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Students share thoughts on learning from home

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Distance learning proves challenge

By Taylor Howell

Everyone has their own thoughts on distance learning. Throughout this crazy time the world has been living through, everybody has had to accept uncomfortable challenges. From staying in their houses quarantining, buying groceries through an app, not being able to see loved ones and not going to school or work. The lives of many have changed and it is not normal, but it must be a new normal for now. One of the biggest challenges for school students is distance learning.

Distance learning is more difficult than learning in school for many reasons. Students cannot ask questions on the spot or engage in the material to their full capacity. Many feel that they are assigned busy work to have proof that they turned something in as opposed to moving forward with their knowledge. Students believe that the difficulty in distance learning is because in a normal class, teachers walk students through the

material and read through notes for a better understanding of what they are supposed to be learning.

McKenna Bowman said, "It is more difficult to learn at home because most of the teachers are not there to explain the material when I have a question." Students also miss playing their favorite sports, being with their classmates, and seeing some of their favorite teachers. Seniors are especially upset that they are missing their senior prom and many of their lasts.

"I would say as seniors we are missing so many important senior festivities and experiences," said Kyleigh Bothwell. Other disadvantages students state are lack of having a teacher in the room as well as the distractions of others in their home, which prevents some from working to the best of their abilities.

Students have said there are a few advantages of distance learning, like having the ability to stay in pajamas while working on school work, going at their own pace, and completing their tasks at any time of the day.

Allison Clise said, "An advantage is that I can do my work at my own pace. My teachers are helping me as much as possible through email, so I am very thankful for them." Distance learning has its pros and cons, but students and teachers are making the best of it.

Taylor Howell, a senior at Mountain Ridge High School, has been involved in FCA, Spanish Club, Diamonds dance/drill team, National Honor Society and as business manager of the Meridian. She has volunteered at Dixon Dance Studio as an assistant dance teacher as well as at LaVale Baptist Church for holiday dinners. She has worked as a receptionist at Studio 757 hair salon, is a cleaner and an office assistant for Creative Property Management and is an office assistant at Frostburg State University in the vice president's Office of Student Affairs.

Overcoming the pandemic

By Jenna Green

Alarms clocks ringing at 6 a.m., rushing to the bus stop or driving to school to get there on time, carrying a backpack full of books, and walking to Sheetz or McDonald's after school before practice. All of these routines that seemed like small, normal parts of the day as well as just being fortunate enough to walk the halls and learn from teachers in a face-to-face fashion have been something that many have taken for granted.

Learning online, figuring out how to do a lesson from notes posted on Google Classroom, trying to contact teachers and getting in touch with other students for group projects has turned out to be much more difficult than anyone would have thought, even with all of the technology we have today.

Distance learning was not an easy task, but students learned quickly how to manage their time to get their assignments completed.

Austin McKenzie stated, "My math class has been harder than usual because I haven't been able to see my teacher demonstrate how to work out the example problems in class. Trying to follow the notes has been a real challenge."

Many students learn better with hands-on experiments or with a demonstration done by a teacher but moving to the online platform limited this. However, teachers continued to go out of their way to make sure that their students were taken care of and were still receiving the education they deserved.

Working from home comes with many distractions and can hinder a student's ability to retain the information given to them. "It was a lot easier to work at school because I didn't have my dog in my lap trying to play with me as I was doing my English assignments causing me to lose focus," said Vincent Green.

Many students had said that the thing they missed most about school was seeing their friends, the faculty and staff and just having a regular schedule to work with. "I'm really

upset to not only not have a final baseball season, but to not get to spend my final moments of senior year with my best friends,” said Noah Merling.

Students also missed out on events like their sports seasons, drama club productions and school dances.

Although online learning is not ideal and can be difficult at times; the main advantage of it is that by staying away from the large crowds that schools provide, we can help do our part in slowing the spread of COVID-19. In the end, this advantage will outweigh all of the disadvantages when we can return to our normal activities and feel confident that we can be healthy, happy and safe. We are all in this together, and together we can overcome this history-making pandemic.

Jenna Green is the editor of the Mountain Ridge Meridian yearbook, co-captain of the volleyball team as well as the indoor and outdoor track teams and was captain of the Diamonds Dance Team. She was also a member of the National Honor Society and a participant in the Leadership Allegany! Rising program. She was a winner of the Cumberland Rotary Club speech contest and was runner-up at the regional level. Green volunteers her time at the Frostburg Storybook Holiday and other various community events. She plans to attend Frostburg State University and was recently awarded an FSU Distinction Scholarship for academic excellence.

Thriving in a new environment

By Rachel Jones

Distance learning is defined as a form of education in which the main elements include physical separation of teachers and students during instruction.

During this time in quarantine, students have to adjust so that they can finish the rest of the year from home. Throughout this new experience, both teachers and students are

finding that some aspects are better than others. Some families with several children share a singular computer in order to complete the designated tasks.

Audrey Jones explained, "Distance learning while in college has proven to certainly be different than in-person learning, but the vast technology we have at our fingertips has allowed the transition to be smooth."

Another aspect of distance learning is the ability to do video calls between teachers and students. This allows students to have the opportunity to communicate with teachers and ask questions about the assignments given to them. Not only is this new territory for parents and students, but also for teachers. A lot of pressure is on teachers to make this a smooth transition, but teachers are also trying to determine plans for students that can be achievable. Emma Lauder said, "I like this because I have time to work at my own pace and I feel like I can get everything done."

Many people agree that COVID-19 is changing education. David Jones at Allegany College of Maryland stated, "Online learning is a whole new paradigm shift in the way that education and workforce development occurs."

Allegany College of Maryland has done an excellent job throughout this transformation to remain on the cutting edge by continuing to provide a high quality education that our employers and our community need." With the help of the community, students will be able to succeed and thrive in this new learning environment.

Rachel Jones, a junior at Mountain Ridge, is a member of the yearbook staff, Spanish club and National Honor Society. She participated in Leadership Rising and received recognition for Minds in Motion, honor roll and the Voice of Democracy. Jones participates in soccer, basketball and tennis. She is active in her church where she is involved in the youth group. In her spare time, she enjoys outdoor activities, playing board games and spending time with friends.

Pros and cons of distance learning

By Lena Maffley

Distance learning has had its advantages and disadvantages. "Distance learning is more difficult because it's harder to learn information when you are by yourself," said Rhett Robinette, a student at Allegany High School. Depending on the student, distance learning was either more difficult or easier. Also, missing different aspects of school was hard for most students in Allegany County.

"The thing I miss most about school is getting to talk and work with my friends," said Tabetha Wratchford, an auto-mechanical student at the Career Center. Having a face-to-face connection with not only students, but also teachers, was difficult for students because they were used to speaking to them on a day to day basis. Lack of a routine was difficult because students have been on a set schedule for as long as they could remember.

Distance learning had advantages such as, "being able to do my homework in my pajamas," said Tori Packard, a culinary student at the Career Center. Being able to be in a relaxing environment was beneficial, so students would be able to complete their work more efficiently.

Distance learning also had disadvantages such as not being able to learn information as easily as being in a classroom setting with a teacher. Gabby James, a nursing student at the Career Center stated, "I learned to appreciate the teachers more because they are always able to answer my questions right away."

Distance learning has either had positive or negative effects on students' lives.

Lena Maffley, a senior at Mountain Ridge High School, participates in soccer, track, the Diamonds and played softball during her freshman and sophomore years. Maffley is on the yearbook staff, Spanish Club, secretary of the Green Team, National Honor Society and has a 4.46 GPA. She teaches at Frostburg Dance Academy, plays in the Arion

Band and bales hay at two farms. She will study medical laboratory technology to become a pathologists' assistant.

Education, interrupted

By Elizabeth Marchbank

Around the globe, 391.5 million students had their education interrupted due to the coronavirus. School closures due to the coronavirus had impacted at least 124,000 U.S. public and private schools and affected 55.1 million students, according to Education Week.

In the state of Maryland, Gov. Larry Hogan stated that all schools were to be shut down starting March 16. For the next month, the state of Maryland and most of the United States' schools had been shut down. Maryland will be doing so until at least the 15th of May. To continue educating the masses, schools turned to online schooling. "While I miss my friends and being able to interact with teachers and classmates, I enjoy the flexibility of being able to work at my own pace at any hour," said Brielle Windle.

As the restriction of social distancing extended, so was online schooling. Most students were on their electronics doing school work through Google Classroom that each of their teachers had set up.

Teachers gave students a week's worth of assignments that were due either Friday or Sunday at midnight. Many teachers used an app called "Zoom" or "Google Meet" to contact their students and talk to them face to face, especially AP teachers. Joey Oyer said, "I think that online schooling is a good thing because it's preparing me for college and prioritizing my time."

However, many students do not have internet connections, which makes it hard for them to ask for help from their teachers and for their teachers to check in with them.

Some students are struggling with the fact that they cannot see their friends on a daily basis.

Some of the online schooling was benefitting to the seniors who were getting ready to go to college. Katherine Baker said, "Online school has been challenging, but has helped me continue to expand my knowledge and prepare for college." As there were many disadvantages to online schooling, there were many advantages like, learning to prioritize time and a feeling of preparation for future online classes for college.

Elizabeth Marchbank, a Mountain Ridge High School junior, plays soccer and runs track, both indoor and outdoor. Her awards include Rookie of the Year, Coach's Award, Minds in Motion Scholar Athlete, honor roll and the Voice of Democracy essay finalist. She is a second-year member of the yearbook staff as well as the National Honor Society. She volunteered for the Summer Lunch Box Program, at the animal shelter and at her church as a teacher. Her hobbies include playing piano and running. She is a graduate of the Leadership Allegany Rising program.

Coninue pushing toward success

By Miah McKenzie

Most kids are excited to stay home and not go to school, but now that COVID-19 has forced them to stay at home, their opinions have changed. Students miss the sense of normalcy they once had when they went to school five days a week, and that was just earlier this year.

Students miss seeing and interacting with their friends, their teammates and their teachers. "I miss being able to compete at track meets with my friends," said Justus LePrevost. Students' spring sport seasons were originally delayed, then eventually cancelled.

Athletes had practice for only two weeks before schools closed indefinitely. Not only are athletes missing their spring season, but also seniors are disappointed to miss their final months in high school. These months are usually spent with lifelong friends from the last 13 years. They miss this sentimental time with favorite teachers from the past four years.

Students also have adapted to online teaching. "I find online learning difficult and more time consuming than learning at school," said Neel Singh. Students no longer have teachers in front of them teaching a new lesson. They lack immediate access to the teacher who helps to work out a problem or explain how to do the assignment.

Some students now struggle to grasp concepts that were easy when taught in person. Other disadvantages to online learning are the many home distractions and lack of motivation. During school, students are in a classroom with fellow classmates and a teacher, in which 80% of the time the teacher is the focus. When learning through online classes at home, students can be distracted by siblings, pets, parents or even other family members.

"I miss my friends and learning in the classroom, but I know it's for the safety of my friends and me," said Kyleigh Bothwell.

Although learning online is difficult and students are missing their friends, people are making the most of these strange times and pushing toward success.

Miah McKenzie is a senior at Mountain Ridge High School, currently carrying a GPA of 4.4. She has played on the girls basketball team all four years and the track team for three. She also is a competitive horseback rider. McKenzie has received the Minds in Motion award all four years of high school. She was inducted into the National Honor Society her junior year and is a member of the yearbook staff. She plans to attend Allegany College of Maryland in the fall and major in nursing.