

Being a Student During COVID-19

By Hannah Gabelnick

It has been eight months since I have been inside of Amherst Central High School. Since the March lockdown, I have been participating in my sophomore and junior years of high school entirely online from the safety of my bedroom. For the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year, Amherst decided to stick with asynchronous learning where students do their school work on their own time with minimal teacher instruction. I watched teacher-created videos, took notes, completed assignments and quizzes, and even took the AP European History exam online. With no live teaching, in-class discussions, or final exams, it was hard to find motivation to keep learning.

This current school year looks much different: students and their families choose between a hybrid model, where students go to school in-person two days a week, or a fully-remote model, where all learning is done at home. Both models are synchronous and have students follow the same schedule with the same teachers, either through Zoom or in-person, depending on the day of the week. Students at home hear the same lectures, take the same tests, and participate in the same discussions as the students in school.

For the beginning of the school year, my family chose the fully-remote plan. I missed going into school, seeing my friends and teachers, playing in the school band and singing in chorus, and being able to get out of the house. Some teachers worked hard to include the fully-remote students by offering extra office hours, but others mainly focused on the in-person students. This week (Nov. 9), I will be going to school for the first time since March. While I am beyond excited, I'm anxious. The number of COVID-19 cases and positivity rate in Erie County are continuing to increase, and I'm unsure how much longer in-person learning will last.

Unfortunately, many students find it difficult to concentrate while online all day, and technology and internet issues frequently interfere with class. "While this pandemic has taught me many valuable things, I've felt my academic experience has only been embittered by COVID-19," said Michael Sanders, 17. "I hadn't realized how much my work ethic relied on a classroom environment, and it's been increasingly difficult to be an efficient and successful student." It is clear from many students I spoke to that while it's nice to have a school routine, staring at a computer screen all day is draining.

Additionally, students in different cohorts are unable to see each other, creating a division in the school community. Even students within the same cohort find it difficult to socialize, as students are masked, separated by plastic dividers, and required to follow social distancing guidelines. Another student remarked, "I miss seeing my friends in the hallways and being able to learn in a

more interactive environment. The teachers are doing their best to make this year as normal as possible, but it's not the same. All in all, going back to school under these circumstances has made me more grateful for my education."

Many students are feeling lost as they attempt to navigate this new world. Max Hodin, 16, said, "The way I interact with my education completely changed. [I have] less mental space to deal with regular life problems... It really takes a lot to function in this strange world, and I wish more people gave themselves credit for that."

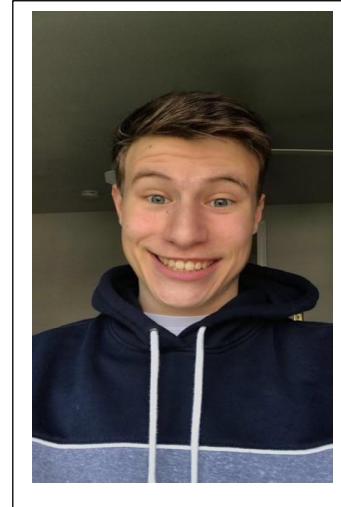
Listening to other students' perspectives has made me realize how much the COVID-19 pandemic has transformed how students see their education. Students all across the country are experiencing the stress of the pandemic and the uncertainty surrounding school, but I am optimistic that we will come out of the pandemic as strong, independent young adults. We will emerge more resilient, more educated, and more appreciative than ever before.

Many thanks to the teens in the Buffalo Jewish community for contributing their thoughts on what it's like to be a student during COVID-19.

Hannah Gabelnick is a junior at Amherst Central High School and an intern at the Buffalo Jewish Community Relations Council.



Michael Sanders, 17



Max Hodin, 16