

Marshallese Families' Reported Experiences of Home-school Connections: An Asset-based Model for Critiquing "Parental Involvement" Frameworks and Understanding Remote Schooling during COVID-19

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COVID-19 closed school buildings across the United States, forcing a shift to remote education. How families navigated remote schooling likely varied across class, racial, and ethnic differences, raising questions about how the pandemic might deepen educational inequities. We talked to Marshallese migrant families in a town in the South Central United States about their experiences with remote schooling in Spring 2020. Findings suggest families engaged in school activities at home and were invested in their children's schooling. They reported numerous inequities tied to technology access and "time-collisions" between familial and educational schedules. They also reveal culturally specific patterns of home-school interactions we call "distributed involvement." These issues are relevant during in-person as well as remote schooling. Families' reports suggest problems with normative models of "parental involvement," revealing ways to make home-school connections more culturally sustaining. A better understanding of reported COVID-19 experiences can inform educational policies and practices in post-pandemic futures.

Key words: Parental Involvement; Marshallese; Remote Schooling; COVID-19; Migration; Ethno-racial Equity

COVID-19 closed school buildings across the United States, forcing a shift to remote education. How families navigated remote schooling likely varied across class, racial, and ethnic differences, raising questions about how the pandemic might deepen educational inequities. We talked to Marshallese migrant families in a town in the South Central United States about their experiences with remote schooling in Spring 2020. Findings suggest families engaged in school activities at home and were invested in their children's schooling. They reported numerous inequities tied to technology access and "time-collisions" between familial and educational schedules. They also reveal culturally specific patterns of home-school interactions we call "distributed involvement." These issues are relevant during in-person as well as remote schooling. Families' reports suggest problems with normative

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Critiquing "Parental Involvement"

While "home-school connections" are always relevant to understanding school experiences (McCarthy 2000), such connections become even more relevant when schools close their doors. In Spring 2020, over three-quarters of the world's schoolchildren were barred from classrooms (UNESCO 2020). Many schools transitioned to remote schooling, expecting students to complete some schoolwork at home (Reich et al. 2020). As with homework, such activities often required the involvement of additional family members.

Typically, this family member is expected to be a parent, as is clear from the concept of "parental involvement." This broad term has been used to refer to parental attitudes and expectations, material support, homework help, reading, attending parent-teacher meetings and parental education classes, being involved in the PTA, ritualized school activities at home, and more (Antony-Newman 2019). Despite disagreement on the definition, "parental involvement" is perceived by many as central to school success

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and influences views of what it means to be a “good parent” (Boonk et al. 2018; Thomas, Keogh, and Hay 2015).

Expectations and problems with this concept have significant relevance for educational experiences during COVID-19 and beyond. “Parental involvement” practices often “marginalize lower-income and racial-minority parents while creating pathways of access for White and middle-class parents” (Baquedano-López, Alexander, and Hernandez 2013:172). There are cultural differences in what constitutes parental involvement. Sometimes, “involvement” requires direct contact in the school itself through things such as parent-teacher conferences. But many immigrant parents have a different cultural model that may include transmitting cultural values, nurturing, providing for material and emotional needs, and monitoring homework (Andrews 2013; Antony-Newman 2019). The latter are activities the school system cannot see. These differences often lead to deficit views of minoritized families and incorrect assumptions that such parents do not care about education (Cooper 2009).

School expectations of familial interaction are often structurally inaccessible to families. Even in normal times, expected involvement may require resources such as phone numbers and email addresses, computers, internet access, English and internet proficiency, time off work, and adult-child roles in which adults act as teachers (Baquedano-López, Alexander, and Hernandez 2013). Many families don’t have time, money, or cultural capital to participate in these ways (Cooper 2009).

In the transition to remote learning, previous responsibilities of teachers transferred to family members. Such transfers could heighten inequities in two ways. First, the shift could increase schools’ reliance on middle-class models of involvement that COVID-19 made even more inaccessible. Second, the pandemic could increase ethnocentric ideas that only some types of learning count and that students with fewer resources are getting particularly behind. We see this second assumption appearing in deficit ideologies about COVID-19-induced “learning loss” and increased achievement gaps (Engzell, Frey, and Verhagen 2021). But deficit ideologies, in pandemic and non-pandemic times, potentially create the inequities they aim to counter (McCarty 2015; Valencia 2010).

Instead, we take an asset-based approach. First, building on discussions by indigenous scholars Heine (2004) and Raati (2017) of successful Micronesian students, we describe families’ reports on how they engaged in school activities and navigated barriers in access. These reports also reveal tensions between an analytic asset-based approach and deficit ideologies that are sometimes internalized (Cooper 2009). At the same time, Marshallese families’ reports differ in some crucial ways from the ideologies discussed above. While families reproduce the idea that only school-measured forms of learning count, they do not compare Marshallese students to others or position minoritized students as particularly deficient. In addition, the adult accounts of problems in access may serve as indirect requests for help.

Second, we also take an asset-based approach to the pandemic’s impact on educational equities. Building on these reports, as well as a previous article considering how remote schooling increased educators’ cultural competence (Collet

and Berman 2021), we consider how remote schooling experiences might help reform structures and make home-school interactions more culturally sustainable.

Marshallese Students

An archipelago southwest of Hawai’i, the Republic of the Marshall Islands (RMI), has a long and complicated relationship with the United States that directly affects the experience of students in United States schools. The United States took over the region during World War II. During American control, curricula were modeled on the United States system, and English was imposed as the language of instruction (Heine 2004; Low, Penland, and Heine 2005; Nimmer 2017; Pine and Savage 1989). The United States also appropriated three atolls, one as a military base and two as nuclear testing sites. The health and economic consequences of nuclear testing have been immense and long-term (Barker 2013). In 1986, what is now the RMI entered into a Compact of Free Association (COFA) with the United States. Among its provisions, COFA gives the United States strategic and military control over the RMI, while Marshallese can migrate to the United States as “non-immigrants without visas” (USCIS 2019). Economic and military dependence of the RMI makes the relationship between the two nations *neocolonial* and Marshallese in the United States as *neocolonial migrants* (Berman, Roeder, and Tereshenko n.d.; Duke 2017b).

Since COFA in 1986, migration from the RMI to the United States has skyrocketed (Hezel 2013). In the 1990s, the loci of migration shifted from the West Coast toward the South and Southeast, where Marshallese have moved to meatpacking towns such as Barnestown, the location of this study. Previously almost entirely White, Barnestown’s school district is now 35 percent White, with the remaining population largely Latinx and Marshallese (Duke 2017a; School District 2019). Schools in such “new” immigrant destinations often struggle to provide language support and adapt to changing demographics (Hamann and Harklau 2015). This is particularly true for indigenous migrants such as Marshallese, who often experience educational inequities beyond those of other migrants (Jonas and Rodríguez 2015; Kovats Sánchez 2020).

In the United States, Marshallese students have highly inequitable learning experiences (Heine 2004; Nimmer 2017). Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders (NHPI) are more likely to be evaluated as learning disabled—12 percent higher than White children (Brey et al. 2019); Marshallese in the region where this study took place are the least likely ethnic group to graduate from high school (State Department of Education 2019). Marshallese students also encounter intercultural communicative differences. In Marshallese households, elder siblings often assume childrearing and helping roles, decision making is shared, children are expected to be quiet in adults’ presence, and strangers don’t speak to each other until they know each other well (Berman 2019). But educators may interpret students’ silence as disrespectful and students’ commitment to family as a lack of commitment to education. Discrimination is also apparent in accounts of both Marshallese students (Jetñil-Kijiner 2017)

and educators, who may believe Marshallese families do not care about education (Robinson 2018).

Contrary to such beliefs, research with Marshallese families reveals a widespread commitment to education and education as a reason for migration (Carucci 2013). Our study reflects this finding, revealing that even in pandemic times, families valued school activities. Their modes of conducting those activities at home expose problems with normative models of parental involvement; recognizing these issues suggests reforms needed, not just in pandemic times but also beyond.

Marshallese and COVID-19

Although only 3 percent of the population in the region, Marshallese were 65 percent of deaths in July 2020 (Golden and Thompson 2020). In this Marshallese community, a CDC report found rates of COVID-19 incidence, hospitalization, and death were 71, 96, and 65 times more likely than the White population, and 4, 9, and 21 times more likely than the Hispanic population (Center et al. 2020).

COVID-19 entered the Marshallese community through poultry plants, where most people worked, who then brought it home to their large, multigenerational households. Considered essential work even while they were viral hotspots, poultry plants did not shut down. Marshallese exposed to COVID-19 were frequently forced to quarantine without pay, sometimes losing their homes. In addition to these labor inequities, dispossession combined with United States food aid in the RMI have created particularly high rates of diabetes and other diseases (Hallgren, McElfish, and Rubon-Chutaro 2014). Welfare reform in the 1990s also stripped Marshallese of eligibility for Medicare (although originally included in the Compact), an inequity that was just remedied in 2021 (Diamond 2021). Exposure to COVID-19 at work, historical health care inequities, and lack of access to health care placed Marshallese at high risk of disease and death (Berta, Berman, and Latior 2020).

Methods

This study took place in June 2020, during the height of the pandemic in the South Central United States. We conducted remote interviews with Marshallese families and educators in Barnestown. This article focuses on interviews with the families; a separate article details educators' perspectives (Collet and Berman 2021).

Due to long-term ethnographic research in the RMI as well as research conducted in this city in 2018, the first author has relationships with many Marshallese families (Berman 2019). She spoke with members of four households about their remote schooling experiences using Facebook Messenger and cell phones. Adult interviews were conducted in Marshallese, and children interviews were in English; most Marshallese children in the United States are bilingual and prefer English when speaking with peers or non-Marshallese adults (Berman, Roeder, and Tereshenko n.d.). Other family members were present during interviews and often commented.

Initially open, in vivo codes of transcripts were grouped into four main themes. Transcripts were then reviewed, checking for instances of these themes. We cross-referenced findings with themes found in earlier fieldwork and considered long-term ethnographic knowledge of these families and their migration experiences.

Families

All adults in participant households are migrants who came to the United States within the last ten years. All but one of the students were born in the RMI.

Household 1:

Adults in household 1—Karol and Abinol—came to the United States in 2015 and are poultry workers. During Spring 2020, Karol was at home with her infant. She had just returned to the poultry plants in June. In the RMI, Abinol

Figure 1. Household 1

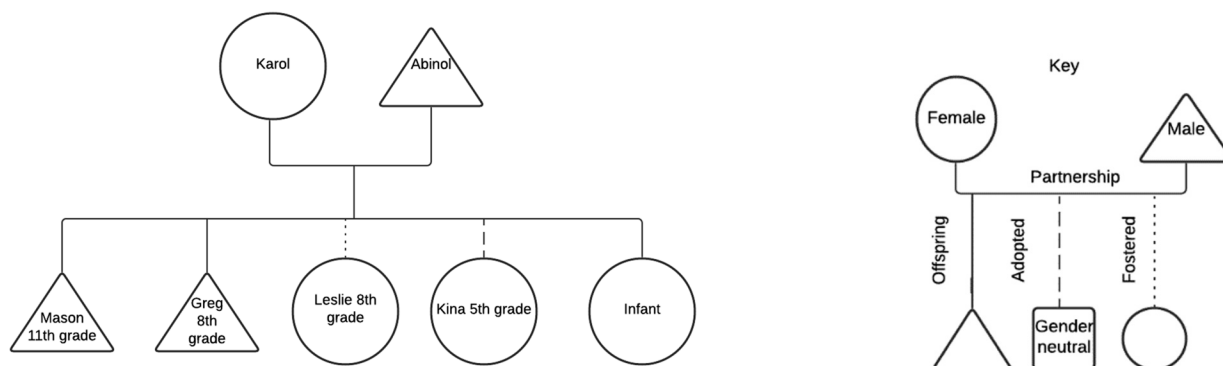
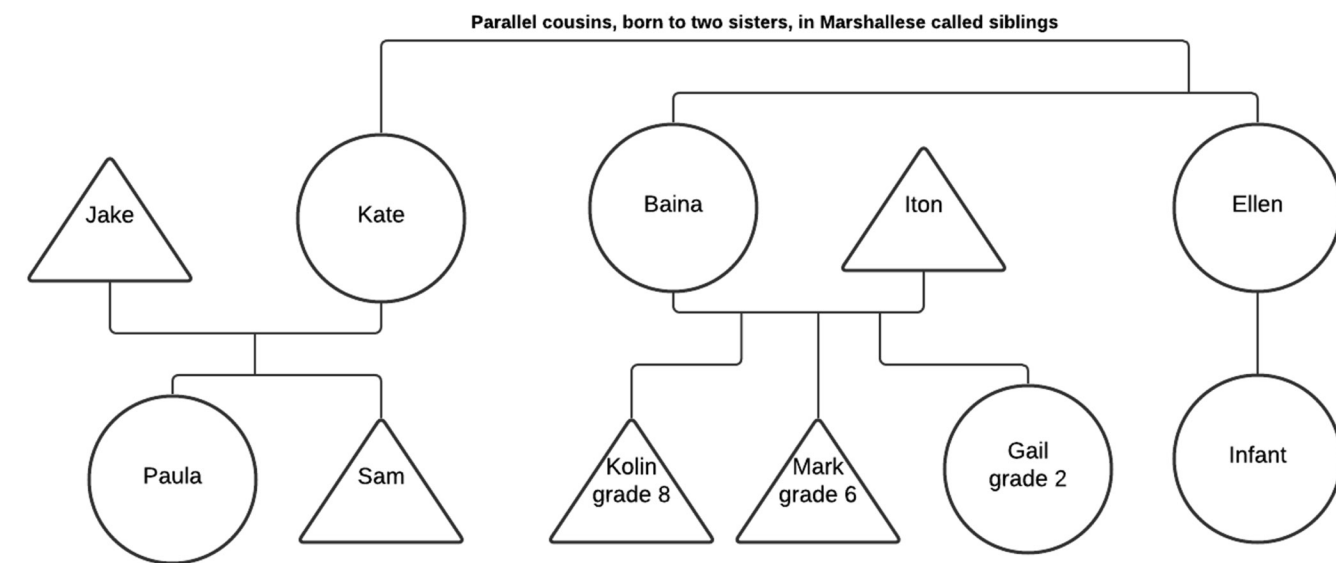


Figure 2. Household 2



was a schoolteacher and principal. He speaks Marshallese and English. Five children lived in this household, including four school-age children born in the RMI. Berman spoke with Karol, the mother, and three of the children: Mason, Leslie, and Kina.

Household 2:

Three sisters—Baina, Ellen, and Kate—and two of their male partners lived in household 2. Baina came to the United States in 2015, Ellen in 2014, and Kate in 2020. Baina’s three children were the only students in the household during Spring 2020. Ellen and the men worked in poultry plants, although Ellen stopped prior to the pandemic when her infant was born. Ellen was a graduate of the College of Marshall Islands (CMI). Berman spoke with Baina, Ellen, and Mark.

Household 3:

Two sisters, Lali and Salin, along with their partners, Bob and Lance, lived in household 3 along with one student and two infants. All children were born in the United States. Lali arrived in the United States in 2017. Salin and Lance arrived in 2020. Berman spoke with Lali and Bob.

Household 4:

Coren, the student in household 4, lived with his grandfather and uncle. His grandfather had been in the United States for seven years; his uncle was a poultry worker. Berman spoke with Coren and his grandfather Bilijo.

Findings

Life During COVID-19

Adults and children had different accounts of life during COVID-19, with adults discussing more hardships than children.

“Aolep men ebin (Everything is hard)”

All adults and one child described COVID-19 as difficult. In Ellen’s words, “Everything is hard during Covid-19.... We can’t go and spend time together at the lake and the park, take the baby and go play in the park.” “We don’t go here and there,” Karol said, “it’s like you are in jail.” According to Karol, there was “nothing” good. Baina agreed, saying, “We can’t go and see our family. We can’t move around and get the things we need.” Baina continued, “*Bwe kwojeḷā manten Majel, jeaikuj jipañ doon im ippān doon, aolep iien* (because

Figure 3. Household 3

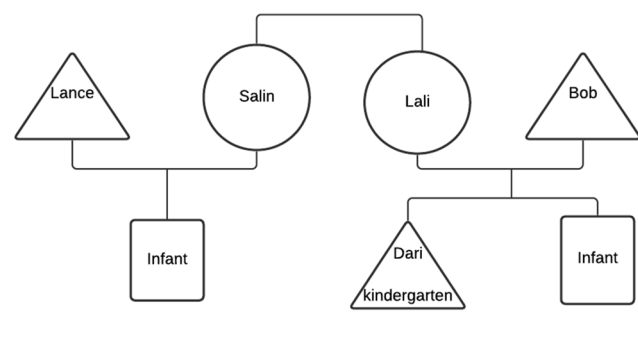
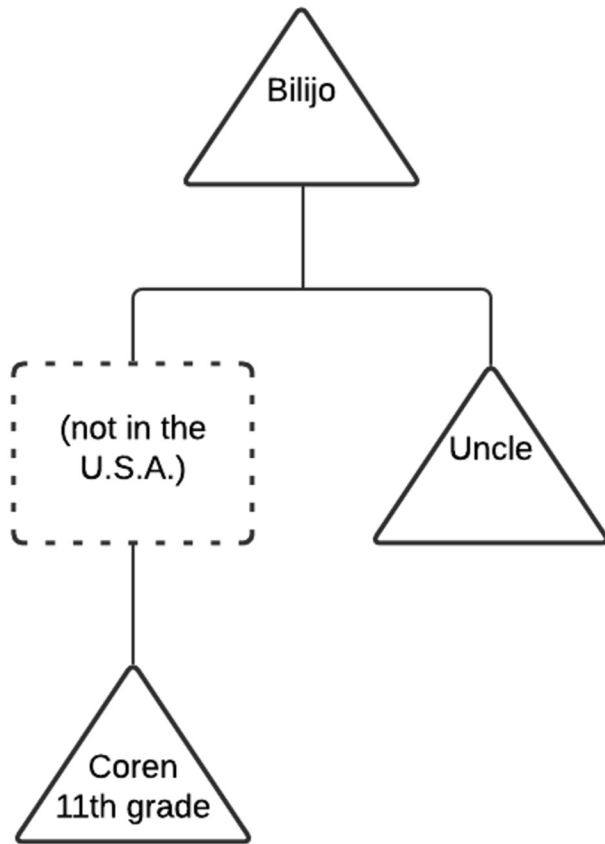


Figure 4. Household 4



you know Marshallese culture, we need to help each other and be together, all the time.”

Sickness and death in the community were also described. “It is not just the sickness, but there are many dead.” “Some Marshallese died last week.” “I had a couple friends,” Coren, a high schooler, said, “[their] family die from it... They are just sad.” Ellen, a poultry worker, explained, “There is no help from [the poultry plant]. They only help those who test positive. But those who have to quarantine, there is no money to help.” Coren thought, “They should shut it [a poultry plant] down. Because last time I heard, they had like 247 cases. It’s that one factory.” But they didn’t “because there’s a lot of chickens coming in and a lot of demands.” Coren concluded, “This is like, the worst year of my life.”

“It’s Fun and Boring”

While adults struggled to find anything good, all students—including Coren—described a more complicated mix of good and bad. In Coren’s words, it is “a good thing we’re spending time together.” Mason, the other high schooler, was particularly enthusiastic:

It was wonderful.... We get to [be] together and eat together and stuff, you know? And then we talk with each other, communicate and we get to share our secrets.

Students spent time “play[ing] video games and stuff.” It was “fun,” Leslie said, “you could talk to your friends through the games... we always laugh together.” In addition, “It was good not doing homework,” Kina said. Mark also liked “getting some rest [from] doing homework” as well as “free time” and “playing with [his] friends.” Leslie was “happy” because she “sleep[s] a lot.” “I mean,” Coren said, “it is good that I don’t have to wake up at seven, eight in the morning.”

Coren continued, “But it’s just boring.” Everybody discussed boredom. The children “are very bored because they sleep, then get up, all in the house. They don’t move around,” one mother said. Explained Kina, “It was good at first when school was off but when I started staying home more it got boring.” Leslie “was happy” at first, but “after like a month, I just realized that school is very fun.”

School during COVID-19

Everyone described school at home as inferior to school at school. It was “not fun at all,” Coren said. Mason said, “I would rather do it with a teacher. I don’t enjoy it. I just don’t feel like it’s school, doing it by yourself with your Chromebook.”

While no one liked school at home, perceptions differed regarding its difficulty and students’ willingness to study. In household 1, Leslie and Kina found school at home “easy,” while their mother said her children did their work. In household 2, Mark said school was “hard for me.” “When I was at school, I always ask my teachers to help me and then they always do.” But at home, “when something is hard I need help.... But my friends don’t really know what to do.” “All the time when I say “study,” his mother said, “sometimes they want to do it and sometimes they don’t.” Similarly, “it is always really hard teaching children of this size,” the kindergartener’s father said, “because they just want to play.”

Marshallese families also echoed widespread ideas that, out of school buildings, children were learning less. “They aren’t learning all of the time,” one mother said. “When they go to school...they learn more.” Learning from home was “bad” “because they are not really studying all the things. They are only learning some things.” “When he is in the school building,” another mother explained, “he learns really fast.” “Maybe because it is fun with his friends.” The children agreed. Mark learned more “at school.” Kina concluded, “I think I’m gonna be more dumb.” These comments reflect commonly held ideologies that the only type of learning that counts is the form measured by schools.

Nonetheless, adults said, “They did a lot of studying in the house,” although adults reported greater amounts of studying than the students themselves. “First they do their studying.... When they are done, they play,” Karol said. Families reported a variety of activities: “science and math”;

“reading, after that we teach him to write with letters, ABCD, counting to 100”; “biology”; and Mason “wrote a whole story about what I’m going to tell my kids, [in] like five years, about this coronavirus and stuff.” “Yes, I saw him study,” Bilijo said. “The teachers gave him work to do and I saw it. He did it himself, and when his report came, the report was very good.” They also “used Zoom a lot,” Karol said. “Every Wednesday and Friday they would talk as a group. Zoom and talk with them, just like they are teaching them.” Despite the perceived inferiority of school at home, adults emphasized that school activities continued.

Medium, Access, and Communication

With one exception, people reported preferring to complete work by hand rather than online. This was because of problems with access to the internet and devices, as well as a dislike of synchronous Zoom meetings.

Devices, Internet, and Working by Hand

Everybody reported lacking either internet access and/or enough devices. Household 3 had neither, and their kindergartener missed out. “There was a field day that they talked about on Facebook but we haven’t gone. . . . We are not online and don’t have internet.” Both high school students had computers “borrowed from school” “before” COVID-19. But Coren didn’t have “Wi-Fi.” Household 1 had internet, but only Mason had a computer from school. The three other students did their work, including Zoom meetings, on “phone[s].” Household 2 reported that teachers “came to ask if the children have a computer and I said ‘none.’” Then, “they said that they were going to give us one but they haven’t.” They had “internet” but only one device, “their mother’s cell phone.” Children had to “take turns” and work “one by one,” their mother said. Ellen explained, “It takes a long time because they wait for each other.”

Unsurprisingly, only household 1 reported engaging in Zoom or online work. In Mark’s words, “I never got to [do schoolwork on the phone] because they keep calling and using it.” Most people reported preferentially working on paper. Even in household 1, only the high schooler said he worked online; everybody else talked about paper and pencil. “There was a package for Greg and Leslie. . . they collected this week to next week, when we finished it, they turned the package in and again took their [other] booklet.” Other households also “went to the drive-through and picked up the papers. And when we were done, we returned them to the school. . . after a week, I go and take them again.”

Schedules and Sleep Insecurity

The students reported a deep dislike of Zoom. Even if he did have internet, Coren said, he “didn’t want to go on Zoom” while Mason did “not really” want to have Zoom meetings at all. Zoom classes reportedly did not fit their sleep, housework,

or caregiving schedules. Meetings were “really early” in the morning. “Sometimes students would want to sleep while they were doing, while they were in the Zoom.” Others, like Kina, would “stay up late and then I miss the Zoom class.” Leslie and Kina often missed meetings because they were “busy working [cleaning],” “eating,” and “babysitting. . . Karol’s baby.” In household 2, with only one phone, schedules had to be coordinated. “They had video conferences, but I always forgot the time.”

Students reported being awake at night or in the afternoon and asleep during the day—a problem for synchronous Zoom meetings. To be sure to make a Zoom meeting, which was “normally at 10:00 [A.M.],” Mason would sometimes “stay up and like wait for them.” He did schoolwork “in the middle of the night”; Coren “until like, one or early in the morning”; “when it’s night [Mark would] come and do my homework.”

Students also expressed negative accounts of their own sleep practices. They described themselves as “lazy,” said they “sleep a lot,” and described their “sleeping schedule” as “not good.” “My sleeping schedule is really bad,” Mason said. “I usually go to sleep in the morning and then, yeah, wake up in the afternoon.” Students’ comments reflect an internalized deficit perspective that did not acknowledge potential reasons for mismatches between their sleep schedules and the schedule of synchronous school meetings.

Communication

Just as online classes were difficult because of schedules and technology, so was communication with schools. Households 1, 2, and 3 all mentioned adults using email to communicate with teachers; household 1 also discussed phone calls. “I have never spoken with the teachers,” Bob in household 3 said, “but his teacher emails us all the time and. . . shows us how I can teach him his lessons.” They also “showed them YouTube videos” and got information from Facebook. In household 4, no adults reported communicating with teachers. As for students, no one mentioned the kindergartener communicating; those in household 1 said they emailed teachers, while Coren called his teachers. “The school told me if my teachers needed everything—or if I needed anything, just call them and they’re going to call me, too.” In household 2, it is unclear if students emailed teachers, but teachers apparently paid a home visit. “They came to the house and talked. . . some of the children’s teachers, and they brought some lessons.”

It is unclear how successful such communications were. Lali apparently used her email account but “on my mother’s phone”—suggesting she didn’t have email access on her own phone. In household 1, Leslie and Kina said their parents emailed teachers through the children’s student accounts. Nobody mentioned talking with teachers through Facebook Messenger, the most reliable way for Berman to contact the families, although references to “calls” could refer to Facebook or phones calls.

People's lack of knowledge about free food and internet hubs offered in the community suggests such communication systems had holes. Only household 1 reported getting food, although they didn't go every day "because I am busy." But other people hadn't heard about the opportunities. "I'm really clueless about that. I never heard," Coren said, even though an internet hub would have been helpful. The women in household 2 explained they "heard in the news that there was going to be...help with free lunch at the schools." But "we never" went to get it "because we don't know where it is....we don't know where the address is."

People and Knowledge

Families reported on a wide range of people who had the *jelālokjen* (knowledge) framed as necessary to help students. These people reflect extensive kinship networks common in Marshallese households and go far beyond the "parents" implied by the phrase "parental involvement." Bob in household 3 said everyone helped—"sometimes [Dari's] mother" and sometimes Dari's "father":

It was easy because you teach him, we help each other. Sometimes his aunt also taught him because she also knows, and also [his uncle]...he was always helping.

In household 2, Mark's mother Baina "helped with the things that [she] understands...math and reading." But Ellen emphasized she helped with many tasks. "There was a note that the school mailed here, and I followed the directions. They showed how to download the app and after that do the homework online." In household 4, when Coren didn't know something, he "called my mom." While this might seem like a typical example of expected involvement, Coren's mom lived on the islands. Coren would call her "on Facebook."

Siblings also helped, particularly in household 1. People presented Abinol—a former schoolteacher—as the main helper. Kina and "her father, the two worked together." But Kina also asked for help "from Jimmy, Greg, Leslie." Leslie asked "Ruben" because he was "pretty good at math." She also "asked Abinol and Jimmy, and then sometimes I helped Kina." Kina agreed that Leslie would try to help, but "she didn't understand it. It was a thing about math it was kinda hard." Leslie also took Kina to drop off work at school. Mason helped Kina with "activities outside and stuff, like exercise.... We did like five or fifteen jumping jacks and then five sit-ups and pushups." This help reflects the sibling caregiving that is central to Marshallese kinship systems.

So many different people were engaged because different people had the requisite "knowledge." This word *jelā* means "know, well-informed, know how to" (Abo et al. 2009). Coren's grandfather used "jelā" to explain why he didn't help. "Maybe [Coren] knows because he knows how to use that thing [the computer]; the two of us don't really know because we are old for those things." The mother in household 2 characterized herself as largely lacking in "knowing," which is why "it was hard" teaching the children in the house. "We

don't really jelā [speak] the English to teach them and we don't jelā [know] what type of lessons we should be giving them." This lack of "knowing" is why Ellen said she was the main person who helped. "I helped them, Baina does not really jelā [know]...English. She only jelā [knows] how to listen." In household 3, Salin helped because "she really jelā [speaks] English, and she jelā [speaks] Marshallese." As Lali explained, they were able to teach their child because "if we don't understand, we help each other."

Perspectives on the Future

Most adults reported happiness with their teachers, though they disliked remote learning. "Everything is good, their teachers are good," Karol said. "Yes, his teacher is good, he teaches him well," Lali said. Everyone, however, agreed schools should "provide laptops because they don't have anything to do the online work, there are no tools in the house to study with." Schools should also give "us [the information] in Marshallese because then we could really understand."

The students mainly wanted to change the schedules of Zoom meetings and get computers. Two also said schools should play a greater role in keeping students' safe from COVID-19. Kina said teachers should "check on [students] if they're sick," while Coren argued schools should open because it's "safer that way, checking. Better than just staying at home while you have the corona and you don't know. At least go to school and get checked for it." Here, they argue for more intervention from schools.

Closing or Opening Schools

The students' school systems opened in-person in Fall 2020, despite high rates of COVID-19. This was what the children, but not necessarily the adults, seemed to have wanted. While everyone agreed that school at school was better than school at home, most also said closing schools in the first place was a good idea. "It is good because they are keeping them safe from the sickness, the dangerous sickness," one father said.

As for the future, perspectives diverged. Men presented ambivalence about opening schools, "maybe they should go ahead...." All the women argued schools should stay "closed because the virus is still here...they should keep studying only in the home. I won't [be tired] because they shouldn't get COVID-19." "There should not" be school. "This virus is bad, because it stops you from breathing." Alternatively, Coren's grandfather said the options should be in-person school or work rather than remote school. "If [the coronavirus] is still here...okay we should send them to a place of work so that they can work and seek success."

This perspective was very different from students', who all wanted school open regardless of COVID-19. "They should have kept them open," Leslie said, "because like I'm kinda tired of staying inside." Kina "wanted [school] to open cause I wanna go see my friends." Coren wanted "to go back to school" and thought they should "get a really good plan":

I want them to put...protective glasses over each table and make sure everybody's wearing gloves and masks... People [should get] checked for the corona and stuff... before and after they leave the school. [There also should be] like a temperature check and like, asking them questions if they've been, been with anybody that has like, been exposed to corona and stuff... You have to be like six feet away from each other...

Coren previously reported on many school activities he had accomplished during remote schooling. Here, however, he demonstrates an additional form of learning that was likely widespread across Marshallese families and yet not accounted for by standardized assessment measures: viral transmission. If there was a test on viral transmission, Coren would pass with flying colors.

Discussion

These four families may or may not be representative. Two families included former schoolteachers; another included a CMI graduate. But families within the Marshallese community are large enough that many include at least one college graduate. In addition, all working adults in the families are poultry workers, and they all also come from outer islands; they were not members of the Marshallese elite or people educated in private schools. Household members expressed a desire for in-person school, efforts to continue school activities at home, some obstacles that affected those activities, and a wide range of family members involved in remote school. While children expressed some internalized deficit ideologies, they also critiqued the system and presented learning problems as widespread rather than specific to minoritized families.

Communication and Technology Barriers

All participants reported barriers in access and said such barriers made remote schooling inferior to in-person schooling. The children missed being able to talk to teachers and friends, which they said made school activities easier and more enjoyable. People also reported technological barriers, lacking internet or sufficient devices, and most students said they preferred to complete work by hand. To work on paper, however, they had to drive to school to pick up and drop off packets; the availability of cars and gas may limit this type of access. Other barriers included communications in English and appropriate technology for communication.

Barriers in access, while potentially magnified in impact, are not unique to remote learning. Migrant families have long been disadvantaged in United States school systems by the use of English for communications, particularly indigenous migrants who speak languages with fewer translators (Kovats Sánchez 2020). Families saw translating communications as important beyond the pandemic:

There are some families, the mothers and fathers don't know English.... They use English with the mothers and fathers, and some things they don't understand. It is important for it

to be in Marshallese, they should do it in Marshallese. So that the mothers and fathers and students can understand together.

Interview responses indicated gaps in communication extend beyond remote schooling. For example, adults in households 3 and 4 both reported they paid for their children's food at school even before the pandemic, even though they knew there should be some way to get free food.

In familial reports, rather than framing these obstacles as familial deficits, the problem lay in what schools failed to provide. "They are only covering some of the things." Some spoke directly of expectations they had, expressing a desire for schools to provide computers and internet access when schools returned, be it in-person or remote. As one mother said, "Now if I return to the school, I am going to go ask" for Wi-Fi and a computer. Other critiques and expectations were less direct. Consider how Baina talked about the issue of getting a computer:

They [the teachers] came because they need to be able to bring them [the children] a computer for their studies.... They left again and we still haven't reached/been able to do it [the work].... They said they were going to give us one but it's like they haven't.

This mode of speaking—discussing how someone hasn't yet provided something—is a cultural way of asking indirectly rather than confrontationally. Once one's need is known, people are obligated to help (Berman 2020). Marshallese expectations that the powerful have a responsibility to care and provide for those with less makes these comments a deep, albeit indirect, critique (Berman 2019).

Time Collisions and Sleep Insecurity

Students expressed negative accounts of their sleep practices, which we term "sleep insecurity." We take "sleep insecurity" from "linguistic insecurity," which refers to negative beliefs held by people, typically minoritized people, of their own language (Macaulay 1975). We see in students' reports negative attitudes held by a minoritized population about practices that differ from those expected by the dominant society.

One might think the reported schedule conflicts, or as Mason called it, "that shit like, the schedule on Zoom meetings," would be a unique result of the pandemic. But Berman's previous research in 2018 indicated students' schedules have long conflicted with school schedules. Berman learned to arrive at houses in the afternoon if she wanted to find people awake. Most social events started in the evening and continued until early morning. In 2018, Karol and Lali had commented on the sleeping patterns, stating that Marshallese children go to bed at "eleven or twelve" and sleep until "the afternoon."

The pandemic thus sheds a spotlight on something that has always been an issue: Marshallese families and the school systems experience a "time collision" (Orellana and Thorne

1998). Exactly why is unclear. In the outer islands, women's and children's schedules are mostly aligned with the sun (with some exceptions) (Berman 2019). In 2018, Karol offered that the different patterns are tied to light—there is minimal light at night on outer atolls in contrast to both the United States and urban centers in the RMI. Another possibility is shiftwork. Most Marshallese adults work varying shifts, and often, adults work different shifts within the same household. Adults and children also share rooms. This means adults are coming and going throughout the day and night, shifting the entire schedule of the community and likely the children as well (Vincent and Neis 2011). During COVID-19, poultry workers were also essential workers, meaning they could not help with remote schooling while working from home.

Scholars note that “parental involvement” requests fail to consider the time constraints of immigrant and working-class parents (Antony-Newman 2019). We add that the school day's structure can conflict with sleep and wake patterns in minoritized communities. School systems ask families to assimilate to schools' preferred time schedules. This assimilation requires ignoring family functions and rejecting family practices (Raatiar 2017) and is the opposite of culturally sustaining practices. These are also some of the hardest school structures to transform.

Distributed Involvement

We define “distributed involvement” as the distribution of familial involvement in child care and schooling over a range of family members. Every family reported a different configuration of people who were engaged due to differing abilities. In Household 1, parents were mainly responsible and seemed to have been in communication with teachers. That said, Leslie was fostered in their household—so teachers needed to talk to Karol and Abinol even though they are probably not Leslie's official guardians. Students in Karol's household also helped each other. In Mark's household, teachers who wanted to coordinate online learning would need to be in contact with both Baina and Cindy. In Coren's household, they might need to call his mother in the islands on Facebook Messenger. And in Lali's household, they could talk to Lali or her husband but also Lance and their aunt.

Distributed involvement is continuous with Marshallese social life pre-, and likely, post-pandemic. While household configurations varied, they reflect typical Marshallese family and household structures: extensive adoption and fosterage systems between kin, specifically siblings and grandparents (households 1 and 4); sibling caretaking (household 1); sisters joining households and jointly caring for children (households 2 and 3); and a support network extending across oceans (household 4) (Berman 2019).

This distributed involvement does not fit the typical notion of “parental involvement.” The potential for cultural clash is high. Educators might incorrectly assume Marshallese families have “limited adult or parental involvement” (Robinson 2018) because they are speaking to the wrong people

or not enough people. Problems can also go the other way, where educators incorrectly assume all Marshallese adults are responsible for all children, instead of understanding the intricacies of specific families (Carucci 2013). A central aspect of transforming schooling to make it more culturally sustaining for Marshallese families is to understand and engage with the distributed involvement of multiple caregivers.

Conclusion: Toward an Asset-based Approach to Pandemic Schooling

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted society, including schooling. One view of structural challenges posed by the pandemic is that these challenges resulted from upsetting the status quo. Another possibility, however, is that the pandemic has made more visible inequities that always existed. Central to this rethinking is the role that home-school connections may play in teaching, school systems, and educational reform.

We argue for an asset-based approach to research on, and reactions to, pandemic schooling. As researchers, we also acknowledge a tension among perceptions and needs of both participants and ourselves: while hoping for improved services to the Marshallese diaspora in this area, there is a simultaneous need to recognize cultural assets and provide services responsive to such assets. Research in education and minoritized groups has shown how damaging deficit ideologies are—they produce negative interpretations of minoritized groups that get internalized and reproduced. In contrast, we might approach remote learning with an interest in things students did learn—be it school concepts, caregiving, or knowledge of viral transmission—as well as how experiences in pandemic schooling might prompt meaningful reform. While Marshallese families reported barriers in access, they also reported engagement with remote schooling *and* drawing upon distributed familial networks to do so.

Marshallese reports of remote schooling during the pandemic produce recommendations for policy changes that would benefit Marshallese students, and potentially other minoritized students, during in-person schooling as well as remote. Some are straightforward, although requiring monetary investment: greater availability of Marshallese translators, teachers, tutors, and administrators; options for synchronous and asynchronous schooling; universal high-speed internet and devices for all; using Facebook Messenger for home communication. Others are less straightforward: learning about each student's specific support networks and how to contact them (perhaps a beginning-of-the-year project could be describing one's support network and family system, while weekly or monthly journals could provide updates); creating multi-age classrooms or projects where older siblings work with younger ones; providing students—even elementary school ones—with night school options. Other changes could address larger structural inequalities within which these school systems lie; that is, making shift work more predictable, eliminating night shifts, or providing funds so people can purchase their own devices.

Most of the barriers described were not unique to the pandemic but existed prior to it; they are simply magnified in impact and visibility. In the harsh impact of COVID-19, the inequalities of society are seen in the glaring light of day. Our data reveal not only Marshallese reported experiences of remote learning but also how home-school connections must be reformed to be more culturally sustaining. Perhaps the return to post-pandemic schooling can take these lessons into account.

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