

2020: The end of the classroom, the beginning of distance learning



PHOTOS COURTESY OF TOM CHEAH, AMY WU, AND HAOYANG ZHAO
Compared to in-person learning, distance learning provides less opportunities for students to actively engage with their teachers and peers.



A classroom and campus library remain untouched by students for nine months since March 13. Students have been attending classes through Zoom for this school year, although they may transfer to hybrid learning in the future.

With in-person classes no longer a viable option, teachers and students were forced to adapt to an entirely new learning environment, resulting in never-ending disruptions to education.

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An outbreak like no other. Desperate to escape the downpour, many students rush home, unaware that it would be their last day at school for the rest of the year.

Following an upsurge in local COVID-19 cases, the district announced a school closure on April 2. Instruction continued through distance learning for the remainder of the 2019-20 school year and resumed for the 2020-21 school year. Distance learning resulted in disorder among students and staff regarding the efforts made to preserve the quality of students' education in the midst of an international crisis.

When distance learning was initiated, there was no established platform, schedule, or mandatory work, prompting students to lose the incentive to continue their studies. As teachers were accustomed to instructing in a physical

environment, the sudden shift to a virtual environment also resulted in a lack of training for managing online classes.

Testing

Rather than cancelling the 2019-20 AP exams, the College Board released a shortened version of the test, claiming to be "committed to ensuring that AP students receive the credit they have worked this year to earn." To safeguard the integrity of the exams, they adopted a range of digital security tools and limited the tests to only free-response questions.

"The test was disappointing because much of what I had practiced was not included, and I know that I could have done better if there was a multiple-choice section," senior Jason Chow said. "I really hoped to save money by earning college credits through the AP exams, so I studied for months. I plan on taking AP exams again this year, and in the case that we are still taking them online, the College Board should provide us with a fairer experience."

Due to the many delays and uncertainties concerning testing through remote learning, the California Department of Education suspended all statewide testing, including the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium exams. Many colleges, namely the University of California system, waived their SAT and ACT requirements.

Distance Learning Preparation

By the time the new school year started, teachers had undergone months of technology training on navigating Zoom and Google Classroom. To ease the transition from distance learning to hybrid learning, the district organized block scheduling, decreasing instructional time and impeding student learning.

Participation

Despite the improved distance learning measures, students demonstrated how a lack of engagement could inhibit their educational growth when they do not participate or submit

assignments in a timely manner. However, due to personal as well as technological problems, many students disagree with some teachers' policies that enforce camera usage.

"The fact that so many students are using distance learning as an excuse to not participate is ridiculous," sophomore Linh Dinh said. "Some students may have personal issues that stop them from turning on their cameras or turning in work on time, but it is appalling when not a single person in the entire class seems to care about their education."

Cheating

Incidents of cheating have been a reoccurring issue throughout the year, forcing many teachers to use preventative measures such as time restrictions, plagiarism detectors, and platforms designated for online testing. The increase in cheating also elicited many test reforms, including requiring students to explain their answers when they are suspected of cheating.

"The unwillingness of some students to actually struggle through and complete assignments greatly diminished their writing, analysis, and reasoning skills," history teacher Henry Osborne said. "This often becomes apparent when students must demonstrate those skills either in school, during testing, or later in the workforce. When students cut corners by cheating, they weaken their own skill set."

Education's Future

A return to normalcy may be sooner than expected as the district has discussed possibilities of reopening in a hybrid learning model in January. For the time being, block scheduling will continue, new precautionary measures will be implemented, and new limitations on education will arise, making it uncertain whether the quality of education will improve by then.