

Transcript of Interview with Alicia S. Travino by Mario S. Travino

Interviewee: Alicia S. Travino

Interviewer: Mario S. Travino

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Location (Interviewee): San Antonio, Texas

Location (Interviewer): San Antonio, Texas

Transcriber: Lily Crigler

Abstract: Mario S. Travino interviews his mother, Alicia S. Travino, about her experience with working in education during COVID-19. She discusses challenges that her students faced due to the pandemic and due to online learning.

Mario S Travino 00:01

So for this interview, I have here with me, my mom. And I'll be talking to her about the educational journey, and how she felt the pandemic affected that whole process.

Alicia S Travino 00:12

So my name is Alicia Silvino Trevino. I have been a bilingual educator for 27 years. I am now a dyslexia therapist, a reading specialist. I coordinate our RTI, which is our response to intervention. I also provide teachers with activities to address students' needs. And I support my administration by processing paperwork such as our dyslexia paperwork, and speech referrals, as well as special ed referrals.

Mario S Travino 00:46

Well, seeing how that's a very packed schedule, I would imagine that you have a lot of experience, like you said, in this business and institution. And the main thing I want to get at is how you felt this pandemic affected that process. So starting off, back when we first learned that our schools would be closing down, and we would be out of school, how did the teachers take that news?

Alicia S Travino 01:12

I think back in spring break, that's when it actually happened two years ago, and it was a Monday well we're going to be ready to go back to school. And unfortunately, the news started to advise us that schools were going to be closed. And in the beginning it seemed to be okay, because we thought we had an extra week of spring break, but in the long run, we realized that it was actually a pandemic that was causing so many, so many deaths and so much destruction in the world. So it took us by surprise.

Mario S Travino 01:45

Would you say that, after learning the true size of the situation, that there was a time period in which education became kind of a second concern in most people's minds?

Alicia S Travino 02:00

I think, for parents, even as a teacher and a parent myself, education was the last thing on my mind. But we knew we had to keep on going as teachers, and we still had to provide services for our students, especially my school, my school is a title one school. So we have a lot of children who are economically disadvantaged, which means

that we're their source of breakfast or source of lunch, and snacks. So not only that, we're their source of knowledge, because a lot of the parents work or many parents don't speak the language and can't support their children. So it really affected our students.

Mario S Travino 02:40

So seen as how you were like you said, a title one school, because of that language barrier and financial barrier, do you think your kids were impacted in a greater sense, than perhaps, better off schools like the north side of San Antonio?

Alicia S Travino 02:59

Yes, our kids were at a major disadvantage. If I would compare my students in South San Antonio ISD at Benavidez to let's say, Tejada middle school or Bulverde Creek, those students alone have the internet or the capacity for their computers to run programs and apps, or their parents have the background knowledge to support their kids at home. While my students don't have but maybe one computer or no computers at home. They probably only had their cell phones, a lot of parents said that they only had a cell phone with internet. And most students actually had to go to hotspots and pick up Chromebooks from our campuses. So they didn't even possess, they didn't have in their homes any type of technology that would help them support them through this critical time.

Mario S Travino 03:51

Speaking of being online and an online presence, how would you say teachers felt about this sudden switch from in person to a completely virtual classroom?

Alicia S Travino 04:04

Well, personally, it was a very difficult change, because just the simple lack of that interaction with our students, you know, we couldn't, I wasn't there to speak to them face to face, you know, the proximity where we find each other, or we have a confidence in each other and build a relationship so that teaching can become enjoyable. That distance that int-, the internet provided us wasn't helpful at all. And the fact that there were so many glitches, you know, it made teaching, very non-personal because teaching has to have a, I have to have a build a relationship with my students so that teaching could happen. And through online or through the internet, it wasn't happening.

Mario S Travino 04:54

I know that you work with kids ranging from kindergarten to fifth, so would you say that kids who had previously been in school before the pandemic performed, performed better than those who started school during this time?

Alicia S Travino 05:13

I don't think they performed better, I just think they knew more about what is expected from them at school, while the pre K kinder, and first, they weren't really sure what was going on, because they had lacked experience in school. Our pre K students really come in not knowing how to sit, social skills, they don't know how to hold a pencil, our kindergarten students now have become like pre K students who came into school without knowing how to hold a pencil or write their name. So it really affected our lower grades, our little ones, because they need more supports, in different ways in basic skills, like holding a pencil, writing their name, social skills, you know, sitting down, attention span, so it's affected the lower grades in a different manner.

Mario S Travino 06:02

The social skills that these kids lacked, would you say that now they are starting to learn them as we adjust to a in person setting?

Alicia S Travino 06:12

I think right now towards December, the kids are learning what they were supposed to learn in August, as, as if we talk about social skills. So they're already lagging socially. And even the upper grades, I could see that the older students are very immature. And they just don't have that stamina that they need like to read a story to answer questions. They lack a lot of background information.

Mario S Travino 06:44

Other than these hopeful benefits, that we see that we hope kids will achieve their social skills, are you happy that we're moving back towards an in person class? Or would you rather stay virtually online for the time being?

Alicia S Travino 06:58

We've been back on campus since last year, we started at 10%, then we increase gradually to 20 and 30. And this year, we started at 100%. And personally, I prefer to be at, at a campus with my students face to face. Because it's, I know they're going to be there in my classroom, I can use manipulatives, that proximity that we need, you know, I could read the child's face and expressions or needs better than using technology. The other thing is that now the child goes to school all day. And when we were virtual, they had to login maybe for 5, 10 minutes, and they were calling it present, which really affected their learning skills, because they have a lot of academic apps now. So yes, I would prefer them to be face to face if they're safe, because now they're talking about a second strand. And if this strand is as bad as the first one, again, education takes a second place in life; I'd rather have students safe, all students safe, all my kids safe than anything else.

Mario S Travino 08:15

So talking about them being safe, would you say that you still have in place certain rules like in schools that are doing their job and keeping students safe, sanitize?

Alicia S Travino 08:28

Yes, we are. Because in the morning, I'll do for example, duty at seven o'clock in the morning, and then make sure that the students enter our building with masks. If they don't have masks, we provide masks, we do temperature checks, we do basically what we can with what we have. So we keep the six, the students six inches apart. We try to divide, use dividers on the desks. We try our best, again, that's what we have.

Mario S Travino 09:00

So I guess to end off this interview, I just wanted to get your personal opinion on which do you prefer, the virtual setting or the in person setting? And are there any benefits to either or that you would keep?

Alicia S Travino 09:15

I think you can, we could learn something from the virtual learning. A lot of the application and the programs that are created, like Google Classroom, Seesaw, and others that we use can be now implemented in class with the students face to face. They can now use their, something that we didn't do before, they could use their Chromebook in the classroom while we also present online. And at the same time, we can walk around and see

our children keep that distance. Make sure we have a connection with our students so that learning can take place. So there was some benefits, about the applications and Google Classroom and technology that we used during the pandemic now in the real classroom.

Mario S Travino 10:08

Okay, I think then the most important thing we could hope for is that students slowly adjust back. And we have a hope that we'll catch back up to where we were and create a new normal that we are all comfortable with during these times.

Alicia S Travino 10:27

Yeah, I think that people need to be patient because it's going to take us a while so that students can catch up on their academics. Our children are probably two years behind, which means it would take us about another two to three years to catch them up. So as teachers, we try our best with what we have, and with parents support, we hopefully can reach a middle ground.

Mario S Travino 10:54

Wow, thank you for talking with me, and let's just hope for the best for our education.

Alicia S Travino 10:59

Yes, we will.