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The Covid-19 Pandemic and College Student Parents: Balancing Childcare, Mental Health, and Academics

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The purpose of this study was to examine the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on college student parents' use of childcare and campus resources and their state of mental health and education. Participants were 58 college students with a child/children at California State University Long Beach, a four-year Hispanic Serving Institution. An online survey was conducted inquiring their current childcare arrangements, severity of depressive symptoms, and access to university resources. Qualitative results based on grounded theory indicated that student parents were concerned about the lack of childcare, balancing responsibilities as a parent and student, and financial constraints. Based on research findings, institutions need to assess the resources provided to student parents to help support and retain them during this challenging time. Applications for family and consumer sciences educators are included.

Introduction

College students who are parents are often considered among the most vulnerable populations, with needs ranging from financial strain, housing insecurity, lack of childcare, to no access to broadband networks (Douglas-Gabriel, 2020). These students attempt to balance competing demands of student, parent, and provider and struggle to prioritize their education over other responsibilities.

Nationally, 22% of college students are parents (United States Government Accountability Office, 2019). Pre-pandemic, there were few policies, resources, and services to support student parents' pursuit of a college degree (Douglas-Gabriel, 2020), and those who did had resources that were spread thin. When the Covid-19 pandemic began, many of the resources that college student parents were dependent on were no longer available. Childcare centers closed immediately and many have remained closed. Childcare availability was a concern pre-pandemic, in terms of availability and affordability (Dayne et al., 2021), but, with the switch to online learning, college student parents had to grapple with the transition to online learning, while caring for their children at home full time. Many college student parents struggled with internet access and often needed to share computers and hot spots with their children. Other resources they were accustomed to, such as counseling services and parent support groups, moved to online platforms and some were put on hold.

Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study was to look at the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on the educational trajectory of college student parents and how the university support services or lack of these services has affected their academic plans. Previous research by Dayne, Jung, and Roy (2021) found that many student parents had concerns with campus childcare and resources as

they balanced studying, working and parenting prior to the pandemic. This research revealed that many student parents felt unprepared, overwhelmed, and exhausted when it came to raising children and discussed interest in workshops to support their well-being (Dayne et al., 2021) . Because family and consumer sciences (FCS) educators have a unique, integrative background and an understanding of families and family systems, they can support this unique population by using critical and creative thinking to find ways to improve student parent well-being and access to resources. FCS educators also have a responsibility to help others be aware of the community vitality of student parents and how this diverse population deserves to be a focus on college campuses with resources that help them thrive on college campuses.

This study aimed to:

1. Understand challenges in the areas of finances, mental health, and childcare needs of college student parents during the Covid-19 pandemic.
2. Assess the campus support systems accessed by college student parents during the Covid-19 pandemic.
3. Share suggestions on how college campuses and those (including FCS educators) who work with student parents and their families, can better support these students' basic and academic needs during a crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic.

Review of Literature

The closure of campuses and early childcare facilities have had repercussions among student parents who are already facing unique challenges that their counterparts are not facing, such as, in this case, having one or more dependents (Lin et al., 2020). Though many nonprofit organizations and governmental agencies provided resources for those who were affected negatively by the pandemic; student parents in colleges continued to grapple with the impact of the loss of campus resources, mental health challenges, childcare needs, and financial limitations (Lin et al., 2020).

Financial Needs of Student Parents

Increasingly, more and more student parents are requiring financial support to complete higher education. A recent study revealed that the number of student parents who qualify for a $0 expected family contribution to college tuition has increased by 31.8% between 2004 and 2012 (Green & Galison, 2021). Currently, 62.4% of student parents qualify for maximum federal financial aid based on their *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA) and their average unmet financial need is $6,124 per year (Green & Galison, 2021). Childcare is one of many financial needs that student parents need help with. Although federal financial aid takes childcare into account, it often underestimates actual childcare costs leaving many student parents short of funds to pay for reliable childcare for their young children (Wladis, 2018). During the Covid-19 pandemic, the *Economic Impact Payment* program was enacted to provide financial relief for those who have been significantly affected by the pandemic. Student parents could have benefited from the program; however, the relief effort did not consider their unique financial needs, such as childcare expenses, student loans, and college tuition, among many other things (Lin et al., 2020). Research suggests that unmet childcare needs are likely to cause time deficiency for schoolwork, which could subsequently lead to students dropping out of college (Conway et al.,, 2021; Wladis et al., 2018). With fewer childcare programs available and

possible fee increases, student parents are in dire need of more affordable childcare options and other forms of financial assistance.

Mental Health

Mental health has been the constant topic of mainstream media during the pandemic, with many student parents having to significantly adjust and limit their pre-Covid daily routines (Reed et al., 2021). Many students were forced to conduct their classes online, resulting in prolonged use of screen time and disconnect from others. Other psychological distress included: emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and depression (Lin et al., 2020; Reed et al., 2021). With the Covid-19 pandemic shutting down childcare centers, student parents faced the stress of having to provide childcare and educational support for their children, on top of attending classes on their own (Abdellatif & Gatto, 2020). In dealing with stress from parenting and academics, student parents may not perform well in their ability to parent, study, or work at their job. As such, these factors may exacerbate psychological and emotional stress of student parents (Lin et al., 2020).

Childcare Needs of Student Parents

When the Covid-19 pandemic began in March 2000, about two-thirds of childcare programs were closed in the U.S., and half of them still remain closed even after the lockdown was lifted (Lee & Parolin, 2021). Across California, 3,635 family childcare and 4,873 center-based childcare sites were closed between January 2020 and January 2021 (Aguilera, 2021). The closure of such a high number of childcare programs has sent tens of thousands of children to the home, increasing the burdens of student parents in homeschooling. Unfortunately, student parents are not likely to be able to send their children back to childcare soon because many childcare programs remain closed, operate at decreased capacity, and struggle to absorb the rising operational costs. The scarcity of childcare compounds the challenges student parents already have (e.g., financial hardship, time poverty, housing insecurity) and impedes their completion of higher education (Ajayi et al., 2021). For instance, even before the pandemic, student parents spend an average of 40 hours per week to care for their children in addition to spending 40 hours of college-related activities (Reed et al., 2021). With their children at home, student parents are now dealing with potential job loss, increased parenting stress, and unfamiliar remote learning as well. Despite the difficulties they face, the number of student parents enrolling in college continues to increase (Reed et al., 2021). However, without expanded childcare support in higher education, student parents are likely to struggle to balance work, parenting, and schooling. Recent research has found that affordable childcare can make a difference in student parents' ability to complete their education (Cruse et. al 2018; DeMario 2017). With a prolonged lack of childcare, many student parents may have to make tough decisions on whether or not they can continue their education (Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2021).

Methods

The Setting

This study was conducted at California State University Long Beach, a public four-year university located on the West Coast in the United States, which serves over 35,0000 students, among whom about 40% of them are Hispanic (The California State University, 2018). In late Spring 2020, the university began lockdown and suspended all in-person teaching due to the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, the campus childcare center along with many community

childcare centers were closed, leaving few childcare options available for student parents. Many student parents were forced to continue their study at home, while providing care for children and many also working.

Upon approval of the campus Institutional Review Board, a survey of student parents was conducted to inquire how the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted their college education, childcare, and mental health during the Fall 2020 and Spring 2021 semesters. A survey was sent out to student parents whose children were enrolled in the student campus childcare center before the pandemic. The survey was also distributed online through a campus social media outlet. Students who had a child or children were eligible to participate. The survey questions looked at demographics and questions related to well-being, childcare, campus resources used, and support needed. There were open-ended questions that provided rich data from the student parents, related to challenging aspects of being a college student parent during the Covid-19 pandemic and the resources that the university could provide to support student parents.

Participants

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristics of participants. A total of 58 student parents with a child or children responded to the survey. Participants were on average 29.38 years old (*SD* = 7.48) and had 1.39 children (*SD* = 1.09). They were ethnically diverse: 45% Hispanics, 17% Whites, 14% Asians, and 14% multiracial. Half of the participants were single and never married (*n* = 29). Most of the student parents were attending school full-time (86.3%). Many of them worked (56.9%), mostly less than 30 hours a week (39.7%).

Measures

A student survey was created to measure students' mental health, concerns (e.g., finance, health, education), and childcare arrangement as well as identify university resources and services that they used during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Student parents' mental health was measured using a 10-item short form of the Center for Epidemiological Studies–Depression Scale (Radloff, 1977), which is a 20-item self-report measure of depressive symptoms developed and validated for use with the general population, including ethnic subgroups. The 10-item short form of the CES–D demonstrates reliability and sensitivity comparable to those of the full 20-item CES-D (Andresen et al., 1994). Sample items include, "How often during the past week have you felt you did not feel like eating? felt sad? felt depressed? felt lonely?" Student parents responded to each of the 10 items on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = rarely or never; 4 = most or all), with higher scores indicating stronger depressive symptoms. Maternal depression was calculated as the average score of the 12 items and its Cronbach's alpha was .85 for this sample.

Student parents were asked if they have any concerns about paying for college, maintaining adequate housing, keeping a job, staying healthy, and paying for basic necessities. With regard to college education, student parents reported their learning and educational experience during the Covid-19 pandemic and if they made any changes to their college and graduation plans due to the pandemic. Student parents were also asked to mark all student services that they used during the pandemic. Finally, we asked them an open-question to list other student services that they want to be added to the current student services offered by the university. These survey items were adopted from a Covid-19 student impact survey conducted by the California Community Research and Planning Group (College of the Sequoias Research, Planning and Institutional Effectiveness, 2020).

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Student Parents

Demographic variable	Frequency	Proportion (%)
Age (*M* = 29.38; *SD* = 7.48; *range* = 19.96-49.23)	58	100.0
Number of children (*M* = 1.39; *SD* = 1.09; *range* = 1-5)	58	100.0
Gender		
Female	55	100.0
Ethnicity		
White	10	17.2
African American/Black	3	5.2
Asian American/Asian	8	13.8
Hispanic	26	44.8
Middle Eastern or North African	2	3.4
Multi-racial	8	13.8
Other	1	1.7
Household income		
Less than $19,999	20	35.1
$20,000 – $39,999	17	29.8
$40,000 – $59,999	6	10.5
$60,000 – $99,999	9	15.8
More than $100,000	5	8.8
Relationship status		
Single	29	50.0
Married or domestic partnership	27	46.6
Separated	2	3.4

Demographic variable	Frequency	Proportion (%)
Employment status		
Not working	25	43.1
Part-time	22	37.9
Full-time	11	19.0
Work hours per week		
None	25	43.1
1-20 hours	12	20.7
21-30 hours	11	19.0
31-40 hours	7	12.1
More than 40 hours	3	5.2
Student status		
Part-time	8	13.7
Full-time	50	86.3

Note. N = 58. This table displays the demographic characteristics of participants. Although there was a total of 58 participants, the number of people who answered each question was lower, indicating some missing data. The proportion data is based on the number of people who answered the questions.

Results

Childcare

The childcare arrangements of student parents before and during the pandemic are displayed in Table 2. After the pandemic began, many children lost their space at their childcare programs. Except for three children, all children were cared at home by parents, grandparents, or relatives. Student parents described some of their childcare – based challenges:

- *Keeping my children or finding alternative childcare when their schools were shut down or they have any sign of a cough.*
- *Not being able to separate time to do classwork/homework and time to take care of my child.*
- *Preschool being shut down and not offering any services for children to attend in person.*

Table 2

Childcare Arrangements of Student Parents before and after the Covid-19 Pandemic

Variable	Before the pandemic		During the pandemic	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Childcare arrangement (*n* = 48)				
Child/ren at home	13	27.1	34	70.9
Child/ren at childcare	23	47.9	3	6.3
Grandparents/Relative	9	18.8	7	14.6
Other	3	6.3	4	8.3
Main care provider of child/ren (*n* = 46)				
Mother	9	19.6	9	19.6
Father	1	2.2	1	2.2
Mother/Father	11	23.9	14	30.4
Partner	2	4.3	3	6.5
Grandparents/Relative	9	19.6	4	8.7
Mother/Grandparents	7	15.2	10	21.7
Father/Grandparents	1	2.2	0	0.0
Paid caregiver	3	6.5	0	0.0
Other	3	6.5	5	10.9

Note. N = 58. This table displays the childcare arrangements of student parents before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. The proportion data is based on the number of people who answered the questions.

Financial Concerns, Balancing School and Family Care, and Depression

The concerns that student parents felt during the Covid-19 were summarized in Table 3. During the Covid-19 pandemic, student parents were highly worried about their finances (*M* =

4.45, *SD* = .96), expressing concerns paying for tuition, adequate housing, food and family necessities, transportation, technology and internet, healthcare, and keeping a job.

Student parents reported that they were worried about their own health, their children, and families, while continuing their studies. They were also concerned about whether they could finish their degrees on time and take the courses required for these degrees online.

Student parents also reported a high level of depression (*M* = 2.37; *SD* = .76). They often had difficulty focusing on what they were doing (*M* = 2.73; *SD* = .96), had restless sleep (*M* = 2.69; *SD* = 1.04), and had to put extra effort to get things done (*Mean* = 2.65; *SD* = 1.00). The open-ended question related to challenges for student parents during the Covid-19 pandemic, had these responses related to financial concerns, balance, and depression:

- *Job loss: I was employed on campus.*
- *Distractions at home and financial stability.*
- *Finances and lack of understanding professors.*
- *The most challenging aspect of being a student parent is having to manage time to be able to log in two small children into their classes and at the same time log into my own. I'm a stay-at-home mom and my husband is the only source of income and he was laid off some days. It was very stressful managing my class workloads plus my children and still do all the mother duties, such as cook, clean, wash, and supervise children all day, even though I'm in class. It's also a big distraction having children around while in class.*

Campus Resources

During the Covid-19 pandemic, few student parents reported using college support services. Among various services, they used financial aid, academic advising service, psychological service, student health service, and basic needs service. Nonetheless, the most used services were financial aid (*n* = 3) and basic needs services (*n* = 4), which provide students with free storage, grocery gift cards, and access to food pantries.

When asked about what support services they would like for next semester, student parents said more financial support (*n* = 33), supplies for children and families (*n* = 33), flexibility in course scheduling and attendance (*n* = 29), and flexible tuition payment and course offerings (*n* = 25). The open ended question on challenges for student parents during the Covid-19 pandemic, had these responses related to campus resources:

- *Childcare for all. No wait lists. Onsite resources for children, while we are in class, like clubs, art classes, extracurricular activities for kids.*
- *Parenting support courses.*
- *Advocates and support groups for student parents.*
- *Safe environments for parents to potentially do homework/classwork at.*

Discussion

This study focused on college student parents during the Covid-19 pandemic. The research on this population of students during this time is very limited but should be an important focus as campuses discuss and plan for repopulation and the opening of childcare centers and resources that are desperately needed.

The majority of student parents had their children at home. They pivoted their education online and assisted their children with school while balancing school and home life

simultaneously. As campuses begin to plan repopulation, administrators will need to think about how their childcare centers will be able to meet the needs of student parents, especially if they

Table 3

Financial Concerns, Difficulty Balancing School and Family Care, and Depression of Student Parents during the Covid-19 Pandemic

Variable	*Mean*	*SD*
Financial concerns[a]	4.45	.96
Balancing school and family care[a]	5.08	.88
Depression[b]	2.37	.76

Note. N = 58. This table displays challenges that student parents face with regard to finance, balancing school work and child care, and depression.
[a] Financial concerns and balancing school and child care were measured on a Likert scale of 1 (I don't know) - 6 (A lot more than before).
[b] Depression was measured on a Likert scale of 1 (less than one day) - 4 (5-7 days).

cannot open at full capacity. When on-campus childcare is provided, student parents are more-likely to stay in school and do better academically (Graham, 2021). If on campus childcare is scarce, grants to support off campus childcare could greatly benefit student parents. Another great support for student parents would be options for asynchronous courses and coursework for parents to complete assignments when childcare was available.

While some of the student parents continued to work during the pandemic, many lost their jobs. College campuses may need to look at ways to assist with the financial burdens, such as offering more scholarships or grants to student parents, as suggested by a participant in this study. Sixty-eight percent of student parents live in or near poverty, with nine in ten being single mother students (Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2020). Emergency financial aid to student parent families from institutions, community-based organizations or philanthropy can assist with the economic shocks from the effects of a pandemic or other crisis situations (Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2020). Everett Community College, for example, turned the school lot into a WIFI hotspot and provided priority access to Chromebooks for students with children during the pandemic (Douglas-Gabriel, 2020), relieving one possible financial constraint for this unique population.

Student parents involved in this study revealed increased mental health issues and struggles associated with balancing their lives as students and parents during the Covid-19 pandemic. Institutions will need to think about the resources available to assist and support student parents as they continue online courses or transition back to campus. Los Angeles Valley College, for example, provided Zoom-based parenting workshops and phone call check-ups during the pandemic (Israelsen-Hartley, 2020). The video platform, Zoom, was also used by California State University Long Beach when Pregnant and Parenting club to offer meetings while campus was closed (California State University Long Beach, 2021). To benefit college student parents, resources designed to address their needs will need to be easily accessed in online formats and have flexible meeting times, due to the time constraints associated with childcare and school work.

Implications

This paper has focused on a study designed to investigate the needs of college student parents during the Covid-19 pandemic. With the pandemic, there has also been an increase in parents returning to schools to continue education (Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2021), thereby increasing the number of college student parents. As noted previously, college student parents often have many unmet needs. Nickols et. al (2009) noted that individuals, families, and communities suffer when basic human needs are not met. It is imperative that FCS educators introduce their students to the basic needs of student parent families. FCS educators also have a responsibility to increase awareness of the college students' needs on college campuses.

As student parents return to campus, administrators and faculty need to think about what basic human needs they can meet. Flexibility of assignment due dates, availability of asynchronous courses, and the availability of resources that specifically support student parents should be evaluated and assessed. Wraparound services (Institute for Women's Policy Research, 2021) that include financial aid, physical resources, and services tailored for student parents and their families can provide concrete and emotional supports. These types of intentional programming efforts can assist student parents meet their basic needs and will help them focus on their education.

Although this research focused on college student parents, and although the teen birthrate has decreased in recent years in the United States to 16.9 births per thousand females between the ages of 15 and 19 years, the teen birth rate in this country is "substantially higher than [those found] in other western industrialized nations" (Centers for Disease Control, 2021). Given that some of these teen parents participate in FCS classes at the secondary level, FCS educators should be prepared to meet these students' needs (Smith, Jones, & Hall, 2003). Secondary-level teen parents often drop out of school (Centers for Disease Control, 2021; National Conference of State Legislatures, 2018), experience financial challenges (National Conference of State Legislatures, 2018; Thompson, 2016), and grapple with mental health challenges (Tebb & Brindis, 2021; National Conference of State Legislatures, 2018; Thompson, 2016): These challenges were also found among college-level student parents included in this research.

It should also be noted that many students enroll in a variety of FCS courses that include parenting skills. These courses should address the challenges and needs of student parents and strategies—including government programs available to support them—available to them at both the secondary and post-secondary levels.

Limitations

This research is subject to limitations. The first one is the sample size. For future collection of data, it would be helpful to find other ways to connect to student parents other than email. The second limitation is that the participants were only from one institution of higher education on the West Coast and may not reflect the diverse population of student parents on all college campuses. For future research, it may be beneficial to collect data from different institutions of higher education to understands the needs of student parents on different campuses, which could also increase the sample size.

Conclusion

It is imperative that institutions of higher education and those working with student parents, such as FCS professionals, understand that these students have unique needs and

challenges that should be accounted for during and following the Covid-19 pandemic—or during any future crises that may come. Institute for Women's Policy Research (2020) states that it is likely that student parents may delay or discontinue their education due to the pandemic and economic instability. As FCS educators, we must think critically about the issues impacting student parents, the availability of resources, and their ability to successfully care for their families.

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Raising the Visibility of the Work of FCS Educators in the Areas of Wellness and Laboratory Management

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This article highlights the recent addition of two standards to the National Standards for Teachers of Family and Consumer Sciences. *The new standards in the areas of wellness and laboratory management provide clear and precise guidance for post-secondary family and consumer sciences (FCS) teacher educators as well as for secondary FCS educators who introduce students to "teach and train" career pathways. Recommendations for implementation of the new standards are included.*

National Standards for Teachers of Family and Consumer Sciences

The first set of *National Standards for Teachers of Family and Consumer Sciences* (FCS) by the FCS Division of the Association for Career and Technical Education (ACTE) were published in 2004 (Fox, et al., 2008). In response to the ever-changing needs and experiences of individuals, families, and communities the National Association of Teacher Educators of FCS (NATEFACS) spearheaded the process of revising the standards in 2017 which were adopted in 2019 (Handy, et al., 2020). Updates to the competencies soon followed and were approved in 2020. According to Handy et al. (2021), the updated standards allowed for further alignment with the National Standards for FCS (NASAFACS, 2018); Family, Career and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA) Adviser Professional Standards (FCCLA, 2018); Career and Technical Education (CTE) framework (Palombit, 2019), 21st Century Learning Skills (P21, 2019); and Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (InTASC) standards (CCSSO, 2013)

Standards Overview

Standard 1 of the teacher education standards: *Career, Community, and Family Connections* is an overarching standard that aligns with Career and Technical Education (CTE) while staying true to the overall intent of FCS. This standard helps to contextualize the role of FCS teachers as ambassadors to FCS careers while recognizing the interconnectedness of careers with communities and families.

Standards 2 through 4 highlight the importance of FCS teachers being content experts in the areas of *Consumer Economics and Family Resources*, *Family and Human Development*, and *Food & Nutrition*. These content-focused standards are aligned with National Standards for Family and Consumer Sciences (NASAFACS, 2018).

Standard 5: *Wellness* was added during the 2019 revisions (Handy et al., 2021). This standard calls for FCS teachers to be well versed in the multiple dimensions of wellness and to exercise reasoned and informed decision making focused on the optimization of quality of life for individuals, families, and communities.

Standard 6: *Career and Technical Student Organization Integration* recognizes FCCLA as the premiere FCS Career and Technical Student Organization (CTSO). FCS educators should be well versed in the mission and vision of FCCLA and be prepared to serve in the role of advisor. FCCLA offers students the opportunity to apply their FCS content knowledge, develop leadership skills, engage in their community, and pursue career interests.

Standards 7 through 12 focus on pedagogy by outlining the key skill sets required of highly qualified FCS educators. These standards guide teacher educators in preparing future teachers to develop comprehensive curriculum; utilize a wide range of instructional strategies and resources; manage laboratory experiences; assess student progress and evaluate program effectiveness; create a safe, supportive, and culturally responsive learning environment; and conduct oneself as a professional by adhering to ethical professional practices with a focus on continual growth and improvement (NATEFACS, 2020).

This paper turns a spotlight on the two new standards that were added during the 2019 updates: Standard 5, *Wellness,* and Standard 9, *Laboratory Management.* The *Wellness* standard increases the visibility of the work that FCS professionals have been doing for decades. The addition of the *Laboratory Management* further strengthens the connection of FCS courses to CTE.

Wellness

In 2001, the AAFCS Body of Knowledge (BOK) taskforce identified wellness as a key theme of the FCS profession (AAFCS) and wellness remains a cross-cutting theme of the FCS-BOK (Nickols et al., 2009). "Wellness encompasses health and well-being, including nutrition; reducing the risk of chronic disease; learning behavior and development; health care availability, access, and costs; psychological health; and spirituality" (AAFCS, 2001, p. 5). Wellness is multidimensional and holistic; therefore, the profession recognizes the inability to fully separate multiple dimensions of wellness.

Even though teaching and modeling wellness have been embedded in the work of FCS professionals for decades, prior to the 2019 standards' revision, the concept of wellness was not clearly articulated in the National Standards for Teachers of FCS. As noted by Handy et al. (2020), growing concerns about individual, family, and societal well-being have been reported by researchers and the media.

Professionals who contributed to the standards' revision process made note of the need to emphasize wellness as a key standard to better equip FCS educators to meet the needs of students, families, and communities in an ever evolving and global environment.

The new *Wellness* standard and associated competencies are as follows:

Standard 5: *Wellness*- Utilize the practical reasoning process to make informed decisions and apply appropriate preventative and protective strategies to achieve optimal quality of life including social and emotional well-being for individuals, families, and communities.

- *Identify signs of wellness concerns.*
- *Analyze the effects of global, community and individual factors on all areas of wellness.*
- *Evaluate multiple dimensions of wellness (emotional, environmental, financial, intellectual, occupational, physical, social, spiritual).*
- *Practice strategies for health and well-being.* (NATEFACS, 2020)

How Post-Secondary and Secondary FCS Educators Can Apply the Wellness Standard

While the National Standards for Teachers of FCS primarily guide the work of FCS teacher educators in preparing the next generation of FCS educators, secondary FCS educators can also embrace these standards as they work to introduce middle and high school students to "teaching and training" careers (LEAD FCS Education, 2020). The addition of the *Wellness* standard and competencies is particularly important to the work of FCS educators in the modern era.

It is important that FCS educators not only teach their students about wellness, but they must also be fully equipped to maintain their own wellness while modeling such behaviors for their students. As noted in the competencies, teachers must be able to "identify signs of wellness concerns."

"Stress and burnout are pervasive among public school teachers and amplified in urban schools, where job demands are often high and resources low" (Bottiani, et al., 2019, p. 6). Teachers categorized as experiencing high stress and burnout coupled with low coping skills are more likely to see lower student outcomes (Herman, et al., 2017) which impacts the wellness of students. It is imperative that the well-being of an entire school system is considered for the optimal outcomes. "School mental health" not only relates to mental health and wellness of students, but also to educators, counselors, and school administrators (Lever, et al., 2017).

FCS teacher educators can make pre-service teachers aware of issues such as burnout and equip them with the skills to recognize signs of burnout early in their careers. In addition, they can teach and model coping skills to combat burnout and provide pre-service and in-service teachers with resources to turn to if they are feeling overwhelmed. Providing growth mindset coaching could also help teachers find more success in the classroom by empowering student learning through grit and resilience (Brock & Hendley, 2016).

The COVID-19 pandemic that swept across the globe in late 2020 had an impact on teacher wellness. A recent study of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on teachers in the Midwest found that FCS teachers reported lower feelings of personal accomplishment and higher levels of depersonalization (Durr et al., 2020) associated with remote learning during the pandemic. This aligns with findings that positively associate close relationships with students with higher levels of personal accomplishment (Corbin et al., 2019). FCS teachers strongly value relationships with their students (Mimbs, 2002; Arnett & Freeburg, 2011; Godbey & Johnson, 2011; Larson, 2011). When in-person learning was swapped for remote learning, teachers started to lose some of those connections they had built with students.

Pre-service teachers will need guidance in navigating the new landscape of teaching that will emerge post-pandemic. Enhanced tech integration skills will certainly be needed. However, a recognition of the trauma that fellow teachers and students may have faced will also be an important part of the equation. Information about how to recognize warning signs of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), how to support students, and keys to prevention (CDC, 2020) could be embedded in teacher-education programming. Teachers who are trauma-informed will be able to collaborate with other teachers, school administrators, school counselors, staff, and parents to support students and create a culture of respect (Treatment and Services Adaption Center, 2021).

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) "provide(s) a key to workforce development by explicitly teaching the social and emotional skills employers are seeking and the U.S. economy needs" (Committee for Children, 2016, p. 1). Teaching and modeling SEL is of particular interest to CTE programs (Smith, 2020), which prepare students to be college and career ready (ACTE, 2021). FCS professionals are uniquely positioned to teach SEL due to "the innate focus

on human and family development and relationships" and the fact that it is embedded in the FCS-BOK (Smith, 2020, p. 2).

The new *Wellness* standard speaks to the need for FCS educators to be well-versed in content related to wellness. It also bridges the gap between the content related standards (2-4) and the pedagogy standards (7-11) since educators will not be able to be successful in their roles if they or their students are not well. As noted previously, as defined by the FCS-BOK, wellness considers the relationship between health and safety and nutrition. Therefore, there is a noted connection between the new standards for *Wellness* and *Laboratory Management* as many FCS educators incorporate foods labs into their courses and must ensure the safety and well-being of their students during those contextualized and hands-on learning experiences.

Laboratory Management

One of the hallmarks of CTE and FCS is hands-on practical application of conceptual knowledge. John Dewey's philosophy rings through CTE and is evident in FCS with lab-based coursework. "Dewey wanted the students to learn from hands-on experience" (Zhou & Brown, 2015, p. 48). "From a Vygotskian perspective," noted McCombie (2009), "this is an ideal way for high school students to learn" (p. 40). Frequent opportunities for students to practice and apply knowledge and skills as well as demonstrate concept attainment through performance assessment is considered essential for high quality CTE programs (Imperatore, 2019). Lab experiences are considered essential because they provide training in observation, prompt the application of detailed and contextualized information, and spark curiosity in students (Queen's University, n.d.). Ellen Swallow Richards, a leader in the establishment of the profession of home economics/FCS, was so committed to practical lab experiences that she established the Women's Laboratory at MIT and even used her own home as a laboratory for conducting experiments (Swallow, 2014).

Family and Consumer Sciences educators engage students in a multitude of content specific experiences throughout the FCS curriculum including child development, apparel and textiles, interior design, food science, and teaching internships (Jensen, 2020). Opportunities to work with manipulatives and interact with others are motivations for students to enroll in FCS classes. Students "take FCS courses like food science and technology or interior design or apparel and textile production, because they want to use their hands and play with materials," (Paterson, 2019, p. 33). "Students look forward to the class because it is something that makes sense to them, a place they can find success as a result of their hard work and dedication" (McCombie, 2009, p. 41).

While textiles, child development, and other content areas include lab-based experiences, Handy et al. (2021) argued that "one of the most visible aspects of the family and consumer sciences curriculum is the foods laboratory" (p.208). FCS classrooms are typically designed to support culinary endeavors and both residential and commercial kitchens are utilized in FCS programs. A quick scan of social media will find an abundance of photos highlighting student work and showcasing food products created during labs. Culinary curriculum and competitions, such as ProStart, have amplified the recognition of food services lab experiences in FCS.

Occupational programs that have a goal of preparing students for the world of work indicate a higher percent of daily use on contextual teaching and learning practices. Simulated or real laboratory experiences are needed to assist in adequately preparing students for careers as "the chances of enabling students to transfer learning from one teaching setting to another and/or to real life situations may increase when teachers use contextual teaching and learning practices"

(Shamsid-Deen & Smith, 2006, p.14). McCombie (2009) recommended including "laboratory experience where the high school students can apply the theories and concepts studied in the course" (p. 41). Shamsid-Deen and Smith (2006) posited that "using such innovative practices as those embodied in the contextual teaching and learning concept will also help position family and consumer sciences educators as educational leaders" (p. 15)

To be considered educational leaders, FCS educators must be trained in utilizing contextual teaching and learning practices, which include laboratory experiences. Handy et al. (2021) identified a gap in general teacher preparation programs and the need for FCS teachers to have experience planning and implementing lab experiences. Due to the concerns raised by Arnett (2012) and Judge (2015), formal training and experience must be a standard of expectation set for teacher preparation in FCS. Thus, the addition of the *Laboratory Management* standard to the National Standards for Teachers of FCS which reads as follows:

Standard 9: *Laboratory Management* - Develop, implement, and demonstrate laboratory policies and procedures based on current industry standards specific to the focus of the course to ensure both the safety of students and clients, and sustainability of products and the environment.

- *Justify the importance of including hands-on activities in demonstration of knowledge and skills.*
- *Demonstrate and model appropriate health, safety, and sanitation practices.*
- *Design labs that allow students to transfer learned skills sets to career and/or home Settings.*
- *Assess laboratory areas and practices for safety, sanitation, and sustainability concerns.*
- *Implement instruction and lab policies that follow industry (i.e. ServSafe ©) standards related to health, safety, and sanitation practices.*
- *Maintain and facilitate maintenance of products, tools, and equipment.*
- *Assess group dynamics, protocol adherence, and product development as needed for specific environment.*

How Post-Secondary and Secondary FCS Educators Can Apply the Laboratory Management Standard

This standard was included to raise awareness for the importance of developing necessary skills for successful lab experiences and to highlight FCS educators as being uniquely qualified to facilitate this form of contextual learning. Each of the competencies are key in becoming effective at facilitating lab experiences for students. Additionally, alignment with the elements of high quality CTE programming was made more evident. FCS educators can illustrate this connection through three elements of high quality CTE programs which align specifically with laboratory experiences: The first element, *standards aligned and integrated equipment,* focuses on curriculum that allows for student application of integrated knowledge and skills in authentic scenarios. The second, *engaging instruction*, also calls for authentic scenarios for applying technical, academic and employability knowledge and skills. The third, *facilities equipment, technology, and materials*, indicates that students demonstrate safe and appropriate use and maintenance of these components within the program of study (Imperatore & Hyslop, 2018). Explicit communication to administrators, parents, and students is needed to convey the purpose of each lab experience and how the experience meets these high-quality standards.

Safety is noted in three of the seven competencies for the *Laboratory Management* standard. Safety is paramount when facilitating laboratory experiences, which is why the

ServSafe © certification is highly recommended for FCS educators who teach food and nutrition lab courses. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture [USDA] Food Safety and Inspection Service (n.d), a major factor in preventing foodborne illness is cleanliness. Avoiding cross-contamination, cooking food to the recommended temperatures, and refrigerating food promptly are other principles of food safety. FCS educators must not only demonstrate and model appropriate health, safety, and sanitation practices, but they must be prepared to implement instruction and lab policies that follow industry standards related to health, safety, and sanitation practices. Becoming *ServSafe* © certified at the manager level demonstrates content knowledge mastery. Taking the next step to gain proctor status allows an FCS teacher to certify their students which can also lead to job opportunities for students while they are still in high school. Requiring staff who utilize the lab facilities to hold certification ensures safety and sanitation standards are upheld.

Teacher preparation programs should consider increasing the opportunities for pre-service teachers to gain laboratory management experience. As laboratory management was expressed as a problem for beginning FCS teachers (Arnett, 2012), the suggestion was made to dedicate course time in teacher preparation programs to address laboratory management, "especially food labs" (p. 40). Although FCS has varied laboratory experiences, research indicated problems predominantly with the operation of managing a foods lab, "ranging from how to group students to when to grocery shop" (p.40).

Mentorship and guidance from FCS teachers who have experience with food laboratory management is suggested (Arnett, 2012). Teacher preparation programs should collaborate with experienced FCS teachers for practicum and student teaching experiences that provide laboratory management opportunities. Gaining insight into practices and procedures while engaged in analysis and reflection can be valuable in the development of future FCS teachers. A sample observation form used in one FCS teacher preparation program is included as a reference (Appendix A).

Professional development should be provided for beginning as well as more experienced teachers. "Just because an employee has graduated from college or gotten their master's degree doesn't mean that they should stop learning. In fact, professional development has many benefits that can help a company in the long run" (Crawford, 2016, para. 3). Interactions between the two audiences should be encouraged to form connections for support and idea creation. Engaging in ongoing learning also supports the National Standards for Teachers of FCS , Standard 12: *Professionalism*. "Accomplished teaching is a status that is continually evolving (Roubanis, et al., 2008) and warrants training to remain current in best practices. Professional organizations are encouraged to offer additional professional development, such as the webinars sponsored by the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (AAFCS) – *Leading in the Lab: Before, During, and After* (Turgeson, 2020). As teachers new to FCS enter the field, particularly from alternative licensure pathways, additional attention should be given to workshops and training related to laboratory management to support them in the development of their skills.

Conclusion

FCS professionals have recognized the importance of teaching and practicing wellness as well as integrating hands-on laboratory experiences for decades. However, prior to the most recent revisions of the National Standards for Teachers of FCS, that work was not explicitly stated. The addition of the *Wellness* and *Laboratory Management* standards helps to raise the visibility of this important work and ensure FCS educators will be fully prepared to transfer this

information and skill sets to the next generation of FCS educators and professionals while also helping to contribute to happier and healthier individuals, families, and communities.

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APPENDIX A

1. Briefly describe the class you observed
    a. Number and demographics of participants (age, gender, etc.)
    b. Room arrangement – please diagram
    c. Lesson objectives – Students will be able to:

2. Describe the teaching/learning situation by indicating the:

Techniques/Strategies Used	Reactions of Learners Record Behaviors & Questions Asked

3. How did the instructor manage time? What worked well or how might improvements be made?

4. How did the instructor maintain safety while conducting the lab? What kinds of procedures/practices are in place?

5. How did the instructor prepare students for the lab experience? How did the instructor debrief / reflect with the students after the lab?

6. What materials were needed in order for this lab to be conducted? How/when were these materials gathered/purchased? How did students access the materials?

7. Were there any special circumstances surrounding this lab experience? Were any modifications required (i.e. accommodations for students with exceptional education needs, dietary restrictions, cultural differences)?

8. How did the instructor integrate: technology, literacy skills, multiple learning styles, higher order questions, hands-on practice, and student choice?

9. What conclusions can you make from your observations? What might you take from this observation and use to guide your professional career? What was the most meaningful "takeaway" from this observation?

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Senior Sendoff: The Importance of School-Community Partnerships in Family and Consumer Sciences

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School-community partnerships in rural settings can promote quality student education, family relationships, and community vitality. Rural schools often serve as the "hubs" of communities and build on intergenerational connections that exist with these schools. In one rural school, the family and consumer sciences department and other career and technical education (CTE) teachers developed a unique community partnership project called Senior Sendoff, which equips graduating seniors with necessary materials, financial means, and educational seminars as they transition to the workforce. With the collaboration of parents, businesses, and community members, students gain support and increased preparedness for success after graduation. Family and consumer sciences has focused on preparing students as they transition from high school into the workforce throughout its history. This article discusses the importance of partnerships between CTE departments and the school community as well as the success of the Senior Sendoff project.

Background

Partnerships in education matter because educating students does not simply fall into the hands of the school alone. Instead, it often relies upon teachers, families, and the community. When these three groups work in conjunction with one another, the education and well-being of students and families can benefit all stakeholders (Barley & Beesley, 2007; Semke & Sheridan, 2012; Witte & Sheridan, 2011).

One may be surprised to know that there are over 9.3 million public school students attending rural schools in the United States (Blad, 2019), which equates to nearly one in every five students across this country. More specifically, it is estimated that one in six rural students lives below the poverty line, one in seven will qualify for special education, and one in nine has changed residence in the previous twelve months (Showalter, et al., 2019). However, just because schools may be considered rural, they are still expected to provide quality education to all students.

The face of education in schools, large or small, has changed due to societal changes and most recently, a pandemic. In rural schools, many teachers struggled to obtain classroom resources, transition to virtual learning during the pandemic, and find creative ways to prepare graduates for life after high school. It wasn't just the rural schools that faced challenges. The small communities surrounding these schools have also seen their fair share of challenges by way of unemployment, health, and economic impacts. According to McShane and Smarick (2019), rural communities have higher rates of young people neither working nor attending school. Rural communities' high poverty rates, limited job opportunities, and shrinking population have combined to create a particularly challenging environment in students and their families.

However, good things are still happening in rural schools and communities. Rural areas and the schools that serve them are home to deep traditions and values, higher levels of social cohesion, and community safety where people look out for each other (McShane and Smarick, 2019). According to Bryant (2012), rural schools actually have an advantage when it comes to empowering students to become productive citizens. This can be accomplished through parental involvement, self-sacrificing communities, and dedicated teachers- all qualities that show commitment to improving education.

The Role of Family and Consumer Sciences in Preparing Students

The role of family and consumer sciences (FCS) is multifaceted. It includes preparing varied lessons, advising students, and teaching money management and a multitude of life skills. In recent years, the FCS curriculum has been influenced by changes in our society, families, and even the school districts they exist in. Poirier, Faria, Hernandez, et al. (2012) stated that the very nature of our field has evolved due to changes in the family, culture, available resources, new knowledge in disciplines and applied research. These changes can easily be seen in family structures, children living with non-biological parents, and even the way society views the family. In addition, changes in workforce demographics have presented a challenge in work attitudes, which affect how FCS and other Career and Technical Education (CTE) education courses are designed and taught in public schools. As a result of these influential changes, the important role of FCS and other CTE programs can be confirmed as teachers transition to a more student-centered approach in standards, course activities, and projects like Senior Sendoff.

Today's FCS programs are robust and do not just prepare students for the entry-level workforce. Instead, FCS provides a link between the workforce and prepares students with skills and training to succeed (Stone, 2014). It provides students with the academic, technical, and employability skills for postsecondary education or entry into a chosen career field (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, Association for Career and Technical Education, & National Association of State Directors of Career Technical Education Consortium, 2010). FCS, in particular, plays an essential role in preparing students as adults in areas such as finance, homeownership, insurance, career success, nutrition, life skills, and parenting. These areas provide opportunities for students to transfer learned skills to real-life applications through labs, hands-on activities, and demonstrations. Students must understand the meaning behind the skills being learned. The unique role of FCS teachers also includes bringing those learning opportunities to the students where learning takes place outside of the traditional classroom and where connections can be made. These connections enable students to begin seeing the bigger picture and how learned skills in the classroom transition into adulthood. Lobato (2006) stated that a central goal of education is providing learning experiences that are useful beyond the initial learning. To create relevant learning opportunities, FCS teachers look for ways to make learning interesting and valuable to their students. They are creating more student-centered learning opportunities through hands-on projects, demonstrations, and accessing speakers in the community through partnerships.

The Importance of Partnerships in Rural School Settings

Partnerships are important to the success of school systems, students, and the community. When partners collaborate in education, they help children build strengths and

resilience that improves academic, personal, social, and college-career outcomes (Bryan, 2005; Epstein, 1995; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). FCS programs can be instrumental in building those relationships because their courses transcend beyond the classroom into business and industry. These programs, along with other CTE programs, provide specialized instruction where teachers prepare students for their roles as adults after graduation. When schools and communities develop partnerships, they can provide experiences, relationships, and learning environments that decrease behavioral issues and risks, increase attendance and academic achievement and even improve school climate (American School Counselor Association, 2010; Benard, 2004; Bryan, 2005; Bryan & Henry, 2008; Epstein & Van Voorhis, 2010; Galassi & Akos, 2004).

When analyzing the importance of community partnerships, educators must remember that in 2015, the *Every Student Succeeds Act* became law. It reauthorized the 50-year-old *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* (ESSA) and replaced the *No Child Left Behind Act* of 2002. In fact, ESSA requires each state to seek ways to engage community stakeholders; but only one-third of states included them in their implementation plans (First Five Years Fund, 2018). Many people may think that education and business are separate entities, but they actually depend upon one another. However, in rural school settings, community partnerships take on a more important role. Cooke (2018) revealed that schools need input from business and industry leaders to prepare students for the workforce while businesses in the community depend upon schools to prepare skilled workers. Furthermore, this relationship is a win-win for the most important stakeholder involved--students.

Effective educational systems use resources that meet the needs of students, the school, and the community and innovative education programs utilize the strengths of both the school and the community. Rural school districts can be supported both physically and financially and businesses see the payoff with skilled graduates who have soft skills and technical skills necessary for success after graduation. The Senior Sendoff project developed by FCS and other CTE programs represents the very essence of a collaborative community partnership.

The Senior Sendoff Project

Recognizing the needs of its graduating seniors, the FCS and other CTE programs in one rural school realized the potential benefits of developing community partnerships for their students. These partnerships sought to bridge the gap that can exist in students' lives between being a student to being a community member; it also had the goal of helping seniors meet their future needs. The primary purpose of Senior Sendoff was to help equip graduating seniors with financial, material, and community resources as they prepared for life after graduation. This meant bringing those resources to the school where students would have free and easy access. However, as the project began to take shape, the CTE programs realized that the level of community support and available resources were much more than they imagined. The project has resulted in a stronger FCS program, a greater sense of camaraderie among faculty, students, parents, and community members, and a sense of pride and accomplishment by all. Most of all, students graduate with the necessary resources as they transition to independent living as adults.

Details of the Senior Sendoff Project

The enrollment in the school where Senior Sendoff was developed was 1,134, with 76% of the 519 high school students receiving free or reduced meals. The 2021 graduating class

consisted of 56 students, who were of Asian, African American, Native American, Hispanic/Latino, and White ethnicities. For the past three years, the average graduation rate among its seniors was 78% (Arkansas Department of Education, 2021). Realizing graduating students needed additional resources to prepare them for independent living after high school, CTE teachers began planning the day-long event. The FCS teacher chaired the Senior Sendoff project along with three other CTE teachers. In addition, six staff members, twelve parents, and several individuals assisted in reaching out to community members for donations and guest speakers. Phone calls, emails, and word of mouth helped advocate the needs of students and the purpose of the Senior Sendoff project. As donations began coming in, logistics in organizing, scheduling, sorting, and storage became a task that involved the FCS and other CTE teachers. Filling the gift bags and decorating was completed by volunteers and other school staff. In the end, seventeen local businesses and organizations partnered with the school which included medical, farming, food, home life skills, and automotive industries. Local churches, private businesses, and the local community college also provided donations. Fifteen guest speakers from the community provided breakout sessions on topics related to independent living after high school. After Senior Sendoff Day was complete, students were awarded donated gift cards, gift bags, and prizes with a total value of $6,025.00. Each student averaged a total of $107.59 in donations.

Community Donations

The FCS and CTE teachers and community partners developed a list of contacts. Businesses, organizations, and even individuals donated money to assist graduating seniors. Once monetary donations were collected, each senior received gift cards totaling $60.00 in value. Each senior's name was entered into a drawing for prizes. Enough money and donations were collected from community members and businesses to ensure each senior received a gift bag filled with items needed for life after graduation such as dish sets, home repair kits, tool sets, linens, glassware, first aid and sewing kits, and home cleaning baskets filled with detergents, soaps, cleaners, and shampoos. One community member, who is a law enforcement officer, attended the Senior Sendoff and was so inspired that he donated $100.00 to be given to a winning senior whose name had been drawn. In the end, approximately $6,025.00 in donations were given to seniors in Senior Sendoff.

Seminars in Independent Living

Community members volunteered to provide seminars on specific topics related to areas students would be facing as adults. In all, fifteen guest speakers provided demonstrations, hands-on training, and resources in six areas relating to life skills after high school:

Finance. Financial seminars were provided by the two local banks. An independent financial investment company provided each student with an external drive containing resources related to each seminar which allowed students to take it with them. For those without computer access, three-ring binders with hard copies of resources were provided.

Etiquette. A seminar on social etiquette tips and graces was provided by a community member. This was especially important to seniors as they learned proper behaviors in social gatherings, dining out in restaurants, and common public courtesies.

Home Management. Home management tips were provided by the agriculture teacher and Cooperative Extension agent wherein they discussed areas of the home requiring

maintenance and how to check them, as well as techniques for simple repairs and practice energy-saving techniques.

Employability Skills. A retired JAG (Jobs for America's Graduates) teacher returned to share employability skills with students who were seeking jobs after high school. Students learned specific tips on how to complete applications and proper attire for job interviews and the workplace.

Credit. Two local auto dealerships hosted a seminar on the importance of building credit and its importance in purchasing a vehicle.

Auto Maintenance. One of the dealership's mechanics demonstrated tire changes, checking air pressure and tread wear on tires, and showed how to check a vehicle's fluid levels.

Post-Secondary Options. The chancellor and four representatives from the local community college spent the day sharing post-secondary options for students wanting to enter specialized trades with technical degrees. They also shared available associate degrees students could earn locally before transferring to earn their bachelor's degrees. This was especially important to students who needed more options in earning certifications and degrees for the workforce. The local military recruiting office provided a table with breakfast refreshments and small items for each graduating senior.

Health. The local hospital provided speakers who discussed different types of health insurance and services provided. As students enter the workforce and begin paying for health coverage of their own, it is important to understand differences in coverage. Also, the hospital provided special Senior Sendoff shirts for every senior, CTE educator, administrator, counselor, career coach, and secretarial staff to be worn on the day of the event.

Seminar topics were carefully chosen as they related to FCS and other CTE programs. Topics correlated with classroom standards that help students transition from high school to independent living. As students left each seminar, they were seen smiling and eager to attend the next one as they learned skills they could use after graduation. Speakers were engaging and fun with students as they shared relatable information, business cards for future contact, and resource handouts with each group that attended. Breakout seminars were conducted in six thirty-minute rotations so smaller groups could attend. The small groups provided a more comfortable educational setting which allowed speakers and students to work one-on-one, engage in demonstrations and hands-on activities, and have time for questions.

Conclusion

Effective rural schools are often built upon strong foundations of family support and a cohesive community that provides the necessary resources to educate its students. It is not uncommon for parents, teachers, businesses, and other community members to rally behind school initiatives such as Senior Sendoff. It provided much more than financial and donated items; the Senior Sendoff project provided a unique learning opportunity for graduating seniors in a rural Arkansas school. The project is a prime example of what working partnerships between a school and the community look like. The original aim of the project was to provide seniors with learning opportunities that will enable them to become successful members of society utilizing the content areas of Career and Technical programs. It was also designed to provide students with life skills as they transition to independent living after graduation. Not only was this achieved, but there was more community support than expected. This included more guest speakers, more monetary donations despite poor economic conditions, and more volunteers within the school and parents than ever before.

This was the second year for the Senior Sendoff project. It has become so successful within the school and community that it will be an annual tradition. In fact, so much interest and support has been shown that next year's Senior Sendoff is already being planned. In the future, the Senior Sendoff project may include data collection from each year, sharing the overall contributions with the community, as well as its impact upon student success after graduation. As the project begins to grow, it is anticipated that additional volunteers will be needed from the school, community, and even parents. More speakers are needed to broaden the range of seminar topics such as home cooking tips for easy, economic meals, or steps in buying a home. Another long-term goal is to have graduated seniors come back the following year to share how beneficial this project was for them and to encourage that year's seniors to take full advantage of the resources provided that day.

For the present, however, faculty, parents, and the community are enjoying the successful partnership Senior Sendoff has created. They are also enjoying the stories of each student's success after graduation. The school and community look forward to many more opportunities to partner together-ensuring that students continue to learn and grow into productive and successful adults in this small Arkansas town. As FCS teachers seek creative ways to build community support for their program, it is important to consider local resources, networking opportunities, and the fact that sometimes the first step in developing a partnership is simply asking for it.

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