department of Education, 2020). George’s encounter with the truancy officer was described as a teachable moment or a learning experience. The school truancy officer spoke with the family and George on the phone. He discussed the consequences of truancy, such as not being able to have a driver’s license and not graduating on time. He knew that George was approaching his sixteenth birthday, and he made him aware of the opportunities he would miss out on if his attendance and grades did not improve. No further punitive actions were taken in George’s situation. He started attending and participating in his online instruction, and he did not receive another truancy notice.
The truancy officer’s approach to addressing attendance concerns with George and his family are notable. Rather than focusing on punitive consequences, the truancy officer steered the conversation in a positive direction with driving privileges and goals. George’s attendance rate improved. This story may be unique to George and his family, but the lesson learned could be transferred to other schools, students, and families. Schools can communicate with students in a more personal manner about how their goals and privileges are affected by poor attendance. George’s conversation with the school resource officer started with the truancy letter; however, schools can be proactive and reach out to students who have decreased attendance rates before their absenteeism warrants disciplinary consequences.

Inconsistencies also occurred in communication. All three AIHs used the information they received from the school regarding attendance, grades, and missing assignments to help guide and prompt their child’s participation. Rachel explained that she received emails from some of her daughter’s classes, which she found helpful. She used those emails to help her figure out what her daughter needed to work on. She provided her daughter prompts and reminders based on those emails. Not all teachers sent out emails for their classes, and it made it more challenging for her to determine how her daughter was performing in each class. Valerie expressed discrepancies between the missing assignment grades in Alma (the school district’s student information system) and the assignments marked missing in Google Classroom. When she followed-up with the teachers regarding this matter, she was told not to go by Alma because it was not always updated.

The inconsistent availability and inconsistent accuracy of the information provided hindered the AIHs’ ability to successfully ensure and maximize their child’s participation. Rachel commented, “There was a very big loss of communication between the school and the parents.” She recommended the school send emails to parents on a regular basis informing them of their child’s upcoming assignments, missing assignments, and other important elements that parents would need to know. This aspect of communication was specific to online instruction; however,
communication between the school and families is relevant to the brick-and-mortar setting as well. Administrators and teachers would serve their students and students’ families better by making concerted efforts to improve the frequency and accuracy of their communication practices.

In addition to attendance and communication, the participants described inconsistencies in delivery of instruction. Generally, all three students indicated that they had 4-5 Google Meets to attend each day. However, the length of the Google Meets varied. Some Google Meets were reported to be as short as fifteen minutes, and other Google Meets would last almost an hour. The variance in the length of time for each Google Meet was also reflected in the quality of education and caring attitude perceived by the dyads. Valerie observed that some of her daughter’s teachers would say what they had to say and then they would get off. She described the teachers that stayed on to help answer questions demonstrated a caring attitude. The variance in length of Google Meets suggested inconsistencies in implementation of online instruction between teachers. The Google Meets were held during the timeframe the students would have had during instruction in the brick-and-mortar classroom, which were forty-minute class periods. The inconsistent adherence to the schedule and shortened live sessions impeded meeting the students’ learning needs. Valerie felt that her daughter learned best during live sessions (Google Meets/Zoom meetings). She suggested that students with IEPs receive their online instruction live. Valerie’s concerns regarding her daughter’s educational needs is consistent with the special education disciplinary lens of the conceptual framework. Some of Victoria’s teachers met her educational needs, which would have been facilitators to her participation. The inconsistencies or occasions where her daughter’s educational needs were not met, could have been potential barriers to her online participation.

Not all AIHs shared the same perspective on meeting their child’s learning needs. The three dyads provided perceptions of students with different levels of engagement in online instruction, which provided insight on the differing needs of students with high incidence
disabilities (SLD and OHI). George had the highest rate of absenteeism. Suzy felt that her son’s learning needs would have been best met by having pre-recorded sessions that could be accessible outside of class time. She was not home when his Google Meets were held, so she was unable to help him. The pre-recorded sessions would have allowed her to help George when she returned home from work.

Rachel felt that her daughter would have benefited from check-ins from her teacher. It could have been a check-in to let her know that she had an upcoming assignment or just a check to see how she was doing. She felt that these check-ins could have helped motivate Elysa to engage in her instruction. Elysa had trouble getting up in the morning to get started with her Google Meets and assignments. Moreover, she indicated that she was prohibited from using her camera and microphone during the Google Meets, which hindered her ability to interact with her peers and teachers. Unbeknownst to her teachers, Elysa was suffering from depression. Rachel was recovering from breast cancer. In consideration of the conceptual framework, her isolation from peers and the teacher in the social construct of the online learning environment could have contributed to her inconsistent participation.

Motivation, or the lack of motivation, was a key facilitator and barrier to student participation in online instruction. This is consistent with the literature and the conceptual framework within the psychology disciplinary lens (Repko & Szostak, 2016). Students who were motivated logged into training units more than “unmotivated” students (Beek et al., 2020). Victoria was motivated by earning good grades. Elysa struggled with participation, but she ultimately participated because she did not want to disappoint her mother. Some motivators such as grades and not wanting to disappoint one’s parents is applicable to both online and the brick-and-mortar settings. Significantly, one barrier that was unique to online learning was what George described as the “weekend mindset.” The idea of having to go to school in the comfort of one’s own home, one’s own bed. Elysa described the task of waking up and turning on her
computer as a litany of chores. She did not feel up to the task, and yet, technically, that was not the educational task, that was just accessing instruction.

Dickson and Hutchinson (2010) and Kearney (2008) described truancy as the persistent and regular absence without reasonable grounds. George’s lack of attendance due to sleeping in and not wanting to do his assignments were well within the parameters of that definition. However, George’s truancy is unique to online learning. George’s attendance rate prior to the government shutdown that school year in March 2020 was 96%. His attendance rate the previous school year (2018-2019) was 98%. Elysa’s attendance was described as poor during the interviews; however, her attendance records indicated that she had consistent attendance (100%) during 2020-2021. It is most likely that her completion of assignments equated to her attending class even if she missed the Google Meets. Victoria also had an acceptable attendance rate (96%) during the 2020-2021 schoolyear, which complemented her attendance statements from her mom and herself during the interviews. Please refer to Table A3 for attendance rates.

Despite their attendance status during online instruction, all three students experienced three years of disrupted instruction. All three transitioned abruptly from a brick-and-mortar classroom setting to an online setting in March 2020. All three students had a hybrid year of synchronous instruction. All three students had a year of face-to-face instruction with asynchronous online options. Elysa described that she had gaps in her English language arts instruction. Her teachers made references to books that she had not read or was able to finish from her 10th grade year. Elysa just graduated in June 2022. The effect of this disruption remains to be seen. How will her employment options be affected? What is the impact of this disruption on her postsecondary education options? George and Victoria are nearing graduation as well. The questions about the impact three years of disrupted instruction will have on their future have yet to be answered. Notably, the answers to these questions are worth investigating because the potential for another occasion for widespread online education exists.
This is just the first group of students to experience it, and the lessons learned and to be learned from their experiences are worth investigating.

**Limitations and Future Research**

One of the limitations acknowledged in this study is the limited tracking of attendance by the featured school district during the online portion (4th quarter) of the 2019-2020 school year. Thus, the perceptions regarding attendance during the initial shutdown are reliant on data from the questionnaire and interviews.

Another limitation was the inconsistency among teachers in their implementation of attendance tracking procedures during the second year (2020-2021). For example, some teachers initially marked students as absent, and then went back and marked students as present after work had been completed. Other teachers marked students present and then updated attendance records after the due date. In other words, a student could have been marked present and then later marked absent when the student failed to submit work by the due date. The inconsistency prevented accurate day-to-day tracking. This limitation did not apply to the third year (2021-2022) as students who opted to do online learning were required to do a standard check-in for attendance through the district’s cyber administrator. All other students attended face-to-face, and attendance was taken by traditional roll call and documented accordingly.

Self-reporting is another concern as students and AIHs may want to be viewed more positively. Additionally, the students and AIHs were interviewed in the same room at the same time. They had the option to be interviewed separately; however, the dyads felt more comfortable to do the interviews together. The shared interviews limited the ability to compare responses between the student and AIH for accuracy. The rural location where this study was conducted and the limited number of participants may not transfer to other school districts, schools, etc., particularly if different online instructional formats were used. Likewise, different attendance procedures may limit transference to other school districts/schools.
Much of the research conducted on absenteeism has been in the context of the brick-and-mortar school (Gastic, 2008; Mazerolle et al., 2017; Galloway, 1985; Daromody et al., 2008; Archambault et al., 2013; Havik et al., 2015). Limited research has been conducted on absenteeism in an online setting from the perspective of the AIH with children with disabilities (Burdette & Greer, 2014; Ziadat, 2021). This study added to the existing literature by providing insight from the perspective of students and AIHs into the barriers to the consistent participation of online instruction for students in grades 9-12 receiving special education services with a diagnosis of SLD and OHI. However, future research can extend to additional schools and populations of students. Moreover, it would be worthwhile to investigate teacher perceptions of facilitators and barriers to obtaining student participation involvement in online instruction. Additional opportunities for further research may include an investigation on the aftermath of lenient grading procedures and laxed attendance policies during COVID-19 on student performance in grades 9-12 receiving special education services.

Conclusion

Just as each IEP is individualized, each dyad’s online learning experience was personal and unique. All three student participants received instruction using the same educational platform (Google Classroom and Zoom meeting); however, each provided a different perspective on the barriers and facilitators that promoted and prevented their participation. Not all AIHs saw eye-to-eye on the issues that impeded their child’s online learning experiences. Suggestions for improvement were different and specific to the dyad’s unique set of problems experienced. Moreover, the participants provided a behind-the-scenes glimpse of online learning that can only be experienced on the receiving end of online education. This rare, invaluable insight will enable stakeholders, administrators, and teachers, to make meaningful steps toward improving online education practices for all learners and particularly students in grades 9-12 receiving special education services.
References


CHOOSING NOT TO PARTICIPATE


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https://doi.org/10.3102/0028312031004845
## Appendix A

### Table A1

**Associated Categories and Codes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Associated Category</th>
<th>Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Barriers: challenges to communication with teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Facilitators: ease of communication with teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ambiguous: forms of Communication (email, phone, Google Classroom private message, and Google Meet/Zoom), communication response times.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instruction in the Home</td>
<td>Barriers: none listed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Facilitators: assistance that was available to the student in the home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ambiguous: role the AIH played in home instruction, people that were present in the same room with the student at the time of instruction, and the physical location where the student completed aspects of online instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of the AIH</td>
<td>Barriers: student wants less AIH involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Facilitators: providing encouragement, reminders, check-ins on assignments and grades to help promote active participation and completion of schoolwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ambiguous: None listed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td>Barriers: none listed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Facilitators: none listed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ambiguous: truancy, attendance procedures, number of daily Google Meets students were required to attend, the length of Google Meet/Zoom session, accessing assignments regardless of attendance status of Google Meet/Zoom session, and perceived rate of attendance by AIH and/or student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grading</td>
<td>Barriers: perceived passing grades students could earn by not attending Google Meets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Facilitators: resubmission of assignments to attain a higher grade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ambiguous: grading procedures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associated Category</td>
<td>Codes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Provided Student Support</td>
<td>Barriers: None listed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Facilitators: Caring attitude, teacher encouragement, teacher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>availability outside of class time, and teacher availability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>during class time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ambiguous: Support provided to students from teachers during</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>instruction and non-instructional times, office hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall Quality of Online Learning Experience</td>
<td>Barriers: teacher inconsistencies, least favorite classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Facilitators: favorite classes, student motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ambiguous: peer interactions, quality of online learning experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suggestions</td>
<td>Barriers: None listed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Facilitators: live sessions, pre-recorded sessions, check-ins, games</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ambiguous: None listed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table A2

Technology, Schedule, and Synchronous Characteristics During Online Instruction

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Year One (2019-2020)</th>
<th>Year Two (2020-2021)</th>
<th>Year Three (2021-2022)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Technology</td>
<td>ol issued laptops for students who did not have one at home to use</td>
<td>ol issued laptops with Google Classroom, styluses for every student</td>
<td>ol issued laptops with Google Classroom, styluses for every student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schedule</td>
<td>scheduled instruction from shutdown on March 13, 2020 for the remainder of the schoolyear</td>
<td>two day (Monday and Tuesday or Thursday and Friday). Wednesday were used for office hours</td>
<td>two days and remote with the option of online classes were asynchronous. Some classes were synchronous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synchronous Status</td>
<td>synchronous with Zoom Meetings</td>
<td>synchronous with Zoom Meetings and Google Meets</td>
<td>synchronous</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table A3

Attendance Rates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>2018-2019 (Pre-COVID)</th>
<th>Year One (2019-2020)</th>
<th>Year Two (2020-2021)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victoria</td>
<td>97%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>George</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>96%</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elysa</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Interview Protocol for Student Interview

Script: Thank you very much for taking the time to talk with me today and for completing the online questionnaire. Your insights into online learning from the student’s perspective will help administrators, teachers, and educational stakeholders to better understand the real-world factors that promote and/or challenge online learning experiences. This interview will be recorded for accuracy and transcription purposes. For the questions I’m about to ask you, please answer in as much detail as possible, and share any additional information that may occur to you while you are speaking.

Demographic information:
1. Tell me about yourself and your family:
   (Follow-up questions if these are not addressed)
   - How old are you?
   - What grade are you in?
   - How many siblings live with you? Are all of you doing online instruction? Do you all do this in the same place at the same time?
   - How old are your siblings? Do any of your siblings receive special education services
   - Who is home with you when you are doing your online instruction?

2. Can you tell me about the physical location where you attend your online classes?
   (Follow-up questions below)
   - Is your physical location for attending online classes different day to day? If so, please describe your other physical locations?
   - If your physical location for attending online classes is different day to day, how often does your physical location change?
   - Is there anyone else in the room with you when you do your schoolwork?

3. The Covid pandemic has changed many aspects of daily life such as how we attend school, socialize, and get together with family and friends. How has the pandemic changed how you and your family do things?

4. Before Covid-19, what was your experience with online learning? Have you ever taken a class or done a training that was completely online? When did you do this? What was the training about?
   (Follow-up questions below)
   - Did you have experience with online learning prior to the government shutdown of schools in March 2020?
   - What are some things you did to earn passing grades on an assignment?
     - How did you learn to access your classes virtually?

5. Describe what your virtual learning experience is like.
   (Follow up questions below):
CHOOSING NOT TO PARTICIPATE

- How many Zooms/Google Meets do you have to do a day?
- Do you attend all of your Google Meets each day? Why or why not?
- How long are your Zooms/Google Meets?

6. Are you motivated to participate in your online education? What motivates you?
   (Follow-up questions below)
   - In your opinion, do you feel that you are encouraged to participate in your online education? If so, how is this done?
   - How do you know what assignments you need to work on if you do not attend your Zoom/Google Meet?
   - If you missed your live sessions, what are some reasons why?
   - If you missed assignments or turned in assignments late, what are some reasons why?

   If yes………………

7. How do you go about contacting/communicating with your teachers?
   (Follow-up questions below)
   - Have you met with one of your teachers online using Google Meet during office hours on Wednesday? If so, can you please describe your experiences?
   - In your opinion, do you feel that your teachers are available to help you during class time? If yes, how did you get help?
   - In your opinion, do you feel that your teachers are available to help you outside of class time? If so, how do you get help?
   - What are some reasons some teachers are easier to communicate with than others?

   If no, why not?

8. You are being interviewed because you are a student who receives online instruction, and there is not a lot of research telling the student’s point of view about online learning. What would you like teachers and researchers to know about online learning from your point of view?

9. How would you describe the quality of your online education?
   (Follow-up questions below)
   - What do you like most about online learning? Why?
   - What do you like least about online learning? Why?
   - What is good about online learning? Why?
   - What is bad about online learning? Why?
   - What is your favorite class online? Why?
   - What is your least favorite class online? Why?
   - What do you think the school and/or teachers can do to improve your online education?

10. Did you feel that you could connect with your friends in an online instruction setting? Why or why not?

11. How does your teacher take attendance online?
   (Follow-up questions below)
   - If you missed a Zoom/Google Meet are you absent that day?
12. How does your teacher grade assignments and tests online?

13. How did you submit changes to assignments online?

14. What role does the adult in your home play in your online instruction?

15. Is the adult in your home actively involved in your online instruction?
   (Follow-up questions below)
   - Is the adult in your home available to help you with your school work if/when you need assistance?
   - Is the adult in your home at home when you are completing assignments online?

16. Would you like more or less AIH involvement in your online instruction?

17. What would you like your AIH to do to help in your online instruction?

**Follow-up to Questions from Questionnaire:**

18. Do you feel confident that if you asked your teachers for help on your assignments, you would get the help you need?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Sometimes

You responded: ______. Please explain.

19. Have you received a truancy notice this 2020-2021 school year?
   - Yes
   - No
   - I don’t know

You responded: yes. Please describe how your family was made aware of your truancy and any other details that you can remember.

You responded: I don’t know. Please explain. Why you don’t know if you had a truancy notice.

20. Do you feel that attending Google Meets leads to earning good grades?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Sometimes

Please explain your answer.

21. Do you feel that you can earning passing grades if you miss your Google Meets in Math?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Maybe

Please explain your answer.
22. Do you feel that you can earning passing grades if you miss your Google Meets in English Language Arts?
   • Yes
   • No
   • Maybe

   Please explain your answer.

23. Do you feel that you can earning passing grades if you miss your Google Meets in Science or Biology?
   • Yes
   • No
   • Maybe

   Please explain your answer or tell me why you answered this way.

24. Do you feel that you can earning passing grades if you miss your Google Meets in History?
   • Yes
   • No
   • Maybe

   Please explain. Same as above

Script: Do you have any additional points you'd like to make about any of the questions I've asked? That concludes the interview. Thank you very much for your time. I will follow-up with you in the near future to verify your responses to ensure accurate recording and interpretation.
Appendix C

Student Questionnaire

1. Prior to March 2020, have you taken online classes?
   - yes
   - no

2. If your answer to question 1 was yes, how many years did you take online classes?
   - less than 1 year
   - 1 year
   - 2-3 years
   - 4 or more

3. When virtual, how often do you join your Math Google Meets during your designated period?
   - 3-4 days a week
   - 1-2 days a week
   - 2-3 days a month
   - once a month
   - never

4. When virtual, how often do you join your English Language Arts Google Meets during your designated period?
   - 3-4 days a week
   - 1-2 days a week
   - 2-3 days a month
   - once a month
   - never

5. When virtual, how often do you join your History Google Meets during your designated period?
   - 3-4 days a week
   - 1-2 days a week
   - 2-3 days a month
   - once a month
   - never

6. When virtual, how often do you join your Science or Biology Google Meets during your designated period?
   - 3-4 days a week
   - 1-2 days a week
   - 2-3 days a month
   - once a month
   - never

7. When virtual, how often do you complete and turn in your assignments on time?
   - Regularly – you turn your assignments in by the due date consistently
   - Sometimes – you turn in most of your assignments, but some don’t get finished.
• Not usually – you have 2 or more missing assignments each week that do not get done
• Never – you always have missing assignments from all of your classes every week

8. What is the primary method you use to communicate with your teachers online?
• Google Classroom
• email
• Google Meet
• Phone

9. Do you feel confident that if you asked your teachers for help on your assignments, you would get the help you need?
• Yes
• No
• Sometimes

10. How motivated are you to finish high school?
• High
• Medium
• Low

11. Have you received a truancy notice this 2020-2021 school year?
• Yes
• No
• I don’t know

12. Do you feel that attending Google Meets leads to earning good grades?
• Yes
• No
• Sometimes

13. Do you feel that you can earning passing grades if you miss your Google Meets in Math?
• Yes
• No
• Maybe

14. Do you feel that you can earning passing grades if you miss your Google Meets in English Language Arts?
• Yes
• No
• Maybe

15. Do you feel that you can earning passing grades if you miss your Google Meets in Science or Biology?
• Yes
• No
• Maybe
16. Do you feel that you can earning passing grades if you miss your Google Meets in History?
   • Yes
   • No
   • Maybe
Appendix D

AIH Questionnaire

1. Describe the level of involvement you think adults in the home need to have in their high school student’s online education?
   - Very Involved
   - Moderately Involved
   - Low Involvement
   - No Involvement

2. Are you available to help your child with online school work if/when you are needed for assistance?
   - Yes
   - No

3. Would you like to be more or less involved in your child’s online instruction?
   - More Involved
   - Less Involved

4. How would you describe your child’s rate of attendance online?
   - 90% to 100%
   - 80% to 90%
   - 70% to 60%
   - 50% or less

5. When virtual, how often does your child attend and participate in online Google Meets?
   - 3-4 days a week
   - 1-2 days a week
   - 2-3 days a month
   - once a month
   - never

6. When virtual, how often does your child complete and turn in assignments on time?
   - Regularly – turns in assignments by the due date consistently
   - Sometimes – turns in most assignments, but some don’t get finished.
   - Not usually – has 2 or more missing assignments each week that do not get done
   - Never – always has missing assignments from all classes every week

7. What is the primary method you use to communicate with your child’s teachers online?
   - Google Classroom
   - email
   - Google Meet
   - Phone

8. Do you feel confident that if your child asked teachers for help on assignments, he/she would get the help he/she needs?
• Yes
• No
• Sometimes

9. How motivated is your child to finish high school?
   • High
   • Medium
   • Low

10. Have you received a truancy notice this 2020-2021 school year for your child?
    • Yes
    • No
    • I don’t know

11. Do you feel that your child attending Google Meets leads to earning good grades?
    • Yes
    • No
    • Sometimes

12. Do you feel that your child can earning passing grades if he/she misses Google Meets in Math?
    • Yes
    • No
    • Maybe

13. Do you feel that your child can earning passing grades if he/she misses Google Meets in English Language Arts?
    • Yes
    • No
    • Maybe

14. Do you feel that your child can earning passing grades if he/she misses Google Meets in Science or Biology?
    • Yes
    • No
    • Maybe

15. Do you feel that your child can earning passing grades if he/she misses Google Meets in History?
    • Yes
    • No
    • Maybe
Appendix E

AIH Interview Protocol

Script: Thank you very much for taking the time to talk with me today and for completing the online questionnaire. Your insights into online learning from the parent’s perspective will help administrators, teachers, and educational stakeholders to better understand the real-world factors that promote and/or challenge online learning experiences. For the questions I’m about to ask you, please answer in as much detail as possible, and share any additional information that may occur to you while you are speaking.

Demographic information:
1. Tell me about yourself and your family:
   (Follow-up questions if these are not addressed)
   - How old and what grade is your child in high school?
   - How many children live with you? Are all of your children doing online instruction? Do your children do online instruction in the same place at the same time?
   - How old are your children? Do any of your children receive special education services?
   - Who is home when your children are doing online instruction?

2. Can you tell me about the physical location where your high school student attends online classes?
   (Follow-up questions below)
   - Is the physical location for attending online classes different day to day? If so, please describe your other physical locations?
   - If the physical location for attending online classes is different day to day, how often does the physical location change?
   - Is there anyone else in the room with your high school student when he/she does his/her schoolwork?

3. The Covid pandemic has changed many aspects of daily life such as how we attend school, socialize, get together with family and friends. How has the pandemic changed how you and your family do things?

4. Before Covid-19, what was your high school child’s experience with online learning? Had he/she ever taken a class or done a training that was completely online? When did he/she do this? What was the training about?
   (Follow-up questions below)
   - Did your high school child have experience with online learning prior to the government shutdown of schools in March 2020?
   - What are some things your high school child did to earn passing grades on an assignment?
     - How did he/she learn to access his/her classes virtually?

5. Describe your high school child’s virtual learning experience.
(Follow up questions below):
- How many Zooms/Google Meets does your high school child have to do a day?
- Does your high school child attend all of his/her Google Meets each day? Why or why not?
- How long are his/her Zooms/Google Meets?

6. Do you feel that your high school child is motivated to participate in his/her online education? What do you think motivates him/her?
(Follow-up questions below)
- In your opinion, do you feel that your high school child is encouraged to participate in his/her online education? If so, how is this done?
- How do you know what assignments your high school child needs to work on if he/she does not attend his/her Zoom/Google Meet?
- If your high school child missed his/her live sessions, what are some reasons why?
- If your high school child missed assignments or turned in assignments late, what are some reasons why?

Have you ever needed to contact your high school child’s teacher for any reason (ex. extra assistance on an assignment, identify work that needs to be made up, etc., want to know what grade is, etc.)

If yes………..

7. How do you go about contacting/communicating with your high school child’s teachers?
(Follow-up questions below)
- Have you met with one of your high school child’s teachers online using Google Meet during office hours on Wednesday? If so, can you please describe your experiences?
- In your opinion, do you feel that your high school child’s teachers are available to help him/her during class time? If yes, how did he/she get help?
- In your opinion, do you feel that your high school child’s teachers are available to help him/her outside of class time? If so, how do he/she get help?
- What are some reasons some teachers are easier to communicate with than others?

If no, why not?

8. Do you feel that the teachers were interested in your child?
(Follow-up questions below)
- What does interest or caring attitude look like?

9. How would you describe the quality of your high school child’s online education?
(Follow-up questions below)
- What do you like most about online learning? Why?
- What do you like least about online learning? Why?
- What is good about online learning? Why?
- What is bad about online learning? Why?
- What is your high school child’s favorite class online? Why?
- What is your high school child’s least favorite class online? Why?
- What do you think the school and/or teachers can do to improve your high school child’s online education?
10. How does your high school child’s teacher take attendance online? (Follow-up questions below)
   • If he/she missed a Zoom/Google Meet is he/she absent that day?

11. How does your high school child’s teacher grade assignments online?

12. What role do you play in your high school child’s online instruction?

13. Are you actively involved in your high school child’s online instruction? (Follow-up questions below)
   • Are you available to help you with school work if/when your high school child needs assistance?
   • Are you home when your high school child is completing assignments online?

14. Would you like to be more or less involved in your child’s online instruction?

15. How would you describe your child’s attendance online?

16. You are being interviewed because you have a child in high school who receives online instruction, and there is not a lot of research telling the students’ and parent’s point of view about online learning. What would you like teachers and researchers to know about online learning from your point of view?

Script: Do you have any additional points you’d like to make about any of the questions I’ve asked? That concludes the interview. Thank you very much for your time. I will follow-up with you in the near future to verify your responses to ensure accurate recording and interpretation.