

Reflection of Experience of School Reentry and Transition in the Current School Year

Mikey Zoi - 11th Grade

Ransom Everglades School; Coconut Grove, FL

The tumultuous past few years have been full of change for many high schoolers around the nation. These years are commonly characterized by the COVID-19 pandemic: a time filled with hardships, adventures, and long-lived experiences. Ever since the rise of the pandemic in the spring of 2020, our social, political, and economic systems have become utterly transformed. When schools closed because of Covid, so did a vast support system for the nation's families. Masking has become a common practice indoors and outdoors and remains a fixture in societal gatherings. A presidential change has marked a new era filled with policy reformation and reconsideration of how the United States operates. Our financial systems have undergone considerable fluctuation; the country's GDP has dropped and clawed back up to pre-COVID levels. In the context of education, meteoric changes have occurred throughout school systems. Classroom desks are more spaced out for most individuals, school lunches are different, masks are still required around campus, and contracting the virus will put you out of school for five or more days. Thus, the rethinking of education that has been in effect has left a growing sense that some changes may last.

In the United States' southernmost state, the transition into the current school year has been nothing short of eventful in Florida. This is especially the case in South Florida, where the Greater Miami area makes up roughly one-fourth of the state's citizens. In general terms, the area has taken a lenient approach to the COVID Pandemic. Mask mandates are limited to inside classrooms, and interior seating at restaurants is quite regular. Seating within school buildings has become much more relaxed, and athletics has resumed normal gameplay. Even though Covid has a less profound effect on our day-to-day lives, the pandemic has left its mark on several long-term opportunities. For example, field trips are canceled left and right, laboratory entry is highly restricted, and some classes still fully operate through a computer screen.

In a more personal context, school re-entry has been challenging, even after considerable time since the return of in-person schooling and classes. A real challenge was resocializing after doing online school for a long time. I was used to FaceTimes and phone calls, and it took quite a while to get back to normal, in-person contact. The psychological aspect of human-to-human communication was even more challenging to recover when seating arrangements were very spaced out, along with assigned seating. These conditions had various effects on many students' mental health. This situation improved over time, and by the second semester, systems reverted to normal.

Despite all the recovery steps that have taken place, school morale has stayed very low, especially in an athletic context. At the beginning of the year, school sports were required to wear masks while participating in the activities. This circumstance hindered the athletes' ability to perform and de-incentivized competition. At the same time, there were no pep rallies to promote school spirit, which was essential to reviving excitement regarding athletics. This lack of spirit was also derived from the fact that no fans were allowed at any athletics event. Thus, a lack of spectators meant a lack of coverage and enthusiasm for our school sports. Art performances were also either pre-recorded or otherwise canceled. The spring season has taken a new turn as Florida and Miami-Dade County policies have become more relaxed than ever. Hopefully, these upcoming months will allow for even more transition and a similar taste to what life was like back before the pandemic.