The Voices of Wisconsin Students Project:
Learning, Coping, And Building Resilience During COVID-19

IN THEIR OWN WORDS:
High School Students' Coping Strategies, Examples of Resilience, And What They Need To Succeed

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This document serves as a supplement to the full report prepared by the University of Wisconsin's Wisconsin Institute for Public Policy and Service (WIPPS) Research Partners and the Medical College of Wisconsin (MCW) summarizing the findings of *The Voices of Wisconsin Students Project: Learning, Coping, and Building Resilience During COVID-19 – HIGH SCHOOL REPORT[1]*. The full report and this supplement were prepared for the Wisconsin Department of Health Services (DHS) by WIPPS Research Partners and MCW. WIPPS Research Partners was asked to conduct this project by DHS, with input from representatives from many state and non-governmental entities who serve the educational and mental health needs of Wisconsin's youth.

The Voices of Wisconsin Students project sought to better understand how Wisconsin high school students are coping with school, learning, and life in general during COVID-19 and to understand in more detail the nature of students' sources of stress and anxiety and their thoughts on what support they need. Equally important was to identify, strengthen, and reinforce examples of students' success and resiliency.

To gather this feedback, WIPPS Research Partners and MCW conducted 13 virtual focus groups in January and February 2021 using Zoom with a total of 96 Wisconsin high school students. The students were from 29 different Wisconsin counties and 46 different rural, urban, and suburban communities. The students attend 56 different high schools.

By compiling and sharing this information, the "voices" of Wisconsin students can help policymakers and stakeholders make more-informed and more-targeted decisions about how to support students during these challenging times. This information can also help inform the broader community about additional resources to address students' needs. Below we share a brief summary of the key findings; we urge readers to refer to the full report which provides examples and illustrates – in their own words – the feedback and input from the student participants themselves.

While it is common in focus groups to summarize the themes that emerge across groups, we decided that, with respect to 2 specific focus group questions, a compilation of the direct student responses could serve as a useful foundation for identifying examples of students' coping strategies that others may benefit from, as well an opportunity for school leaders to hear directly from the focus group participants – in their own words – what they say they need to be successful with school and learning in the months ahead (and beyond). These 2 questions are:

- **Coping Strategies and Resilience (Q11 in the interview guide):** Are there some specific strategies or things you have found that help you cope better or help you feel more resilient while trying to learn and go to school during COVID-19? Or you can think about it this way: Is there something the experience of COVID-19 has taught you about yourself that has helped you in a positive way that you would want to share with someone else?

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[1] The full report summarizing the findings of the high school focus groups can be found at https://wipps.org/research-partners/. Separate reports summarizing the findings from the focus groups with Wisconsin middle school students can also be found at that link.

- **The ONE Thing (Q12 in the interview guide):** Going forward and thinking about the next several months of the school year that lie ahead, what is the ONE thing you and your friends need most from your school leaders in order to do the best you can in school?

We used the focus group transcripts to compile this information; any omissions in a specific student's response or comment were not intentional. For ease of readability, in some cases, students' quotes used throughout the report have been edited to remove filler words such as "like," "um," "yeah," "so," etc. Some student's responses may have contained several examples or ideas and could have fallen into several of the broader categories used to organize responses.

The Medical College of Wisconsin/Froedtert Hospital Institutional Review Board #5 granted approval for this project's protocol [PRO00039423] in accordance with 45 CFR 46.111 by expedited review, Category 5, 6, & 7. The protocol involves minors as research subjects. The Committee granted approval under 45 CFR 46.404 of Subpart D, as the specific additional regulatory requirements have been met.

For more information about the Voices of Wisconsin Students Project, visit:
www.wipps.org/research-partners/

To view the complete set of reports:
https://wipps.org/research-partners/Voices-High-School
https://wipps.org/research-partners/Voices-High-School-supplemental
https://wipps.org/research-partners/Voices-Middle-School
https://wipps.org/research-partners/Voices-Middle-School-supplemental

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COPING STRATEGIES AND RESILIENCE

Examples of Coping and Resilience: Are there some specific strategies or things you have found that help you cope better or help you feel more resilient while trying to learn and go to school during COVID-19? Or, you can think about it this way: Is there something the experience of COVID-19 has taught you about yourself that has helped you in a positive way that you would want to share with someone else?

Connecting with Friends and Other People

Find that specific one person that will always listen to you. Because everyone needs just someone to listen to you, even if they can't find a solution themselves. The best way for me to just get stuff out is just, really, just rant on and on and on until you feel like you just want to just let that go and just like move on.

One thing that I find helpful is like doing work with a friend, whether or not we go to the same school. Because a friend of mine, we'll just be on FaceTime, and we'll be doing our work for the simple fact that there's motivation where we keep each other motivated. So if she starts slacking off, and she puts me on pause because she's scrolling on TikTok, I'll be like, no, do your work. And she'll do the same back for me. So it's like I feel that I definitely need help, just having somebody else there kind of making it almost like a classroom environment.

If I'm in more of a hyperactive mood, I'll play some games with my friends. That's always fun. I like playing Minecraft and stuff online with friends over voice calls, which is great. But when I'm feeling a bit more mellow, I'll make myself some tea and take a bath or maybe hang out with my pets. Yeah, just trying to chill out or have fun is what I try to do.

I've kind of realized and a lot of my friends [have realized], our confidence has really grown this year…we've been seeing all these really empowering TikToks, and maybe it's…everything that's going on with the government right now. But I just feel like this year has really been a big change in a lot of ways, in a lot of ways. That's really been rubbing off on the youth, and I guess kind of talking about government issues…the amount of my friends that know about the government, it doesn't even matter what side, you know, we're so much more like informed. We know what's going on.

My family is taking the social distancing and the masks during COVID pretty seriously, so usually if I'm going to see any of my friends, it's one or two at a time, typically in an outdoor location, which winter in Wisconsin, it's negative ten degrees outside right now. So that's pretty difficult, and if I do see them, it's through a mask, and I'm very happy to do my part in keeping others safe, but the masks are getting old. I want to be able to see people's faces again, even where I work. I work at [retail store]. I want people to know that I'm smiling at them, and I'm happy to see them. I want to be able to see that reciprocated, and I just, the mask is a physical, it's a tangible reminder that we are not connected, and this is not normal.

For me, it's being there for other people.

I luckily have great friends that I can go to, and our school offers a student-to-student peer mediating group. So we offer select students that are trained and we're there to just kind of listen and to like report anything that's needed. And I personally, I've just been struggling, so I luckily have had a friend that's encouraged me, and I'm going to…I'm starting the process of seeing a therapist and getting help.

I would say I FaceTime my friends a lot more than I used to. If we're bored during our free period that's like a work time, we'll FaceTime each other and do the work together, which we didn't really do before, and so it's kind of nice to get some friend time and homework help if we need it.

My career advisor, and there's some other people in there too, and we just talk about our problems and what problems we have and how we are doing in school, like how we are talking about now. That seemed to help a lot.

It's helpful to have that FaceTime connectivity with friends who are in the same class, who share the same needs and have the same questions when teachers are busy with other students, like the other half of our student body. And so that's really helpful and a great tool that I've been using more this year versus last year.

I usually go out with my friends, and we hang out or something like that, or we just chill at someone's house or something. We just talk about something else just to get my mind off of it so I can deal with it later. I'm also a very busy person that likes to stay busy. So over quarantine for everyone, it was very hard to keep myself busy.

I also am normally super busy, and when everything first shut down, I did have a job, and I actually picked up a lot more hours just so I can get out and still interact with people, and I try to still work a decent amount so that I can be around people. And I'm a waitress most of the time, so I can talk to people, and it's really nice. And then I also like to hang out with my friends, and sometimes I like to hear everyone else's problems, so I can try and help them with theirs and kind of like worry about my problems a little later because I feel better a lot of times when I help other people.

I think talking with my friends has [helped]. I've just been trying to talk to them as much as I can recently. And one thing I wanted to add was you kind of figured out who your real friends and fake friends are, I guess, during COVID. Because I lost connections with a lot of friends during COVID, I was able to keep strong friendships with some of them too. So I lost a lot of friendships, and I gained a lot of friendships too. So, I have new people to talk to, and I have figured out who my trusted friends are that I can talk to.

Spending Time with Family

I think that this whole COVID thing has made me realize my relationships. So like what needs, or what's strengthened by this like, you know, I mean, I've strengthened my relationships with my parents, my close friends, like my spiritual relationships. Like everything has just, there's like more time for all of that. So I feel closer to everyone, and I feel like it was a really good time to just kind of reflect, I guess, kind of. So I think that was a good thing that came out of this.

I learned that I actually like people. I like being with people. I like my family. That I enjoy their company, and that I don't need to hide in my room all day. Like I learned that I need to spend time with my family, because like it helps. It really helps. So I'm a very social and active person. So as of right now, it's been really hard to stay active and go out and do sports, just because everything is so iffy. So I do work, so I feel like that really gives me an opportunity to de-stress and just take my eyes off of my computer and interact with different people. And I go to the batting cages once in a while. They just opened up. And I'm in volleyball right now, so I'm able to go to that and like de-stress. And I feel like sometimes I'm with my mom, she bakes a lot, so I bake, I help her and we just enjoy little moments like that, like really get closer and bond. You don't understand how connected you are to your parents until you actually spend time with them.

Engaging in Self-Reflection

The things that help me cope better in this age are just human. We're people. When we're at the age where we're supposed to be grown up now, we just have a different mind and different view of the world now. When we were little, we kind of saw everything as something fun that we would want to do. But when we grow up now, we would have a mind that explains how we want to live our life, and how everything is supposed to be a challenge to us that we are supposed to solve it by.

I do this thing where I leave things in yesterday and bring things into tomorrow every night. So if I have something that goes, you either leave it in yesterday, or bring it with you to the next day. And to me, that's been something that's really helped me, because if you don't need it with you, just leave it. So that's something that I've done.

I just like to get into the mindset where I think am I really going to throw away all of the hard work that I've already done this year just because we're in the middle of a pandemic, or just because we're in virtual learning? I like to think about how my work now is going to affect me in the future, and it really helps me. Like, oh, well, I'm going to be successful in the future. Why would I throw it all away just because of one assignment that I don't understand and don't want to get help on?

Well, academically, sometimes, like how [Student] said, I would usually just think to myself, all the work that I've done in sophomore year and freshman year and first semester of junior year, why would I want to waste that when I am almost going to graduate next year? And with personal issues, to help myself cope, I usually just write down my thoughts or emotions into notes.

I wouldn't say coping strategies yet. I'm kind of still trying to figure that out. But with being in quarantine a lot, you know, I've learned a lot about myself because before, I avoided it by helping a lot of other people. But now I have more time to see who I really am. So I guess by learning how I am, I can figure out my coping strategies soon, so.

A big thing with me is I realized how much I enjoy alone time more. Because I'm a social introvert, which means I like my social time, but I also need that time to like recharge my battery, which I've been realizing more as COVID has gone on, because I've had more time to myself, and I didn't feel forced to go out and do stuff.

I've learned not to take people's crap and to just be who I am and just not care. Because like, in the past, I used to be like, oh, no, like what if I wear this, they're going to think this of me. And now I'm just like who cares.

It's made me relearn how fun learning can be, because, not school subjects. I want to make that clear. Not school subjects. But learning about other things, like learning about Greek gods, Roman gods, Norse gods, a bunch of different mythologies, all of that stuff. And that I am a very patient person, and that I can be too patient with people sometimes. Like I'm the kind of person who you would walk up to, ask a question for help, and then if you really needed it, I could be there for like an hour and a half. But I'm also disrupting whatever I need to do, so I am patient to a fault in a way.

Through this whole COVID thing, I kind of learned what I really like to do, and what I want to do without getting like, being afraid to get made fun of. Because like in March and stuff, we were all at home, so I learned what I really love to do and kind of like my opinions on everything.

I've been thinking about how I feel like my childhood has been taken away from me, I guess, because we have, we had to grow up so quickly, so I've been trying to kind of go back while still being mature, I guess. So one of the things I used to do when I was little and I did for a while was play Minecraft. So recently I've been playing a lot of Minecraft, and I don't know, I've been really happy with it.

I have a lot of strategies for different things because of what I've just learned from my own experiences, but I feel like people often forget it is an option, but crying. I feel like there's a lot of people that feel like they can't cry, or else they're not a man, or they're too weak, or they're not good enough or whatever. Especially girls as well, I suppose. Everyone, just cry. It definitely relieves stress. And it kind of makes your eyes sore, and you're probably tired, but at least you have a clearer head when you're done, at least for me.

Crying is a good option. But the other thing that I find is being organized helps with that. Like if I know that a lot of things are bothering me, sometimes I'll write them down because if it's just in my head, then it will just continue to bother me. But at least when I write it down, I can see some issues that I can take steps towards fixing. And some things aren't fixable, but I don't know, writing it down just kind of helps me.

There's this one thing that I guess I looked up, and it sounds kind of weird and cheesy, but the thing is I personally, and I know a lot of other people find it easier to solve problems for other people than for yourself. So basically, just sometimes thinking about your problems in a third person, like someone else has this problem instead of I have this problem, I find that that kind of helps

If I'm trying to avoid something, I'll just not go near it. So if there's a problem at home, I'll just stay at work a bit later, if, like vice versa. I don't know, just kind of keeping away from it, I guess, let it cool down, come back. Especially considering when things just happen, you can react a bit hastily, and it ends up being bad or unhealthy. So I don't know, like not staying away from it for too long, but letting things cool down, making sure that what you're thinking or what you're talking is reasonable.

Well, I feel like I'm a lot stronger than I knew I was, just in the fact that it's all really hard. And especially when it first, like everything shut down, nobody really knew what was happening, and everyone just kind of like, for school-wise, just kind of threw things together to like make something work to continue school. But then I also feel on the aspect of things that I've done, I feel like the social media site TikTok just had so much information, and it just has opened up the door of there's so much in the world that I could explore, and I

could never stop learning. There's just always things that I could learn. And then also I feel like hobbies or my religion too, I have a youth group that I go to, and I just feel like that has kept me really strong with what I believe in.

One thing that I definitely learned was I was able to confirm my passion for a lot of things, if that makes sense. Because when COVID kind of shut everything down, there were a lot of things that I was looking forward to that were canceled. And it's pretty much been a year now, and I know that like every single day I still look forward to those things. And that assured me that those are things that I'm extremely passionate about and things that I want to do for the rest of my life. So even though it's awful, but I don't get to do those things, I get to look forward to the fact that I'll be able to explore more passions even more and things like that.

I think that since COVID hit last March, I feel like I've been taking the motto to take every day like day by day, take it day by day, basically. Because like tomorrow isn't promised, and they don't like, you know, you just don't know what you're going to have to do, and you don't know what's going to be like, you know, like cancelled or like what you might actually get to do the next day.

For my self-care, I try to take a little bit of time off my phone every weekend.

I think the best thing that I did over quarantine to figure out some coping strategies was I took, and I can't remember her name, but I took a course online. It was through like Coursera or something. But it was free, and it was a Yale course on the science of happiness. It had really good coping strategies and all the science behind it was very impactful in terms of pointing me towards mediation, the scientific benefits of that. And then also, one random thing is if you talk to people, even if you don't know them, it increases your happiness level, and that's scientifically proven. So it was a really cool experience to be able to have that course and then be able to implement some of those strategies right away.

I personally, and I know a lot of other people find it easier to solve problems for other people than for yourself. So basically, just sometimes thinking about your problems in a third person, like someone else has this problem instead of I have this problem, I find that that kind of helps.

One thing that's different between this year and last spring is we had our fourth quarter was completely virtual, and it was crazy, because there was no plan. The teachers didn't know how to use technology. I mean, I was so stressed out. I took four AP classes last year, so four AP tests. I was so stressed out trying to get myself prepared for that, that I would literally do homework until 2:00 in the morning, crash on my couch in the basement, and then wake up at 6:00 and repeat the same cycle, for probably a two- or three-month period. And the teachers tried, but they had no instruction either. It was just chaos. And so I think this year, even though there are some sticking points, anything is better than last spring.

It's much easier for me to think at school than at home. It's much easier. It's, I don't know, I can also trust myself that I'm going to be able to do the work that I want to do to get things done. I want to do the work when I'm at school. Like I can't wait for it. Things like that. And, you know, it seems like the grass is greener on the other side, but, really, it is just the same grass, and you've got to learn to take care of it and appreciate it. If you work hard, you can get anywhere you want, anywhere, and I mean that.

Writing and Journaling

I make sure that I have some food in my body…and I would write in my journal.

For me, I'm someone that doesn't really like people suggesting me to do things to improve myself. I like to find that stuff on my own and search for that. But for New Year's, I started writing about how my year went, and what all happened, how I felt about it, and what I was hoping for the next year as my resolution. And instead of just doing that right on the night of New Year's Eve, I kind of turned that into a sort of a diary. And traditional methods of writing, like just going into a diary or something, it doesn't really resonate with me. So my advice, and kind of lesson, would be to find your own kind of groove for certain things. Maybe take someone's suggestion and put a new spin on it that will help you use that outlet more rather than just completely discarding it because it doesn't work whatsoever.

I think with quarantine and school and everything, I started journaling. So I just write my feelings down, and I like reflecting back to see how I've improved and what I can do to improve. So just writing in a journal really just helps me put my feelings down, and it's been making me feel more positive about this situation and everything.

Yeah, so I'm a senior, so I would say I'm not as stressed out about my schoolwork right now, kind of a senior slide. But as far as my future and maybe stuff outside of school that I'm stressed out about, I do a lot of journaling and Bible studies before school and before I go to bed. So that kind of helps me start off my day and end my day with something that calms me down, and I'm just able to listen to some music or drink a cup of tea and just relax before and, or before I go to bed and before school.

Spending Time with Hobbies and New Activities

I've always loved crocheting, but I've gotten really into it since the pandemic started, and I've been, like I never had been able to finish projects before because of ADHD, but I've been finishing projects left and right lately. So that's been helping me a lot.

Honestly, I have been playing a lot of chess. It's not just because of The Queen's Gambit. I was playing chess before The Queen's Gambit happened. It just so happened to exist around the same time. But, no, I've been playing it online. I have improved a lot. I'm still nowhere near as good as some of the best, but it's fun. It forces me to think. It takes my mind off of things, and it's just something that I've really found that I'm passionate about, and I've been needing something to kind of like put my energy into when I'm not doing school.

So personally, when I'm dealing with stuff, I like my hobby, which is to play video games and stuff like that. You know, that, for me personally, does like so much for myself. But I would say for advice to try and do something different and new to try to do, or try to get yourself out there, because for an example, like I said, I normally always game, but then the one time I decided to hang out with someone in person at my own house made a huge difference in my stress level. It decreased a ton. So I would say trying to get in better connection with your friends and stuff would be very helpful.

My art and running has really helped me through, I guess. I've always been a very artistic person, but after last year, I was kind of discouraged. So over quarantine, I picked up my love for it again, and I've really been like doing that. And running, I've also always enjoyed running, but I've just doubled my lengths, and I really enjoyed that just the free time in it and the time to myself like mentality to both of these things that have really helped me to get through this time.

I do a lot of theater. A local theater actually found a way to put on some Shakespeare shows in an outdoor garden, so I was able to participate in that. And that was really nice because not only was I able to do the thing that I loved, but it was outdoors, it was socially distant, and it was really nice weather. So just, I think that aspect of just being outside and in nature is really helping. And obviously, right now, to me, the weather is a bit discouraging from doing that, but I'm excited that like once March or April starts back up, I can just do it again, and I'll probably feel a whole lot better.

I just wanted to say I love graffiti. I love to do art. At my job…we basically have an art group, art center, art thing. You know, we're working on a wall. And I just want to say we are almost done.

Listening to Music

I listen to music, I start, you know, really feeling music and stuff. And I learned that people are really special. Like I was one of those people who really didn't care if I was around people, or if I was an extrovert or whatever. But I found out that I really do like people, and I really enjoy people around me, so, yeah.

You know, music is my thing too. I like peace and quiet, just being me, myself, and I, just having me time by myself. You know, just relaxing, just sitting down, sleeping, whatever you can do once you get done with work, get done with school, whatever you can do or find that's peaceful. You know, listening to music, sleeping, taking a nap, watching TV…movies…

What I do a lot is I listen to music all the time for just about everything. And, you know, just even, like I'm home alone when I do online school, so I just, during lunchtime, I'll just turn on my speaker, and I just dance around the kitchen. It's just so fun.

I mean, typically like what I do is just, when I try to get something done, I'll just throw on music and then do my homework or something. And that's kind of nice. I don't know.

To reduce stress, I just kind of have like a playlist that I put together. And then I kind of just play it whenever I have free time.

The music, just get a playlist. But for on, not online, for in person, I would say, find your people. Find the people that make you feel comfortable, people who you know what to be your friend and that actually like you, who won't talk bad, so just find the people who make you most comfortable and just stick with them.

But for me, music is all that. I listen to every single genre. I mean, I listen from like, you know, country to rock to classical to heavy metal to rap to hip-hop or, yeah, rap to electronic. Like it's amazing, whether it's writing music or playing guitar or saxophone, things like that, it's just it's so nice, and it's really good to hear that people are doing this.

Like music was a big one, just like listening to it, just listening to music overall. And I like to do art, like most of these pieces behind me are mine, and so like that's been like a huge coping mechanism, just like drawing or painting to get my mind off of things.

I usually listen to music and try to chill, you know, try to get a little stuff done around the house. And I really haven't been that active. I've been trying. So I play a little volleyball with my friends here and there, or I try to go out and stuff.

Staying Organized

And also like to keep up with assignments and stuff, I bought myself a physical calendar, and like I write down what I have to do every day, and like that's really been helping me keep on track of my assignments and stuff. And I've also been trying to meet my friends, but socially distanced or quarantining before meeting them so like we know we're safe, I guess. Well, we don't know for sure, but like we've been trying to see each other when we can, and that's helped me cope through COVID.

I find it helpful to take my computer outside of my room and work at the kitchen table so I can focus more and not have all these electronics around me to watch TV and get my eyes off my work and stuff.

For me, I write down a schedule. So, I write down like all the stuff I have to do in one day, and checking it off feels really nice. And then also, for studying and doing homework, I use the Pomodoro technique. It's where you do 25 minutes of homework, and then you take a 5-minute break, and then you do that for four hours. And I usually get everything done like that.

I think my main thing is at the beginning of the week, I make myself a little schedule just to kind of keep myself on track. Like this is what I'm going to do this day, this day. So then it doesn't get to Friday, and then you're like, oh, I have seven days' worth of homework. That's what I've seen a lot of my friends are doing, and I'm like, hmm. I think that kind of adds into like why kids are cheating on a lot of stuff, because it comes to Friday, and they go, well, I'm just going to look up all the answers to this. I don't have any time.

For virtual students or like a combination, I like to make a planner before the actual day so that I can go to sleep knowing what I have to do the next day, and that really helped.

Creating a schedule, that works for me.

I like using a planner and listening to music, like what other people said. I also found that taking breaks between classes and going away from your computer like every time can help you reduce pressure. And I also like to take notes in classes because it helps you be more present.

Planning and making sure I know what I'm going to be doing, taking breaks, taking walks, and sometimes just laying down and reading a book—a book that I want to read and not one that we're assigned in school.

I really struggled with a personal-time-to-work-time balance. I've kind of set myself on a limit of nine hours a day on school, which seems like a lot, but it's not a lot compared to what I was doing. And then no matter what…after that nine hours, I stop, because I do need to have that boundary…I will still do homework on a Saturday if I have that overflow, but taking up part of my Saturday is worth having that good balance.

Exercising and Being Active

Well, a couple things I have done during COVID that have actually been really nice would be basketball. Do a lot of that during COVID. I'm sure everyone can agree, just like a lot of physical activities, like parkour, taking a walk, scootering. And then on the weekends, just go down to the Amtrak station, see a couple freight trains go through. Nobody else does that.

Working out. I mean, I've always been kind of active, but when I've had a rough day or just, and trying not to bottle all that frustration and anger in or anxiety, going to work out, you just focus on something else. Like listening to music and just pushing yourself to be physical instead of just sitting in your bed all day being sad has helped me.

I like being very active, I like going running a lot, even when it's snowing. When it comes to running, I like being by myself. So when I'm by myself, I can free my thoughts, and while I'm running, it kind of feels like I'm running away from those problems. Which is kind of bad at the same time, but it feels kind of nice to not think about those problems and just think about how I'm being active and how I'm improving my body, since I do like being very active. So it's nice to have just exercise because when I'm exercising, I'm only thinking about myself and improving myself. And sometimes it's hard to interact with others at the same time because if, I feel like I interact with people too much, I get lost in their thoughts, and I kind of forget about myself.

I've just gone for walks, and I've played with our dog, and I've kind of, sometimes I've done yoga, and that's helped. Or just, since I really love school and I enjoy doing school, sometimes I'll do that, and that will help.

I like being active, so I like going on runs and just like going to practices and playing basketball and soccer and all that. That's a good coping mechanism for me when I'm stressed.

Being Outside; Enjoying Nature

Another coping skill that my family and I normally use is my mom and I would go camping a lot as a family and with our family camping crew. So, we'll just go to Mirror Lake, and we'll just go to Ishnala, a very fancy restaurant, and just do that during camping. But camping is another coping skill my family uses.

I have been going on a lot of walks. Obviously, the past week has not been the most cooperative weather in this situation. But I've never had a state park pass until this year, and I've loved going to the different state parks. Over the summer, I would drive by myself two or three hours to different parks across the state because that's what, I don't know, I guess I got to enjoy nature a lot more and just be more, enjoy not staring at a computer.

Also, on the topic of getting involved with nature, when everything first happened like in April and May, I started going on bike rides. And those are so much fun because I actually live right near a park, so I biked down to that park. I just sat outside for a good 30 minutes listening to music, just looking at the lake, and then I biked home, and it was really nice. Another thing that I'm grateful that we got to do was, actually two things, is, once every year, my family rents out a cabin which is super nice. It's kind of secluded. It comes with like a pontoon boat right on a lake, so we take out that boat. And the kicker with that is that it's an unplugged

weekend. So my mom and I rent out a ton of books from the library, and we just read those for five days, and it's so therapeutic, and nice. And this year, thankfully, we were still allowed to rent out that same cabin and do that. And then, yeah, it's my favorite time of the summer, I think. It's just so nice and therapeutic, and you can swim in the lake. My family grows closer than ever.

Taking a Drive

That's been really helpful to myself this year. I have a couple teammates that live around me that I have to take to practice, and sometimes we just take the long way home and just listen to music. I don't know, music has always been an outlet, but I think driving is now kind of my newer outlet. So if you have your license, I would recommend it.

But definitely during our lockdown, quarantine, I did that a lot [driving], because it was a huge anxiety relief for me, and I would mostly just do it alone, because, again, it was during lockdown.

If I want to go out and hang out with my brother and just like to ride around, like I'm going to do that and spend time with him before my schoolwork.

Even when you drive alone, I live by a lot of like country roads and such, so I would just drive down those for like an hour or two, and maybe I'd go get food or something like that, and it was very therapeutic, and I would just listen to music, and it was awesome.

Using Technology

Ever since quarantine, I kind of just went online and started learning how to buy stuff, and now I have a bunch of stuff from online. So I guess that was one of the positives.

I watch a lot of Netflix, like not in an unhealthy way, but like I really do. And when I'm doing something, I feel less alone if there's talk around me. So like I'll just play it doing like my normal daily things. It makes me feel less alone.

WHAT STUDENTS NEED FROM SCHOOL LEADERS

The ONE Thing: Going forward and thinking about the next several months of the school year that lie ahead, what is the ONE thing you and your friends need most from your school leaders in order to do the best you can in school?

Involvement in Decision-Making; Communication and Information

Maybe for students to be more involved within school, so maybe if the school board would say, 'here are the students' opinions', actually. It's (school board) making big decisions.

Right now, it's having our questions answered (about going back to in-person learning). They said we were going back to school, but they don't really have any answers to what happens if this, or how's this going to work? So just kind of having an actual structure to how our day is going to look.

Another thing would be if the school took more consideration of the students and their situation, because sometimes it feels like the school kind of doesn't listen to our opinions or things that make us feel distressed.

…we've got to communicate back and forth.

…the school says something new, and us virtual kids don't even know anything about it. They might say, oh, we sent you an email a couple days ago, but we never get anything. And I wish that we would just talk, like communicate with each other about everything of what's going on with school. Even though it doesn't involve with virtual at all, it would be nice to know what they're doing so that we know what their options are, because I know that for a lot of virtual kids in my school, it's a lot harder because we don't know. There's not enough communication with teachers and students…they're not saying anything to us. I wish they would talk to us about what's going on in school and if there's new policies. I didn't even know that they had free lunch. I didn't know that they had cohorts…I wish there was more communications with virtual people and everyone would just communicate a lot better…And it makes it really frustrating on my part because the transcript can be all screwed up because of that too.

I feel like the people in power should respond more to the students and ask them how they're feeling in different ways to improve more often. And when you take the survey, make sure you actually do something. Because a lot of the time, I feel like I'm taking surveys for this Madison thing, and it's like they don't do anything about it afterwards. So, yeah, I guess taking action on what you need to improve.

I wish they would give us more updates on the numbers and like, even if it's just from our school, like the numbers of people who are out right now. I wish they would just give us more information.

The administrators put a lot of faith in the teachers recognizing the students that really need help, but the teachers can't know everything. Their classmates are really the ones that do know all of it. So, give the students more power to reach out and help people…but also the students that are asking to do more, create

a system where they can actually do more. Because I want to do more, but I've maxed out everything in the district. I even talked to the superintendent, but there's nothing more I can do.

More Understanding, Empathy, and Sympathy

I was just going to say something to our school board and school administration, I kind of just wish they would put themselves in our shoes and in our teachers' shoes, because a lot of them aren't physically in buildings right now, so they don't really understand what it's like. So they kind of have to look at it from our perspective, if that makes sense.

Oh, I would just want to tell them that we're all trying. We're trying every day. We're getting out of bed, and we're giving it all we can give some days. And it may not be 100%, but we're still giving something, and just keeping that in mind.

Personally, I think sympathy. Most of us are home alone all day, so if our Wi-Fi goes out, what is a 15-year-old going to do? And they're like, you need your parents to call us. Just understanding things happen, we're online, technology fails us. We need more understanding, more sympathetic answers to things that happen.

I think that due dates are really restrictive...You see all of this stuff in the news, and I can understand that, you see it, and as a student, you should just ignore it. But sometimes you're not able to ignore the kind of things that you see. So I think understanding that students need more time to finish their stuff, because it's a very hard time in our lives. I think that would be really helpful.

Honestly, not piling work on top of each other. There has to be a point where they've got to realize wow, kids are really not turning in assignments right now. Let's just have a catchup day during class, where they can just do some work.

A lot of teachers had to get certified to do online classes, some of them are already put into that situation, so some of them already know how to handle it. But as kids, we never really had to go through this before. We were so used to just being handed a worksheet in class, and it was just doing this before the end of the class, and then getting homework to take home. But now it's so much different.

Before we take a regular break, we should get all of our stuff caught up, and then a break to take our mind off of all the schoolwork and everything.

So we go to learn, we got to do all our work in all seven classes in only four hours. It's more stressful, and that's because we have to think about hurrying up and getting the work done. Instead of like being there, we go to the next class and figure out what the next assignment is.

If we do go back to everybody in person, or we ever go back to school, I feel like the teachers should really understand that it's a big transition. I feel like because we're at home, we're not used to all the workload, or we're not used to having to walk across buildings. It's like restarting high school all over again. And especially with upper class people, we're starting to think about college. I feel like they should really understand that we want to go back to school, but we want to be able to breathe as well. So we don't want everybody to start storming us with, okay, you need to do this for college, do this for college, do your ACT, do all of this, do all of

that. We just want to be able to breathe and still be able to have that transition to going back to everything normal.

I feel like they should be more understanding and open minded with us and help us and know that it's a very big transition going back into school and to understand that.

I feel like teachers should be more open minded and mindful that this is a big transition, especially for juniors. We have such a big workload, because this is the important year, and it's mainly colleges looking because we got all these tests to do. So, I feel like they should be mindful and open minded.

I'd say that they have to be more patient than normal because everyone was just kind of thrown into this weird situation, and we can't help it at all.

I wish that not only teachers, but people in general with all the education would realize that you can't just give us a whole lot of work and expect us to be done by the end of the week. I get that we have deadlines to turn things in, but now that we are in a home situation, that's just not going to be possible if you put on a whole bunch of workload and then expect us to be done that specific day, because it's just not realistic. We have a whole lot of things going on at home. We have other classes to focus on, and I just want the people in the educational system to be aware that you don't know the kid situation. So just be mindful of how much you expect the kid to actually do. We have to show up for a class every day, except on Wednesday, because there's no school, and then you're expected to complete work every day along with missing work, so just be mindful about how much you're giving the students.

I feel like the teachers and the principal and all of them, I wish they were a little more patient with us because I feel like they think we catch on faster than we actually do. And we need time to process things, whatever it is, it depends on what we need to process.

I think we need time and support to like help us deal with this stuff. Like give us time to work it out and time to learn and (get) support from teachers that aren't really giving it right now.

I think that our teachers or school leaders need to understand that we have a lot going on too. We have a lot of emotions too, and when we get home our willpower is just not there anymore to do homework. And they need to understand that we need the help, and we need them to understand that. Sometimes it's just a struggle.

I think teachers should be more lenient with us with due dates and stuff because a lot of people in my class and school have jobs and sports. Some people don't even have Wi-Fi at their houses, and they can't get rides to like the library or back to the school so they can continue using the school's Wi-Fi.

Definitely patience or empathy for us, because we also have seven or eight other classes that we have homework and other stuff for. And also this is a crazy time, this has never happened before, a pandemic in a time like this. It's just all new for everybody. And in addition to the patience with the students, having patience with themselves as they are having a hard time figuring out. Because everything is on computers, and a lot of teachers kind of struggle with things like computers and online stuff. So just have patience with themselves and be able to ask questions instead of ignoring it. If they needed to figure some type of computer program out, they could ask rather than just having the students do a bunch of extra work that isn't needed just because they can't figure it out.

I just wanted to say that we're all going through this together and that, you know, everyone is going through something, and they're all experiencing something different, but we're all in this together really. So that, having that understanding of communicating everything like that and just having that sympathy for everyone else.

I'd say that I have been a lot more relaxed about things since coming back and since running and just drawing and more. But it is becoming hard to find time to do all this stuff. I try to make time for it. But, yet again, a lot of assignments, but that's just school, I guess.

I think if there's one thing that students need is we just need a little bit of forgiveness. You don't know what anyone is going through normally, but especially right now, I think that, I don't think that we should be docking points for late assignments during a pandemic. I think that our administration needs to understand that this isn't going to be a regular school year, and we aren't going to be regular students this year. And I think we just need a little bit of that understanding of we are going through a global pandemic, and we are not going to be the same, and we're not going to be able to go through the same school year as normal, and I wish they would stop holding us to the expectations that we would.

Teachers need to understand that there's going to be a learning curve, and they need to adhere to that. As of now, they're pumping out your essay, essay, essay. It's like, no, I can't do that. And I agree with [student] completely on the missing work or late work. Sometimes I have technology issues. I can't email you that I'm having trouble, and I get docked assignment points, and then I tell you that, and you take five days to respond to an email, and you're like, oh, well, too bad. It's already in the grade book. There needs to be a little bit more interaction, I think, and they need to pay more attention to what's going on and how it affects their students and the workload. That's my opinion.

It's hard being a teen and with the Zooms and all this and all the horrible things you see on the Internet about this stuff. It's not easy, like a lot of people would say it should be, to be living in these times.

Lighten the load a little bit. I understand teachers are struggling, and they want school to continue as normal just as much as the next person, but, you know, sometimes the workload is so insane, and honestly, I don't think it would feel that insane if it was a normal year. The work that would've worked maybe last year is not going to work this year. I don't think you'll see as much of a high performance or response as you would like. As disappointing as I think it is, I feel like they might need to make some sacrifices in terms of their curriculum, not that they haven't already, but I think there needs to just be a bit more, because there's a lot of work going on right now.

Personally, for me, I would want them to know that there are a lot of kids out there who are struggling with mental health, who are struggling with bad grades and just who are struggling in general, who are scared to reach out, who are scared to ask someone for help because it's not that they're scared of what, necessarily what's going to happen to them. It's they're scared of how they're going to react. Kids are scared of being judged because they want the world to accept them, because of social media and everything. People just want to be accepted. And they're scared of, if they reach out to someone and tell them that they have a problem, that they're not going to be accepted, and that's all kids want. They just want to be accepted and know that someone loves and cares for them. And it's hard, with social media and just being a teenager in general these days, to know that someone is out there and someone is going to care for them. And they're scared like, oh, I have a mental health problem. No one is going to like me anymore. I'm going to be weird

now. So I think that's something I would definitely tell them . It's like, you know, hey, there are kids out there who are scared of telling you this, not because they're scared of the outcome. They're just scared that if, just being accepted. That's all they want, honestly.

Mental Health Support and Resources

If I were able to actually go down to Madison and explain to the Board of Education and stuff, I would say just believe kids and give us a lot more resources…sometimes they are actively trying to get rid of those resources and make it [mental health] less accessible.

Try to do something to educate your teachers about the signs of mental, physical, any kind of abuse, any kind. Because most teachers don't know. And that's the thing that hurts the most is that kids every day are trying to do signs to reach out, but the teachers are not seeing those signs. So teach the teachers what they look, the signs are, and what they look like, and then give them something that they can do about it.

I would probably tell them to take in more in account our mental health and really advance on that and really do something to actually change and help kids struggling with mental health, like really bring that as a key point in our school system.

Giving students access to those resources and making the resources more accessible than they are. Because I understand they probably think they are giving us those resources, but if they would listen to students and realize that we don't actually believe that we're being helped, they need to either give us better resources or make them more accessible.

A lot of it is the mental health thing. When I was preparing for this meeting, I actually made a Google form and put it on my social medias. And I had my friends that are other students answer the questions that were on the poster, so that I could kind of incorporate them into my responses, so that I could, you know, give as many voices as possible, since there's only so many people here. And one of the things that really stood out to me that kind of has to do with this question, and this is a direct quote from one of the people that responded to my form, they said, why would we seek help from a system that wants us to fail? And now I definitely think that that has to do with my school district and how I've said they're not exactly the most helpful. They don't have the most resources. And so I definitely think that my school district needs to step that up with mental health and give us those resources, because everything is just so much worse with COVID. But even if COVID wasn't a thing, we still need those resources, and, but with COVID especially.

Changes to Teaching Approaches and Teacher Interactions

I would just say bring us back in person because so many people are being affected by this. And, I mean, like I said before, we had a girl kill herself not too long ago. But, and this was towards, more towards the beginning of when we were virtual. And if we continue being virtual, there's going to be more people doing the same exact thing. And just honestly, every time I think about this, it just doesn't seem like it's going to end well. A lot of people are going to end up doing something like that.

We need them (teachers) to be more knowledgeable about events that just occurred in the news because, sometimes, teachers are a bit aloof when it comes to those types of things. And generally, just assign less

work to students, because the more work they give, the more stressed the students are, and the more likely the students are to show an influx of mental disorders such as depression and anxiety every year as workload increases.

More stuff done inside of school rather than homework. I need to learn with the teachers there, not in my own house, where I can only email them. Just breaks and less homework.

I think a lot of teachers are just assuming that students understand things when they assign homework, and it just piles up, and it's a lot. And when you're at home doing your homework, it's hard to tell or ask, especially in online, when you're doing stuff, you don't want to interrupt the whole Zoom session and then have everyone look at you. And it's just so different than asking a question in real life. And during the day at school, when you have a free period, you can go see your teacher, but if you have a free period at home, you can't go see your teacher. So it's just different.

Well, it might not be possible. Me and my friends learn better in person, when we're hands on with teachers, interacting with them in person. But I don't think we will be going to like school in person anytime soon.

I would say more feedback, if possible. I love it when my teachers give me feedback, specific feedback on my work and stuff like that. I think that really helps me to improve. Some teachers do it, some teachers don't. So if that could be a universal thing where all teachers could give in-depth feedback about what you did right and wrong on an assignment, that would be great.

One thing that I will say the school needs to give us for success is teacher encouragement, because a lot of teachers don't encourage their students to do well.

I would also tell my principal that you need to make your teachers aware of how much they're giving us students for each class. We have a lot of classes that we have to deal with as a student, and giving us a lot of homework in just one day, to be honest, is not going to help us pass. I get that we have a lot to cover in such a short amount of time, but you have to be aware of how much you're going to give your student.

I think that during classes, teachers should add fun activities into the mix of all the learning. I know it's kind of difficult to fit into schedules, but just adding fun little activities could kind of bring everybody together to lift moods and give a break. That's been the most fun – Kahoot! games and stuff like that.

I get that there's work time, and you can be in groups, but they'll force you to be in groups with people you don't know, and it's kind of forcing you to interact, and it just doesn't help. It makes it a lot worse if you're being forced to talk to people you don't like or know.

…by the teacher saying you have to have your camera on, it helps everyone because then you can see who's actually paying attention and engaged. And then you can see each other more as well.

I think we need more stimulating classes. Almost all of my classes are just teachers screen sharing a PowerPoint. It's so easy to get bored and distracted. It's so easy to just give up and stop writing notes. And so I think we need more things to do. I have classes where we could do fun projects and do icebreakers every once in a while. I know in a lot of classes, we can't have fun conversations. My one teacher starts every class with an icebreaker to get everyone comfortable. He just asks us questions, and it's nice, and we all get to have conversation and a little fun. And I think lots of teachers, they're just trying to get through.

I feel like in the classroom, the teacher should build a stronger connection with the student. I understand due to COVID, we don't really get to do many activities at school or fun things in the classroom. But do they really understand us, or do they really know who we are? Because sometimes, okay, you go to class. You study. You do your homework. You take your test. You get a good grade, because that's all you need. That's it. Sometimes the teacher forgets that there's a disconnect between us and them . I think the connection between the teacher and the student is very important. And through that, sometimes the teacher will understand more about the student's home life. So like the teacher will understand, okay, that's what is going on with her or him. That's why she acts like that, or kind of puts themselves into our shoes. I know they've been trying to do that, but not all of them.

I kind of wish they would make more people turn their cameras on because in my class, everyone has their cameras off, and it's really hard to connect because everyone is just names. And I know you can't actually make people turn their cameras on, but like in school, they're saying you have to wear your mask, not you can wear your mask. And like in class, they're just telling us you can turn on your video. So no one is actually going to turn it on.

Something that I wish I could tell our school leaders - please stop throwing a bunch of assignments at us. We're just high schoolers. This is not college. Try to calm down a little bit, the amount of the assignments and work that you're giving. I just don't think that they realize that we're also in a pandemic too, because I feel like they all realize that they're in a pandemic, but then kind of forget about us and then they're shoving two weeks' worth of work at us and we're not actually taking the time to really sit down and learn it.

They're throwing a bunch of assignments at us that we should be taking more time to learn. And I feel like school is more about just like passing now, and a lot of kids are resorting to cheating, almost, on assignments. And it's basically just about passing grades now, and nobody really cares about actually learning the subjects anymore. A lot of subjects I learned last semester, I pretty much forgot a lot of them because we went through them so fast, and we didn't really take time to learn them. And also, teachers take so long to grade assignments that we don't know how we're doing in that class, like if we need to improve or if we need to improve in the class. And I know a school district near me has applied a new policy where teachers have to do it, like return work within two weeks. I feel if all school districts did that, that students would be much more successful in their classes, because they can see how they're doing much faster, and it's not too late to improve on the class if you get your work returned to you faster.

It's definitely more about getting a high GPA than it is about learning something new. Especially at my school, I feel like students are really, really competitive and want to make sure that their GPA is super high. And, in fact, there's a lot of like, what did you get on this test? What did you get on this assignment? Oh, you did better than I did. You did worse than I did. There's a lot of comparison. A lot of the assignments that we have to do are so big, and they don't really consider the fact that people have things that they have to do outside of school. Like I've had some nights where I'm working literally the entire night, so I have an entire day of school, and there's no break. And there's so much fatigue, and you need to just keep working and working and working, and then sometimes your work lacks because of that. And the teachers aren't necessarily super conscious of that fact. And especially once activities and stuff come back, like you will have absolutely no time for yourself.

Something that I really like that teachers are doing is they're always just being encouraging, and they're just being there if you need to talk to them either about personal or academic stuff.

Just push out less assignments and give us more time to actually fully understand what we're learning.

Knowing that you have someone to talk to and knowing that you don't have to be afraid to reach out to a teacher if you need help.

Online school to me has felt so optional. So I just look at the assignments and I'm like, whatever, it's fine. But it's really not optional. I think that it's the fact that it's on the screen, and a lot of us associate screen time with free time. So it's like, oh, it's optional, when it's really not. So I feel the motivation to get stuff done is a big issue too.

When I was in middle school, we used to have mindfulness time. After lunch, we would all come to the classroom, our teacher would turn the lights off, and she would put mindfulness music on the smartboard, and we could just sit and relax. You can't touch any paper, just relax for about 30 minutes. And so before I went to sleep, I would play the music, and usually be asleep.

I'd kind of like it if students understood that even though it's tough, that school has criteria that they have to meet and stuff like that…they can't help it because they have to meet a certain criteria, or they could get fired or something like that. And I don't feel like some students really realize that. They just think that the teacher is all just, you know, being mean or something like that, but they're just trying to not get fired. And I feel like it would be nice if students just kind of just realized that, that they're trying as much as they can.

I just think all the students also need to be kind of taught that grades are a private thing and that you shouldn't be sharing with other people. But I don't know how that could necessarily be stopped, because it's kind of part of the culture at our school now. It's just like you get your paper back, and it has a big letter on it, and then you tell everybody what you got. I would be really happy if that wasn't a thing anymore, because it causes a lot of comparison and a lot of, oh, I did so much worse than this person, but I worked so hard.

I do feel like there is a lack of communication throughout the teachers in our school as like an online system, and I feel like we do need to increase the communication, because I'm getting stuff from all different teachers, and it's just a lot to try and plan out and organize when I have like teachers, you know, using this program, and another teacher using that program. And it's just a lot to try and manage altogether.

I know myself included and most of my friends are all falling behind in at least one class. Teachers just assume that we understand what they're teaching us, and a lot of people's motivation to understand stuff has really gone down. So a lot of times, the kids aren't going to reach out. We need someone keeping us accountable. So maybe if teachers just take more time to focus on the students individually and really ask them, you know, if they're not doing so well in the class, if they reach out to them personally outside of class and ask how they can help or how they can better explain something, maybe like a small Zoom call study group or something for those kids online. But in person, I know at my school, we've added a few tutoring groups, but they're still not being utilized. Like I was a math tutor one day, and no one came down. So, I mean, it's really, it's kind of on the kids because a lot of kids' motivation is just not there.

Attention to and Communication about Safety and COVID-19

I would say doing something is better than doing nothing. I feel like there's a mentality right now of like, okay, we're just going to kind of ignore it and hope it goes away, and we'll all just get through it. But I don't want to say there's no end in sight, but right now, we are living through it, and we need to just talk about what's happening and realize that it's not fake…like talking about it, I'd say.

It's (COVID-19) taken a lot of lives, and it got very, very serious around last year's March, and it just started carrying on and cases that are rising up, deaths that are rising up. You know, the thing that I do is I basically just pray that God takes it all away. But then again, it just, you know, keeps going up, and then you'll wear a mask over your nose. I tell people, mask over your nose. You know, there's just some kids out here that won't listen until they realize they get it because the symptoms are not a joke, once you realize you are positive for COVID.

I just want to make sure we're safe, obviously, whether it's in person or still virtual.

I don't know how I feel about necessarily opening up schools. I feel like it should be a choice for the child and the family because in my situation, my family is pretty stable with money. But if one of us got COVID, we lose our income for a good two weeks, and that could really set us back. Like I mentioned before, my friends already struggle with money, so for them, going to school and having that risk of getting COVID, their family could lose all income, and some people wouldn't even eat.

I want teachers and schools to enforce masks a lot more. I want them to enforce them. I want the teachers to, whenever they see them, to tell kids to put their masks over their noses. I want people in the halls to be able to be more comfortable telling each other, put your mask on correctly. I just really want and need better mask enforcement because it's probably the reason why there's some quarantining. I get so uncomfortable when there's kids near me, and I feel unsafe too, when there's kids near me without their masks on. So I want to hear teachers start announcing it more . I want to hear them confirming, putting your mask over your nose, and stuff like at the start of class or something, and at the end of class, just something. I need better mask enforcement. It's so bad right now. It makes me angry.

Ability to Connect to and Socialize with Other Students

…maybe just allowing them to form clubs and stuff that they would want to go to too. Because like I feel like there's been limited to no clubs this year.

One thing that maybe we need…talk to each other more and make new friends…when we don't have connections…we don't feel like we were friends with our classmates or any people that we know before.

I think we should have more things, especially for freshmen or new kids, to get to know each other or more opportunities or events through something like that.

I think for the next couple months of school, how we will get through is all of us together, all of the students together talking to each other. And even if it's only a few of us, we try, and we get through it together. It's

kind of like some student union thing. Like we just talk, and we talk about the schoolwork and everything and how it upsets us.

Something that hasn't been really working well is that I'm very out of the loop with my friends. It's hard to see them through social media only and all their drama or whatever that goes on is very hard for me to feel included and feel a part of them. Only seeing them through a screen is just really difficult sometimes.

Since almost all of our fun things, like homecoming, pep rallies, spirit week, have been taken away, we need fun. Like we just need something to take our minds off of schoolwork and just time to have fun at school, like how it has been before.

Just having more time communicating with friends, because I feel, I think one of the biggest times during school when we communicate with friends is during lunch, and lunch periods at my school are very bad. Since the lunch is set up very differently for COVID, it takes forever to go through the line. My brother had only four minutes to eat once he got out of line. That's how bad it is, and that's how current it is. And not having that time to speak or communicate with anybody is not very functional for everyone.

I wish they would give us any possible way to have more social interaction. They are doing that with the prom now, but that's not from our school. That's from our parents. So I'm hoping something comes up.

A big problem is that all the fun aspects of school have kind of been taken out. They need to find some solution to have something fun to keep people engaged. I think a lot of people just have nothing to look forward to, and it feels like week after week of doing the same thing over and over again, and there's no end to it.

Being able to talk with friends, because in the classroom, they have been kind of strict with talking, which I understand they want to get it (teaching) in because technology is taking up a lot of time. But this is really the only time we get to see each other. So it's nice to take in those moments. So I hope they realize that. It's just really important that we have that.

Other Ideas

Recreation programs. And I know in one of the programs I'm in, we do many activities for volunteering, and I think that not only helps other people, but it gives us a break from school, and it makes us feel good that we're helping other people.

I think another thing is possibly giving out money to families in school because some of these kids are forced to get a job to help pay the bills.

Personally, for me, it just comes down to each other. We just, we need to lean on each other, and we need to be there for each other. And instead of, you know, tearing people down, we need to lift people up, no matter their sexuality, their race, or gender. We just need to be there for each other and let them know that and just connect with each other, even if we are virtual, just let people know that we're there for each other, so.

I also think that dealing with stress helps us become who we are. And I think a lot of people are struggling with their mental health, but I think there's a lot of different things we can do to benefit our mental health, like self-affirmations. And I don't know how religious people are or whatever, but I think relying on God and what he does and just letting him take control of your life and just accepting yourself and knowing that he loves you no matter what.