

In early January 2020, I returned from holiday break and entered my eighth-hour speech and debate class. In this class, political and social dilemmas and discussions around them were at the forefront of every conversation. However, this day was unique. In the two weeks we were gone, a virus had begun ravaging the Wuhan province of China and spread to other regions of the world. We all had one question on our minds: how great would the impacts of this disease be? At the time, we grossly underestimated its impacts. In fact, that weekend, I was presented with an extemporaneous speaking topic along the lines of, "How should the United States respond to the recent coronavirus outbreak?" I responded by stating the most important thing to do was remain calm, noting the presumed over-analyzing and fear-mongering by the media. Yet, only a few months later, I was shown exactly how wrong these assumptions were.

Similarly to January, I entered my eighth-hour class on March 10, 2020. However, this time the discussion of COVID-19 had shifted to rumors of an extended Spring Break. Yet again, our presumptions could not have been more wrong. Now, almost a year later, every day still remains uncertain. However, I believe the lessons I have learned from this experience have been invaluable. I have learned to adapt to ever-changing circumstances and work effectively in a multitude of environments.

At the end of March, I was taking six honors, Advanced Placement (AP), or dual-credit courses online: something I never could have predicted and most likely never would have attempted at the beginning of the year. Nonetheless, I got to work. In this time, I maintained a 95% or above in every single class, took two AP exams (both of which I scored a 5 on), and stayed physically and emotionally healthy. This experience truly showed me how resilient I could be. I learned to adapt under pressure and execute the tasks at hand effectively and efficiently. Now in my senior year, I have been quarantined for a total of four weeks of in-person instruction and have maintained similar accomplishments in equally challenging courses. This skill of adaptability is something I am grateful to have learned and will undoubtedly find helpful in my future endeavors.

Moreover, another difficult transition was a change in learning environments. The COVID-19 pandemic required me to bridge the gap between home and school. The areas which I commonly associated with work (school) and those which I associated with relaxation (home) were completely shifted. I was required to shift these tendencies which I had learned in more than 10 years of school in a matter of weeks. Over time, I became more comfortable working and learning in a new environment. Now, I feel prepared for anything that may be thrown at me in a professional career, including a unique work environment.

However, although I successfully transitioned into this new virtual environment, many students around the world and even in Republic did not. I believe schools now have a new obligation to prepare students for these unusual situations. Although this pandemic may be close to winding down, virtual education may be necessary again or stay a

viable option for students long term. Teaching these invaluable lessons of adaptability in the classroom is going to be essential for future students, even as we transition out of this pandemic. This will leave the students who attend Republic High School better prepared if this were to ever happen again and overall, more well-rounded as individuals heading into the professional world.

Today in December of 2020, I walk into my eighth-hour class and now laugh at the assumptions made almost a year ago. Although my classmates and I could not have been more wrong about the political, economic, social, and educational impacts of COVID-19, I was still able to adapt to the ever-changing circumstances. I am thankful for this experience and the lessons it has taught me.