

Jessica Taylor

May 2022

Changes Galore

In the year 2020, the world turned upside down. A global pandemic swept the earth, and everything changed. People were confined to their homes, jobs were lost, and there were shortages in stores. The COVID-19 pandemic changed everything for everyone, regardless of race, age, or gender. Everyone struggled. Students ranging from eighth-twelfth grade already have constant unfamiliarity in their lives, and the COVID-19 pandemic has multiplied that overwhelming change, leading us to ask, how much more adapting can our students handle?

When Coronavirus first became a threat in March 2020, spring break was already rolling around for most high school students. To cope with the increasing cases and concerning reports from the CDC, many states and schools opted to extend the students' upcoming spring break by two weeks. Most teenagers rejoiced, already exhausted from the school year, happy to enjoy any leisure time available. More reports and evidence about the new disease, however, led to more fear, and eventually, states, one by one, were ordered into quarantine. Presented with the importance of their students' education, schools had to come up with ways to finish the school year with everyone at home.

Pandemics aren't new; they have been plaguing our history with millions of deaths for years. The difference with COVID-19 was the accessibility of technology, "in the United States 90.8% of people have internet access"(Johnson). This large accessibility to computers allowed schools to continue education at home. Students could group video calls (or "Zoom") to attend class with the click of a button. Completing digital documents instead of physically writing out assignments. With the rising technology already being heavily leaned upon in schools, most

programs didn't have much difficulty finding a working online system. Some educators continued monotone lectures to cameras instead of students, while others gave up entirely, assigning a worksheet every now and again, and never doing video calls. The majority of teachers, however, took online teaching as a challenge, doing their best to use it with gusto. "Teachers have worked out creative ways of Zoom-based teaching. These stretch beyond the streamed lecture format and include live demonstrations, experiments, and live music and pottery workshops"(Selwyn). Although it was nice to see some educators expressing how much they cared for their classes, students remained mixed in their reactions to the entire situation.

While the entire online schooling situation was designed to try to help students, the students themselves were never really consulted on how their lives were being run. For most teenagers, the advantages of a "regular" school year were entirely dependent on being in person. Hanging out with friends, fine arts electives, and the entire after-school activity section of schools were all either shut down or changed so much that they practically were. One change brought on by the pandemic wasn't entirely bad, though. Mental health was suddenly a larger focus than it had ever been before. Every generation has its issues and hardships, and the '24-'20 graduates were no exception. The strain of high school, hormonal changes, and societal pressures are enough to stress out anyone; adding a global pandemic into the mix led to a collective struggle and panic. Rates of mental health struggles in adolescents spiked, "28% of teenagers between the ages of 13-18 reported an intense increase in anxiety"(Sparks). A good amount of teachers understood the strain put on their students, took the time to learn about teenage struggles, and checked up on the kids. The effort was appreciated but often not what these kids needed. With their worlds crumbling, nothing would ever make life the same. A whole

generation would be extremely developmentally changed by this. Unfortunately, that was not something fixable.

Now, after a year and a half of online schooling, students are finally back in schools, in person with teachers. These students, however, are not rubber bands. People don't just snap back to how things were after such a long and intense change. Adaptation is human nature, and some students adapted so well they can't even return to the new "normal". The number of students in private or home schools continues to rise, as the pandemic still refuses to come to a close. The flexibility of our world is dependent on the people in it, and our struggle as a community on earth together increases with every new death and change from the pandemic. Current high schoolers are the future of our world. Hopefully, the struggle of e-learning, along with other challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, will help us grow into a better society.

WC: 748

Works Cited

Cellini, Stephanie Riegg. "How Does Virtual Learning Impact Students in Higher Education?"

Brookings, Brookings, 13 Aug. 2021,

www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2021/08/13/how-does-virtual-learning-impact-students-in-higher-education/.

Johnson, Joseph. "Topic: Internet Usage in the United States." *Statista*, 4 Aug. 2021,

www.statista.com/topics/2237/internet-usage-in-the-united-states/.

Liu, Eric. "What Every American Should Know: Defining Common Cultural Literacy for an Increasingly Diverse Nation." *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, 6 July 2015,

www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/07/what-every-american-should-know/397334/.

Rodriguez, Tori. "Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Adolescent Mental Health."

Psychiatry Advisor, 30 Apr. 2021,

www.psychiatryadvisor.com/home/topics/child-adolescent-psychiatry/adolescent-mental-health-issues-are-further-exacerbated-by-the-covid-19-pandemic/.

Selwyn, Neil. "How Creative Use of Technology May Have Helped Save Schooling during the

Pandemic.” *The Conversation*, 3 Dec. 2020,

theconversation.com/how-creative-use-of-technology-may-have-helped-save-schooling-during-the-pandemic-146488.

Sparks, Sarah D. “Data: What We Know about Student Mental Health and the Pandemic.”

Education Week, Education Week, 31 Mar. 2021,

www.edweek.org/leadership/data-what-we-know-about-student-mental-health-and-the-pandemic/2021/03.