



○ The Quarantine

The Spectator

If you are the host, [sign in](#) to start this meeting

Start reading now



FALL 2020 MAGAZINE

The Spectator

The Stuyvesant High School Newspaper

Dear Reader,

When we started our spring term this past February, we had ambitious plans for the newspaper, among them a magazine. Though we were nervous, we were looking forward to leading Spec class on the daily and distributing hundreds of copies on the stands by the bridge every two weeks. Just as it did for everybody else in Stuyvesant, New York City, and the world, the COVID-19 pandemic pulled our plans out from under our feet on March 15. And like many others, we had to adjust our expectations—after that day, our main goal became ensuring that The Spectator stayed afloat during the pandemic, and the concept of a magazine slipped completely from our minds.

After a semester's worth of experience, though, we sought to push boundaries during our last semester working on the paper. Stuyvesant was beginning a new school year like never before, and it was imperative we report on this period of great change and adjustment. Given that we are one month into the school year, now is the perfect time to do so.

The Quarantine is a collection of pieces examining various aspects of the Stuyvesant remote and blended learning experiences, from new methods for testing and homework to the silver lining(s) of virtual school. We hope that, now, this magazine will resonate with and promote reflection among the Stuyvesant community and, down the line, will serve as a historical record of this time.

Please enjoy, and as always, thank you for reading.

—Talia Kahan and Erin Lee
Editors-in-Chief

Special thank you to:

ART

Nicholas Evangelinos
Michael Hu
Andrea Huang
Chloe Huang
Cadence Li
Afra Mahmud (front cover)
Adrianna Peng
Saadat Rafin (back cover)
Vivian Teo

COPY

Irene Hao
Haley Huh
Shreyasi Saha
Ruiwen Tang
Brian Zhang















LAYOUT







Allison Ho
Ezra Lee
Amy Lin
Michelle Thaung

And the 2020-2021 Editorial Board for all their contributions.

Participants

Find an article

	"Most of Education is Lonely": Investigating the Rise of Perusal	4
	Edpuzzle, FlipGrid, and DeltaMath. Oh My!	7
	Making the Most Out of Your Day	8
	Snapshot of Working From Home	10
	Working Out Homework	11
	"Essentially Malware": Experts Raise Concerns About Stuyvesant's Lockdown Software	14
	Remote, Hybrid, or In-Person: How Are Students Across the World Learning?	16
	Why In-Person Strategies Don't Work At Home	19
	Tested by Testing: How Teachers Are Managing Assessments	20
	Reactions to Remote Learning	22
	A Day in the Blended Life	24
	The Babies in the Bathwater	25
	Pressure Cookers, Swimming, and Mental Health	26
	How My Family Became My Lifeline	27

Fall 2020 Magazine

Table of Contents

My Articles

My Favorites

New Releases

Featured Articles

The Spectator Website

Sign Up for Newsletter

Readings

Working Out ... pg. 11

Snapshot of ... pg. 19

Making the Most ... pg. 20

Pressure Cookers, ... pg. 26

How My Family ... pg. 27

Hashtags

#stuyspec

#eureka

#quaranzine

#jointhespectator

#layoutisbest

#fall2020mag

#perusing

#stuyvesant

#ericmazur

#weneedsleep

#sportsfrontpage

#wewritethings

#pulseofthestudentbody



“Most of Education is Lonely”: Investigating The Rise of Perusall

By Talia Kahan, Sam Levine, and Oliver Stewart

As the time increases since Stuyvesant students last set foot in a real, honest-to-goodness classroom at 345 Chambers Street, attempts to replicate parts of the classroom experience have become more creative and, perhaps, more desperate. While some functions of the physical classroom have been replicated with relative ease and success—Zoom’s raise hand feature quickly took the place of raising hands, and a daily reCaptcha on Talos supplanted scanning in by the bridge to mark attendance—other aspects, particularly the simple act of holding a flowing live discussion, have proved more elusive in the naturally stilted remote environment.

Some Stuyvesant teachers have attempted to solve that problem by using Perusall. One of the platform’s creators, Harvard University physics professor Eric Mazur, traced its origin all the way back to 1984. “I started teaching at Harvard, and I did what my teachers had done to me: I lectured [...] I would get great ratings, so I very quickly started to believe that I was the world’s best physics teacher,” he recounted. “Then in 1990 [...] I discovered through a test that my Harvard students were not even understanding the most basic concepts in my course. They were simply memorizing to pass the exam.” This realization prompted Mazur to develop the flipped classroom model, which has become a popular classroom style especially during remote learning. In a flipped classroom model, students do the work traditionally done in class—lectures and instruction—at home, and traditional homework—problem sets and practice—during class with the aid of the teacher and peers. One deficiency, though, remained: “Most of education,” Mazur said, “is lonely.” His idea was to “make a pre-class assignment more meaningful and then make it more social.” He was struck by the success of a prototype he tested with his physics classes, and quickly colleagues began to ask him for access to the platform.

Perusall has exploded during remote learning and now boasts more than a million students learning through the platform. At its core, the concept behind Perusall is simple: a group of students is tossed together onto a document which they are responsible for annotating individually and replying to each other’s comments. In theory, these interactions create exactly the kind of discussion that has so often vanished since the advent of remote learning. In many ways, in fact, it is suited perfectly to remote learning—it takes the place of a cumbersome, hard-to-distribute (and potentially virulent) physical textbook, allows for a back-and-forth in real time, and, with its clean user interface, allows students to upvote, reply to, or otherwise interact with their peers’ comments like a bona fide social media platform.

For many teachers, Perusall has been just what they needed, providing them with a way to ensure that students are reading the necessary material and, at the same time, giving students a way to interact with each other about such material. For social studies teacher Josina Dunkel, it has even provided her a way to learn more about how her students think. “I like that it encourages intellectual engagement and social interactions,” she said. “As a teacher, I also like the insights I gain into what questions students have and what they are responding to.”

That sentiment has rung true for freshman William Tang, who is a student in biology teacher Marianne Prabhu’s class. Beyond simply giving students assignments on Perusall, Prabhu has cultivated a community among Tang and his classmates by putting them in the same small groups for at-home reading as well as in-class activities. Especially given that Tang does not know his classmates, he has found the platform to be “really helpful at getting to know peers.”

This social-based interaction that Tang described is what Mazur had in mind when creating Perusall. And because Perusall is essentially asynchronous instruction, the platform tries to encourage students to engage with each other. “You probably already noticed that Perusall nudges you a little bit by sort of comparing you to other students and saying most of your classmates are going to see that,” Mazur told us. “So we’re trying to sort of stimulate people’s intrinsic motivation

to participate, rather than saying, ‘Hey, if you don’t do this, we’re going to punish you,’ which I don’t think is the right approach to group learning.”

From a teacher’s perspective, Perusall has been helpful in crowdsourcing which concepts are difficult for students. “What it does is it shows me the kids’ questions that they ask a lot,” an anonymous teacher said. “I can see the top questions and see what the kids are confused about, so I can know for my next lesson.”

Furthermore, Perusall touts its built-in scoring algorithm, advertising that it “motivates participation via social connections and automatic engagement scores.” A document published online titled “How scoring works” lays out six “scoring components” that the system uses to assign students a total grade out of three: annotation quality, opening assignment, reading, active reading time, getting responses, and upvoting. Some are relatively straightforward—“reading” simply awards a proportion of the score based on how much of the document a student has looked at, “active reading time” awards points based on how long a student has had the document open and is actively engaging with the browser, “getting responses” gives credit for receiving replies on comments, and “upvoting” grants credit for either upvoting or being upvoted by one’s peers. A portion of a student’s score can also be taken off if the student’s comments are not spread evenly throughout the document.

Knowledge of this grading criteria sometimes affects how students complete their assignments: “I do kind of have to think about it, because where they are being spaced out is part of the grade. If I put half of them on the first page, but nothing on the second or third page, then that lowers my grade a lot,” sophomore Mary Harvey described. “So sometimes I’ll see something and go, ‘Oh, I can annotate that,’ but at the same time, this is a six page article, so I don’t need to annotate three things on the first page and have it not be evenly spaced.”

The automated grading feature of the platform has been controversial among both students and teachers, particularly the vague “annotation quality” component. According to Mazur, in developing the algorithm that calculates annotation quality, he used a machine learning algorithm to look at the comments of students who demonstrated mastery of the subject in order to identify factors that set their comments apart from less successful ones. “It’s not vague because we want to hide it,” Mazur said. “It’s vague because we’d be hard pressed to explain it, and that’s inherent to machine learning.” This component, which in the default scoring settings can offer students up to 60 percent credit on an assignment, remains unenumerated even in the published grading breakdown on the Perusall website: while conducting trials on Perusall using a teacher account we created, we found that scores for annotation quality were closely correlated with word count regardless of the substance of the comment.

The heavily weighted annotation quality component, which relies on word count to determine a score, combined with the seemingly arbitrary lower boundary of seven annotations to receive full credit, can make Perusall grades seem mysterious and somewhat random. Senior Julian Cunningham, who uses the platform for his Advanced Placement (AP) Government class, appreciates that Perusall facilitates conversation between students but wishes that there were more clarity surrounding the platform and how teachers are using it. “I think teachers owe it to us to be transparent,” he explained. “[Though] I understand the sentiment of not wanting students to just be trying to fulfill a quota, by being transparent about it, you ensure that people are able to do the work and feel confident about it. If anything, not being transparent about what is required almost puts a bit more pressure on us.”

Without clarity around how scores are calculated, students have to guess what is expected of them based on (often vague) comments from their teachers and the minimal information available online. If you type “perusall grading” into Google,

✓ All Annotations ✕

Page 4

ERIC MAZUR: We have now 1.2 million people using it worldwide. I would never ever have imagined that because I was simply trying to solve a problem in my class, I was not trying to launch a platform or anything.

ERIC MAZUR: My hope is that through the social features we can make this whole scoring and grading fade into insignificance. That’s my hope, right. In other words, we want to make it so much fun, or so engaging for people like you that you could even turn the whole scoring off and it would work just as well or even better.

Page 5

ERIC MAZUR: By actually looking at the interaction between the students, I had a much better opportunity to prepare myself for class. In a sense it’s like a window into the minds of the students, because you see, oh, that’s what they’re wondering about, and if they don’t resolve it with each other, then I can address it through discussion in the classroom.

ERIC MAZUR: We find that students who chunk their reading do better than those who do it in one sitting. So let’s say that you and I, we both have the same reading assignment due. I sit down, one hour, do the whole thing. You split it into six chunks of ten minutes. Keeping everything else the same, you will do better in the class than I, on average. Which also makes sense, since you get more time to think about it and you give others more time to respond to the questions you’ve posed. It makes a lot of sense. We also find that students who put questions that get upvoted or answers that get upvoted do better. Again, probably because they’re more deeply engaged with the material and therefore they get reactions from many students.

ERIC MAZUR: I think that [comment length] is indeed one of the outputs of the machine learning algorithm. And the reason we went to all of these other metrics, I’m pulling them up here. I think the machine learning algorithm worked that out, word count, as one of the many things, one of the half a dozen to a dozen rules that come out of the machine, that’s correct.

ERIC MAZUR: I think creating a watertight system which uses extrinsic motivation, namely a score or a grade, is never going to work [...] any time you do a simple evaluation of people, it can be defeated. It can be gamed or defeated.

Making the Most Out of Your Day

By Karen Zhang

Additional reporting by Suah Chung and Zoe Oppenheimer

Going into a school year unlike any other, all students regardless of grade have been adjusting to new routines during remote learning. To make this transition easier, here is some advice from guidance counselors, teachers, and members of the Editorial Board.

Tidy Up

On top of schoolwork, it's easy to feel overwhelmed physically when you have an array of papers on one side of your table, a sprawl of Muji pens and pencils on the other, and several empty water bottles to top it all off. Rather than starting your homework immediately after class, clear your desk, and make sure that you have the devices, tools, and lighting you need to create an optimal workspace. "Make sure your space is well-lit and you've stretched. Make sure your pencils are sharpened and the distractions are away, that you're in a comfortable space," Kornhauser said. Moreover, she recommended using physical folders to optimally organize your workspace. "It keeps you organized, but it's kind of symbolic. It's a way to put things away and move on to the next thing," she continued.

For Kornhauser, the distinction between a workspace and a leisure setting is especially crucial. She advised students not to work on their beds, since the bed is typically associated with relaxation and sleeping, which could prove counterproductive. "Create these kinds of symbolic differences or else [...] everything bleeds together," she explained.

Chrome Extension Recommendations

Some small but nifty browser tools to help you stay focused.

- Toggl Tracker: keeps track of how long you spend on each of your tasks through its built-in stopwatch.
- StayFocusd: blocks certain websites after you reached your time limit that you set for the day.
- Todoist: allows you to save websites as "tasks" so that you can come back to them a few days later, in addition to its To-Do list feature.
- Momentum: provides a personalized dashboard with some feel-good quotes.
- OneTab: consolidates your tabs into one with links to each to save memory and clutter.

Stop and Smell the Roses

With the long hours of remote learning, it's important to take frequent breaks from staring at the screen. Using the 10-minute transition periods is crucial in revitalizing yourself after sitting in class for almost an hour. Stand up, stretch your arms, legs, and back, walk around your house, and drink some water. "[Step] away from the remote space when you can [during the 10]-minute transitional period between classes [...] you can do a couple of lunges or toe touches or wall stands [...] eat a piece of fresh fruit, [and] drink some water," McAuliffe suggested. "[M]ake sure you're breaking up the times so that you really can absorb all of the information that is coming at you."

In addition to the brief, but fundamental breaks throughout the school day, remember to take some time for yourself after school. Whether it's taking a short walk outside (masked up, of course), exercising, or coloring in a coloring book, engage in activities that don't require a screen. Not only do you grant your eyes some rest and your lungs some crisp, fresh air, but it also helps foster a transitory divide between school and home so that the two don't get blurred.

As remote learning continues for several months, guidance counselor Sarah Kornhauser also suggests setting aside half a day during the weekends dedicated to yourself and doing activities that you enjoy. "Schedule the free time to do the things you love to avoid burn-out [...] I think it's really important to pre-decide some hobbies that you value," she said. "It's something else that's not a screen because [...] by early December, you're going to be tired of this [routine,] and there have to be other ways that you fill your life to find meaning."

Tips and Tricks From the Editorial Board

- Use one Google Doc or Sticky Notes to centralize your schedule or teachers' Zoom links.
- If you are working on many different subjects at the same time, use multiple desktops to create different workspaces for each subject to avoid any clutter.
- If you constantly have 10 tabs open, use the tab-grouping feature on the Google Chrome browser to group tabs of a similar subject together. Right-click on a tab and select the second option Add Tab to New Group.
- Plan deadlines, meetings, and reminders into Google Calendar or a paper calendar.
- Use a planner or a daily to-do list, and write down ALL tasks you have for the day. Our favorite one is Muji's September-September calendar.
- Set a timer or stopwatch for each assignment you work to push yourself to work more productively.
- Use the 10-minute passing periods to take a break from your computer, and move around. This will help you renew your focus when you come back and separate your periods the way they would be during in-person school.
- Get dressed and ready for your classes as if you were going outside to help create a divide between your school time and after-school time. If you can, take a walk around your block before school begins.

We'll Find a Title for This Tomorrow

Almost all Stuyvesant students are guilty of procrastination, and unfortunately, this collective habit has not diminished in the age of the coronavirus. It has become even easier to push our tasks when homework is due every two days instead of the next morning. Despite the longer gap between classes, Kornhauser recommends backwards planning by breaking down a large task or project into smaller tasks to be completed across a period of time. "Making a list of what [you] need to do is the first step in the homework process when you're not feeling creative [...] each thing helps you see that you're getting through it, and it doesn't seem as huge of a chunk where you're not able to check it off until four hours from now," she said. "If you can break the task down really small, you can feel successful faster, and it'll help you feel less overwhelmed." Even crossing off the small tasks can make you feel more satisfied as it affirms that you are moving forward.

We all, however, experience a lack of motivation at one point. To combat this, give yourself small rewards in between your tasks to keep spirits up. "Tiny rewards, like taking a shower [or checking] texts [are little] things, but you can't do it until this thing is done," Kornhauser said.

Overall, avoiding the pitfalls of procrastination is crucial, especially when working on a long-term project. "Sometimes you need to walk away from your work, and then come back to it, and perfect it," McAuliffe said. "You can only do that if you don't wait for the last minute to get it done in the first place." Though not procrastinating is easier said than done, planning ahead can make a large difference, both for remote and in-school experiences.

You've Got a Friend in Me

Remote learning has erased many opportunities to talk to others, which at times can make school days feel isolating. Though some find it distracting to call with a friend while working on homework, others find it productive to do so because they know that their friend on the receiving end is doing work simultaneously. As math teacher Carrie Chu said in an e-mail interview, "Give a friend a call, and Zoom study together! Maybe set a timer to work for 25-40 minutes, take a timed [five]-minute check-in/social break, and repeat. You don't have to be studying for the same class, but having someone also being productive with you can be motivating and fun."

Connect With Your Teachers Better Than You Do With Your WiFi

Though remote education fosters a different learning environment as you interact with and learn from your teachers through Zoom, it is essential that you continue to reach out to your teachers as you would during in-person schooling. "The first thing you want to do with making sure that you're prepared, especially if you're seeking additional information for advancing your learning or just making sure that you have a solid foundation, is to speak with your instructor," Assistant Principal of World Languages, Art, and Music Francesca McAuliffe said. "Let your instructor know that you are looking for additional ways to solidify or advance your learning." Take advantage of your teachers' office hours. It's not only a space to ask any clarifying questions, but also a way to connect with them.

Learn How You Learn Best

Despite all these pieces of advice, it's important for you to figure out how you learn most effectively. Shanna Schwartz, Curriculum Coordinator for Primary Literacy at the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project, suggests, "Spy on yourself. When are you most engaged in your classrooms? What are the things that are going on for you when you're most engaged?"

Even if you're not transitioning into Stuyvesant, with the world of remote instruction, you can examine how you interact with this new learning experience and setup. "It may be that putting on speaker view is really helpful for kids staying engaged because it doesn't have them looking at what all the other kids are doing," Schwartz said. "For other kids, it may actually be that not looking at the person who is talking but having a notes document open and trying to track themselves through their notes is going to be really helpful to them."

There are so many new factors in play as we study from home, from our Zoom settings to our work schedules. But by finding which styles work best for you, you can ensure you are learning how you do it best.

Virtual Listening: A Playlist

- | | |
|---|--|
| "DANGEROUS" BY SON LUX
"FOR WATCHING SCARY MOVIES AT 3AM."
-SASHA SOCOLOW | "THE USUAL" BY SAM FISCHER
"A MELLOW VIBE, PERFECT WHEN WASHING THE DISHES."
-CAROLINE JI |
| "SLEEPING IN" BY ALL TIME LOW
"FOR WHEN VIBING WITH FRIENDS IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN REMOTE LEARNING."
-SHREYASI SAHA | "AS LONG AS YOU CARE" BY RUEL
"A REMINDER THAT IT'S OKAY TO BE OUT OF IT."
-SHREYASI SAHA |
| "CUT EM IN" BY ANDERSON .PAAK & RICK ROSS
"A LATE NIGHT ENERGY BOOST FOR LONG NIGHTS OF WORK."
-NORRIS BASKIN | "HERE COMES THE SUN" BY THE BEATLES
"FOR WATCHING THE SUNRISE."
-KAREN ZHANG |
| | "SUMMERHOUSE" BY KOTA THE FRIEND
"A LIGHT BOP THAT'S KEPT SLUGGISH AFTERNOONS LIVELY."
-EBIN LEE |
| | "STEP INTO MY LIFE" BY POWFU FT. SLEEPING
"LONG CAR RIDES FILLED WITH NOSTALGIA."
-JENNY LIU |

SNAPSHOT OF WORKING FROM HOME

BY THE PHOTO DEPARTMENT

Christine Yan / The Spectator

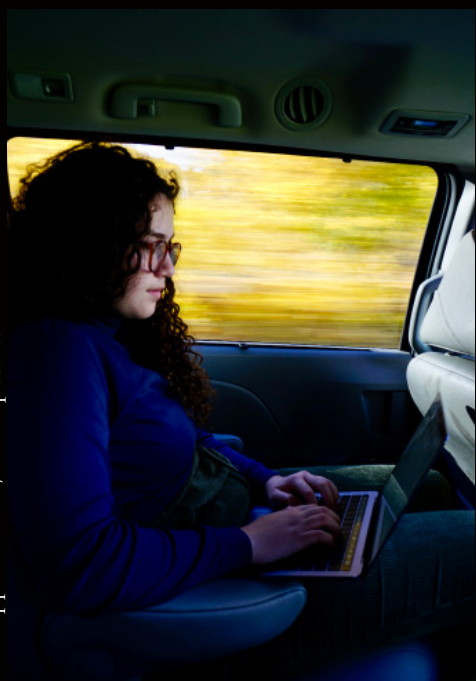


Juan Giordano / The Spectator

Frances Sy / The Spectator

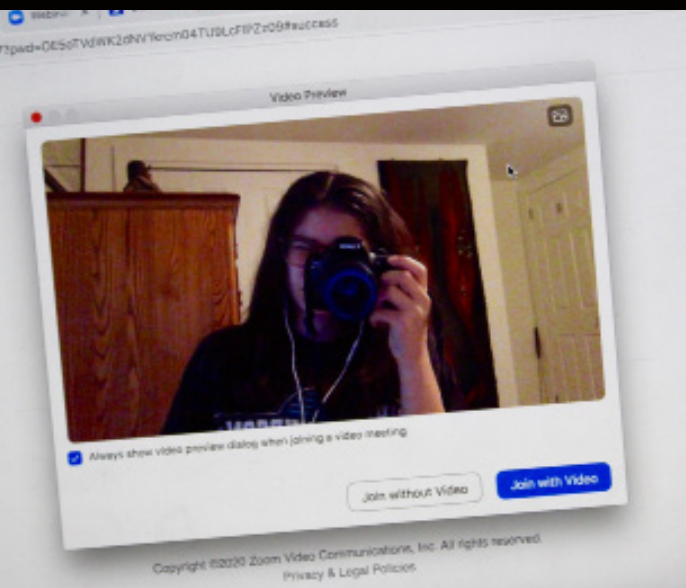


Zoe Oppenheimer / The Spectator



Sasna Socolow / The Spectator

Francesca Nemati / The Spectator



Steven Wen / The Spectator

WORKING OUT HOMEWORK

BY JONATHAN SCHNEIDERMAN AND CLARA SHAPIRO

When it comes to homework, teachers are generally free to make their own rules—how much should be given, how long it should take, how much is too much, and how little is too little. Ideally, homework is something that strengthens students’ skill sets and understanding of the material. Ideally (at least according to Stuyvesant’s homework policy), homework should take no more than a half-hour for a non-AP class and no more than one hour for an AP class. Ideally, teachers aren’t teaching from their living rooms and kitchens. But nothing about this situation is ideal. As we begin the school year with a transformed schedule, one in which classes meet only every other day and homework can thus be assigned in double the usual quantity, teachers too must transform, or at least revise, how they give homework.

“IT KIND OF DEPENDS ON THE SUBJECT.”

When asked about the amount of homework they assign, some teachers will start by zooming out (as it were) to “the rationale for why homework exists,” as social studies teacher Josina Dunkel put it. In Dunkel’s view, different subjects use homework differently: “I am not a math teacher at all, but the way that I understand it, in a math class, you learn the formulas and the approach, and then you practice doing that with the different problems.”

Here she paused to ask if that was a fair analysis, which we thought it was; though there are some math courses in which much of the class time is devoted to going over problems from homework, most fit Dunkel’s description. Dunkel was not the only teacher to emphasize the importance of her subject in determining the homework she assigns; French teacher Manuel Ramirez gave a description of how language education’s content shapes the form of its homework: “I don’t teach a content-based class, like a history class [...] in general, I usually give homework that I call priming my students; it [kind of] introduces them to what we’re gonna do in class the next day.”

Dunkel, by contrast, does teach a content-based class and uses homework for precisely the opposite reason as Ramirez. She said, “In a history class, that’s not the way that we use homework. We don’t use it for practice; we use it for preparation. And I think part of it is because, let’s be honest, we know what happened in history, right? The thing that we’re concerned about knowing is why. And so the idea then, to be prepared for a history class, is that you know the who, the what, the where, the when, and then in class, we can get to the more interesting things.”

Dunkel assigns homework with the single goal of preparing students for the next day’s class discussion. “I always found it very tricky to have a time component be the gauge of homework,” Dunkel said. “I don’t know how much time it takes people to be prepared for the class.” In an e-mail interview, physics teacher Daisy Sharaf gave a similarly qualitative answer to the question of what constitutes too much homework: “Too much homework is when the assignment is repetitive and nothing new in the way of understanding or skills comes out of it.”

Many teachers have trepidations about the idea that the “correct” amount of homework is measured by time (anything in a range from 30 to 60 minutes) and not the amount that

Adrianna Peng / The Spectator

is necessary for students to understand the material. Dunkel is one such teacher. “People chose to be at a school that’s supposed to be the best, right?” she questioned. “And yet the work for the best is something they don’t want to have to do.”

Dunkel views a chiefly quantitative view of homework as problematic for other reasons as well: for instance, because not “all subjects use homework or even approach work in the same way,” Dunkel argued that the appropriate amount of homework “kind of depends on the subject [...] I would think that a half an hour of straight-up practice with math would be, like, enough”—an implicit criticism of Stuyvesant’s one-size-fits-all policy, which makes no such distinctions. Dunkel similarly argued that, just as homework doesn’t function uniformly across all classes, it is not interacted with uniformly by all students. Struggling students will need to study for longer than average; students who already have a strong grasp of the material will need to put in less effort for good results. “And that’s the tricky part about homework,” she said. “It’s sort of assigned for the whole class, but like, it hits everyone differently individually.”

Dunkel was not alone in speaking to this variability. As Sharaf wrote of her AP Physics class, “I think that the video lessons take about 20 minutes to complete, and the associated practice problems could take between 10 and 50, but there really might be a lot of variability. The actual calculation and documentation of the problems can’t take very long, but sometimes it’s a struggle to understand how to approach them, and that’s different with every student.”

“IN THE WORLD OF REMOTE, I HAVE A NEW VOCABULARY NOW.”

What Dunkel and others describe is the sort of fine-tuning that remote learning has forced teachers to take on. Homework formulas are being recalibrated. It makes sense—30 minutes of homework might not have the same kick

“I always found it very tricky to have a time component be the gauge of homework [...] I don’t know how much time it takes people to be prepared for the class.” —
Josina Dunkel, social studies teacher

if a class meets only every other day. For many teachers, this is the rationale behind giving more homework than usual in remote learning.

Biology teacher Dr. Maria Nedwidek-Moore is one example. “I backed off on the work that I gave last term, but I did a 180 this term.

I’m giving more, and I know a lot of the families and the children are upset about this, but the fact is that because we’re seeing you half the time, and because I don’t want to give you stuff when I’m seeing you [...] I’m assigning more,” she said. “They need to do more on their own to compensate for the fact

that I see them less.”

Ramirez echoed this thought: “Normally, I would only give 20 minutes of homework a night,” he said. “Now, it’s not quite like that. I would say, now, probably about 40 minutes.” But Ramirez is also cautious about giving too much, not just because of student mutiny, but because if homework were to take three hours, it simply wouldn’t be effective. “We can give up to an hour of homework a night, but especially in the lower and intermediate levels, you can’t really have them do anything for an hour. They might not understand everything; there’ll be too many questions,” he said. “I just know that in my subject, I don’t think three hours of a block of homework would be particularly useful. And then, of course the students would also probably hit me.”

Striking a balance between Dr. Nedwidek-Moore and Ramirez’s approaches is English teacher Heather Huhn. Rather than assigning twice the amount of reading to her students, she approximates that she assigns one and a half

times the amount. And while this will have the long-term effect of her classes getting through fewer books, she has accepted that and recognizes that, in this case, the quantity of books is not the most important. “I’ve just been looking at it like we’re going to get through the books that we are going to get through and we’re not going to get through a lot of things this semester,” she said. “And that’s okay. It’s really about the quality over quantity and which books do I think students enjoy the most, which ones will they get the most out of?”

Not all teachers have that luxury though. Social studies teacher Dr. Zachary Berman has decided to use a new and shortened textbook—AMSCO—to ensure he makes it through the entire AP World History curriculum on time. Still, he described his amount of homework as “a lot.” But because he teaches an AP class, that is expected, and per the results of an anonymous survey he conducted, students seemed to be spending around one hour a night on homework, which falls within the administration’s guidelines.

Beyond the question of how much, there is also the question

of how. “I had one strategy that worked for the last three decades, which I’ve had to abandon in the world of the remote,” math teacher Debbie Goldberg wrote in an e-mail interview. “I have a new vocabulary now that includes Delta Math, Edpuzzle, and Jamboard. I am a rookie teacher all over again as I experiment with new ways to give homework. I’m still groping around in the dark. I found out twice that students can’t complete an assignment if I don’t post it.”

For Goldberg, remote learning means a change in not only the way that she gives homework, but also why. “The purpose [of homework] is for students to discover whether they understand the lessons they were taught in class and to reinforce skills and ideas. [In this new remote world however,] the purpose has become to make up for unfinished lessons since we now

have less instructional time,” she wrote. Another mystery is just how long these remote learning homework assignments take: “In the old days, I’d say 30 minutes for Algebra II and an hour for [calculus]. Now? I have no idea.”

“I backed off on the work that I gave last term, but I did a 180 this term. I’m giving more, and I know a lot of the families and the children are upset about this, but the fact is that because we’re seeing you half the time, and because I don’t want to give you stuff when I’m seeing you [...] I’m assigning more.” —Dr. Maria Nedwidek-Moore, biology teacher

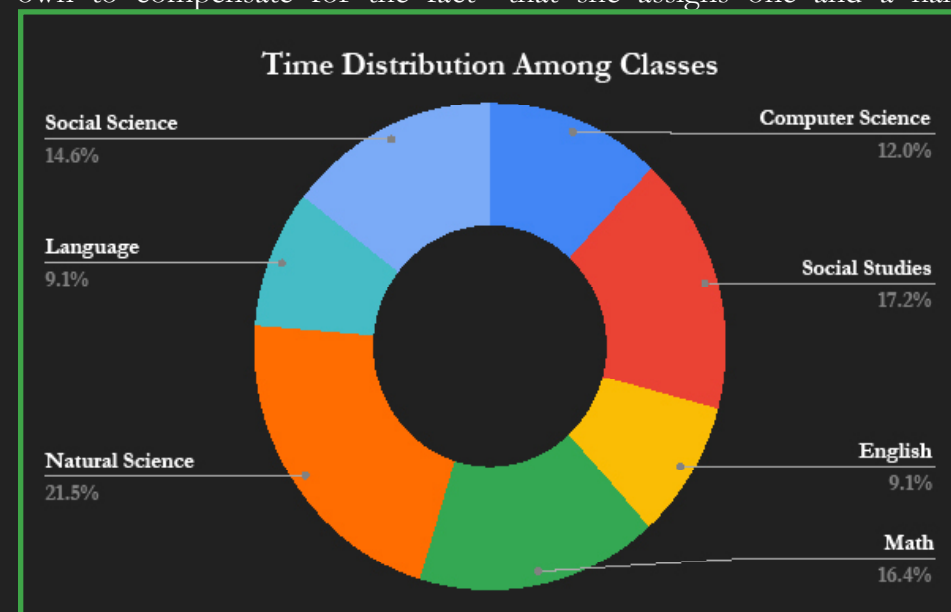
Another teacher, biology and chemistry teacher Gilbert Papagayo, has also been making changes in how he assigns homework. “In years past, I’ve primarily used homework in two ways—to either introduce students to the material so they’ll be slightly familiar with it when we

discuss it in class, or reinforce concepts learned in class,” he wrote in an e-mail interview. “This year, given that teachers have less contact time with students, homework takes on a more important role as it is the only exposure students have to parts of the curriculum.”

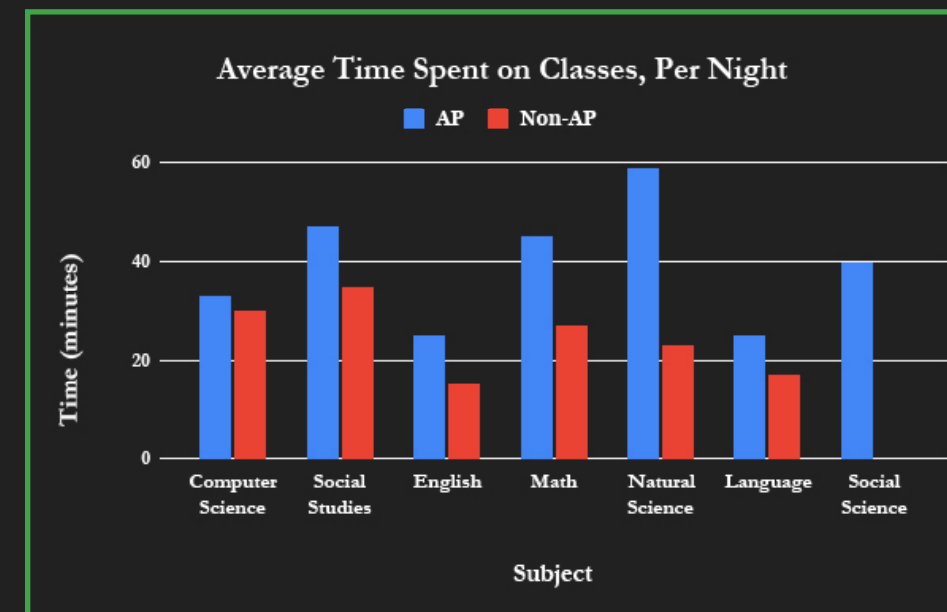
Perhaps most important is finding a balance. Homework should give the brain a workout, not crush it under an Olympic barbell. And for teachers, being realistic is key. When asked if more than an hour of homework would be justified if it enhanced students’ understanding of the material, Sharaf responded definitively: “No. Nope. Never. If the homework is designed to take that long, then the teacher is being unrealistic about the constraints on the students’ time.”

“No matter what, you have to strike a balance,” Ramirez emphasized. “The students do have to be pushed, and you do have to get either a certain amount of skill building or content, but at the same time, it has to stop before the students begin to resent it.”

Taking notes? Good.



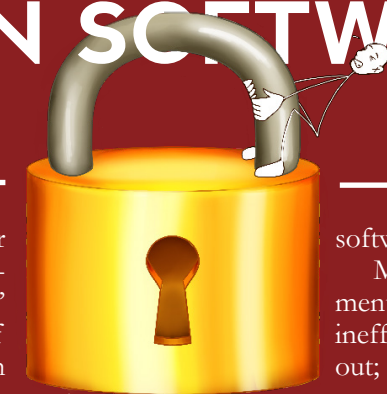
Members of *The Spectator* Editorial Board recorded how long they spent on their homework per subject each day. The subjects that took the longest were social studies and the natural sciences.



The average time spent on homework per subject split by AP and non-AP level. Note: there are no non-AP social science classes.

“ESSENTIALLY MALWARE”: EXPERTS RAISE CONCERNS ABOUT STUYVESANT’S LOCKDOWN SOFTWARE

By MADDY ANDERSEN and HUGO SMITH



Andrea Huang / The Spectator

Some Stuyvesant teachers are requiring students to install test proctoring software that experts claim could threaten their privacy and security.

Students download the software, called LockDown Browser, off the internet and install it on their computer. Once installed, teachers can create tests through the College Board’s Advanced Placement (AP) Classroom or Jupiter Ed’s Juno Pods that can only be taken in the browser. Once students open the browser, it disables certain system functions, like the menu toolbar and some shortcuts, and takes over the screen. A blog post on the manufacturer’s site boasts about its “direct access” to the computer and operating system.

It’s this kind of access that has some privacy experts worried.

“This software is essentially malware or academic stalkerware. It’s deeply invasive and allows school administrators to violate students’ privacy rights, but it’s also an enormous security threat. Universities are setting themselves up for massive student data breaches, lawsuits, and worse if they continue in this direction of forcing students to install dangerous surveillance software on their computers in order to get an education,” Evan Greer, Deputy Director of Fight for the Future, a digital rights non-profit, said in an e-mail interview. The Electronic Frontier Foundation, another digital privacy group, shared similar concerns.

Dr. Sean Lawson, Associate Professor at the University of Utah and Non-Resident Fellow at Marine Corps University, described how this kind of software could put students at risk. “The more intrusive forms of proctoring software are similar to malware in terms of the amount of personal information to which they potentially give access,” he said in an e-mail interview.

The software is manufactured by

Respondus, an educational technology company based in Washington State. Respondus Chief Executive Officer David Smetters disputed the characterization of its software as malware. “Embodied in the very definition of spyware and malware is the malicious intent of the creator or distributor. That certainly isn’t the case here. It’s like saying soldiers are similar to terrorists because they both use weapons,” he said in an e-mail interview.

The Respondus website stresses its desire to collect as little information as possible. The page on LockDown Browser’s privacy says that personal

students’ webcams and behavior, claiming to use AI to detect cheating.

A series of data breaches among other test proctoring companies, however, has raised concerns about the security around the data collected by these services. ProctorU confirmed that 440,000 records were stolen and leaked publicly in August. In mid-October, Verificient, the maker of another test proctoring service, ProctorTrack, was hacked and forced to disable the service.

Some students have had technical issues with the software. After downloading a version of the browser, senior Chris Buiciuc realized the features that

Smetters responded to reports of technical difficulties with the software, saying: “Over 150 million exams will be taken with LockDown Browser this year,” and that if even a very small fraction of users had problems, Respondus’s support team would be overwhelmed with requests. “We simply aren’t seeing common issues where LockDown Browser is found to be the source of the problem,” he said.

Principal Seung Yu declined to respond to specific questions about LockDown Browser, but acknowledged that remote learning has presented a unique set of challenges, including test administration. “My hope is that students will make choices to uphold the Stuyvesant Integrity Policy rather than finding shortcuts,” he said in an e-mail interview. “There is no fool-proof way to prevent and/or monitor completely for dishonesty. We have to trust in our students to make good decisions while also exploring preventative measures as necessary.”

Teachers have mixed feelings about the software. Social studies teacher Lee Brando said they were using LockDown Browser because it was required to administer tests using the AP Classroom question bank. “For the multiple choice exams, in addition to using a lockdown browser, I make seven versions of the exam and have questions and answers scrambled. Each is timed to prevent additional time for students to look up answers, and I select a fair number of application questions rather than a straightforward knowledge-based type,” they said in an e-mail interview.

Brando found that ultimately, the benefits of using it outweighed the potential downsides. Last semester, they only assigned writing assessments, but this year, they felt comfortable giving multiple choice tests with the additional security LockDown Browser provides.

“No singular type of assessment is perfect,” they said. “If students wish to have multiple choice exams, they will need to consider the trade-off—that is, ensuring some security from cheating through the use of a lockdown browser.”

Economics teacher David Wang added, “All I can say is I didn’t necessarily want to impose lockdown browsers on my students. It’s just that the use of a lockdown browser is bundled with the use of questions from AP Classroom.” In order for him to give his students access to the AP Classroom question bank, which he believed would best prepare them for the AP exam at the end of the year, he had to use LockDown

software,” he said.

Most students shared the sentiment that the software is ultimately ineffective. “You can have your notes out; you can have like three computers set up; and you can literally have someone who you paid to sit there and help you during it,” junior Katherine Lake said. “Having this one browser isn’t going to change things.”

Instead, she urged teachers to take that into account and adapt their assessments to the reality that students will have access to outside resources. She said one of her teachers gave open-note tests, but made the questions harder, while another gave faster-paced questions that didn’t allow students enough time to look something up. “Teachers need to understand that they cannot prevent cheating,” Lake said.

That was the conclusion that many

“This software is essentially malware or academic stalkerware. It’s deeply invasive and allows school administrators to violate students’ privacy rights, but it’s also an enormous security threat.”

—Evan Greer, Deputy Director of Fight for the Future

information about students is not sent to the company except in cases where a student requests technical support or exits an assessment early. “LockDown Browser doesn’t send any information to Respondus servers, except for the two examples [on the site]. It doesn’t require a student to register at our website and it doesn’t gather information on a student during an exam session,” Smetters said. “In short, we don’t know the individual identities of LockDown Browser users.” Another more aggressive Respondus product, Respondus Monitor, records

were supposed to be disabled only while the test was in progress, such as screen-shotting, were disabled all the time. Other students have had similar issues.

After attempts to resolve the issue, including contacting the College Board, Buiciuc’s classmate found a solution on the internet that resolved most of the issues. He was able to install a different version of the software that “worked much better and caused no problems,” he said. The problems with his computer that remain, he said, can wait until his college applications are submitted.

“Embodied in the very definition of spyware and malware is the malicious intent of the creator or distributor. That certainly isn’t the case here. It’s like saying soldiers are similar to terrorists because they both use weapons.”

—David Smetters, CEO of Respondus

Browser—“for better or worse,” he said.

Dr. Lawson decided not to use remote proctoring software with his students at the University of Utah this year. “Since I teach students about the importance of privacy, cybersecurity, and the dangers of online surveillance, I would feel hypocritical turning around and making my students use proctoring

teachers, like biology teacher Dr. Maria Nedwidek-Moore, came to as well: “I was trying to convince a colleague that she shouldn’t use a lockdown browser and she said, ‘but they cheat without the lockdown browser.’” Dr. Nedwidek-Moore replied that with or without the browser, “they cheat with the phone.”

NYC PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Townsend Harris High School (remote, formerly hybrid)

Raine Wu, sophomore

Townsend Harris is handling remote learning pretty well. They have prepared a manageable bell schedule with a 20-minute break halfway through the day. The teachers have also established days where each subject [is] not able to assign students homework, which I find helps students relax a little bit. [It was, however,] different from the spring semester because we didn't have a bell schedule then. Townsend was doing a hybrid system until the DOE decided to close all schools on Wednesday, October 7.

Hunter College High School (hybrid)

Jane Robinson, freshman

Hunter gives students both the option to do fully remote or a hybrid system [in which] they go to the campus two out of five days a week. Additionally, because our 94th street campus is pretty small and the Elementary School learns there, there's far from enough room for both the elementary and high school to have both a safe and effective learning environment. That's why the 7th and 8th graders doing the hybrid system go to the 94th street school, the 11th and 12th graders are all fully remote, while the 9th and 10th graders doing hybrid go to a completely different CUNY campus at the Silberman School of Social Work.

Beacon High School (hybrid)

Dahlia Miller, sophomore

Originally, we were split into four cohorts—one of them was remote, and then three of them were hybrid. Each one would come in on a different day, and basically, everybody only got one or two days of full synchronous instruction the whole week, while the remote instruction was two classes a day for all five days. Because of that and because of some safety precautions [...] now everyone is home except teachers [who] go into school once a week, and they are in a classroom all day with a group of nine students who come in once a week and do their remote learning in school [...] The teachers are also teaching remotely from the classroom, so it's just a bunch of people on laptops in a room. For remote, they basically set it up as a normal school

Remote, Hybrid, or In-Person: How Are Students Across the World Learning?

By Maddy Andersen, Rachel Ok, Zoe Oppenheimer, and Ruiwen Tang

with additional reporting by Eliza Oppenheimer



day, just on Zoom. Every day, we have a check-in in the morning with our advisory, two classes, a break for 20 minutes, another class, lunch, and another class—it's all spaced out pretty nicely. Each class has been cut to 40 minutes instead of the normal 55 minutes. When they switched to the new system, I was really excited we could learn more—though it's the same amount of learning, just spread out differently.

Bronx Science High School (hybrid)

Ethan Leung, senior

Though the majority of the student population opted for remote, there were still approximately 15 percent of students [who] opted for the blended option. For remote learning, the teachers are using either Zoom or Google Meet to do regular class instruction. Each class is allowed 100 minutes of synchronous instruction [a week] with the rest being allotted as asynchronous instruction (e.g. I could have a synchronous 40 minute class on Tuesdays and Thursdays, plus a synchronous 20 minute class on Friday).

Academy of American Studies (hybrid)

Hannah Lee, senior

I think only 80 or so kids are doing blended [learning]. Most of the kids at the beginning of the month when school started kept switching back to remote, so the schedules kept changing. It was so hectic. I think the schedules are changing even now. Mine only got switched twice, but for a lot of kids, their schedules switched about six times.

Some of my teachers are fully remote, and some of them are blended, but they're mostly in school teaching. They teach the in-person kids at the

school, and then they teach the remote kids separately. So, it's just remote kids in one call, and then for a different period they teach blended, and it's just the blended kids being taught.

The people who are in blended are schedules in A, B, C, D [cohorts], so if you're in [cohort] A, then you go in for that day while the rest of the kids stay home. For remote, [there are] a lot of kids [in each class], about 20 or 30 students in each class. For in-person classes, one of my teachers said that there was one student in her class.

Brooklyn Tech (hybrid)

Owen Thomas, senior

There are four groups—A, B, and C are hybrid, and D is all remote. [...] You have the same teachers and the same class time regardless of whether you are remote or in-person, so teachers are simultaneously teaching both in-school learners and remote learners. Over the summer, they installed smartboards in every classroom, so teachers can screen-share the smartboard on Zoom and show it for kids who are in the actual building. There are some advantages to being in person, but from my experience, teachers are pretty responsive on Zoom, and if you raise your virtual hand, they see it. [...] I was originally doing hybrid, and then I switched. There were some videos circulating of people from Tech who were going to large, unmasked parties, so I decided to go fully remote because it made me realize how irresponsible some people are. You can't be too careful, and you never know who's doing what.

The Hill School (in-person)

Sarah Kenvin, sophomore

Our school is doing all in-person classes with physically distanced seating and a mask requirement. If someone tests positive for the virus, ignores the rules and refuses to distance or wear a mask, comes in close contact with someone who tested positive, etc., they are sent home to do remote learning [...] until they get cleared to return. The international students who cannot return to campus are also doing remote school, being on Zoom for two classes and watching a recording for the third (because of the time zones, it would be too late for them to stay up for the last class of the day). During the winter term, since the virus is apparently expected to get worse with the flu season, all students who are not on a winter varsity sports team will do remote classes for two weeks, similar to the spring term, and the athletes will do classes on campus.

Every day, we have to complete a super quick health check, wear bracelets to track who we come in close contact with, and have an app on our phone that also tracks us. If you don't comply with these things, you will end up receiving a lot of infractions and might get sent home to do remote learning.

Marymount School of New York (hybrid)

Evelyn Donnelly, sophomore

Marymount [is] doing a hybrid system, but it is a lot different from how they did it in the spring. There is a two-week cycle of classes, with an A week and a B week. Everyone has remote school on Mondays. On Tuesday[s] and

Wednesday[s] of the A week, freshmen go into school, [and] on Thursday[s] and Friday[s], the sophomores go in. During the B week, it's the same for juniors and seniors.

St. Andrew's Preparatory School (hybrid)

Adele Auchincloss, sophomore

Half the school is in in-person learning, and the other half is on Zoom. Well, now, it's only the sophomores who are on Zoom; everyone else is in-class learning. It's pretty much Zoom and a little bit of asynchronous classes, but pretty much all of our classes are synchronous. We're definitely doing more school [than the spring]. So in the spring, I had done a four [day] week schedule. But now, I have six days of school from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. [...] except for Wednesdays and Saturdays, when it's 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m. [Once we go back,] all the classes will be in person, and the day will go back to a full schedule, [from] 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. I have to wear my mask at all times unless I'm in my room. We have assigned times to eat; we can only have a certain amount of people at a table, [and] we can only hang out in groups outdoors six to 10 feet apart at all times. That's a general overview of the guidelines. [There are] a lot more smaller rules for how they're dealing with dorm life. [For instance,] we can only have two people in the bathroom at once. We're going to have scheduled [times to] shower and [brush] our teeth. We can't use the kitchen. But they're basically just keeping us very isolated on campus, and they're not letting us leave, so I have to stay on campus at all times. I can't go into town. So far, it has been working. They haven't had any cases. You have to be tested before you arrive, and then you get tested the day you arrive, and you get tested five days into your stay at school as well.

Trinity School (hybrid)

Megha Kumar, freshman

Each grade in the high school comes into school one week per month. For lunch, we order on an app in advance and then [...] pick it up in school. When in the building, we [have] some Zoom meetings to accommodate anyone in the class who is not doing in-person learning. If everyone in the class has chosen in-person learning, then the class [is] in person without Zoom.

PRIVATE/ BOARDING SCHOOLS

The Abraham Joshua Heschel School (hybrid)

Sarah Horvath, senior

We have hybrid learning, so three days on Zoom and two days in school. And for seniors, the way it works is that [...] we have specific Zoom classes and specific in-school classes. Your in-school classes are geared around one major subject a day—for me its math and physics—[and] we have them for extra time. On those days [in-school], during the social studies block, we'll have current events and in the Hebrew block, instead of leveled with honors [like we do in Zoom classes], we will have Hebrew culture. Those are called "seminar" classes and count for 15 percent of your normal class grade.

I think that, though it's really nice to be in the building and be with people while you have school and seeing their faces in person, the seminar classes on in-school days kind of feel like a joke and a waste of time because they are made up and we only have them once a week.

HIGH SCHOOLS ACROSS THE WORLD

Paul D. Schreiber High School—Port Washington, New York (hybrid)
Ashley Lee, senior

The high school students are divided by last names, and each half alternates [between] going to school and learning remotely. It additionally provides an option for students to go fully remote if they do not want to or cannot go to school for whatever reason. Everybody is able to fill out a form each month about whether they want to use the hybrid plan or stay at home for the next month, which gives the individual student and family a choice. Further, the school has distributed Chromebooks (with a built-in lockdown browser) to every student, so everyone has a device to attend classes and take tests. As for the rules in the school, there are stricter restrictions on where people can enter, where people can eat, and where people can take a mask break. There is also a newly added one-way system to ensure that no unnecessary contact between people will be made.

West Shore High School—Melbourne, Florida (hybrid)
Lily Winstler, junior

You can either be full-time online or you can be full-time in person. Then, in certain circumstances, you can go for half the day online and half the day in person. I think we're somewhere in the 60 to 80 percent capacity. We're a small school to begin with, but there's definitely a significant number of kids online.

I'm on volleyball and our season got shortened from almost 20 games to 12 for the entire district and the whole state. We actually have districts this week. If anyone on your team tests positive for COVID, then your whole team is quarantined for two weeks. One of the girls on my team sits next to someone in class who tested positive, so she had to quarantine for two weeks, but the rest of the team did not. There are no requirements [for testing]. We get temperature checks before every practice, and we wear masks everytime we're not actively playing on the court. That literally does nothing: we're sweating and breathing on each other.

We are on a block schedule this year to limit exposure. We were used to going to seven classes a day, but now, we only go to four classes a day. We only have four classes each semester, which is going to be really difficult because AP classes are now only a semester. Any class that was a semester class turned into a nine-week class, and any

class that was a double-period class just turned into a full year class.

Allerdice High School—Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (remote)
Sophia Levin, senior

Teachers are fine. My school is doing better; last year when we went to online learning, we took a month off. A full month of nothing. If teachers wanted to teach, the school told them not to.

Chipping Norton School—Oxfordshire, England (in-person)
Emily Bertie, Year 12 (Grade 11)

We're 100 percent in school, but they've changed how the school system works. Our exams have been dialed back because of the number of absences that people have, from teachers and from students, so we're all zoned now. We're in a bubble of our year, and each year has its own section of the school. Unless you're in a specialized session such as art, you're not allowed to leave your zone of your year. Within those years, you're wearing a mask whenever you're in the corridor. They aren't having a cafeteria because there'd be too many people moving around. You're not allowed to be at extracurriculars after school because they have to clean it. If you're sitting down, you don't have to wear a mask, but if you're not sitting down, you have to be wearing a mask. I think we had one confirmed case in the Year 9 (your grade 8), but I think that's been the only one.

Redlands School—Sydney, Australia (in-person)
Mia Ramsey, Year 12

We went back to school at the end of Term 2 (June), and we're about to go into Term 4. We had two weeks where the Year 12s would go there every day, and all the other years would go once a week, and the rest of the week would be online. But then after that, we were back at school. We had to socially distance, but we weren't really following that, because if one person gets corona, we're all getting corona. We don't have to wear masks. You don't have to socially distance anymore—they've stopped doing that. I hug everyone.

MIDDLE SCHOOLS

Mark Twain (hybrid)
Jamie Andersen, eighth grade

My school is split up into four groups, and three of them are in-person. Each in-person group has a day that it goes to school every single week no matter what [either Wednesday, Thursday, or Friday], and the groups alternate Monday and Tuesday, which makes me go in-person five days

out of every 15 school days. When I go to school, there is homeroom, and then, I get core classes—math, science, ELA, and social studies—and then I also get Spanish, gym, and talent. When I'm out of school, I only have ELA, math, science, and social studies. [...] When I'm in school, I am with 12 kids and I move classrooms, but I am with different kids for Spanish and different kids for talent. [My remote classes have] all the kids from the two other in-person groups who aren't in school and are waiting to go in-person. [...] My science class has 80 kids, and the other ones have 50 kids.

Echo Horizon School—California (hybrid)
Clara Cottrell, sixth grade

My school is doing Zoom. We will be going into school—only the 6th graders—every Friday, starting on October 23. It's going pretty well, but there are some challenges. The challenges would be when you need to give a presentation or when your internet gets bad. People will turn off their cameras and say that they're not there just to get out of work. [...] I think that they're handling it pretty well. Some of the students aren't cooperating, so it can be really hard for them.

Lab Middle School (hybrid)
Emma Surko, sixth grade

When we go in-person, we keep our masks on the whole day and we stay at our desks for the most part, which are distanced. We stay with the same pod of around 10 people for the whole day without outside contact. During remote learning, we usually have a lesson in Zoom class and we usually have at least one asynchronous class per day. We apply what we have learned in lessons with homework. I think the teachers are doing pretty well, except I wish that they would add a bit of time during Zoom classes when we're doing worksheets for asking them questions about our work.

MS 104 (Baruch Junior High) (hybrid)

Aisha Madspjerg, sixth grade

Remote days are five core subjects, which are science, ELA, math, social studies, and homeroom. For some reason, they count homeroom as a core class. They'll give us 30-minute lessons, and then, we go off to do our work if we have anything after, but the majority of it is in class. We do have an in-school platform for people who choose to have hybrid, and that would be having your regular core subjects and an additional two extra subjects. [...] We end earlier when we're not in school as well. For lunch in school—for your fourth period—which for us is either health or music, you just go outside into our yard-area-space-thing for 15 minutes, eat lunch, and then, you come inside and they teach you the rest of the lesson. You have an assigned group, and of course, regular cohorts. Masks must be on every time you're inside, and you must distance six feet apart with the desks.

WHY IN-PERSON STRATEGIES DON'T WORK AT HOME

BY AARON VISSER

After COVID-19 made it clear normal education would be impossible, the Department of Education had four months—from April until September—to develop a plan that utilized the strengths of remote learning while minimizing its weaknesses. Instead, they implemented a system of live instruction that attempts to mimic in-person education rather than design a system that is tailored specifically for the remote environment. Our schools have failed to exploit the opportunities granted by remote learning, instead opting for a flawed version of the previous system.

While replacing normal instruction with Zoom has done a fine job of allowing real-time instruction, critical aspects of the in-person experience have been lost. Ordinarily, teachers hold discussions, and some students participate. They give lectures, and students appear to be listening and engaged. Online classes, however, have broken the core visual connection between teacher and student. A constant correspondence takes place in a regular class between the teacher and the students. When the teacher goes too fast, students may appear confused, signaling to the teacher to repeat and slow down, and when the teacher goes over a topic one too many times, students may act slightly bored, signaling to the teacher to speed up.

When a student has an urge to go on his or her phone or to daydream in class, the gaze of the teacher reminds the student to focus on the task at hand. This lost interaction affects those with attention problems, who already struggled disproportionately in school. For me, I'm frequently drawn by the countless apps built into my phone and computer that are designed to grab my attention. In school, checking social media isn't an option, but at home the allure of "multitasking" is quite potent during a slow lesson.

Zoom has many other small differences from in-person learning that detract from the

"classroom" experience. First, Zoom sticks a camera right at the user's face and gives him the image of his own video. It emphasizes personal insecurities about appearances harbored by every teen and provides a constant feeling of being scrutinized by an unknown number of people. Second, the remote environment warps in-class discussion from a conversation to a distant experience, where students might rhetorically interact, but in reality mostly ignore each other. It's common for students to check out of conversations when they feel they've participated enough for the day. Finally, Zoom replaces energizing social contact with a 25-inch screen to stare into all day. It's simply tiring to sit in the same chair for hours straight isolated from true human interaction. People commonly describe the platform as "draining" or "soul-sucking," and "Zoom fatigue" has become a part of our everyday vocabulary. Each of these problems by themselves is fairly small, but put together, they compound into a learning system that misses out on many important aspects of in-person instruction.

A better system would focus on remote instruction's two potential strengths: efficiency and flexibility. Asynchronous learning allows each student to study at his or her own pace as productively as possible. It bases progress on accurate completion of assignments for which students can prepare however they choose. They can watch whichever assigned videos at whatever speed or go as deeply into the textbook as they feel is necessary to understand the topic. For discussion based classes, platforms like Google Classroom allow for asynchronous discussion. Students can respond to assignment prompts and one another, providing the thoughtfulness of the written word, which doubles as proof of engagement to the teacher. These asynchronous opportunities are less high-stress and

anxiety provoking for many students, and oftentimes even produce more thoughtful discussion given students unlimited time to ponder any prompts or questions. It's inherently more productive when students can go as fast or as slow as they need—rather than observe the "one size fits all" daily lecture model.

Furthermore, asynchronous learning allows students to arrange their own schedules. Remote work gives students the chance to sleep late, choose when they want to eat lunch, and decide to do most of their work in the morning, afternoon, or evening. Freedom for students is an important value in itself. As high school students, the next period of our life will afford us much more freedom, and taking this opportunity to prepare us for college is valuable. Requiring that students follow a rigid hour-by-hour that mimics the bell schedule we hear in the building is a lost opportunity.

In fact, a National Bureau of Economic Research study showed that employees who work from home and design their own hours are happier and more productive than those who have office jobs and strict schedules. It found that even if workers still worked the same numbers of hours, they reported higher satisfaction numbers because they had control over their schedules.

This applies to remote learning as well. Students respond to greater independence in a positive way, and since this time has strained every student's mental health, higher satisfaction is exactly what we need.

Still, asynchronous learning is not without its own issues, and the model I have described above relies on self-motivation from students to stay on top of their assignments independently. Occasional real-time check-ins can be useful: daily, optional office hours that allow students to ask teacher questions via Zoom, rather than via email, would be helpful for those who are auditory learners, and weekly class meetings could hold discussions that tether class members to each other and to the material. In addition, this model should not always be applied the same way: each teacher should have the freedom to hold supplementary live calls when asynchronous lessons fall short, and the necessity of this live contact varies based on subject.

Ultimately, though, an asynchronous model is best for remote learning: it allows students both efficiency and flexibility, both of which we lack with the current plan. Rather than try to imperfectly replicate the in-person experience, we should implement a more innovative system that capitalizes on the advantages of learning from home.



Nicholas Evangelinos / The Spectator

TESTED BY TESTING: MANAGING ASSESSMENTS

By MADDY ANDERSEN, ERIN LEE, MATT MELUCCI, MORRIS RASKIN, AND CLAIRE SHIN

“Testing is a nightmare,” biology teacher Dr. Maria Nedwidek-Moore remarked. “When we closed last term, I said ‘I’m not even trying to do this’ because even if three or four or five kids can’t do it, then [...] I can’t use the test [...] And that’s what’s happening for some teachers this term as well.”

When schools first closed back in March, one of the biggest issues of remote learning was accurately assessing students for the last two marking periods of the semester. This rapid transition left teachers with little time to find effective methods to teach and test students remotely. But even going into the fall term armed with experience from the spring and guidance from training sessions conducted this summer, testing is still up in the air.

With the entire semester being conducted remotely this year, assessing students has become even more difficult than it was last semester. “The big transition was that in the spring, we already had a bunch of school in, so we already knew students, we already had a few tests and or papers dealt with, so the grades weren’t as important,” social studies teacher Dr. Zachary Berman said. “Now, we have to actually determine grades remotely [...] It’s hard; the grades won’t be based on as much stuff.”

Many teachers are using AP Classroom or Juno Pods,

a feature of the grading platform Jupiter Ed, to test students. Though not ideal, online multiple-choice testing does have its perks. “The pods are self-grading, which is more efficient than using the old scantron machines and manually transferring scores into Jupiter Ed,” music teacher Harold Stephan said in an e-mail interview. In addition, teachers can more easily assign extended time for students who need it.

But one concern regarding Juno Pods is the technical issues that may arise on certain devices while the test is launched. “I think the Jupiter thing is great except when it doesn’t work, and I’ve heard from other teachers and been [made] aware that some students have problems with the Jupiter interface when the lockdown browser is being used on Chromebooks and on the DOE iPads,” Dr. Nedwidek-Moore explained. Other students echoed this issue.

With online testing in general, however, the biggest challenge becomes minimizing academic dishonesty. “There is no way to ensure transparency across online platforms, and I am fully aware that students can open a smartphone or iPad and search for information that may unfairly help them achieve a higher test score than their classmates who choose a higher level of academic integrity,” Stephan elaborated.

Because of this, other teachers are turning to alternative solutions regard-

ing fairness and academic honesty. Some teachers have acknowledged the potential issues with academic honesty in remote learning

Chemistry teacher Michael Orlando has also adopted the open-notebook assessment approach in an attempt to circumvent



Cadence Li / The Spectator

by holding open-notebook tests, reducing the chances of students using online sources or working with classmates. “I plan on giving timed, in-class essays as my tests,” social studies teacher David Hanna said in an e-mail interview. “This is basically the same as before the pandemic. The only difference is that they are open-notebook. This also reflects what the College-Board went with last May.”

concerns about academic honesty. “I feel the need to give open-note tests because I don’t want to punish the honest kids and would have a hard time stopping the cheaters,” he said in an e-mail interview.

Dr. Nedwidek-Moore, on the other hand, created her own testing system to conduct her assessments. “My husband is helping me assess students fairly with a variety of program-

ming things that he’s trying out that are not public,” she said. “I pulled a couple all-nighters a couple of weeks ago when we were

your intellect a better tool for taking the test than trying to cheat on it,” she explained. “And believe me, they don’t all get 100s, even

physics teacher Thomas Miner said in an e-mail interview.

Instead of emphasizing multiple-choice tests, some teachers are opting for mostly project-based assessments. “I plan on using online testing platforms as they become available as well as the good old format when I give students a set of problems and they finish it by a certain time,” math teacher Aziz Jumash described in an e-mail interview. “These assignments allow teachers more flexibility than in-class tests and quizzes. [...] I asked students to write a problem with specific characteristics and then solve it. There were many clever problems and clever solutions.”

Dr. Berman has a slightly different approach: “I’m giving some multiple choice, but I’m not counting it for much, whereas I would’ve counted [it] for a lot [during in-person classes],” he said. “I’m going to have to count everything else a little more, so [I’m] giving more written quizzes and counting presentations more.”

A testament to teachers’ efforts can be found in the reactions of participating students. Freshman Eshaal Ubaid has already received numerous tests in subjects ranging from biology to Spanish. Ubaid has found aspects of her testing experience to be generally positive, though she prefers certain methods over others. “The formats of these quizzes and tests [are] usually all multiple choice, which I feel

makes things straightforward; plus, a lot of students prefer it to short-response questions,” she explained. However, she has found fault with some inevitable trappings of remote learning: “For my first JunoPod, I didn’t have time to get back to my Google Meet and ask a question about the context of a problem, so I ended up getting that one wrong.”

Senior Zachary Gelman agrees with this mixed perception of online testing. “Overall, I think that the [...] experience is worse than normal test-taking, but being able to leave early if you finish early is pretty neat,” he noted. In addition, Gelman appreciates the fast turnaround time for grading, which is an improvement from that [of] in-person school.

It is almost impossible for Stuyvesant teachers to perfect administering exams, but it’s also unreasonable to expect a seamless testing experience for both teachers and students, given the remote environment and concerns about cheating. To that end, it is up to students to uphold a fair testing system and their own academic honesty, even when they have the opportunity to dismiss it. “I do my best to convey to students that I appreciate academic integrity more than a high test score and that in the end, it will help them build self-esteem, character, and self-control if they do the right thing—even when nobody’s ‘watching,’” Stephan concluded.

making the first batch of tests.”

Though she cannot prevent her students from looking up the answers during a test, Dr. Nedwidek-Moore has set up her exams so that cheating is ultimately unproductive for them. “I’m just trying to make tests that they can’t cheat on or that if they try to cheat on, they would run out of time. That’s my goal—to make

if they know ahead of time what it’s going to be [on].”

In addition to concerns regarding academic dishonesty, online testing also poses limitations for teachers to assess students’ grasp of the material, particularly in STEM subjects. “You can’t really award partial credit or see the full extent of a student’s problem-solving process/thinking like you can on a paper/pencil test,”

REACTIONS TO REMOTE LEARNING: TEACHERS, PARENTS, AND STUDENTS SHARE THEIR THOUGHTS

TEACHERS

Dr. Zachary Berman, social studies teacher

What are some of the challenges of blended/remote instruction?

The challenge is just trying to remake the energy that you find in a classroom. This whole year, I've been standing up while I teach, and I feel like that helps me get into the feeling of teaching. I want to see everybody's face at least sometimes; I like it when they can physically raise their hands and I can call on them. I feel like that gets me into the energy of the classroom, and it's hard to make that happen.

Heather Huhn, English teacher

What have you liked?

I have really liked the schedule. I love it. I am a big fan. And it feels more like college readiness. This is a schedule that sets students up to be successful in college. You have to set an alarm, and you have to make sure that you are budgeting your time wisely to get your homework done in between classes. So I really like the schedule, and I also like that we have some clear expectations about Zoom and live instruction this year. I like that it's mandatory [and] that students have to show up and participate because that's what I really felt was missing last spring when we did remote instruction.

What have you disliked?

The challenge is that it is not in-person learning—and it never will be—and it's hard. For example, I ask students to have a physical notebook with them to write down a prompt as you would normally in an English class, but I am not there to read what they are writing and I am not there to correct any misperceptions in the moment, so that is what I feel is missing—the personal connection.

Dr. Maria Nedwidek-Moore, biology teacher

How do you feel about blended/remote instruction so far? This [type of teaching] is really, really, really the hardest thing I have ever done. Just to give you a perspective—and I am not bragging—I am a molecular biologist, and that is really hard. I trained at some of the most difficult universities on the planet, and that was really hard. And this is hard compared to that because it is the stuff I know, but I can't do it the way I do it.

What are some of the challenges of remote instruction? It is a huge challenge to meet the instructional expectations of a Stuyvesant education and to function as a human being within the context of being available for students: being a good instructor, being a kind person, and making sure that students are doing well and emotionally okay. Really being able to do all of that well and fully is extraordinarily difficult.

Dr. Susan Brockman, Latin teacher

How do you feel about blended/remote instruction so far? It's actually harder this fall than it was last spring. I think it's because expectations are higher on my end. I never had a Google Meet or a Zoom call before March 21 [...] so I felt like getting online with my students [last semester] was good enough. [...] It's incredibly hard to do a good job online. It's the Wizard of Oz: you're juggling all the tasks; you've got 34 kids on your screen; you're trying to show them something but they can't see it and then you switch a tab and they can't see that other tab; breakout rooms crash; kids get lost; and the links change. It's really hard.

How did the pandemic affect your future plans with teaching? I wouldn't be here—I was going to retire last year. [...] Remote learning kept me here, for better or for worse, for another year.

PARENTS

Anonymous, parent of grade 10 student

How do you feel remote/blended learning is going for your student(s) so far?

Remote and blended learning platforms have been a blessing, as students can still learn. Just having this opportunity that educational institutions have come up with is highly commendable. Now, there are challenges, but considering the circumstance that there is a pandemic, I think that the opportunity itself is valuable. It puts pressure on the students and families because there is a shared space, and there are technical issues if you have two working parents and two students working at home.

What are some challenges you're facing as a parent? What are some upsides?

Everyone handles remote learning differently. One of the challenges is that no two students are alike, and in the same household, you may have one person who can take the constant strain of staring into the screen and

another person who cannot. And the monitoring of the computer itself—the computer resources have enough distractions for children from YouTube and internet gaming. Keeping the children focused on the teaching is hard [...] and it really becomes apparent when parents have to do those parts, such as the constant monitoring and social interaction that would have been available in the classroom.

Sung Yon Um, parent of grade 11 student

How do you feel remote/blended learning is going for your student(s) so far?

I feel like this is a new learning process for everyone. I grew up in a conventional setting with a very traditional school system, and one thing that is clear to me now is that it's definitely a big transition from the classic education system to the new system involving new tech and innovation. I clearly see there is a loss of structure for my children; even though you can connect with your friends, it's all virtual. I think especially for teens, peer culture is way more important than parent/family time. I feel really sorry seeing my children sad and disappointed because they cannot meet their friends.

What are some challenges you're facing as a parent? What are some upsides?

Our structure has been totally lost. We organized our whole lives around that old, classic school system, and now, children sleep late and get up late. I need to make sure they sign in and do their work and I can't really give that kind of support that their friends can provide. I feel bad because even though you're virtually connected, it's not the same.

STUDENTS

Zoe Piccirillo, senior

How is remote/blended learning going for you so far? Remote learning has honestly been going pretty well. Though I miss being around my friends in the school building, I think being alone has really helped me focus on myself and my personal growth, and I'm no longer constantly comparing myself to others. I'm also happy because last year, my workspace wasn't very productive, but I moved my desk to the front of my window, and I have been so much more productive.

What are some challenges? What have you liked? I really like the flipped classroom model, and I think more teachers should consider trying it out. As a senior, I feel like the [five-period] model is great preparation for college because I don't have every class every day. I think I'll know how to structure my time in college better now that I'm used to this schedule. [...] As a senior, one challenge has been communicating with colleges. I was really looking forward to meeting college representatives in lecture halls during the day.

Sirui Pu, junior

What are some challenges? What have you liked? There have been challenges with time management. It's a lot harder to be efficient or even pay attention in some classes at home since there are so many distractions around. Also, being home and comfortable has reduced my productivity level, since I kind of just sit around on the couch and zone out for an extended period of time. I like the fact that I have much more time to stare at my ceiling and contemplate life though, [and] the fact that I don't need to commute saves me upwards of three hours per day.

Jake Lin, junior

How is remote/blended learning going for you so far? Remote learning has been going pretty well for me, and it has given me different opportunities to have fun. I built myself a computer and created a club with my friends that would have only happened if everyone was inside. My social life has also definitely changed. A lot of people have found it hard to keep up with friends because it's hard to see others face-to-face, but I've actually gotten a lot closer with my friends because I can talk to them the whole day through text or through group chats.

What are some challenges? What have you liked? Since I've been on my computer a lot for online school, I find myself getting distracted pretty easily. A lot of challenges for me have come from using the computer frequently. I feel that online tests are harder than paper tests. [...] Because of online learning, I also don't have to fully focus on the class the entire time. If there's a super boring part of class, I have the option of doing something else like watching YouTube.

Sarah Ibrahim, sophomore

What are some challenges? What have you liked? Some challenges I had [were] honestly participating in some of the classes because I feel like in person, it's a lot easier to participate and actually engage with the teachers and your classes; but through remote, it feels really distant. And if I am confused, it is harder to approach the teacher. I don't really like remote learning at all.

Tony Jia, senior

How is remote/blended learning going for you so far? It's actually been pretty good. I try to wake up at 8:30 a.m. every morning, and I'm lucky I have second and sixth periods free because I get to eat breakfast at 10:00 a.m. every day. The workload is really nice, I can manage everything (besides college apps), and I feel pretty comfortable with all my teachers and classes. I hate being in my room for so long though.

A DAY IN THE BLENDED LIFE

By MORRIS RASKIN

Two hundred and five days ago, I walked out of the quintuple doors of the Tribeca Bridge, heading home after staying at school late for the second day of The Spectator's Spring Recruitments. Tensions surrounding the coronavirus seemed to have built to a new high, and I feared that I might have to isolate from my friends and classmates for a few weeks as we weathered the storm. Months later, just 15 days before our next set of recruitments, I walked through those doors once again and entered into an unfamiliar world.

Following the arrows on the floor (each one reading "One Way For Social Distancing Please" in a blocky font), I made my way to the ID scanners, a once-familiar sight made daunting due to the sheer emptiness of the foyer. In place of the usual hordes of students waiting in line to print assignments, as well as newspaper stands, and fundraisers, there were two tables, one filled with COVID-19 protective gear and the other filled with pre-bagged school breakfast. I took a mask from the first table



Irene Hao / The Spectator

and scurried away, feeling pressured by the unfamiliar silence.

I briskly made my way across the second-floor hallway, up the escalator, and toward the Third Floor Gym. I didn't see a single soul as I made my way through the school; it might as well have been after-hours. I didn't find any release or comfort once I entered the gym either, as the same stiffening silence filled the room. Pacing up and down the aisles, I eventually came across my seat: E-45. I was surrounded by empty desks on all sides, save for a student at a desk diagonally behind me.

I steadily unzipped my backpack and pulled out my laptop, headphones, and a notebook. Every time I rustled a paper, or unzipped a pocket, it felt like the whole room turned to look at the student causing such a ruckus, even though most students were already mid-class at that point. I carefully opened up my laptop and logged in, turning the brightness down to the lowest setting in an effort to conserve battery life. I had an aching feeling that my computer's WiFi wouldn't work without a fight, which

was proven true as soon as I hit enter on the password for "ncpsp." After about 10 minutes of typing and retyping, I mustered up the courage to request assistance, an act that would require me to perform the daunting task of talking out loud in the silent and empty room.

While my WiFi issues were being dealt with, I logged on to my first class—health—from my cell phone. The flaws in my computer-less health class plan began to present themselves immediately, as we were instructed to access a (computer-dependent) Google Slides questionnaire program to participate in the lesson. While I was never able to log on to the Google Slides, health class came to a close soon enough, and somewhere in the mix, my computer was granted access to the school WiFi. Additionally, I requested to change seats in between periods, which allowed me to relocate to a corner of the gym—a spot near one of the few outlets in the room.

With a charging computer, semi-functional WiFi, and an ever-so-slightly more private spot in the gym, I began to fall into the regular motions of the school day. My second period of the day, AP U.S. History, went by with very few hitches. While I was unable to print out the daily note sheet that my teacher posts before each class, I could generally follow along with the conversation and take notes on the content I was able to hear.

While the WiFi was passable for what one might think a public school is capable of, video and audio consistency on Zoom were mediocre at best, and audio cuts were frequent, almost always followed by a rapidly sped-up version of what the speaker had said. Minor inconveniences like these were frequent, but the day was far from a disaster given the low expectations and generally competent oversight.

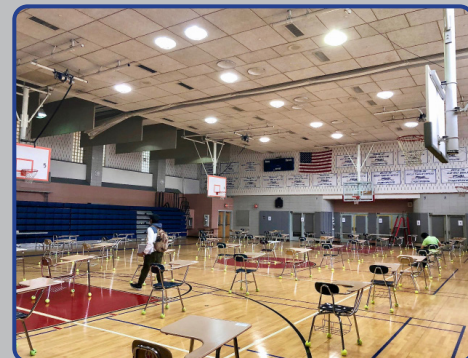
A pleasant distraction from the static nature of the day were the occasional visits from Principal Seung Yu himself. About three times throughout the day, the principal made his rounds through our third-floor gym, walking over to each student and giving a thumbs-up or air fist-bump before exiting once again. His visits were much appreciated, and inspired some confidence in the system and routine that, by period four, felt elongated past belief.

After my following class, Spanish, I pulled out a pre-packed everything bagel and started to eat. I couldn't help but feel as though every chew was excruciatingly louder than the last. The sound of every bite echoed like a gunshot in my head, as I tried to swallow each piece as quickly as possible. I only ended up eating about three-quarters of it before abandoning the effort altogether, surrendering to the grating buzz of the overhead lights.

After a chaotic brief of my day to

The Spectator Editorial Board during my 10th period class (a process that felt disjointed due to my general inability to hear what was going on in the Zoom in real time), the day was over. I couldn't decide whether it felt like a lifetime or a blip, but either way, the school day had come to a close. I gathered my belongings and quietly crept out the door, cementing the fact that I wouldn't end up talking to a single classmate for the entirety of the school day.

I couldn't help but feel slightly deflated as I made my way down the three-to-two escalators; my grand return to the great



Morris Raskin / The Spectator

Stuyvesant High School was more mundane than I could have pictured. While mundane was likely the safest option for both my classmates and me, I couldn't help but long for the bare minimum of a basic conversation or minor interaction.

I wandered out of the building onto the Stuyvesant bridge and made my way over to the CitiBike dock. Despite being completely sedentary for the majority of the day, I felt exhausted, though perhaps fatigued is a better word. Despite having a groundbreaking air, my day was at best uneventful. While I will likely not be returning for more blended days for the semester, I do feel some reassurance knowing exactly what I would be missing out on. Stuyvesant's blended learning plan proved itself to be marginally coherent and bare-minimally functional on opening day, and while it certainly didn't hold a candle to the state of Stuyvesant seven months ago, it should still hopefully provide a last-ditch safe haven for the students who need it most.

Check out News Editor Maddy Andersen's Day in the Remote Life [here](#):



THE BABIES IN THE BATHWATER

By JONATHAN SCHNEIDERMAN

Remote learning, pedagogically speaking, is worse than in-person learning. Face-to-face interactions among students and teachers are important for getting ideas across as effectively as possible. It would be easier to zone out on a Zoom call than in a classroom even without the temptations of the internet; managing a classroom is easier when one can keep track of all the students at once, and for most people I know, it is easier to stay productive and motivated when one is going to school daily.

But remote learning, despite its flaws both inevitable and otherwise, has introduced some positive changes to how Stuyvesant operates, changes that should be kept in place even when we return to normalcy.

First of all, and most radically, the five-period schedule is a significant improvement over the ten-period schedule. There's a real difference between 55 and 41 minutes, and though hour-long Zoom classes can sometimes seem to drag, 41 minute-long in-person classes always seemed to get cut off too soon. In the few years before the coronavirus pandemic struck, there was even some chatter about reducing the school day to nine or eight periods to allow for more instructional time. Now, COVID-19 has forced us into a much better solution, one that leaves students with more free

time and, though it cuts down on overall instructional time, increases the amount of time in a given instructional session. Having longer classes less frequently is good preparation for college too, where that is the norm.

Longer classes are not the only benefit of the five-period schedule. Another innovation it has introduced to Stuyvesant (at least in theory—certain teachers have taken it upon themselves to ignore this)

completing their work, so they will have to learn this responsibility if they don't already have it, and isn't that much of the point of Stuyvesant?

Second, remote learning has necessitated the centralization of platforms for which students have so long been pining. Every year, the Freshman Caucus candidates promise to achieve this, and every year they fall flat. COVID-19 has now forced the administration's hand, and when I want to

fact that snow days will now likely be a thing of the past, and that future mayors will be able to call them more liberally—parents will know, say, 17 hours instead of three before the beginning of the school day whether they can expect to send their kids in the next day—because they will simply be remote instructional days.

Less has been made of the club functions that can be done more easily over evening video calls than through in-person after-school meetings, and here I address my fellow students and not the administration. I have more than once had the experience of scheduling a quick discussion at 3:40 p.m., only to have it start at 4:00 p.m. and go for a half-hour, often at the expense of another, more important meeting that I wrongly expected to be able to attend. When we go back to school in person, we should avoid such meetings. If we want to quickly meet to discuss some minor details of some small matter, we should arrange to do so in the evening, over Zoom or Messenger. That way, we can skip the superfluous quick-but-not-quick after-school meetings and save ourselves a good deal of time.

The last seven months have been months of crisis, and we all look forward enormously to that crisis's end. But crisis births necessity, and necessity is the mother of innovation. When we leave the crisis behind, we should be sure not to leave its small fruits behind us as well.



Michael Hu / The Spectator

is the two-day schedule for completing work. Under this system, students have work due every day, but work for any individual class has two days to be completed. Without freeing students from work, this gives them more flexibility in how and when they do it. If a student has, say, a major event or workload one night, he can simply do some amount of his homework the next night. With this freedom comes new responsibility: it is far easier to procrastinate than it used to be. But students are still held accountable for

know what work I have to put on my to-do list, I can simply go to Google Classroom. When Stuyvesant is back to fully in-person instruction, teachers should still be required to post every assignment on Google Classroom. It's a simple task for teachers to complete, it makes students' lives much easier, and we are proving capable of doing it.

Third, it has elucidated how certain school activities can be almost completely transplanted to an online setting. Much has been made—correctly—of the

PRESSURE COOKERS, SWIMMING, AND MENTAL HEALTH

BY KELLY YIP

Stuyvesant has always been characterized as a competitive, pressure cooker high school. But with the pandemic, the members of our pressure cooker have returned to their respective pots at home. But what happens now that our stew of cutthroat vibes and competitive traditions has disappeared? Well, we float—usually alone. Sometimes with the few friends we stay in touch with, but mostly in our own pot trying to pay attention to the teachers we can only see on a screen. But perhaps this separation is good for us and our mental health.

One of the flavors we often experience at Stuyvesant is the toxicity of its competitive environment. Yes, the friendly competition will always be prevalent among peers, even in our remote setting. But with our desks at home instead of crammed into one another in the classroom, we don't "see" each other anymore. This lack of social interaction may seem negative for many, but there are also some benefits to the change in our school dynamic. For example, there's no more panic when everyone around you flips to the next page on a math test while you happen to be stuck on a question that's taking an obnoxiously long time to solve. The people you may deem "smarter than you" aren't there to make you feel like you're not excelling. The pressure to "stay on top of the class," or rather, stay afloat amid a building full of scholars, has somewhat diminished. Our remote learning experience, confined to our homes and in front of our laptops, has allowed us to learn at our own pace without the toxic

habit of comparing ourselves to others.

This is also especially true for our seniors. College season has always created a tense, sometimes suffocating, atmosphere among students. When speaking with acquaintances you only see in a certain class, the conversation sometimes just drifts toward

sphere of "college and my future" hasn't completely dissipated. And even if we remain alone in our thoughts about this topic, sometimes we can't help but wonder how other people are doing. But at least a chunk of the layer of college has been thrown away.

A new benefit of remote learning has also been

fun). These extra hours, repurposed into time for enjoying ourselves, have given us opportunities to breathe in places we normally wouldn't be able to.

We Stuyvesant students have always been "out of breath," both figuratively and literally. We struggle to balance AP classes, extracurriculars, and homework, all while trying to apply for external programs and internships. And to top it off, we have to go through our daily routines of running through Penn Station, climbing the crowded stairways, and groaning as we go up the escalators that don't work. This makes us immensely strong people, but even the strongest swimmers need to breathe. We are now able to take a break from desperately trying to remain afloat with academic pressure and competition weighing us down toward the bottom of the pool. That heavy weight has gotten a little lighter, and though we still may need to work to make sure our heads are above water, we can take a break, sing "Riptide" or "Hey Soul Sister" at the top of our lungs, and take a much-needed breath in the extra pockets of time we have.

Though remote learning has its ups and downs, it has granted us some freedom concerning our time and has loosened the grip of competition all too common at Stuyvesant. One day, we small ingredients shall reunite again in the pressure cooker of Stuyvesant, and I honestly look forward to the day when we can mingle in all our flavors of talent and ambition again. But when that happens, I know I'll miss the small perks of remote learning in the time of the 'rona. For now, I will cherish the time I have and breathe.



college ("How are you doing with applications? Which colleges are you applying to?"), and this subject is definitely a sensitive one. With the absence of—well, people—this uncomfortable atmosphere has, for the most part, been averted. It's still important to mention that our interactions are restricted to a handful of people, so of course the looming atmo-

Chloe Huang / The Spectator more free time. And what else can we do with free time alone other than focus on ourselves? We can go outside to enjoy the fresh air, meditate, or even spend some more time with the family we are currently stuck at home with. We can take an hour-long nap after a long day of Zoom calls. When we finish homework earlier, we can have a Zoom call with our friends and play some games or have a lit karaoke night (the Zoom lag is there, but it's still

How My Family Became My Lifeline

By Caroline Ji

When the city shut down, the Ji household lit up. Faced with the incredibly unfamiliar sensation of having lots of free time on our hands, my family and I picked up a rather unusual quarantine activity: renovating our home.

Eleven months ago, my family and I moved out of the 700-square-foot condo I grew up in and into a three-story house. It was relatively well-maintained when we first moved in: the walls were solid, the patio was beautiful, and the master bedroom was about as big as they get in Bensonhurst, Brooklyn. There were, however, many incomplete projects that ate away at my perfectionist mother every day. When quarantine began, my parents and I started tackling them, with hammers in one hand and paintbrushes in the other.

Day by day, we made progress throughout our home. We repainted our shed, repaired several windows, and applied covers to the stairs. We knocked down walls, re-did piping with the help of construction workers, and built our own furniture.

One day, I watched my parents as they worked, noticing the slight curvature of my dad's spine, the wrinkles deepening on my mom's face, and the steady breathing that caused both of their face masks to balloon in and out—reminders that my parents' bodies were no longer the invincible forces they once were. I was somewhat disappointed in myself because I felt like their rapid aging was partially a result of my absence from the house due to my hectic Stuyvesant schedule. At the same time,

I was also thankful because something about being with them—right then and there—made me feel like I was making up for the lost time.

One of my favorite memories from our home renovation occurred in the middle of a massive paint job. We divided the basement among the three of us: my mom, the heater; my dad, the storage room; and for me, the living space. In between painting sessions, we took many

in a small apartment in China with only her sister and brother (her parents were sent to a labor camp), praying that, one day, her children would grow up in a loving home with their parents. In those bittersweet moments, I could see the tears welling up in their eyes (and my parents rarely cried in front of me) and the immense pride they felt standing in a house they could finally call their own.

Whenever I walk through



2007年1月31日 蔡景中

Baby Caroline (left), Dad (middle), Mushroom-haired sister (right)

breaks, during which my parents shared stories about the childhood homes in which they grew up. My dad grew up in a 100-square-foot shed with his parents, brother, and sister in China, never expecting that one day, he'd be living in a 1,400-square-foot house in America. My mom grew up

the hallways of my house, I am reminded of the stories my parents have told me, the lessons they've taught me, and the family values they've instilled in me. I know that the time I have left with my parents is limited since once remote learning ends, I will be swept up into the Stuyvesant

hustle and bustle again, so I deeply treasure every moment I share with them.

Many children have lost their parents during this time of immense loss and grief—and my heart breaks daily for each and every one of them. This pandemic has humbled me in ways I will never be able to fully articulate and has reminded me that no matter how crazy life gets, my family is the most important thing to me. No test, college application, or track meet will ever change that.

So while I'd love to rant about how remote learning has stripped away several parts of my senior year I was looking forward to the most (seeing my classmates for the last time, wearing the "I am a second term senior!" sticker in the hallway, eating the BLT from Ferry's I promised my freshman self I would eventually try), I can't. Because if there's anything I've learned during remote learning, it's that no matter how lonely or upset I get, my parents will always be my most accessible and reliable friends; they'll always be able to comfort me in a way that no one else can. Because when they do, they reinforce the things that really matter, college and academics aside, and constantly remind me that as much as I am a student, I am, most importantly, their child—a message every Stuyvesant student needs to hear from his or her parent(s) or guardian(s), especially now.

The reason I wake up every day and keep trying is because of my family. They have become my everything during remote learning: my chefs, my foot massagers, my rant buddies, and my number one supporters. But most importantly, they've become my lifeline, and for that, I am eternally grateful.



The meeting has been ended by the host

OK

**Read the paper
online at stuyspec.com!**