

What Our Nation's Students and Schools Can Learn in Response to the Pandemic
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The COVID-19 pandemic shut down my high school during the spring of my junior year. I had to switch to online learning to finish out the year. I learned that, while it may be challenging to further my education in such an unfamiliar format, it is very possible. Looking back, I now understand that forming a strict routine could be an effective method to keep myself motivated through the school year. It was also challenging for me to often stay isolated from the general public. I knew that isolation wasn't great for my mental health, this further proved it. I feel that the situation caught my school off guard. After my experience with online learning, I would suggest that the school systems of our nation prepare detailed plans of action far in advance in the case of such an event occurring again. I believe it is important that all of our nation's schools are able to provide the appropriate technology to allow students to continue their education in a sufficient manner, no matter their household income level. One course of action my school took was allowing students to use the school's wireless Internet from the safety of their individuals cars in the main school parking lot. I find this especially important during the economic downturn many families have struggled to combat. Some students were even stuck at a home in which reliable wireless Internet was not available, further proving the importance of the accommodative step my school took. Our schools, and government as a whole, need to remember that not every student has the means to learn from home on their own. Perhaps schools could allocate funding to purchasing the necessary technology. Perhaps student councils could use funds to help in this effort, as well.

This year, I have seen multiple teachers plan not only for in-person instruction, but also for remote instruction simultaneously. I greatly respect that our teachers do this for us, as the pandemic is still not over. Every school needs to ensure this level of instruction for every one of its students. This needs to be required of every class in every school system. How can our schools stay functional when a portion of the student body is left unable to receive a proper education? I feel that my high school has done quite well in this regard.

As we continue to weather the pandemic, I feel that schools should always keep masks stocked for students who didn't bring one, require masks in school and at school events (both of which were started by my school at some point during the pandemic), and prioritize safety above all curricular and co-curricular activities. The pandemic is a serious issue which needs to be regulated, at least to some degree, by state governments. Schools should always be held accountable for the safety of their students. After safety, education should be a high priority. Because our nation's schools have now faced such out-of-the-ordinary circumstances, they are better able to plan for similar circumstances in the future. However, ability, obligation, and willingness are three separate concepts. Our governments and education systems need to ensure that all schools are able to meet the challenge and are regulated to do so. Finally, our schools must be willing to face the strange challenges presented to them with the health and education of their students held as high priorities. We can, with the help of God, get through this pandemic and grow from what it has taught us. Thank you.