

ATTENDING ONLINE SCHOOL DURING A PANDEMIC

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When the pandemic started, I was a junior attending school at Garfield High School in Seattle. My friends and I all believed that we had simply gotten two extra weeks of spring break and that we would still be able to go back to school like nothing had happened. Obviously, we were very wrong about that. During those two weeks of “extra spring break,” the Seattle school district announced that schools would be closing for a month; they then announced schools would not reopen until at least the next school year and that all students would transfer to online learning.

During the pandemic, online learning on an average day was getting to sleep in and waking up anywhere from 8am to 10am depending on the day and what classes I had. Some days, I would be required to sign into a Google Classroom or Zoom call. Other days, I didn't have any class to sign into at all. The work we were given for homework was very minimal due to the fact that teachers could not grade work; they could only collect the work we did, if any. The problem with that is it became optional to do work or even to attend classes. It became apparent that it was not necessary to do work for a grade. Almost every student completed the year with all A's, whether or not they did any work.

In an average class, a teacher would appear on the screen in a big box along with other smaller blank squares that had students usernames and a symbol of a muted mic. Since it was not required that students have their cameras on, almost all students left theirs off. With the camera on, it felt like a violation of privacy. While attending school in person, you got to choose who you shared your personal life with and how much they could see into it; whereas online, it felt forced that you had to share what your house looked like and your personal life etc. with the *entire class* and your teachers.

Teachers would take roll, where you would briefly unmute yourself when they called your name to say a quick, “here” or “present”. The lesson usually started with the teacher saying, “I know this is a weird time and that we can't meet in person, but let's try our best to make this work”. They would give the lesson by sharing their screen and awkwardly moving their mouse along the screen trying their best to highlight key points of the lesson while they could not see or even hear if students were listening to them.

I am a visual learner who does well when I am able to ask individual questions to teachers. With online learning, I found it very difficult to stay focused on what I was being taught, and I found that I had a harder time motivating myself to do work and participate in class due to the very low accountability to do good work. I found myself using my phone to contact my friends and other students. I used the excuse that I was getting their help for my work when in reality, it was much more of a distraction than it was helpful. Without the in-person connection that school brought me, I found myself much more disengaged.

For me, online learning was very challenging, to say the least. I am really looking forward to getting back to in person learning... whenever that happens.

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