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Like most everyone else, the pandemic was an interesting year. It was interesting how it could be the craziest time with non-stop historical events happening what felt like multiple times a week while simultaneously being the dullest and most monotonous time. I was beyond grateful that online school over the pandemic did not impact me as hard as some people. As someone who was somewhat of a homebody and not particularly social, staying at home all day was not too difficult and as boring as online school was. The schedule my school put into place made it difficult to hate. School started at 10:00 instead of the usual 8:30 time, giving me an extra two hours of sleep each night. We were given an hour-long lunch break, had 15 minutes of transition time between classes, and had Mondays off to work on our assignments. They even began a rule that said final exam grades only counted if they improved your grade, which is every student's dream.

Another thing that was every student's dream was that you did not have to actually learn anything for most of your classes because it was incredibly easy to cheat, and boy, did people cheat. Online school showed students' creativity and critical thinking when devising methods to do as little work as possible. People formed group chats to share answers on tests, bought subscriptions to answer sites like Brainly and Coursehero, downloaded apps like PhotoMath, and used the most beloved site of every student: Quizlet. The Zoom structure made it impossible for teachers to prevent students from using their devices or notes, so every used them. While this ability to slack off and not put much effort into school was good for online school, it made it difficult to transition back to in-person.

After online school ended and we returned to in-person learning, the first few weeks of transition were rough. I was beyond stressed for the first day of school and was not looking forward to it. The only word that could describe my first day back is overwhelming. I go to a school with roughly 4500 kids, which means I went from seeing maybe five kids my age during a year to seeing 4500 in one day. It also did not help that my school was just as overwhelmed by the number of students as me. One example of so many kids at my school is the bus situation for the first month of school. There were so many people crammed into the bus that we had to sit three to a seat. Even then, approximately eight kids had to sit on the floor in the back of the bus because there was no room. Another overwhelming factor during the transition was my lack of mental endurance. I had not used my brain hardly at all for over a year, and now I had to use it all day. When I came home from school during the first weeks, all I could do was lay down from exhaustion because my brain was so overstimulated.

While each of these things posed challenges, the main issue with transitioning, which was unexpected, was the amount of violence. During the first few months of school, we had an incredible number of fights break out in the school. There were multiple brutal fights outside and in the cafeteria almost daily. During the first few months, we had around five lock-ins, one lockdown, several instances of gun violence, and two school cancelations because people threatened to shoot up or blow up the school. There were many possible causes for this, but I think the main reason was that over the pandemic, everyone changed. Not only had they physically grown up, but each person had fought their own battles over the pandemic, which changed them as people—reconnecting them after such a long period was bound to have repercussions. Even though the transition had some negative repercussions, I believe that the shared experience helped bring students closer. While schools may never return to the way they were before, students have been able to create a new normal, and maybe that's a good thing.