

Nicholas: All right. Perfect. I'm Nicholas Mariano. I give consent for this to be recorded.

Stephanie: I'm Stephanie Dixon. I also give consent for this to be recorded.

Nicholas: I'm Nick. Like I said, I'm from Carmel, Indiana, a health science major.

Stephanie: And I'm Steph. I'm from Indianapolis, Indiana, and I'm a junior public health and biology major. So, starting with our first question, what year of school were you in when COVID 19 arose in the United States?

Nicholas: The pandemic first hit during my freshman year of high school. I remember vividly first hearing about the pandemic originating in China. I heard about the death tolls and how the virus was spreading fast through the news, although I never thought to myself that COVID could impact me directly. I remember it was around November of 2019 when I first heard of a case coming to America, although I never thought it could meet me, and I assumed the government could be able to control it well enough where I didn't have to worry about it. I also thought it was widely exaggerated at the time, so I didn't pay too much attention to it. As 2020 approached, more and more cases arose. It wasn't until mid-February of 2020 that the school system went fully virtual, and we were expected to return to school after spring break, which was going to be around April 9th. We never came back, and I ended my freshman year being fully online. What about you?

Stephanie: I was a sophomore in high school when COVID 19 hit and actually on like March 13th. I was in Florida for cheer competition and so we got stuck in Florida because all of the airlines shut down So I had to complete It was about a half a week of school before we could figure out how to get home. Which made that even more difficult than it already was. I ended up staying online all the way through my junior year of high school. So that was also pretty difficult because I had to completely adjust without even going into the classroom to meet my teachers. or meet any of my classmates as well. So that had a huge impact on my education that year.

Nicholas: So how did it affect your academic school year?

Stephanie: So, we went completely online after March and we were asynchronous as well, which for me was actually really great because I do really well with like personal time management and working on my own schedule. However, in the fall, we started what I call Zoom School, which was all of our classes on Zoom, and I did my entire junior year that way. I loved it when school was asynchronous. I could do really well; all my grades were excelling. but when everyone started going back in for hybrid my grades started to really drop because a lot of my teachers would teach to the kids in the classroom and then ignore the kids on Zoom. So, we would never get answers, questions answered or anything like that. So, it made it very difficult to excel, especially in classes like chemistry. I was in AP chemistry and that was incredibly difficult because we didn't get to do labs or anything as well. So that made it really difficult. How was your experience?

Nicholas: Once school moved to fully online for me, I found it really difficult to actually learn the information that was given to us. Motivation was a big problem. And since there was no one directly telling me to do work, and instead I had to take it upon myself to finish my homework and assignments. So, I found that a real problem and my lack of motivation was really poor. Something especially difficult during the pandemic while being taught online was the use of office hours. My school had a form of office hours known as student resource time. And I used it many times during the first semester of school before the pandemic. While being online, office hours was not given to us or even thought about by some teachers. So, we were on our own most of the time.

Stephanie: What were the lasting effects on your education from the COVID 19 pandemic?

Nicholas: One lasting effect in particular was a gap in my learning actually during my freshman year of high school. I am not a well-rounded student after COVID. I feel like after having many gaps in my English skills mainly, my high school dream freshman year took a large stress on English courses, which I could not use to the fullest, unfortunately, since we went online halfway through the year. This has really impacted me even to this day with the way I write papers and the informalities I use when writing. How about you?

Stephanie: I continue to struggle with chemistry to this day, which as a biology major is not a good thing. Within that class, it was specifically the math within chemistry. I did honors chemistry the year before and did very well with the concepts, but for some reason getting into the more advanced math without having someone there to guide me through it and also no availability for office hours, it was incredibly difficult because based on you being from Carmel, I'm assuming we went to similar high schools. The year previous I had done so well in honors chemistry, but then my grade dropped significantly. And again, as a biology major, it really impacted how much I struggled in my freshman year because I didn't have a good baseline anymore. I wasn't as well rounded in chemistry as I wanted to be. I also ended up having to drop Spanish during the pandemic because of some personal reasons. I had to take extra time off of classes and that was the class that fell through. And that also impacted my college schedule and added a course load that I shouldn't have had to take in college.

Nicholas: So what were, what were some positive impacts that the pandemic had on your educational experience?

Stephanie: I learned that me personally, which is not the case for everybody else, I do very well with my own time management and working asynchronously. I'm very good at keeping myself doing what I'm supposed to be doing, on task when I'm supposed to be doing it, and sometimes even, like, working early. Most subjects I was perfectly fine working on my own, and in some classes my grades were even better due to being online, but it was those certain classes that weren't. It definitely also prepared me for college in a way that nothing else did, because I was kind of running my own schedule. A lot of my teachers would just

tell us at the beginning of the class what we had to do, and then they'd let us go and expect us to do it on our own time. Which, for me, was really awesome, because I was actually working full time during the pandemic. So I was able to go and do my job, and then do the schoolwork when I was able to, which was really amazing for me. And it also prepared me for working in college as well. How about you?

Nicholas: So yeah, actually some surprising positive effects is first, I've noticed how conscious I am towards school. Now I make a very good effort now to be ahead of the game and not need extra assistance. Usually like before the tests and things, the next thing is for sure. For me personally, my study habits definitely actually got better. I learned to study on my own instead of needing someone else to tell me the information and so on like that. I also found, and I've. Kind of discovered like a new way of understanding the material when when you're set up set aside alone instead of someone helping you and directly Telling you when you're alone you just you develop certain ways of understanding the information that better adapt to you and yourself instead of the Professor or something like that.

Stephanie: Alrighty, did the pandemic exacerbate any existing problems in your academic experience? So that could be just within your school the curriculum or anything like that?

Nicholas: For me particularly, yes, there were some serious problems that got worse. It wasn't directly educational, though. It impacted my education, but it was due to the lockdown. My dad, who is from Canada, he couldn't go and see his siblings. And without COVID being in the way, we'd be lucky to see our Canadian siblings once a year, give or take. With COVID, this ended up being three years until we could go to Canada and see them. To make matters worse, during the beginning of the pandemic, my dad's sister contracted lung cancer, so this was my aunt. And she unfortunately passed away in 2021. My dad unfortunately could not visit her, and I could not visit her or even go to the funeral. This really impacted me particularly during my education since I couldn't really focus in school. And I really just wasn't engaged in the learning at the time.

Another problem that also got worse was my job. Not having a job and keeping me active during school really impacted my education since I kind of worked as a referee mainly and for me I played soccer all throughout high school. So, soccer reffing was like kind of my really big hobby and I actually enjoyed it. And eventually they had to let me go because of COVID since there were no more soccer games being like played. So when I was let go, it was like really hard on me since I didn't want to be in school anymore. And then I had nothing to look forward to after school. So, then my attention span in school really struggled big time. What was the biggest challenge you associated with the pandemic?

Stephanie: For me, my biggest personal challenge was definitely personal. Due to the living situation that I had, I lived with my 80-year-old grandmother. So that's why I was not able to go back to school in person because it would, she was very high risk. And because of that, I was always alone in my room, on my computer, and that made it very difficult for me mentally. My mental health really suffered. All of my friends went back in person, or,

because I went to Fishers High School, so like, we're really spread out all around, and so it was very difficult to be able to meet up with people and my friends. I had very little face to face interaction with people except for it was me, my grandma, my mom, and that's it. And so that was really bad for my mental health. And obviously when your mental health is bad, your schoolwork is going to suffer as well. So that was probably my biggest personal challenge. How about you?

Nicholas: Yeah, so for me, I remember my biggest challenge was keeping in touch with friends, very similar, kind of the social aspect like you had. I lost a lot of my freshman friends during quarantining, and I wasn't able to see them. Then, even after the pandemic was not as bad and quarantine restrictions were loosened, things were not the same, I felt like. In school, we were separated six feet and couldn't talk and have a good conversation like we used to. This really took a toll on my social environment in high school. My house, my high school also did something they called hybrid schedule. This was when alphabetically the school was broken in half and one half of the school would be in person while the other half was online at the same time. This schedule flip flopped every day. So it meant the day I was online with one half of the school, the other half of the school was in person. So, I could never, ever see the other half of my school in person and face to face, which added my disconnect with friends.