

Appreciating Life and Facing Adversity

By: Sydney Stundebeck

For the first two and a half years of my high school career, I was involved in sports, almost every single extracurricular activity, and I was operating a small business. Then Covid-19 hit and everything came to a screeching halt. My schedule was wiped free of events. During the almost six months of quarantine, I went without mandatory school instruction, yet I learned some of the most valuable life lessons. Even though I wasn't in school, I was an ever-present student learning about life. The lesson that impacted me the most was this: a full schedule does not equal a full heart.

When I first saw event after event getting canceled, events I had worked tirelessly to prepare for, my heart sank. What I couldn't see and didn't appreciate at the time was the huge blessing that the empty schedule would be to my life. In reality, it gave me something invaluable: time. I finally had the opportunity to slow down, appreciate my life, and connect with family. I vividly remember Sunday nights over the summer playing highly competitive games of kickball in the front lawn at my cousins' house, laughing when Grandma would, without fail, get out every time she kicked and cheering after an awesome play. We had no other commitments to attend to. We simply enjoyed life in those moments. My heart was so full. Even though school has started back up and my schedule is full again, I now make sure to take time to slow down and cherish moments with family. I haven't forgotten the lessons life has taught me.

While I grew immensely during the first school closure, I believe a different approach is necessary if closure were to occur again. As Missouri school districts prepare to overcome the unknown, I believe that the number one priority to enhance virtual learning should be to challenge teachers to engage students by doing hands-on work at home. School districts should

work to keep their teachers as informed as possible and give them the resources they need to plan interactive, memorable lessons. I think that Leon Busdieker, the Agriculture Education Director for the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, said it best when he said, “We need to raise the bar of learning. We will need to make every lesson have meaning, be memorable, and be fun. Nothing does this more than hands-on experiences.” However, he also said, “Finding inventive ways to include this in our lessons will be a challenge...” (Missouri Agricultural..., 5).

It is a challenge worth pursuing. One thing I believe that all students, kindergarten through twelfth grade, have in common is their lack of enthusiasm for virtual learning. We, as students, don't look forward to staring at a computer screen all day as we are lectured by our teachers. We crave the classroom and social atmosphere. In order to grab attention - and keep it - teachers must encourage student discussion and conversation during their virtual class period. School districts should assist their teachers in finding ways to assign work that will get students working with their hands and learning about the world in a practical way. For example, teachers can assign simple experiments for students to do with supplies they have at home for a science class. For English, students could pick an item in their home to share with their class to discuss symbolism. Hands-on learning doesn't have to be complex, but it does need to be implemented.

More than anything, school districts should prepare their students and staff to face adversity head on. Challenges are inevitable in our world's situation. As we prepare for potential school closures, school districts must encourage students to take advantage of the extra time they have to appreciate life. Just as important is school districts' responsibility to aid teachers in making the most of a virtual learning environment by engaging students through at-home

hands-on learning and discussion. Adversity is an unavoidable presence in our world today, it's how our schools react to it that will make all the difference.