Essay Please write and title a 500-700-word essay on the following theme: The COVID-19 pandemic closed school buildings in the Spring of 2020. Schools had to adapt rapidly to provide remote instruction. What did you, as a student, learn from this experience? What should school districts do to prepare if this were to happen again?

The COVID-19 pandemic has been life-altering to say the least. I can undoubtedly say that I have become a different person because of it. I still remember my last day of school before the lockdown happened; most of us believed we were getting a relaxing two weeks off. Almost nine months later, and I regret not taking that last day to hug as many people as I could. I wish I could have stalled time to remember everyone's smile and the feeling of being close to all my teachers and classmates without the fear of a deadly sickness.

Once the realization that the rest of that school year would be online set in, I was extremely grateful to be in a semi-small school district. One of the best things I learned was that having teachers who already knew most of the students' at-home situations and were available for help at all times was extremely beneficial. Even though this was important, I was still doing all of my school-work from the safety of my home. This meant I had to develop a deeper sense of self-motivation. I learned how important it is to believe in and discipline yourself because it is easy to complete classwork purely because you are forced to. Taking the forced aspect out of schooling after we were transferred to online, I had to have multiple deep conversations with myself. My thoughts revolved around how I valued education and who I wanted to be as a person. Did I want to settle for what I had done up until that point or did I push myself to follow through with the standards I had originally set for that school year? This thought process led me to the realization that my self-motivation is a reflection of my self-worth. Going online and living through COVID-19 has been the number one reason I was able to come to this awareness. This includes everything from physical activity to disciplining myself to fill up my gas tank before it reaches empty. Additionally, after experiencing online education, I have learned that the positives of in-person schooling greatly outweigh the negatives. In past years, complaining about school was a daily occurrence and seemed to be the normal thing to do. It wasn't until quarantine that I realized how important school was to me. It provides me with a reason to stay social and learn how to manage a routine, as well as giving me a daily purpose. I may not always enjoy the difficulty of classes or connect with every student, but I do enjoy the satisfaction of hard work and the knowledge that I can see friends that I love on a regular basis. Even taking all of these experiences into consideration, the uncertainty of the future still creates a lot of fear. I love the person I have become, and I am thankful for what I've learned throughout this journey, but I do agree that schools need to take certain precautions if online education becomes necessary again. Primarily, regularly scheduled Zoom classes would be a must. Giving students consistency will help those who struggle with self-motivation and provide them with less opportunity to procrastinate. Reducing the amount of classwork also seems appropriate because it ties with the motivation aspect as well as allowing students to decrease their stress levels. Living through a pandemic can be extremely demanding on a person's mental health, and copious amounts of classwork can only further decline a student's mental state. For administrators, it is very important that every student's online and home situations are accounted for. Multiple students participating in online learning are struggling to complete classwork because of their unreliable internet connection or limited accessibility to an online resource, such as a computer. If teachers knew this information in advance, it would help with

the creation of future lesson plans and methods of getting information out to students. Although the future may be daunting, I believe taking precautionary measures can help both students and teachers create a safe and positive online learning environment.