The Pandemic's First Draft:
From the Magnificent to the Murky and the Mundane, Scholastic Media Continue Publishing Despite Closure

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Scholastic media advisers faced unique challenges during the pandemic. Almost immediately, schools were shut down and students were blocked from access to files necessary to complete the yearbook or to create a newspaper. Along the way, teachers were forced to provide instruction online. At some schools, instructors were threatened with termination if they accessed their classroom. Others were told that the yearbook—the only official record of school history from a student perspective—wasn't a priority. But through it all, many student media operations continued, often moving online but still meeting deadlines and providing the first draft of history from a student perspective. According to a survey of 237 scholastic media advisers, some school newspapers and other media even published more often during the pandemic than they had before. Still, advisers said there was one thing they wished they had—a better plan.

Keywords: scholastic media, yearbook, pandemic, newspaper, business continuity

In any other March, students and teachers would have been looking forward to spring break. A week away. A week with the family. A week to catch up. However, in 2020, teachers spent their time learning how to use Zoom and how to teach online. The new coronavirus pandemic forced a shutdown of schools and what *Education Week* called "an historic upheaval of K-12 schooling in the United States." The headlines began like the one in the *Seattle Times* (Bazzaz, 2020): "Seattle Public Schools to Close for Two Weeks in Light of Coronavirus Concerns" on the West Coast and the Raleigh *News & Observer* (Sherman & Hui, 2020) "Cooper: No School for at Least 2 Weeks; No Mass Gatherings" on the East Coast. Quickly, state and local leaders realized two weeks wasn't enough. Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly was the first to order school buildings K-12 to close for the remainder of the school year, citing fears about the spread of the coronavirus disease COVID-19 and the "unprecedented emergency" it presented (Dwyer, 2020). She wasn't the last. At their peak, the closures affected at least 55.1 million students in 124,000 U.S. public and private schools. Nearly every state either ordered or recommended that schools remain closed through the end of the 2019-20 school year ("Map," 2020). According to UNICEF, schools for more than 168 million children were completely closed for almost the entire 2020-2021 academic year and 214 million children globally missed more than three-quarters of their in-person learning (UNICEF, 2021). In the fall of 2020, only four states required in-person instruction; four other states required the schools to remain closed, and three others required hybrid or remote instruction only ("School responses…" June 9, 2021). Looking ahead, at least nine states have already mandated full-time, in-person learning for the 2021-2022 school year ("Map," 2021).

It quickly became apparent that COVID-19 was the greatest challenge that … education systems have ever faced (Daniel, 2020). Even as schools closed, elected leaders saw that closing schools wasn't enough. In a desperate race to stunt the spread of the coronavirus, millions of Americans were asked to do what would have been unthinkable only a few months prior: Don't go to work, don't go to school, don't leave the house at all unless you have to. A total shutdown. "The directives to keep people at home, which began in California in mid-March, quickly swept the nation. Today, residents in a vast majority of states, the Navajo Nation, and many cities and counties are under instructions to stay at home as much as possible, in an act of solidarity that public health experts say is crucial to controlling the virus" (Mervosh, Lu & Swales, 2020). At least 316 million people in at least 42 states, three counties, 10 cities, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico were urged to stay home (Mervosh, Lu & Swales, 2020). President Donald Trump signed the first of two stimulus packages—$2.2 trillion for the first and $3 trillion for the second on March 27, packages that were each larger than the New Deal, each the single most expensive piece of relief legislation in U.S. history and each more than 10 percent of U.S. gross domestic product.

Despite stay-at-home orders, closures and uncertainty, teachers kept teaching, learning new ways to present curriculum and to get learning tools in the hands of students across all socio-economic classes, urban and rural and regardless of race. "They consistently have demonstrated ingenuity in adapting to the pandemic closures" (Williams, 2020). Some panicked. "The panic was all perfectly understandable" (Merrill, 2020). But most just continued doing their jobs, adapting and evolving. In the back of their minds while learning new tools and new ways of teaching were the students. "Your work will be hard, but there are students facing more severe challenges" (Merrill, 2020). They missed the students. In a story on NPR (Turner, Adame & Nadworny, 2020), Jamie Gordan, a third-grade teacher in

Virginia, recalled the surprise when the governor announced the closure of schools for the remainder of the year. "I'm sorry, I get emotional when I say that. It's really hard to say that out loud. I didn't get to properly say goodbye to them."

Throughout it all, students had few places to turn for reliable, timely information as the normal channels of communication from administrators and teachers dried up with students in lockdown. Students, working with advisers who also continued to put in extra hours and to seek out new ways to communicate, turned to other students; and student media became the agenda setter for student opinion.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In a case dating back to Nov. 17, 2019, a 55-year-old individual from Hubei province in China may have been the first person to contract COVID-19, a disease caused by a new coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2 (Ma, 2020). That's more than a month earlier than doctors noted cases in Wuhan, China, at the end of December 2019 (Huang et al., 2020). As leaders at the federal, state and local levels began to understand the health threats from the virus, virtually all nations closed their schools and sent their students home. By April 30, 2020, as per the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, school functions had been affected globally with 163 countries experiencing nationwide school closures. The closures meant that around 69 percent of registered learners, about 1,212,977,511 learners worldwide, were affected ("COVID-19 Impact on Education," 2020).

The economic impact of the virus in general and its impact on such closures received early attention in the literature and media coverage. "The total cost [of the pandemic] is estimated at more than $16 trillion or approximately 90 percent of the annual gross domestic product of the United States" (Cutler & Summers, 2020). Schools were hit both in terms of income and expenses. On the income side, schools, largely supported by sales tax and income tax revenue, saw dramatic declines (Boudreau, 2020). At the same time, expenses on everything from laptops for schoolchildren to plexiglass dividers in classrooms to safety measures, costs are going up (Boudreau, 2020).

Other research focused on how the schools changed during the pandemic and the impact the changes had on learning. "The Covid-19 pandemic also has changed the way how several people receive and impart education," researchers in India found. "There is no doubt that the school closures in the first half of 2020 have resulted in significant learning losses to the affected cohort of students" (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2020; Owusu-Fordjour et al., 2020). These losses will follow students into the labor market, and both students and their nations are likely to feel the adverse economic outcomes. Students in the United States lost about 20 days of school in the 2019-2020 academic year, resulting in about 3 percent lower career earnings if schools immediately returned to 2019 performance levels (Hanushek & Woessmann, 2020). While students had to find new ways of learning, teachers had to find new ways of teaching. "Today, we are forced to practice online learning; things would have been different if we have already mastered it. The time we lost in learning the modes could have been spent on creating more content. But it is better late than never. This virus surely has accelerated the process of online learning" (Dhawan, 2020; Daniel, 2020; Ferdig et al., 2020; Owusu-Fordjour et al., 2020; Karlis, 2020). At the same time, schools are a place of growth for children. Schools provide social structure and coping mechanisms for those vulnerable to mental health issues. School routines are important coping mechanisms for young people with mental health issues. When schools are closed, students lose an anchor in life (Lee, 2020; Joseph et al., 2020).

Searches on Google for "coronavirus" reached a peak the week of March 15-21, 2020, and a week later for "COVID-19" according to Google Trends. As media outlets, including those in schools, searched through the garbage can of ideas hypothesized by Cohen, March and Olsen (1972), news about the virus came to the forefront with coverage on everything from school closures to changes in teaching methodologies to economic impacts. At the local level, at the level of each school, coverage of the pandemic resembles coverage of any other breaking news event and can fuel fear and anxiety. However, media outlets can also be viewed as partners with school administrators and health officials to provide accurately and timely information.

> …[A] positive role of the media in the aftermath of disasters was also found: the media can have a beneficial effect on the community by informing, educating, or communicating with the people (37). For instance, it has been suggested that following terrorist attacks, the media should be embraced by the authorities as allies because they can help broadcast accurate information to an anxious population (39). It seems that when the media and public health professionals work closely together, informing and educating the public with accurate information, beneficial effects can be achieved and the well-being of the disaster community can be enhanced (Vasterman et al., 2005, p. 114; Njenga et al., 2003)

However, other research has shown that the media's content distorted images of disaster behavior (Quarantelli & Dynes, 1972; Fritz & Mathewson, 1957; Wenger, 1985; Wenger & Friedman, 1986). Barnes et al. (2008) found, after analysis of media coverage of Hurricane Katrina, that strong media agenda-setting effects underscore the valuable contributions of news media to social issues surrounding disaster response and recovery. However, they also found that media coverage did not adequately represent key public health roles and rarely dealt prospectively with future disasters. And Miller and Goidel (2009), also examining coverage of Hurricane Katrina, found that while news organizations are invaluable when reporting breaking news, characteristics of media organizations hinder their ability to gather contextually rich information on the causes and consequences of natural disasters.

Such research is best viewed in light not only of a garbage can model and John Kingdon's multiple streams model (1984) but with concepts initiated by McCombs and Shaw in 1972 on agenda-setting. For Kingdon, the pandemic represented a problem stream, a problem that needs government action to be resolved. "These problems reach the awareness of policy makers because of dramatic events such as crises" (Béland & Howlett, 2016). The pandemic reached into the political stream as political leaders from the national level to local boards adapted and evolved, moving ideas into the policy stream. The three streams merged in the spring of 2020 into a window of opportunity and numerous changes in the educational systems across the world.

Student Media in the Literature

For context, almost any discussion of high school media begins with a legal foundation. In *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District* (1969), the Supreme Court ruled that school administrators could censor a student's freedom of expression only if they could prove the student's actions were disruptive or dangerous to others. Students did not shed their rights at the schoolhouse gate. However, in *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier* (1988), the Supreme Court

ruled that school administrators could censor scholastic newspapers if the administrators could provide educational reasons for censorship (*Hazelwood*, 1988). The reach of *Hazelwood* has been further limited by more recent New Voices state legislation that returns the *Tinker* standard in 14 states.

Given that the courts concede that student media are examples of free expression at least in most situations, it is helpful to know the mission of the school media. In 1974, Jack Nelson wrote as part of the *Captive Voices: Report of the Commission of Inquiry into High School Journalism* that a student newspaper—the Commission used Keenan High School (Columbia, South Carolina) as an example—should keep administrators, the faculty and parents, as well as the student body, informed of student thinking on crucial issues. And permitting students to make the ultimate decision on the contents of the newspaper is also essential. In 1994, Jack Dvorak, Larry Lain and Tom Dickson published *Journalism Kids Do Better: What Research Tells Us about High School Journalism*. They wrote that journalism students are constantly making judgments of value, accuracy and truth. "Reporters—even student reporters—must be able to do much more than listen and repeat: They must understand, evaluate, reconstruct, and communicate clearly, or else their efforts are wasted" (p. 10). Also in 1994, the Freedom Forum published *Death By Cheeseburger: High School Journalism in the 1990s and Beyond* and opened with "A high school without a newspaper is a poorer school indeed" (p.v). As part of the analysis of 233 newspapers from 32 states, the report concluded, "[I]n the absence of any other vehicle, the high school newspaper offers the voice of America's young people within their own time: It chronicles the condition of scholastic life: the hopes, fears and gripes of students, their victories and their failures, and the teen-driven triage that determines who is 'in' or 'out' or just plain overlooked." Tony Gomez said such skills are challenged when other students die. "It greatly affects the school family, and it is the obligation of the school paper and yearbook to tell their stories. This is responsible journalism" (Gomez, 1999, p. 51).

Paige Corder, Hillary Houston, Christine Phan and Jessica Ruyle exemplified these concepts when they wrote about how their school, Brink Junior High School (Monroe, Oklahoma) had been nearly destroyed by a tornado in 1999. "Because it was only a few days after the storm, and much of the city was still in chaos, we collected a lot of conflicting and inaccurate information. We had to use our best judgment to decide what was accurate enough to be published. … [W]e were honored to be able to do such a thing for our community. Making the United After the Storm edition let us give something solid to our injured city" (Corder et al., 1999).

Student Media Become the Story

In light of the agenda-setting role of the media, this study, however, goes beyond the studies of the professional media in times of disaster and examines the scholastic media during COVID-19, a pandemic that forced teachers, administrators and politicians to reexamine every aspect of the public schools, including the scholastic media. A review of the literature also includes how other media outlets covered school newspapers, websites, broadcasts, and yearbooks during the early days of the pandemic, especially considering the limited nature of other literature surrounding media coverage of disasters.

The professional media also picked up on how student media were overcoming challenges. For example, Hannah Natanson (2020) reported in *The Washington Post* how "School's Closed, the Year's Lost. But Yearbook Editors Are Not Missing This Deadline." In the April 3 article, Madison Bailey, editor of the yearbook at Prince George (Virginia) High School, said, "Actually, it's even more

important to me than before. The book is the only thing [seniors] have left to look forward to, the only spot of happiness." In the same article, Sarah Nichols, president of the Journalism Education Association, said, "They know their role documenting history matters. More than ever."

Dillon Stewart (2020) reported in *Cleveland Magazine* that students at Shaker Heights High School were publishing about a story a day. "With devastating layoffs at *The Plain Dealer*, mistrust in the media and cries of fake news from the nation's highest office, there are plenty of reasons to be pessimistic about journalism," Stewart wrote. "But the student reporters and editors at Shaker Heights High School's newspaper, *The Shakerite,* are a beacon of hope for the Fourth Estate. When the coronavirus shutdown put the teenagers out of school, the staffers of the newspaper didn't look at the time off as a vacation but a call to action."

Rafael Garcia (2020) wrote about the student staff members of Manhattan (Kansas) High School and their work on the yearbook and newspaper after adviser Kristy Nyp was able to take some computers out of the school for students to use at home despite challenges getting information and gathering photos. "The thing about high school journalism is that these students aren't all in this because they're going to become professional journalists," Nyp said in Garcia's April 29 article. "Most of them are going to go do some other job. But the ability to handle communication in complex situations and to keep pursuing whatever it is they need, thinking outside of the box—those are the lessons I want them to come away with."

And Meredith Cummings (2020) wrote for *Quill* about how the staff of the Saegertown (Pennsylvania) High School newspaper, the *Panther Press*, continued to publish stories even though their school was shut down, everyone was ordered to stay at home and a third of the people in their small town lacked internet access. Students posted online, on Instagram and in print. "It's really been interesting to say the least," senior Sam Shelenberger said. "I didn't think when I started journalism three years ago that I would be stuck at home from school writing about history we will be talking about when I grow up. I never expected that I would be writing the first draft of history."

The digital divide Cummings mentioned in passing is a real problem for all instructors, not only scholastic media advisers, particularly those at low-resource schools (Valadez & Duran, 2007). More than a quarter of U.S. homes don't have broadband access, and district leaders—particularly those who work in areas with a high percentage of low-income families—said technology access is a major challenge ("Internet/Broadband Fact Sheet," 2019; Herold, 2020). "The lack of reliable, high-speed internet can make an already overwhelming job of pivoting to online instruction even more stressful, teachers say" (Will, 2020). Without high-speed internet, creating yearbook pages, for example, would be almost impossible.

The articles continued across the nation. Bruce Gallaudet wrote about how seniors at Davis High School in Yolo County, California, were deprived of their prom, spring sports and graduation, but not their yearbook. Reilly Smith and Julia Tran wrote in their own paper, *The Falconer* of La Salle Catholic College Preparatory in Milwaukie, Oregon, about how the staff has adapted to social distancing and "the altered lifestyle that we are now experiencing." Claire McNeill of the *Tampa Bay Times* interviewed Marin Fehl of Hillsborough High School in Tampa Bay, Florida, a student who made it her mission to publish the "pandemic edition" of the school newspaper, the *Red & Black*. "There was so much to cover," McNeill wrote. "It was their job to bottle all of it." Fehl said, "I know that the reporting process is kind of sucky right now because we're sitting in our homes, and you can't just go grab random people

on the H patio. Anything that students are currently talking about and are angry about, we want to be covering." Her magazine—they called it "Pause," all 36 pages of it—came out May 11.

One of the challenges student journalists face is the empathy they have with the sources for their stories, the very students who, pre-pandemic, sat next to them in English class. Meredith Averill, then a high school newspaper editor, wrote about an incident when three students died in a car wreck and the staff produced a special pullout. "Emotions were high and grief was evident; they're what made our four-page pullout the most passionate and significant work we have ever done as a whole staff" (Averill, 1999, p. 63). Franklin McCallie, then principal at Kirkwood (Missouri) High School said student journalists learn to be sensitive. Speaking of the student newspaper staff at his school, he said, "[T]he student staff of *The Kirkwood Call* has approached the tragedies with sensitivity and an obvious sense of grief. At the same time, the staff has ascertained and revealed the facts as best they could be understood" (McCallie, 1999, p. 77). Darrell Passwater, then superintendent of Arrowhead Christian Academy in Redlands, California, said he doesn't expect student journalists to have views that agree with his own. "I expect students to think deeply about their intended subjects. The adviser and I expect them to write articles that are carefully thought out, having thoroughly examined the issues from multiple perspectives" (Passwater, 2003, p. 21). And empathy during times of crisis is exactly what professional reporters, such as Erin Ailworth of *The Wall Street Journal*, often say journalists need more of. Ailworth covers breaking news, everything from the California wildfires to the George Floyd demonstrations in Minneapolis to the pandemic. "I'm going into a place of trauma. Let me make sure that I push my empathy to the forefront. I constantly repeat the word 'empathy.' You need to approach people softly and with a lot of patience" (Ailworth, 2020). Journalism adviser Neva Hand also emphasized this idea when writing about how journalists reported on the death of her daughter in the 1999 Texas A&M bonfire collapse. "I made it clear that any person who cannot muster genuine concern for another human being does not belong in a newsroom. As a student publications adviser, I could see to it that my budding journalists learned that the lives of real people are showcased beneath a byline. By example, I could teach students to care" (Hand, 2004, p. 40; see also Gortner & Pennebaker, 2003).

While students routinely choose how they cover car wrecks, suicides, athletic injuries, natural disasters and school violence, no event has reached the magnitude of the pandemic in terms of its impact on society. In recent years, only the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks even came close. "'Nine eleven' redefined the worries of most people in the Western world" (Vasterman et al., 2005, p. 107). Then, as in 2020, student journalists didn't shy away from coverage. At Annandale High School, a school only 13 miles from the Pentagon, adviser Alan Weintraut said they faced the same challenges that Ailworth faces today. "Our primary challenge was finding students and teachers who would actually talk about their experience. One of our sophomores lost her mother in the attack on the Pentagon, yet the grief was so fresh in her mind, she did not want to talk to anyone on our newspaper staff despite our most sensitive requests. Ultimately, we all grieve in different ways, and it was a lesson for my students in respecting a family's wishes in a time of sorrow. … [S]tudents learn by doing, and putting together [an] issue in less than a week enabled them to test their journalistic skills of assembling stories and packaging them in a way that wasn't already told by the national media" (Weintraut, 2001, p. 7). David Thurston, then adviser at Newton (Iowa) Senior High School had similar goals for his students. "As an adviser, a journalist, I realized that our coverage would be our own local stamp to a tragedy that would be remembered forever. We did it because we are journalists, and, simply put, journalists report what is

happening. In this case, it was to accomplish three objectives: practice new skills, inform and document" (Thurston, 2001, p. 8).

Student media coverage of the pandemic exemplified all of the problems of prior events, challenging student journalists to cover such events objectively, to partner with school officials to get timely information out to the community and to show empathy to the people impacted.

METHODS

To determine how high school media programs changed during the pandemic, a survey was distributed to advisers throughout the United States. Surveys are considered the best method for "collecting original data for describing a population too large to observe directly" (Babbie, 2013). In addition, online surveys allow researchers to acquire responses from large groups of people in a shorter amount of time and for less expense than in-person interviews (Nardi, 2006).

The survey was sent out via SurveyMonkey in late March of 2020 via scholastic media advisers email distribution lists and via social media. Ideally, the survey reached the nearly 3,000 members of the Journalism Education Association and other advisers worldwide. Because the survey link was distributed via social media, there is no way to know for certain exactly how many advisers were asked to complete the survey; 238 started it and 237 completed it for a completion rate of 99.6 percent. Advisers who completed the survey represented 30 states, worked at public school overwhelmingly (86 percent), were largely female (72 percent) and had a median age of 46. Half (50.5 percent) described their primary role as "scholastic media adviser" while 39 percent said their primary role was "high school teacher." About half (49 percent) said they advised yearbook primarily, with one-third indicating they advised newspaper primarily and 17 percent indicating online media. Only 4 percent indicated they spent most of their time advising television media. The survey provided initial insights into how the pandemic is impacting schools and the social media that cover them.

As part of the survey, researchers asked advisers open-ended questions that provided qualitative evidence to assist in answering the research questions.

DISCUSSION

RQ1: *Did schools continue to publish in some form during the pandemic?*

In short, overwhelmingly, the answer was yes, with 95 percent of respondents indicating they continued publication (Table 1). One respondent said, "I'm most proud of how my student reporters understood, took seriously and worked actively to fulfill their role of being the go-to source for trusted information both about the pandemic AND the school's response. They knew how important they would be in maintaining a sense of connection between students." And another said, "We have continued to deliver high-quality student journalism every week, on the same publishing schedule that we were following before the pandemic."

Table 1
Have you continued publication in some form during the COVID-19 pandemic and school closure?

    Yes 94.7%
    No...................5.3%

A content analysis of the responses to a question about what advisers were most proud of regarding student media response frequently included such words and phrases as *coverage, online, work harder, keep working* and *community*. The responses emphasized how "students wanted to know."

Advisers repeatedly insisted that coverage of the new coronavirus was a necessary part of any coverage of the year. That coverage took many forms. For Richland High School (Essex, Missouri) yearbook adviser Kyle Carter and the students who produce *The Rebel*, that coverage took the form of "Dear Corona…" a personalized timeline of how the virus impacted individuals at the school. He gave an example of his caption. "Dear Corona, thank you for the time I've had with my own children," he said (Davis, 2020).

RQ2: *How did the student media that did continue publication publish?*

Just because media advisers report continuing to publish during the pandemic doesn't mean they kept publishing in the same form. More than 80 percent of respondents said they did not publish a print version of their product during the pandemic, and 49 percent said they had a print product move to online only during the pandemic (Table 2). "(We) just ceased print," said one respondent. "(We are) moving forward online." Another adviser said, "We decided to publish online only." And a broadcast adviser reported, "We moved from a live daily broadcast to a pre-recorded weekly episode after about a two-week delay." Such a move from print to online reflected the general model schools followed, moving from face-to-face education to remote, online education (Lieberman, 2020).

Table 2
Did you have a publication that would have been in print publish online only during the pandemic (so far)?

    Yes 49%
    No...................51%

Naturally, the pandemic hit newspapers harder than other media with 80 percent of newspaper advisers saying they did not print during the pandemic. The 10 newspaper respondents who said they would continue to print discussed different distribution strategies. One said, "We're going to split up the 700 or so households among the staff and drive around and drop them off—keeping to social distancing rules." This strategy was much more common for yearbook than other media as was setting up distribution in a parking lot with drive-by pickup.

RQ3: *How did student media use online and social media to keep students informed?*

The pandemic did provide an opportunity for scholastic media to ramp up their online and social media operations. Oakdale High School adviser Jaime Hammond commented on her staff's use of social

media in an article in the *Modesto Bee*. "I have been the adviser for eight years, and this one takes the cake for crazy," she said, pointing out that students use online software to produce the book and therefore can work anywhere there is internet access. "We used social media to contact students we still needed to interview" (Farrow, 2020). As the survey showed, however not all students availed themselves of that opportunity. Advisers reported they ordinarily would update a website 2.6 times per week (Table 3). Thirty percent, however, indicated students would update the website less than once per week. During the pandemic, advisers reported that the websites got updated less often, 2.3 times per week, with 35 percent getting updated less than once per week. Particularly given that spring delivery yearbooks were complete and half of the respondents indicating they primarily advised yearbook, it does make sense that overall updates went down with our without the pandemic.

Table 3
How many website updates did your student media make?

Updates	Ordinarily	During pandemic	Best practice
<1 per week	30.2%	34.6%	9.4%
1-2 per week	25.2%	26.4%	23.1%
3-4 per week	13.8%	18.9%	16.9%
4-5 per week	16.4%	10.7%	35.0%
>5 per week	14.8%	9.4%	15.6%

For newspaper advisers alone, however, the opposite was true. Before the pandemic, newspaper advisers reported that students updated the websites 2.6 times per week with 14 percent reporting updates more than five times per week. During the pandemic, newspaper advisers reported an increase to 2.7 times per week and 12 percent reporting updates more than five times per week. One adviser said his or her students "are still interested in covering the news and the school community, even during a time when things weren't required. And (I'm proud of) the fact that they are getting a lot of new traffic on our social media."

In terms of social media, almost half (48 percent), reported they used Instagram not only regularly but as their primary social media outlet for dissemination of news about the pandemic (Tables 4 and 5). Twitter was second in both cases. One adviser said, "Students have been reporting via Twitter, Facebook, Instagram and website every day." Another said, "These students have risen to the occasion of reporting from home in order to keep our community informed; there's a passion and excitement for journalism that doesn't stop simply because we're sheltering in place. In fact, our #shelterinplace Instagram posts on @elestoque have had a lot of traction."

Table 4

Primarily, what social media does this student media outlet use?

Media	Pandemic news	Regular use
Instagram	46.8%	47.8%
Twitter	29.9%	31.9%
Facebook	7.8%	7.0%
TikTok	0.7%	0.0%
Snapchat	0.0%	1.9%
Other	14.9%	11.5%

Table 5

How many social media updates did your student media make?

Updates	Ordinarily	During pandemic	Best practice
<1 per week	19.3%	28.9%	3.1%
1-2 per week	31.1%	22.6%	21.3%
3-4 per week	19.9%	22.6%	18.8%
4-5 per week	14.3%	9.4%	32.5%
>5 per week	15.5%	16.4%	24.4%

Of the 10 schools recognized by National Scholastic Press Association in a COVID-19 contest for General Content-Online, all but one had a Facebook account and all but one had a Twitter account. All of them had Instagram accounts. Two of them kept updating their Facebook accounts well into the summer, into July. Four others stopped in June and the rest stopped earlier, the earliest in February. Twitter was updated the most often. While two schools stopped updating their Twitter accounts in May, six kept going well into July. All the schools had Instagram accounts, and four kept updating well into July. Four stopped updating in May, one in April and one in March.

Advisers reported that their students ordinarily would update social media 2.76 times per week before the pandemic. During the pandemic, at least so far, that number has dropped to 2.62 times per week, with 29 percent of respondents reporting that social media outlets got updated less than once per week even though advisers said they believed social media should be updated about 3.5 times per week as a "best practice." Only 9.4 percent thought posting less than once per week was the best practice — yet that's what almost one-third did. Several advisers commented on how they wished they had had a better plan for social media before school closed. "(I would) have more consistency and a better plan for regular social media posts," one respondent said. "(We would have) more social media presence," said another. And another commented on the importance of planning. "I would like to build better habits of communication. … (I would) establish a role where someone is 'on call' to cover breaking news of that day. Build the email or other distribution list because if the print paper isn't present, you only have social media." In short, as one adviser said, "(We need to) cover it more via social media."

The online stories in websites submitted to the NSPA COVID-19 coverage contest included timely coverage of school board and faculty meetings discussing school closure (Davidson, 2020; Correra, 2020) with headlines such as "District 156 cancels classes, activities, athletics due to coronavirus." Students reported on cancellations of graduation and other major events (Hicks, 2020;

London, 2020; Niles, 2020) with headlines such as "Coronavirus cancels school play, 'The Witches." As one student reported, "Within the past three days, the recent whirlwind of cautions, community impacts and cancellations regarding the recent COVID-19 pandemic have gone from a topic of conversations in classrooms to national news headlines and the closure of events AISD students have been preparing for all semester" (Niles, 2020).

Some coverage went well beyond the news, exploring issues such as racism during the pandemic, food insecurity and mental health, exemplifying the empathy student journalists had with other students. Chi Z. and Kristina M. of the American School of Bucharest wrote under the headline: "'I Am Not a Virus': Asian Students Face Xenophobic Bullying and Harassment" and received 22 comments online. "Like most cases of racism or bullying at this school, recent comments about Chinese people or Asians in general have been played off as jokes. But to many members of our community (Asian or otherwise), it's not only not funny, but also spreads misinformation about the coronavirus." Nathan Nance (2020) of *Northmen News* of Oak Park High School in Kansas City, Missouri, produced a photo gallery under the headline: "Lunches provided curbside and at selected bus stops." Meer Mahfuz (2020) of Coppell (Texas) High School wrote of the "Hidden Toll of COVID-19: Mental Health." Expressing feelings undoubtedly common with students worldwide, Mahfuz wrote, "Every morning I wake up feeling trapped. Every night I go to bed feeling trapped. Trapped inside my house. Trapped in a monotonous routine. Drowning in a pool of never-ending thoughts. Losing my sense of reality. Caged in by the parameters of this global pandemic. Since March 13, my life has been the exact same every day."

RQ4: *Did student media operations have support from administrators and instructional technology support staff?*

Despite social media posts of advisers sitting in school parking lots (Will, 2020) to get access to material that was available only on the school server with school administrators not allowing them in the building, advisers effectively gave campus administrators a B-minus—80 out of 100—for support during the crisis. Members of the instructional technology staff were seen as less supportive and received a solid C—75 out of 100—for being helpful during the crisis. Further, the pandemic increased the stress level of instructors. "I would say our teachers are very overwhelmed," said Beth Ritter, director of teaching and learning for Marshall Public Schools in Michigan (Lieberman, 2020). "I'm not going to sugarcoat it."

RQ5: *Were students and advisers able to access needed resources and what role did business continuity concepts play in that access?*

Despite anecdotal evidence that some advisers couldn't complete the yearbook or other publications because they were unable to access photos and other information, 90 percent of respondents said they were able to access data required to publish during the pandemic. One respondent said, "We can't require our students to do anything, so we can't put out a paper in that circumstance. Plus, our Adobe at-home access has not worked up to this point." Nichols said, "A lot of my students are without adequate technology or reliable Wi-Fi, so they're automatically cut off from some of our interactions, and that's requiring new solutions and another whole layer of flexibility" (Jacobson, 2020). Of the respondents who said they were unable to access the information, 60 percent reported they did not have an off-site backup of files. One respondent said, "I have an external drive on campus that was my

backup, but I cannot access it now from home." Another said, "This has changed my consideration of off-site backup. Our yearbook production has been seriously hampered during this time because everything is stored on servers at school."

Table 5
For student media, administrative support takes on many forms.

Have you had support from your campus administration during this crisis? (5=positively)	4/5
Were the staff members in the instructional technology department on your campus or in your district helpful? (5=very helpful)	3.5/5

	Yes	No
Were you able to access the data (such as photos) required to publish during the pandemic (so far)?	90.1%	9.6%
Prior to this pandemic, did you have an off-site backup of your files?	61.4%	38.6%
Prior to this pandemic, did you have access to an off-site copy of your files?	68.4%	31.6%

Table 6
Publication frequency correlated with administrative support

Question	mean	df	Sum of Squares	F	p
About how many WEBSITE UPDATES did your student media make per week during the pandemic (at least so far)? (Q10)	1.56	1	0.00	0.00	0.96
About how many SOCIAL MEDIA UPDATES (including Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, etc.) did your student media make per week during the pandemic (at least so far)? (Q15)	1.75	1	1.49	0.68	0.41
Did you publish a print version of this publication during the pandemic? (Q18)	0.81	1	0.41	2.18	0.14
					N=153

CONCLUSION

Perhaps the thing that came through most consistently in all the comments was that advisers admitted they need to be more prepared. Given the tools available today online, best practice for scholastic media would suggest that coverage would not stop just because the school building is inaccessible. While barriers were numerous, savvy staffs found ways to report, to do interviews via Zoom or email, and to publish online or via social media. Said one respondent, "If you want to go into this journalism career, then this is a one-of-a-lifetime opportunity to experience being the community's press. If you don't take this opportunity, then you are cutting yourself short. Of course you have to be safe, but you never know when the next time you will cover a global pandemic." Said another, "I hope all journalism students will see the opportunities among the many disappointments. My students have at times said there wasn't any breaking news to cover. No one is saying that now!"

However, not all programs were able to take advantage of the opportunity. Advisers cited lack of training on their part, lack of interest on the part of their students, lack of resources (specifically Adobe InDesign for print production) and just the sheer disruption to the school community as impediments to continued publication. Others even expressed concern about whether their program would continue to exist in the upcoming year. "The level of disruption to our school communities is immense. Many students are not doing well," said one respondent. Said another, "This is something we've never dealt with before. It's deadly and it's awful. What we're doing isn't finishing from home. It's continuing through crisis. It's an emotional and physical toll for us and our students. We've been asked to do the impossible, and we've done it or not, and both answers are right. Give yourself grace."

Repeatedly, advisers said that if given the opportunity, they would be more prepared for a crisis that prevented them from accessing the school, whether it be a tornado, a fire, a terrorist attack or a pandemic. They cited establishing lines of communication as their primary concern. "We had no communication system in place," reported one adviser. "I would like to build better habits of communication," said another. And another elaborated: "I may have underestimated how emotionally sensitive some students are. There's been more drama than normal over what might usually be routine things, so communication doesn't just take a different form; it also may need to take a different tone."

LIMITATIONS

The biggest limitation of this research was its time sensitivity. The survey went out just as advisers went into what some called "panic mode," trying to create or finish publications while teaching their other five classes remotely—something that had never been done before. While this probably meant the responses to the questions were fresh on their minds, it also meant they didn't have time to reflect on real issues or underlying causes. It is hard to say what impact the timing had on the response rate but, given that the national Journalism Education Association has nearly 3,000 adviser members, having 238 advisers respond isn't insignificant, especially considering the diversity of respondents in terms of geography and what media they advise.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Anecdotally, one thing that seemed to come out of this research was the socio-economic divide. The schools that had resources tended to continue to publish more frequently than schools that didn't have resources—such as students with desktop machines at home and the software necessary to create

print publications or to publish online. However, it was not possible to determine, given the questions asked, the true impact of the socio-economic divide.

Inevitably, other factors also played into whether a student staff continued publishing or not. Those warrant further examination. For example, did staffs whose advisers had professional journalism experience (particularly working for a daily newspaper) tend to publish more/more frequently? Did staffs whose advisers had journalism degrees or national certification tend to publish more/more frequently?

Influenced by the ideas of Kingdon, Cohen, March and Olsen, the agenda-setting effects of student coverage on policy also warrant further coverage. At the national level (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) and local level (Wilson, 2012), media coverage leads to changes in public opinion, which lead to changes in the political agenda and finally policy changes. In times of crisis, the cycle that might usually take years or decades can take just weeks or months. In the spring and fall of 2020, school boards and other local governments changed policy to adapt to changing circumstances. The correlation between student media coverage and policy outcomes warrants further examination.

This coming academic year will provide a plethora of other opportunities to see how scholastic media can serve their communities even when football teams may not be playing and classes may be meeting via Zoom, not in person.

Yet, as one respondent said, "The kids are taking it in stride."

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