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## The Undeniable Upsides To Being Back At School

This year has been a roller coaster in myriad ways. But for students and teachers, a lot of added stress during the pandemic has come from school. In 2020, we've transitioned from the pre-pandemic fully in-person school to completely digital learning to our new Hyflex schedule that's a hybrid of both of in-person and online. [...]

Written by Jacob Inouencle - Talon Staff Writer

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This year has been a roller coaster in myriad ways. But for students and teachers, a lot of added stress during the pandemic has come from school. In 2020, we've transitioned from the pre-pandemic fully in-person school to completely digital learning to our new Hyflex schedule that's a hybrid of both of in-person and online. The switch to such vastly different styles of learning in the span of just a year is literally unprecedented in all of human history simply because we've never before had the technological infrastructure necessary to support these massive transitions.

One of the most significant advantages to being back at school in person is students' ability to pay attention in class. Arguably one of the biggest problems with being at home for school is the amount of distractions we have around us at all times. Being inside of an actual classroom provides a learning experience that just can't be matched virtually. The pandemic has largely robbed us of the ability to learn without being interrupted by any of the millions of possible distractions in our homes, and the switch to the Hyflex schedule has helped to somewhat ameliorate this pitfall of distance learning.

"Being back at school has definitely helped my grades," says [Janine Ohai \(12\)](#). He definitely noticed I do better when taking test."

"Going back to school has definitely increased my performance," [Julian Neme \(12\)](#) says. "When I'm here I'm actually productive and get stuff done. It's also way easier to pay attention in class when I'm here."

Another big downside of distance learning has to do with getting to know our teachers. The digital divide between students and teachers has made it really difficult for us to get to know each other. Whereas during a normal school year, teachers would get to know their students (and vice versa) by seeing them in person on a near-daily basis, the distance learning environment just doesn't

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For teachers, having students back in the classroom can help them better grasp the needs of their students.

"There's a little bit of time saved too, because having faces in the class, with students nodding and letting me know what they need or do or don't understand makes a big difference," says math teacher Mrs. Kelly Safford. "Online teaching is much slower because of a lack of communication."

"It's nice being able to talk to my teachers and ask for help in person so I don't have to deal with waiting for a response by email," Jasmine says.

A notable drawback to distance learning is a type of burnout that most of us students have by and large never experienced at any other point in our lives. On a physiological level, there's no way that sitting in one place in front of a screen for seven hours a day, four days a week can possibly be good for our health. Many of us are experiencing extreme eye strain as well as back and neck pain that we didn't expect to have until we're at least 40.

"Going to school in person is super different from online school, it's weird that digital learning is the new normal," Jasmine says. "It's exhausting being in front of a screen all day — I hate it."

"One stress [of full digital learning] is definitely my eyes," Mrs. Safford says. "I feel like they get really tired by the end of the day. Sitting too, is a pretty big stress. I never sit when I'm teaching, and I like being able to walk around and see what students are doing, and not having that makes it harder for me to tell what students are getting and what they're not."

Distance learning has also served to further pronounce the breakdown of the divide between work life and home life. While previously there was at least some semblance of a division between life at school and life at home, the pandemic has blurred these lines even more than they already were. For me, it's not at all uncommon to do chores, clean around the house, or cook while I'm also in class. And the amount of schoolwork that I'm doing outside of school hours has also increased exponentially since the beginning of distance learning.

While before the pandemic it was uncommon for me to have more than a few hours of homework after school, I'm now spending around four to five hours working on homework on a normal day. These exhaustive hours, as well as the dismal state of the world, have combined to raise my stress levels higher than they've ever been before. And the level of anxiety almost every day for a semester and a half has resulted in more burnout than I ever could've imagined.

Jasmine says that switching to the hybrid schedule has helped to decrease her overall levels of stress.

"My stress levels are still high because of the classes I'm taking, but they're much lower now than they were before going back in person. Being in the classroom is definitely a different environment, but it makes me more interested in what we're learning, and I grasp information way better when I'm physically at school."

But students aren't the only ones who've felt a decrease in pressure since the start of the hybrid schedule.

"At home, I feel like I wake up and the computer's there and I start before I even have my morning coffee," Mrs. Safford says. "Hyflex is nice because when I come [to campus] I can leave more of my schoolwork at school."

Even though the hybrid model was preferred over distance learning by everyone I interviewed, no model of returning to school in the age of coronavirus is perfect.

"If I could change something about the hybrid model, I would make Mondays completely off for us to work on homework," Jasmine says. "I know we already have asynchronous Mondays, but it's just not the same because we're still assigned a lot of work on those days."

"I would change it so that we have Wednesdays off like last [spring] instead of Mondays," Jaden suggests. "It was much more convenient when it was in the middle of the week because it allowed me to get ahead and be more productive."

"I would make it so that Wednesdays are our asynchronous days," Mrs. Safford says. "I think it would help to spread out a lot of students' workloads. Right now, Mondays are also a little bit odd. I give homework, but sometimes I feel guilty about giving work before I've even seen [my students]."

Even if there are still some benefits and changes left to be desired by the hybrid schedule, it's pretty clear that students and teachers both see a lot of benefit from being back at school, even if for just a few days a week.

**Tagged:** coronavirus, hybrid, Jaden Hama, Jasmine Ohi, Mrs. Safford

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