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Opinion – Sou Ciência: Basic education receives support from universities amid the pandemic

The closing of schools almost all over the world for a year or more (in Brazil, in several states, for two years) was one of the most serious social impacts of the pandemic. Despite not being the age group most affected by the disease, children and adolescents are one of the groups that suffered the most from the indirect effects of Covid-19 – and along with them all who changed their routines to deal with the new situation: family members and teachers , in particular.

Some of the impacts were the increase in school dropout or loss of grade; oral, written and body expression affected; loss of content due to the new remote format; loss of concentration and interest in studies; inequality in the conditions of remote access (internet connection, necessary equipment and adequate spaces); in addition to lack of family support and socialization, situations of suffering, depression and even domestic violence. In the medium and long term, the cognitive and psychological consequences in this generation will still be better understood.

Panel by SoU_Ciência and Andifes (National Association of Directors of Federal Institutions of Higher Education) that presents how Federal Universities acted in the defense of life during the pandemic shows, among the various initiatives, support for basic education in all regions of the country , through its degree courses, social and extension projects.

Federal Universities supported communities in greater situations of social vulnerability, such as students in rural areas, indigenous people and quilombolas, special education students, early childhood students and students without internet access. They also entered into agreements and partnerships with municipal and state education departments to assist in the production of content and the use of technologies. They provided training courses in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and access to useful software and applications for remote teaching.

Other projects by the institutions repaired equipment and computers to supply lower-income students and produced teaching materials in various formats. Students followed learning difficulties in all age groups, including family and mental health contexts, supporting children and adolescents with lag, from thematic reinforcements and offered online courses for students who would take ENEM.

Let’s see in more detail what some of the federal universities have accomplished: UFABC, in São Paulo, for example, worked with a school inclusion project, identifying the challenges and strategies used by basic education teachers with special education students, disseminating them to help tackle school closures. The Federal Technological Institute of Paraná, among other initiatives, promoted inclusive digital literacy, with methodologies to teach IT and communication to children with disabilities, in serving students with lags and from rural schools.

In Maranhão, UFMA evaluated the impact on quality of life and perception of remote education students during the pandemic, in particular, impacts and challenges for students with disabilities. Unipampa, in Rio Grande do Sul, also supported the schooling process for students with disabilities and provided free access to various software. In Pará, UFPA acted in distance education for children with autistic spectrum disorder and carried out research on the impact of remote literacy teaching in the pandemic.

In Minas, UFMG worked on a project of educational practices in villages during the pandemic, taking into account the specificities of indigenous peoples and, in a broad way, developed a project for remote teaching and learning of mathematics. In Tocantins, UFT worked on mapping students from rural communities, absent from activities and/or dropouts, with the inclusion of families, offering follow-up and monitoring at a distance.

In the area of ??mental health, Unifesp, in São Paulo, carried out training for educators on the subject of mental health, within the intersectoral project Caring and Educating on “Children in a time of pandemic”. In the south of Bahia, UFSB developed research “Sensitive listening in schools”: knowing the reality of remote activities in the pandemic and its effects on psychic illness.

These, and many other initiatives, make it clear that higher education has not neglected basic education. On the contrary: he quickly realized the impact, especially in public schools, and acted to minimize it. Students who were involved in these actions, and who will be new teachers in the future, had a fundamental ethical and academic learning experience in this moment of crisis, which demanded attention, solidarity, creativity, acceptance and direct action.

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