

BACK-TO-SCHOOL: COVID-19 EDITION

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July is almost over, so you know what that means: Back-to-school is almost here.

With COVID in the mix, back-to-school never really left our minds. Will we be able to return to the school buildings? What restrictions and regulations will be put in place to keep the virus from spreading? Will the curve be low enough for us to go back? How will we social distance in such small spaces?

These questions and many more have been on the minds of students, teachers, parents, and everyone connected to education in some way. Preschool, elementary school, middle school, high school, and college. Public school or private school...it doesn't matter. Everyone wants to know how the dreaded, yet steadily approaching, school year is going to work.

Recently Dr. William Hite, the superintendent of the School District of Philadelphia and his staff released the plan for the upcoming school year. This plan allows for students to choose whether they want to do online school only or do a hybrid of school online and in person. The online option allows students to stay home completely to get educated at the expense of not being able to attend their original school and having a standard education set that may be very different from their normal classes, taking them away from their normal teachers and workload. The hybrid option allows students to attend school both online and in-person, which gives them a sense of normalcy at the expense of them risking their health and the health of those around them.

I, for one, was initially excited about the online only option for many reasons. I have a very high-risk parent and, at times, my immune system isn't the strongest either. I was happy that I didn't have to put my family in a tough spot just to learn. Then I found out that the Advanced Placement (AP) classes that I worked so hard to get into were not available to me because I would be in a brand-new online academy without any of my regular teachers. I felt immediate anger and confusion. Why do I have to give up the classes that I want to take and that I have already begun working for just to stay healthy?

Since the end of last school year, there has been pressure from the government for schools to reopen this upcoming year. However, many parents and students feel that this is unfair. Why should students be sent back to school when there is a high chance that the cases will rise? Why should students and teachers risk their lives when we haven't even made it back to the "green zone" yet? Scientists and doctors have been practically screaming at the top of their lungs about how unsafe it is and yet the government chooses to ignore the sound advice of the people with the proof.

Even if we could attend school and still keep up with temperature checks and social distancing, what can the schools do about ventilation? Poor ventilation is common in many schools, mainly public schools, and plays a big role in the spread of the virus.

At the end of the last school year, an effective system of teaching was put into place. Simply make sure every student has the proper resources and allow their teachers to have virtual classes. It worked during the spring and seems to be the smartest solution. Why not just offer that as the online option instead of creating a whole new system for students to learn?

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