

# THE TIGER TIMES

THE OFFICIAL RISING SUN HIGH SCHOOL NEWSPAPER



## *MASKS IN SCHOOLS: WHAT DO YOUR CLASSMATES THINK?*

BY THE TIGER TIMES STAFF

Regardless of your feelings on the pandemic, one thing most people can agree on is that the institution of mask mandates is one of the biggest changes to our daily lives caused by COVID-19. This change was, and continues to be, very controversial, and is a common topic of discussion among the student body.

Because of this, we decided to send out a survey to Rising Sun High School in the hopes of gauging student opinions on masks in schools. Please note, this article is simply intended to report data, not to take a stance on the mask mandate.

Unsurprisingly, student opinions were generally divided:

- More than half of the students surveyed said they felt unhappy about the mask mandate.
- About 26% felt neutral.
- Only about 17% felt happy.

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## Masks (Cont'd)

Feelings while wearing masks varied as well:\*

- 45.6% feel annoyed when wearing masks.
- 36.9% feel uncomfortable, while 12.6% feel comfortable.
- 10.7% feel safer.

Approximately 73% of students reported feeling that wearing masks interfered with their learning to some extent.

When outside of school and when it is optional:

- Almost 60% of students choose not to wear masks, while 30% do.
- 10% say it depends on the situation.
- Approximately 16% of students say they judge other people for wearing masks.
- 16% also say they judge others for NOT wearing masks.
- However, in both groups, 84% said they would not judge, a surprisingly high statistic.

An overwhelming majority of students (80.6%) said they did not plan on wearing masks after the pandemic is over, with 16.5% saying they might and only 2.9% saying they would.

\*This question on the survey allowed selection of multiple options.



# *I Have to Talk To People Now?*

## Socializing Post-Covid

BY ABIGAIL SHORTALL

"After returning to school after the pandemic, I sometimes forget that people can be nice." That's what I told the Tiger Times' advisors during our first meeting this year. This one quote produced a strong thought process that led into the topic of this article: Has socializing become harder after the pandemic?

Just search "socializing" and "pandemic" and google will provide you many upon many webpages purposed to help you socialize after the pandemic. However, is there actually any change? This varies from person to person of course; however, many people believe that their social skills have regressed during the pandemic. This has to do mainly with social distancing and being unable to go out into the world; however, some people also blame masks and other parts of the pandemic. The awkwardness of course stems from a lack of communication. On a physiological side however, there is little to no change. Researchers found that for the average person, there was no change in the size of the amygdala, the part of the brain that acts as the brain's "emotion processing center." This would lead us to believe that there has been no change physically to the structure of how we socialize, but this is not the case for all people. On the part of children, there is a high probability predicted by researchers that they will not develop the amygdala and other parts of the brain used for social interaction as much as they should in their critical years. Because of this, there is worry that they will then become unable to socialize later in life. Furthermore, social distancing and lack of a social presence causes problems for some more vulnerable populations like the elderly and those with socializing issues. These people may also experience more adverse effects from the lack of social interaction caused by the pandemic.

While the average person does not need to worry about long-term adverse effects on their brain, this does not mean that most people are unaffected by the lack of social interaction and the new changes to our society. With a lack of socialization for so long, it becomes harder to interact. We struggle with jokes and conversations because what is over the line anymore? How do I manage awkward interactions? But many of us now struggle with large social gatherings as well. In adults and the average person, there is research showing no change in the brain; however, they are comparing socializing psychologically to a muscle. Lack of use of the 'muscle' leads to its overall degradation.

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# *Socializing Post-COVID (Cont'd)*



Because of this, returning to a normal social environment has been a hard transition for many people. However, like any other 'muscles' they can improve and get stronger with use. By returning to normal social engagement more and more often, many of us will be able to return to normal social situations with ease.

What roles do masks play here though? There aren't many people who fully enjoy wearing masks. However, there are some people who won't take them off. This is because of a social aspect. Daniel M. Lavery said in his podcast, "One of the things that's struck me as I think about the possibility of someday again being in like a crowded room with other people without a mask on is, like, I have spent a very long time longing desperately for such a day, and I also sometimes now catch myself having this sort of like panicked response..." This is a common thought that has crossed many people's heads. For some people, the masks make us feel safer in social environments; this leads many people to not wanting to remove masks even when there is no need for them. While not everyone shares this sentiment, there are many people who will, most likely, continue to wear masks even when they are no longer needed. Asking students around Rising Sun High School will produce a sentiment like this. Especially amongst those who have issues socializing regardless of the pandemic and mask-wearing.

However, I must acknowledge the counterpoint stating that masks inhibit our social experience. According to a BBC article published in June of last year, masks can inhibit our ability to read the emotions of others. As humans, we tend to take in a person's face as a whole, reading their eyes, lips, and facial expressions to decipher their emotions. We focus in on the lips and eyes specifically because they show us the most exaggerated emotion. However, with masks covering the mouth, it suddenly becomes harder to tell someone's emotions. From my own experience with socializing with masks, there is another aspect to this as well. Not only do I have trouble reading other people, when my mask gets too hot or too humid, I get wildly uncomfortable and it becomes harder to focus on conversations. However, this does not mean that masks do inhibit our social ability. Looking at women who have worn head scarves, hijabs, and other head coverings, they have been able to socialize fine for years, sometimes showing less of their face than we do with masks. For these women, eyebrows have become important to communicating emotion and they have adjusted in this way. Furthermore, wearing the correct mask can make the socializing experience better. Wearing a mask that is tight fitted but not hurting your face and one that has good ventilation but is not mesh can severely improve your socializing experience.

Finally, I want to touch on the social media aspect of socializing. Like I said in the beginning of this piece, it's sometimes hard to remember that people can be nice after being at home so long. I've deduced personally that this is due to the role of social media in my life. Staying at home all the time last year, there wasn't much to do other than to scroll through Instagram, TikTok, and occasionally Twitter if I wanted to look at angry people. In my opinion, this severely affected the way in which I communicate with people and view others. Have you ever sat online and realized that what you're saying here is something you would never say in real life? As much as this sounds like a middle school "don't cyber bully!" PSA, it's true that hiding behind a screen makes us a lot more rude and open about our opinions, this is called online disinhibition. This is another reason that some people have been struggling to return back to normal social interaction. In this way, people must grow reaccustomed to normal social interaction without the falseness and rudeness of social media.

Overall, the pandemic has shown to have changed our social ability. For a majority of the population, we can rebound by exercising our social "muscle," going to social events and putting ourselves out there. However, we must be aware of the people that have been very adversely affected by the lack of socialization. There are some people who will struggle to rebound and we must respect and understand their struggles. We must also be aware of the effects of social media and how the socializing online is different from what we experience in real life.



# *TIKTOK ON THE CLOCK: TIKTOK & ATTENTION SPAN*

BY ANONYMOUS

TikTok is one of the most popular apps for teens in America. Whether this is a result of its easy-to-use platform or the spread of new songs and challenges, it would be hard not to have downloaded the app at some point. The influence TikTok has on the modern world is incomprehensible. A teen girl by the name of Charli D'Amelio rules the app with 123.5 million followers. For comparison, the U.K. has a population of around 67.2 million.

TikTok has been an excellent way to spread new ideas and positivity, but the opposite can also be said. There's a thousand horror stories involving TikTok, but one of the less talked about side effects is attention span and its correlation to time spent on the app. It's no secret TikTok is addicting and time-consuming with its endless scrolling and pin-point algorithm, but it's also fostering easily distractible minds. The longest a TikTok can be is one minute, but most videos don't reach this new time restraint. When someone doesn't immediately find a video interesting, they scroll to the next one.

I've noticed that the time I spend on TikTok directly impacts the amount of books or articles I finish. If I don't find something intriguing within the first two pages, I won't finish it. It's so easy to spend multiple hours on TikTok. When I still had the app (about 4 months ago) I could spend whole class periods watching, especially since TikTok doesn't allow my phone to display the time. This means that I often had no idea how much time passed until I looked up or closed the app. Time was no longer counted in minutes, but rather the number of videos I viewed. I would watch TikTok at irresponsible times, and I know I'm not alone. Out of the people I interviewed, a little over 75% said that they have watched TikToks during class. This was especially easy last year, when school was virtual and no one was monitoring them.

TikTok is definitely not great for your mental health either. Like I said earlier, TikTok is highly influential and ideas can spread like wildfire. Multiple songs glorify topics such as drug abuse and self-harm. There are millions of growing minds watching as their TikTok heroes dance to a song about LSD. This isn't to say that Tik Tok is all bad. Certain communities make the platform a safe and positive place for people to share art and personal stories. There are videos about cooking, fashion, YA fiction novels, safety tips, and even eating disorder recovery.

Tik Tok is going to have a lasting effect on our generation, if we want it to or not. My only advice when perusing the app is to watch the time, it has a funny way of slipping out of sight.

## TikTok Fun Facts

### Did you know?

- The co-creator of Phineas and Ferb (Dan Povenmire) is active on TikTok.
- 25% of US TikTok users are between the ages of 10-19.
- Android users spend about 13 hours a month on TikTok.
- Charli D'Amelio has the most followers on TikTok- over 123.5 million!

BY STEVEN HOLBROOK





# *STRAIGHT TALK ABOUT STUDENT STRESS*

BY ASHLYN ANDRUS

Being in high school is difficult, that's a pretty well-known fact. Between sports, homework, extracurricular activities, and hanging out with friends, there's usually little to no wiggle room in our schedules. This constant busyness causes tons of stress on us and can result in us feeling completely overwhelmed. According to the website "Teen Help," 68% of surveyed teens in Baltimore county reported that they are stressed out by schoolwork.

All of this stress piles up. Without dealing with it properly, stress can lead to irritability, heart disease, fatigue, and anxiety. Emphasis on the last word. Anxiety. Anxiety can be caused by chronic stress and without being dealt with properly can cause our health to quickly decline. Ten students were asked if they felt stressed out by school, sports, etc. They all responded with a "yes." One student said, "Definitely, especially on game days where I may not get home until 8:00 or 9:00 and still have to eat, shower, complete homework, check up on my friends, and get an adequate amount of sleep." Another student responded, "There's not a lot of time for extra things/events during the week...You choose to have a social life, school falls behind. You choose to put school first, your social life falls behind." These same ten students were then asked if they felt like that stress caused them to feel anxious. They all answered "yes" again. Ten out of ten students said they feel stressed and anxious from trying to juggle school and extracurricular activities.

Now that we are aware of the severity of the problem, how do we fix it? We can start by spreading more awareness on the subject and offering genuine opportunities for students to get help. We should also request teachers to be lenient with student-athletes who have to leave early in the school day for their sports games. If you think you have anxiety, some symptoms to be aware of are restlessness/constantly on edge, getting tired easily, hard time concentrating, interrupted sleep patterns. If you feel any of the symptoms consistently, please reach out to a trained professional. If that is not available to you, try things like carving time out of your schedule to do absolutely nothing, and no that doesn't mean mindlessly scrolling through social media. Do things like go outside, or read a book, or listen to your favorite music. You can even just lay on your bedroom floor and stare at the ceiling. Stretching ourselves thin doesn't benefit anyone; it causes us to not put our best effort into everything we do. If you joined a club that you really just don't have the time to engage in, leave it, they will understand. If you joined a sport that is causing you to feel exhausted all the time and not just after practice, take a break.

In this generation, most teens have experienced anxiety, you're not alone. Be aware of what activities are giving you energy and which ones aren't, and if school is the main cause of your stress, talk to your teachers about extensions on assignments, ask for help. You are not alone, but just because most teenagers go through this, that doesn't dilute the severity of the state of your overall health. Get help, talk to someone, figure out healthy ways to cope, and manage your time.





# HOCO Returns Under the Big Top

BY EVE



We finally got Homecoming back! After a long year and a half of pandemic scares (though it's not over yet), we were able to have the Homecoming dance at Rising Sun High. Last year was a real bummer for those of us who look forward to dressing up and dancing with our friends, but as things are gradually beginning to look up for social activities, especially when they're outside, we've found ways to keep having fun while being as safe as possible.

The dance was held outside under a big carnival tent in the parking lot and an open space with cotton candy, popcorn, and seating on the patio. The weather was perfect--not too cold, not too hot, hardly a cloud in the sky. Some students found new ways to enjoy the night, with games of giant Jenga on the patio, a 400-meter race on the track, and a lane of cornhole matches along the parking lot. We cheered for the Homecoming King and Queen: Hunter Sauer and Kelly Nguyen, and the DJ played great music as students danced into an unprecedented night under the big top.

