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Lessons from Formerly Incarcerated Students During COVID-19

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Formerly incarcerated students are one of the most successful populations on college campuses nationwide. In the California State University system, formerly incarcerated students show persistence and graduation rates anywhere from 5% to 20% higher than those of the student body as a whole. Once they arrive on campus, their GPAs are above average and their time to degree is shorter. They are so successful, in fact, that it is easy to forget they face challenges. COVID-19 has been a stark reminder.

At San Francisco State, the changes to learning created by COVID-19 have added novel struggles for formerly incarcerated students to ones they already faced. After conducting several short interviews and participating in virtual community meetings, we have identified a set of challenges with remote learning that complicate formerly-incarcerated students' ability to maintain their academic success. Even with the ebbing of the pandemic at some point in the future, some of these challenges are unlikely to abate, especially as social distancing procedures are likely to affect learning for many years to come.