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JusticeEd Initiative Updates!

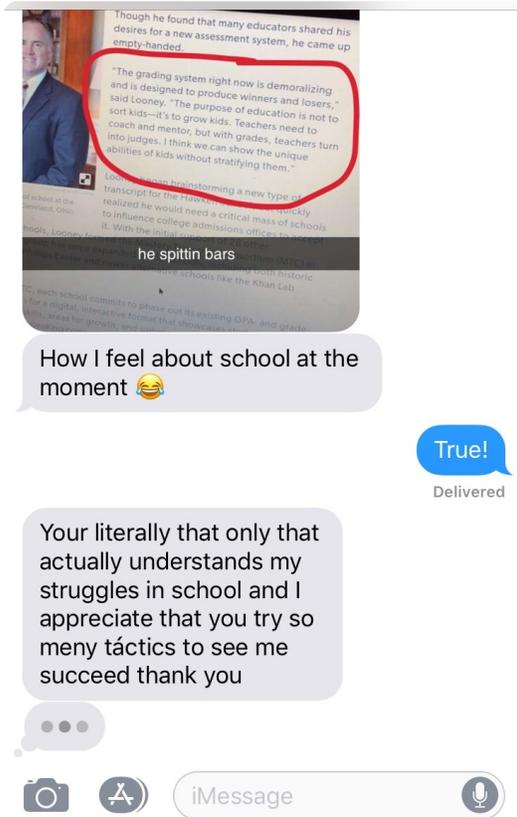
The JusticeEd Program has been working hard to support the education success of youth and families through the shelter-in-place order. *See below for a peek into how the work has transformed, and learn about some of our graduates!*

A View into JusticeEd during COVID-19

By: Jules Villanueva-Castano

As we all learn to adjust amidst COVID-19, one of the many hardships within this unprecedented situation is the educational experience of every student in Santa Clara county. Students have and are experiencing layers of loss: from not seeing friends and hanging out during lunch, to missing in-person instruction for a difficult class, to simply not having a consistent place to get meals and a safe place to be during the day. Their educational worlds have been flipped upside down—even more so for youth on probation. During the past few months, the JusticeEd Team has worked to support youth and their families as they navigate the many changes.

As school closures and shelter in place began last semester, we witnessed a wide range of needs and experiences arise for our youth and their caregivers: from students and parents worried about eviction due to losing their jobs; to young people finding themselves as full-time caregivers for their siblings; to students taking on full-time work to support their families and having no time for remote learning. It became clear, quickly, that the landscape our



students had been navigating just one month before had changed, and that our approach needed to pivot. Activities like college tours and career aptitude tests needed to be placed on hold and instead, the focus

shifted to getting students and families connected to community resources or, for some, just providing a listening ear.

The first months flew by and academic goals slowly fell back onto students' and families' radars as life regained some sense of "normalcy." Many youth and caregivers wanted to know how they could access laptops and WiFi, how to enroll their student while the districts are closed, or how to access and navigate the many remote learning platforms they now had to utilize. For many of the families, language and technology skill barriers made distance learning feel impossible. To ease this, Education Liaisons worked to build communication pathways to teachers, IT Departments, and administrators. Through many text messages, screenshots, guided phone calls, virtual meetings, and screen shares, we guided students and their caregivers through the platforms to build their digital capacity.

Though challenging, we continue to learn daily how to adjust our program and best support families as they deal with the digital divide. This summer, we are focusing on identifying tools and resources, and are developing techniques to better support students as they navigate learning online. We plan to approach the new school year with an even greater focus on collaboration, bridging communication across "Education Teams," and building the capacity of caregivers as they navigate a very different school year. Though we know it will come with many challenges, the resilience we have witnessed from our students reminds us that it is possible to overcome.

Celebrating Graduates!

This year has been a true test of student resiliency, and we are proud to honor seven of our students who have risen to the challenge! Though we weren't able to join them in traditional graduation ceremonies, we made sure to do some socially distant celebrating!

Read below to learn about two students' journeys to graduation!



Prior to joining the JusticeEd Program, this senior had been attending a local charter school where he was struggling to pass his classes and was significantly off track for graduation. His Education Liaison worked with him to identify barriers and discovered school fit was the main thing getting in the way. She discovered that the school was unable to provide

summer school to recover missed credits and only offered an A-G track, which wasn't the best fit for the student.

She met with the student and family to discuss other potential school placement options and explained how each school operated. After many months of meetings and weighing options and strategies, the student and his family ultimately decided to transfer to his public high school, where he received a significant amount of credits towards graduation that he otherwise would have had to retake in a 5th year at the charter school. He was able to get back on track and has graduated with the Class of 2020! When asked how it felt to be a college student soon, the student shared that just one year ago, he didn't believe it would be possible. He will be attending EVC's Auto Program in the fall and will be pursuing a career as an Automotive Technician.

As difficult as the transition has been during shelter in place, we have been inspired by the resiliency our students have shown. For one of our

seniors in particular, he has overcome more than most to get to graduation this semester, and we are extremely proud to honor this milestone in his life.

When joining the JusticeEd program, he was attending a local opportunity school where he was struggling to keep up with school while balancing the need to work and financially provide for his family.

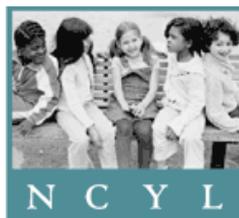


Although he was within range, his fall semester did not go as well as he had hoped, and he was concerned about the prospect of graduating on time.

Feeling pressure amidst COVID to financially provide, he took on working full-time at his job. While exhausting and challenging, he has continued to chip away at his coursework. A couple weeks into the shelter-in-place order, we learned that he had been doing all of his coursework from his smartphone! We instantly searched to resource a laptop (which we were able to get, shoutout to FLY!) and when asked why he didn't ask for one sooner, he shared that "he knew other people needed it more than him."

His efforts paid off and in the last week of the semester, we all learned that he had enough credits to graduate! He is now looking forward to attending San Jose City College when in-person classes are reopened and pursuing a career in the trades.

JusticeEd is an initiative of the [National Center for Youth Law](#).



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