Silverlinings of the pandemic

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No matter what your viewpoint is on what has happened in 2020, I think I speak for all of us when I say that this year has kinda sucked.

On January 22, 2020, the first case of SARS-CoV-2 , or more commonly known as the COVID, was confirmed.

In an effort to slow the spread of COVID-19 and prevent the deaths of thousands of individuals nationwide, the US (along with the rest of the world) implemented some changes in our day-to-day lives. States gradually started decreasing the amount of social gatherings offered to the public eventually forcing the majority of small businesses in the community and country to close their doors momentarily. With most of the world trapped at home and daily positive cases being shared across the media and news, people were left with an unsettling loneliness. Naturally, hundreds of people started focusing on all of the things that had gone wrong in this year, but despite the many unfortunate things that have happened because of COVID-19, there are a couple of positives that have emerged from this less than ideal situation.

One of the positive things that I think we can take away from this awful pandemic is the environmental improvements that have occurred in the last 12 months. According to research done by NASA, the nitrogen-oxide levels in the air have dramatically decreased since the start of the pandemic. This is likely because of the reduction of fossil fuels being released into the air by cars and other motor vehicles.

In addition to the decreased amount of pollution in the air, the same seems to be true for the pollution in the water. A few of the most well-known bodies of water (for instance the canals in the city of Venice, Vembanad Lake, and San Francisco Bay in California) have all become visibly clearer following the start of the pandemic.

Also, animals seem to be benefiting as well. With public zoos closed and less people out and about, the wildlife that was once being held back are now able to roam free without disturbances. On beaches in India, there have been around 60 million baby Olive Ridley sea turtle eggs laid, which is a huge spike compared to previous years.

On Thursday December 27, the governor of Iowa, Kim Reynolds, will hold the first press conference to discuss distributing a vaccine across the state. In best hopes a vaccine will be smoothly distributed and soon afterwards we can start going back to some form of normal.

While going back to normal will be a welcome change for many, maybe there are consequences of the pandemic that we can keep. Taking better care of our environment and animals is good place to start.

Despite the pandemic causing a lot of hardship, it's important to try to look for the positives.

Cohort conundrum

By: Sydney Burlage @burlage_sydney

Would you rather have cohort or online school?

Online 16%
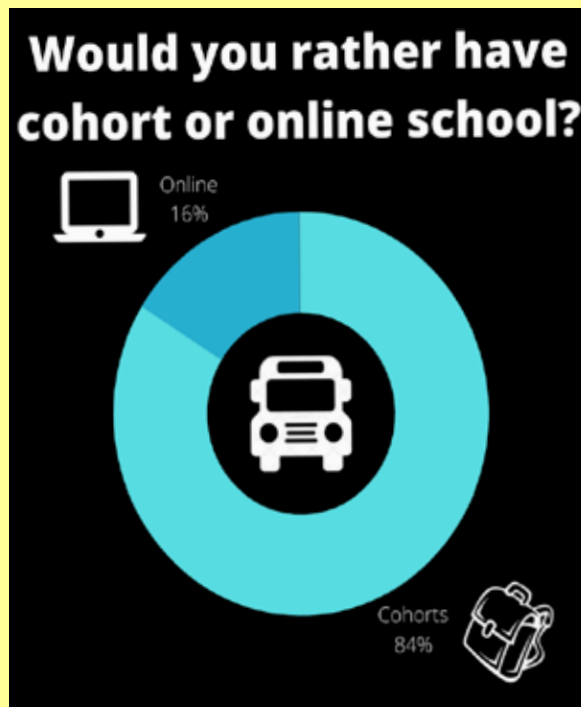
Cohorts 84%

Out of a convenience poll of 50 students, 16% said they would prefer to go fully online while 84% said they wanted to remain in cohort learning.

The recent change from in-person learning to cohorts A and B has brought up an interesting topic. Which is better? Do the benefits of having half the students in the building outweigh the consequences of having all or none of the students there? The answer to this question can't be a simple black or white answer. These times are very complex with many different challenges that get thrown in at random times. There are positives and negatives to both, but overall I think that cohorts take second place.

A pro of cohort learning is that it cuts down on the number of students exposed to each other to transmit COVID-19. It also provides students a small chance at in-person learning and being able to truly interact with their teachers. Many students rely on these few days at school to learn anything at all or ask questions about what they don't understand. Yet, this is about where the pros of this method end. Unfortunately, the cohorts aren't all rainbows and sunshine like everyone hoped it would be.

The days of online learning and the days of in person tend to be hard to mesh. Teachers have to come up with a plan for in-class and out of class learning for each day. My issue with this is that some students receive "better" in-person instruction on certain topics while others have to learn it at home and vice versa. Then coming back the next day and moving right on to the next topic leaves little if any room for review of the previous day. This is not the teachers' fault; there truly is so little time to cover so much material. Personally, this just makes me, and I'm sure many others, feel overwhelmed at times.

The problem with this topic is that there isn't much we can realistically do to fix it. Going back to in-person poses the danger of the infection rates increasing, and going fully online gets rid of any opportunity for in-person learning which many kids rely on. The choice is impossible to make and always leaves someone unhappy. I personally believe that it might have been a smoother and easier transition if teachers had been given time to prepare for the switch. At this point, I think the best option is to wait it out while the teachers do their best to smooth out the kinks to help us all succeed.