

## What a Pandemic Taught Me.

“Students please clean out your lockers.” On March 17, 2020 at 3:00 PM, our secretary’s voice unofficially ended my junior year. My classmates and I excitedly buzzed over the thought of an unplanned two-week vacation. Two weeks slowly turned into five and my class realized that “coronacation” would last until the end of the school year. There were many aspects of in-person schooling I missed: a teacher in the room, social interactions, and someone else managing my time for me with a daily schedule. These struggles pushed me to learn a new skill set, which proved useful in multiple situations.

The value of seated schooling did not strike me until quarantine, and I found myself wishing I could just walk to a teacher’s desk and ask a question instead of sending an email. My teachers made our classes fun to learn and participate in, so when they weren’t able to be with us, assignments became extremely boring. I worked on new ways to stay focused and learned to articulate my questions well through email. Instead of asking a teacher ten questions, I would problem solve small issues myself and ask only the most important questions. This time taught me to be resourceful and enhanced my critical thinking skills.

Most students missed social interaction with peers when the school “went virtual.” Silly conversations, witty comebacks, and laughing until our sides hurt turned into distant memories. The inability to see my friends everyday left me with an empty feeling. During that shelter at home time, I realized how important the social interactions - such as extracurricular activities - offered by the school were to my mental health. I learned fun ways to communicate with my friends so I could keep building strong relationships. I used Zoom for Academic Team meets and FCCLA State Officer meetings, Facebook to post videos of dances for my little students, and Google

Classroom for FCA devotions. Although these platforms were definitely not the same as being there in person, I still felt I was able to connect.

“All assignments are due by Friday.” When I first read those words from my high school teachers, I relaxed. I have been taking college classes that were structured this way for two years, but all of my classes being scheduled this way truly brought my time management skills - or lack thereof - into the spotlight. The first week of virtual instruction flew by and I spent my first Friday working furiously to complete all my assignments. A few minutes after midnight (all my work turned in) I decided I needed to adapt and became much better at time management. I started planning out my week according to my assignments and committed to working on school work for several hours everyday. These time management skills have made my life much less stressful and I am glad that I obtained them.

To better prepare for another shelter at home order, I think school districts in my area need to focus on teacher and student training, providing internet for students, and giving students and parents more information about quarantine procedures and standards. Providing training for students and teachers so both are better equipped for virtual learning in the future would help both sides feel more confident with virtual lessons. I believe students and educators who have a better skill set on platforms such as Google Classroom would feel more comfortable transitioning to virtual learning. Of course virtual learning is impossible without the internet. A long term goal of school districts in my rural area could be working toward free, reliable internet available for students at a location near their home. This would make video chat classrooms a much more viable option. Another preparatory tool would be an orientation or hand book for parents and students so they understand all of the rules and regulations of quarantine schooling.

Though we had to learn new skills in quarantine, we now are able to prepare and plan for times like this again. I've learned not to take school for granted and how to manage my time better, and my school district now can prepare for everything from snowdays to a global pandemic.