

The pandemic is something I would never have expected to experience in my life. I used to believe that these things only happen to those of the past, or those in other countries, but never to me. It almost seemed as though someone was playing a cruel trick, but as the months have passed, I have come to realize the new reality we live in. This huge change has made the transition from child to adult even harder to cope with. Not only has this affected where I travel and who I see, but it has changed one of the most fundamental parts of my life: school.

During the beginning of the pandemic, I didn't understand the enormity of the situation. I, like many others, saw this only as an opportunity for an extended break from school. As time went on, and our absence went beyond what anyone thought, I began to feel the weight of what was happening in the world. It was three weeks after my school shut down that we began our online studies. Our teachers would post assignments for us to complete and hold periodic Zoom meetings to help us better understand the topic, but it just wasn't the same. I struggled through those last two months of school. It was as though I could not make my brain grasp the concepts being presented to me. I never realized just how much support and guidance I received at school, not only from my teacher, but from my peers as well. Without these fundamental people providing a foundation for my success, I felt hopeless.

There are many things that impacted my well-being throughout the extent of the online schooling, but the largest aspect was the feeling of isolation and a lack of support. To prepare for a situation that would make alternative education a reality, we must make changes in our school system that would ensure every student receives the level of guidance and backing they need to succeed in their studies. While, as teens, we are more independent, it was extraordinarily difficult

to even remember basic deadlines in the face of no routine. If the situation of a shut-down were to happen again, the most beneficial change in our virtual schooling would be more consistency in the communication with our teachers. It may be impractical to hold hour-long zoom meetings with the students each day, but I would have greatly appreciated a brief daily video call between my teachers and my classmates. These calls would provide a form of the routine that I receive from regular schooling, and help stem the feeling of isolation.

Another big step schools could take would be forming better relationships with the parents of their students. It is difficult to stay on task and produce quality work without the guidance and reminders from those around you. The teachers may not be able to offer the same amount of support as they would with regular schooling, but if they form a more personal relationship with the guardians of their students, then the parents will be more aware of the work that needs to be done, and have more knowledge in how to help their children succeed in their school work. This development of a relationship is something that will take time and effort, but even the smallest amount of information regarding their children could potentially help a struggling student manage the tasks presented to them.

I am hopeful that another shut-down will not be necessary in our school system, but I also know this hope to be naive. Over the course of this pandemic there have been many trials and tribulations. It is the knowledge that my schooling may provide a sense of support and community in my life that allows a certain amount of stress to fall from my shoulders. I am confident that no matter the problems that arise throughout the school year, our community will persevere and thrive in the face of adversity.