

Belcher 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?

Earlier this year, the COVID-19 pandemic forced schools to close abruptly. With confused students and worried parents emailing administrators demanding to know when schools would start back, teachers had to scramble to provide remote education. Given the amount of technology available today, this would seem to be an easy task. But as many discovered, that is not the case. Education is not a matter of reading facts on a screen and completing assignments on time, but of teachers assessing a students' strengths and finding the best way to meet their needs. This is more difficult to accomplish over a screen, so with several students choosing virtual over in-person schooling, how can students and school districts cope with the change?

One of the greatest hurdles in virtual learning is the fact that students now have to be entirely self-motivated. It is easy to complete assignments when students are at school where teachers can remind them to complete assignments and can quickly address questions and concerns. But at home, where distractions like phones, video games, and family members are unrestricted, it is much easier for students to say, "I can do it later," and allow work to pile up. Once the stack of assignments becomes a mountain of work, the task is too daunting and students abandon ship rather than work through it little by little.

I learned over break, however, that this is just as much of an issue among advanced students as it is for lower-performing students. When schools began releasing materials online, I expected to see advanced students rise to the challenge. But I saw just as many high-performing students choose to ignore the material entirely. The truth is that students are not independently going above and beyond expectations, but rather meeting minimum requirements, and those requirements are just different for every student. A lower performing student could be happy with a D and work just enough to accomplish that grade, while an advanced student who will be happy with an A will still do the minimum amount of work necessary to maintain that grade. There are very few students who are driven solely by the desire to learn what school has to

offer.

If this were to happen again, the work would absolutely have to be graded in order for any student to care about doing it. There is no way to ensure that a student is retaining knowledge from a distance without some sort of evaluation. This is, of course, difficult since testing is impossible to completely secure from a virtual format, given that phones that cannot be regulated. However, this could be solved by moving away from multiple-choice style testing and towards a testing format based on critical thinking. Online discussion boards and analytical essays would be a great way to ensure that students are in fact learning because they require problem-solving skills, not simple memorization that could be replaced with google searches. This would not work for all classes, but it is a place to start.

Schools, in-person or remote, should also better prepare students and teachers for different learning styles. This not only includes training teachers and students in how to use virtual programs, but also teaching them about the innate way different students learn. Most teachers recognize there are different learning styles and try to accommodate students. This could be accomplished by providing different resources or contacting other teachers to see if there are better teaching methods for particular students. However, this becomes exponentially harder in a virtual format, where students are limited to what their teacher can offer over a computer. If students and teachers were better prepared for different methods of teaching, the impact of virtual learning would not be so jarring.

There is no perfect solution to making virtual learning as effective as in-person teaching. It is undeniable that remote education is simply not as good as face-to-face interactions between a student and a teacher. But if students are held accountable for their work and are able to communicate with their teachers in a way that is effective for them, they can still gain the knowledge they need to be successful in their high school career and beyond.