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Social distancing and school closures have forced schools to adapt to mitigation plans and virtual/hybrid learning environments. While there are many downsides to the effects of the pandemic over the last year, it amazes me how educators and students have embraced our situation and learned to flourish in a time of uncertainty. My 2020 experience has taught me how to navigate personal connections to create a stable foundation for my education.

The first way that I have adapted to online learning is by treasuring the time that I have with others. Staying at home has taught me to cherish the precious time that we have together, even if it's online. Normally, students see their teachers, and peers everyday and it's a luxury that we may take for granted. Connecting with teachers over the internet comes with its own set of challenges, so when we actually get a chance to connect and converse it is a good example of how time is used productively. I have learned how to convey myself in a timely manner as well as ask questions. These are both skills that are crucial to becoming a successful member of society and they show competence and appreciation. In my case, I was attempting to learn a complex concept in my AP Calculus course and I was having a tough time. When I finally got a moment to speak with my teacher I noticed how much I appreciated it and how much it helped me when I got to ask questions and connect to someone in real-time. Time is one of the most valuable things in the world and this understanding of other people's time is so important to understanding others and understanding how to work in groups.

In contrast to using time efficiently with personal connections, the online environment has done wonders in teaching me about how to be innovative and learn on my own. I have learned through the pandemic that sometimes it is impossible to connect to someone live, and recordings, digital lectures and videos are all you have to go off of. In this case, I have learned to utilize external resources and tools of the internet to stay successful and embellish my education. As notes and lectures are published virtually, they are accessible to me at any time, meaning I can spend time with my family, while still being able to access important information later. Managing these personal connections, I have also learned I work better at my own speed. This type of learning taught me how to find credible resources to get information from as well as the crucial skill of how to interpret and understand things by myself. It also lets me work at a pace customized to myself, where I can go fast over things like geography and mathematics that I have a good base in and understand, while taking it slower to absorb all the information about topics like writing and programing, which are more difficult and take time to complete.

Another way that my education over the last year has transformed for the better is through my self-discipline and responsibility. Studying online requires more self-motivation and time-management skills. This means that there isn't someone physically on your shoulder to keep you focused on deadlines. Online learning has—as well as teaching me about the topic of the class—taught me a trait that will make you stand out in the workplace and beyond. It has taught me how to manage myself and in doing so I have learned about myself, my habits and how I function. This occurred when I was applying to colleges over Christmas break. I scheduled exactly what to do on each day and from there I sectioned my day to get a healthy balance of work, leisure, and exercise time. It was challenging but by the end I was successful and now I keep to a tight schedule which helps me now in school too, as I procrastinate less. Even though I may not be able to put this on my résumé, peers and employers alike will recognize this skill and gain newfound respect towards you.

Overall, my experience with education in 2020 has come with its challenges, but I have learned so much about myself, others, personal connections and how society functions. I am just beginning to realize how much dedication goes into adapting to the format of 2020 and staying successful, and I can't wait to keep learning and further develop my personal connections.