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### Zoomin' Into 2021

As students sign into Zoom classes day after day, they stare at classmates' names rather than faces. This takes a toll on everyone no matter the age, level, or grade. Generation Z (now known as the Zoomers) has a heavy reliance on technology, but going to school and interacting with people is vital for social skill development and having a stable learning environment.

Everyone quarantined and entered shelter in place as Coronavirus spread throughout the world.

A new distance learning plan became vital in order to protect everyone - relying on technology to continue studies. In most states, students turn on a computer and log into online school rather than walking into a classroom. While Zoom and other technological platforms allow students to continue their studies virtually with some benefits like more flexibility or contactless education, they're many adverse side effects to learning purely through a computer that result in a harmful environment.

It isn't easy to get to know people through a computer, more specifically, your classmates and teachers. Mike Boxer, a case manager at Healthwest, speaks on the differences of Zoom education rather than in-person saying, "But really, I think it mostly has to do with that loss of personal connection. Staring at a computer screen is not the same thing as connecting to your professors and your peers in a real classroom" (Mapes 5). When someone turns the mute button off and speaks, broadcasting to the entire class can be stressful and isolating. Talking through

Zoom is a different experience compared to having a natural conversation. Typically, people only ‘unmute’ themselves when a question arises, sometimes turning to the less stressful ‘chat’ option. Both of these methods are difficult ways to get to know someone, after all how can you get to know someone’s personality based off of a couple questions they ask during an online lecture? Classmates begin to feel like just another name on the screen rather than potential friends.

While online learning has some drawbacks, it allows students to continue their contactless education with a flexible schedule. For the most part, schools are pushing back their start times and ending the day earlier. A student praises the new agenda saying, “I enjoy the new schedule that internet school has given me, since I finally have time to sleep as much as I need and feel well rested and ready to work” (Learning Network 8). Reaching over to a computer takes a lot less time than commuting to school, sometimes half an hour away. This allows students to get a more reasonable amount of sleep in order to prepare them for the day ahead. Commuting to school is not the only thing that is no longer a time consuming activity. Students don’t have to spend unnecessary time getting ready - picking out an outfit, putting on makeup, etc. Tracy speaks about the newfound freedom with her wardrobe saying, “In the mornings I put on a nice shirt, so I look put together when attending online instructional Zoom or Microsoft Teams meetings, but what the camera, my teachers, and my peers cannot see is that I am lounging around in the comfort of my sweatpants” (Learning Network 12). Students have the opportunity to sleep in, or save that time to make a beneficial, healthy breakfast. When the wall separates a kitchen, lunch and snack times are up to the student when they want to eat (even if it’s in the middle of a lecture).

Zoom and other online-based learning platforms caused a shift in normalcy. When students were in person, they had a more formal and scheduled learning experience. Most highschools have strict rules following cell phone usage and a 'no eating' policy during class. The combination of distractions readily available (phones or family members) and the declining rate of motivation, results in a weak performance for grades. Cali, from Pennsylvania, states the difficulty of putting up with distractions saying, "It's easier for me to get distracted and be lazy with my work, so I'm starting to hate the daily mundanity of distance learning" (Learning Network 8). A short time on a phone may soon turn into a deep state of confusion as they missed a step of information. Also, when the assignments are listed on online platforms, such as google classroom, it is easy to get dragged into the pattern of just completing one assignment after the other. This becomes a robotic movement filled with no real thought-provoking ideals. Another student, Emma, speaks about doing assignment after assignment saying, "...I haven't really retained any of the information I just spit back at them for a grade" (Learning Network 8). Each assignment builds on top of another, resulting in an overwhelming amount of work. One can not put the amount of effort that is needed to comprehend one subject without compromising another. Online Learning over Zoom results in a lack of motivation due to distractions and students failing to retain information after just completing assignments for a grade rather than knowledge.

COVID-19 has changed the world in all aspects - especially education. Students are missing out on vital learning opportunities because they are forced to turn to the safer option of online schooling. While online school has some benefits including a more flexible schedule and greater freedom in wardrobe, the negatives - a lack of socialization, distractions, and amount of

useless assignments - all cause students to lack motivation, and therefore, disregard their education schooling.

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