

John T. Belcher Scholarship Essay

Daelon Shockley

COVID-19 proved to be a learning experience for much of the population in various different ways. As a student, COVID proved to be a challenge. With schools unexpectedly closing in my city, it became imperative to adjust to learning on a virtual platform. While this may seem like a simple adjustment, it did come with some challenges. The challenge hardest to deal with was also the most obvious, learning to comprehend material without actually sitting in a classroom is quite an adjustment. For many people, including myself, learning a tough concept without the guidance of an instructor is no easy feat, and text just can't provide the same level of understanding. As such, I learned how to, in effect, teach myself a subject. This involved looking for other resources, doing my own research, and attempting to find other mediums offering a new way of understanding a given subject. Another skill I was forced to learn was time management. When the switch to online happened, it's surprising how fast school went from a slow flow of incoming assignments with a nearby deadline to dozens of assignments with a couple of weeks time to finish. This meant it was no longer practical to finish assignments as the deadline approached, and a degree of planning was necessary on my part. Thus, I developed an improved ability to manage time and plan ahead. Although the COVID-19 pandemic has come with plenty of challenges, at least I was able to come out of it having developed some valuable skills for any student.

In an increasingly connected world, this may not be the last time something like the COVID-19 pandemic will happen; therefore, it is imperative that school districts prepare themselves for a situation like this that may arise in the future. I believe that there are two crucial actions that school districts should take in order to be prepared for potential school closings in the future. The first step has to do with access to technology. Firstly, it's important that schools find a way to provide access to necessary technologies, such as laptops, for students in the case of another school shutdown. If kids are unable to access virtual education should it be necessary, all other efforts become largely useless. Secondly, it's important that teachers have access to the technologies they need in order to teach their courses virtually. Right now in my school district many courses aren't available to students who opted to attend virtual classes, and teachers in my more advanced classes have been struggling to keep quarantined students up to date. This is likely a result of our school systems general unpreparedness for a situation such as this, but one thing is for certain, if school districts are going to attempt to prepare themselves for teaching school online, issues such as these need to

be avoided. The quality of our education cannot afford to suffer in a future COVID-like situation due to a lack of vital technologies. The second step I believe schools need to take may be a bit more difficult to achieve. Many students, including myself, do not have sufficient internet access at home. I personally went to my dad's office everyday to finish my school work, but not everyone has the ability to do something like that. All the technology in the world is for naught if students aren't able to access their virtual classes; therefore, I think school districts should push to achieve greater access to the internet for students. This, obviously, is no easy task. In many states, including Missouri, teachers associations have a great degree of power. Missouri's NEA recently spent 1.5 million dollars opposing Missouri's recent amendment three. I propose that teachers unions and organizations ought to use their vast funds and political power to work with state legislatures on resolutions to create the infrastructure needed to provide internet access to students. It's safe to say that COVID caught the world off guard, but we cannot let ourselves be caught unprepared again. Kids need technology and internet access if schools hope to continue in a crisis, and using the courses of action previously laid out, I believe school districts can provide that to them.