

There is no debating that COVID-19 brought the entire world to an abrupt halt. The pandemic forced educators to completely change their approach. As a result, learning took on a whole new look. I, along with every other student in the world, was faced with the harsh reality of remote learning. Throughout this experience, I learned the importance of personal accountability, being present in each moment, being able to empathize with others, and the impact of the approach taken by the school district.

The most vital lesson I learned during the pandemic pertaining to academics is the importance of personal accountability. Keeping up with schoolwork and learning difficult course material is something that is challenging even when in school building, but it becomes significantly harder when you no longer have teachers in front of you to hold you accountable. However, when you have an excess of free time, the only excuse for slacking in your classes is a lack of drive and dedication to your studies. As a student dedicated to academic success, I quickly realized that I was going to have to buckle down to get a good grasp on my tougher classes, such as Math Analysis and Chemistry. I had to become much more self-motivated.

Another important lesson I learned from the COVID-19 shutdown is to never take memories and experiences for granted. Because I was in my third year of high school, I was set in a comfortable yearly schedule. I felt at ease knowing that I would have the opportunity to do everything again as a senior, and I did not take the time to slow down and enjoy each experience for what it was. When we were sent home, I quickly realized that I may not have the chance to participate in all of these trips, meets, concerts, and competitions again. Along with every other student, I sat at home for months while my Snapchat memories popped up with reminders of the yearly fun I was missing out on. The shutdown gave me the perspective that I needed to approach each individual moment with my friends as though it may be my last. The memory of the shutdown reminds me to take pictures, find time for my friends, and truly enjoy the high school experience as a whole

The last essential lesson I learned during my quarantine experience is to simply be understanding of others. No one knew what it was like to live through a worldwide pandemic until it was forced upon us, and it has affected everyone in vastly different ways. As I watched people take to Facebook to complain about missing out on life or even to complain about those complaining, I realized that the most human thing we can do during difficult times is to empathize with others and be willing to extend them some grace.

I believe that the best strategy a school district could use to prepare for another shutdown is to allow each teacher to take their own approach to remote learning. As a student in many advanced classes, I quickly learned that there is not really a “one-size-fits-all” approach to remote learning. I have found that many teachers know their students well enough to understand what they need and have a deep enough understanding of their subject to communicate it in the right way. There is not going to be a cookie cutter solution when you have subjects and teachers that differ so greatly, because you cannot teach every subject in the same way, nor can every teacher effectively teach using the same strategy. Another way that school districts could prepare is to work with rural internet providers to increase internet connectivity in rural areas. Many students, especially my area, have unreliable internet signals. This makes remote learning difficult to say the least. Possibly improving this signal could positively impact numerous students throughout the district. I believe that both of these suggestions could lessen the stress of another shutdown on both students and teachers.

The COVID-19 pandemic taught me many valuable lessons. I now understand that personal accountability is vital to one’s success, and that it is important to appreciate what you have in the moment. I also learned that the most important to do during challenging times is to try to understand one another. Additionally, I see opportunities to improve remote learning by allowing teachers freedom in creating a remote learning strategy and attempting to improve rural internet signal. Overall, I came out of the pandemic with a far greater understanding of education and life than I had before.