

Vivian Nguyen

Last spring when the pandemic started, I thought that I would return to school a week later. One week turned into two, and two weeks turned into five months. We ended the school year doing distance education. In August, we started in person school again, but in December of 2020, we continued doing distance education due to a large COVID-19 outbreak in our town.

Living on a small isolated island on the Aleutian chain, we don't have reliable internet access to meet on zoom or discord like many other places do. Luckily, with the hard work of our teachers and staff we have adapted with a system in place for students to pick up and return homework efficiently.

Every Monday, manilla envelopes are placed on each student's lockers and teachers place homework in the folders throughout the week. On Friday, there is a homework pickup from 9am-3pm and when students get their homework for the upcoming week, they exchange it with the homework that they have already finished. Not only do we have this pickup system, but for those who can't do the weekly pick up, the school has bought modems to place in each students home and provided each student with a personal laptop. When students are connected to the school modems, we have access to Google apps such as classroom, docs, sheets, slides, etc. With the lack of internet, we have resorted to teleconference calls. Though, this is not always a reliable method since calls tend to fail often here. Recently, our school board created a plan that provides students with the option to attend school for two and a half hours a day in order to receive extra help and have the opportunity for some face to face education while our town is at high risk. In the morning, students would call into three of their classes and then go to school from 1pm-3:30pm. If students choose to participate in this hybrid schedule, they would technically attend all of their classes each day. Personally, I really like this hybrid system and see it as a great way to maintain personal connections with my teachers and peers while balancing my school work at the same time.

When we first started doing distance education, it was hard for me to stay motivated and do my schoolwork. I would spend most of the day sleeping. There were no set times to call in to class and it was hard to communicate with my teachers. With a better system this year, I have been able to get all of my homework done and ask questions during conference calls. Teachers are especially understanding and flexible when it comes to asking for help. Some teachers even created snapchat accounts to communicate with groups of students on the weekend and to check in on us. Since distance learning has started, I have gotten closer with my classmates by talking more in group chats since most of us can't see each other in person. We have also gotten closer working together on projects and asking each other for help when we are struggling to understand some concepts. The most important thing that I learned though, is the value and importance of face to face education and that I should not take it for granted.

Although we live on a small island with limited resources, I am grateful for the dedication that our teachers and staff have to finding and adapting to new ways of providing us with an exemplary education. If it weren't for their continuous support, I would not be the student that I am today.