

Student perspectives: the pros and cons of distance learning

West Contra Costa students reflect on their experiences with distance learning

Student Voices

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Like students throughout California, students in the West Contra Costa Unified school district headquartered in Richmond have been grappling with distance learning instituted in response to the coronavirus pandemic. It is possible or even likely that distance learning will be a prominent part of the school landscape this fall as well. With that in mind, we are bringing you these students' reflections on their experiences with distance learning and being out of school generally — what worked and what didn't. Friday is officially the last day of school in the district, but some of these interviews were conducted earlier this semester. Students' remarks have been edited in some instances for clarity.

Nayeli Mercado, 15, sophomore, Richmond High

Before distance learning, my mental health was never great, but it was controllable. Although, once quarantine started, where we don't go out, I feel way more mentally exhausted. Along with that, I've been really emotional. I get really sad over little things or angry at things I shouldn't get angry about. I used to complain about school a lot but I kind of miss it now. I miss my friends, teachers, attending class. I miss school in general.



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Alizei De Leon, 15, sophomore, Middle College High

I have about the same amount of homework, or maybe a little less since some teachers are trying to make this easier. I also don't have to study as much for tests anymore since some teachers have canceled tests for the rest of the year...I spend about three to four hours on homework per day, unless I've already finished all my work that week. I'm getting through my classes, but I know that I will forget most of this information throughout the summer.

Veronica Contreras, 16, sophomore, De Anza High

What I miss is the support that school actually gives. The way distance learning is set up at De Anza is we have two Zoom

classes every day in which they assign work that is due a week later. On Thursday, we have one class and on Fridays, the Zoom classes are just clubs or extracurriculars that want to have a meeting. I personally feel that I am not learning in these Zoom classes.

Irene Kou, 15, sophomore, De Anza High
It feels like there's more pressure to want to stay silent and even if you do ask for help, most questions are not fully answered due to the lack of the in-person and hands-on experience.

Katherine Henriquez, 19, senior, Richmond High

I feel that I'm not getting as much work done and have fewer resources around me. It makes me feel more stressed because teachers aren't there and you have to wait for their response which might take days because they have other students to respond to as well... I also miss seeing my friends and meeting new people at school.

Edwin Garcia, 17, senior, Richmond High
In the midst of all this chaos and struggle, it's been very hard to stay motivated to do work and keep up with new assignments...Covid-19 also changed the process of enrolling in college as I'm not able to go to the campus for tours or if I need help I can't ask my teachers. Additionally, financially college has also become more frightening because of the financial crisis that's spreading across the world. For now, I'm staying calm but the effects of quarantine are beginning to take a toll on my mental health.

Ricardo Castillo Fierro, 17, senior, Richmond High

Every day, I feel less motivated to do my work. At first, when this distance learning started. I thought the work was going to be easier. Then, as time passed everything just fell apart. I'm behind in all of my classes and it's nearly impossible to catch up. I can't do the work on my own. I want to learn with my classmates. Distance learning changed a lot of things for me. I wasn't able to spend time with my friends and my last year of high school wasn't what I expected at all...It's one of the reasons why I lost motivation in school because we aren't going to be able to graduate on stage.

Yvette Garcia, 18, senior, Richmond High

I lost a part-time job due to the virus. I would work around 24-28 hours a week. I would contribute to my family's expenses by giving \$120 a month for the electricity bill in order to help my family. Not being able to help with the bills makes me feel useless because I know my family needs that extra help...I also just miss being out in public with friends and doing outside activities (and) how it could take my mind off of things and just let me relax a little and enjoy the way things used to be.

Yashika Joshi, 17, senior, Aspire College Prep Academy

Distance learning has been difficult. It's been hard to manage, teaching yourself through assignments...I try to do my work when everybody is asleep at night. If I was at school, I would've learned much more due to a teacher paying more attention. Teachers are assigning work on a daily

basis, with 45 minutes to hour-long assignments for each class, all due at the end of the week. The workload has increased a lot. Some teachers have reached out (checked in) but not often.

Dana Reyes, 18, senior, Middle College High

I am taking both college and high school classes. My classes are all being taught virtually, through email, or through Google Classroom. I have pushed my self-determination to the max and I'm experiencing something very strange. I am still receiving the content but now I have to work twice as hard to understand the material. I sometimes get discouraged and unmotivated but I still try my best to finish early even though teachers and staff have been very flexible and understanding with due dates.

Mekayla Saechao, 16, junior, Richmond High

Distance learning for me so far has been difficult but manageable. Most of my classes consist of completing work that is posted on Google Classroom with a Zoom meeting every other week. I don't believe I'm learning as much as I would have in school because I'm not getting a lesson from my teachers every day. My teachers have helped a lot by answering questions about assignments quickly...To tell you the truth it is a lot to manage since I'm not physically at school working with my classmates and teachers. But being at home in my comfort zone has helped me become more organized with my work.

Jennifer Diaz Lopez, 18, senior, Richmond High

I have been overwhelmed with the amount of work that I receive, which has changed ever since the pandemic began. Most of my classes are being taught through videos. The majority of my teachers upload videos in which they explain the week's assignments, while other teachers upload files and text through Remind. My teachers have only reached out when I ask for extensions. I honestly have not learned anything since classes went virtual, because I'm a student that needs to interact and engage with physical activities.

Olinda Raquel Figueredo Orellana, 14, freshman, Kennedy High

It's been really stressful because most people just want this whole thing to be over and I'm one of them but overall I just feel like it's not going to happen since so many people still go out. Freshman year wasn't what I expected because of the whole social distancing. I mean it kind of ruined the high school experience.

Monishlla Maharaj, 18, senior, Richmond High

Although I have assignments from almost all of my classes every day, almost back to back, I always feel like I can do the work whenever I want to... It's like fighting with my brain daily to do the work or to not do the work. As much as I wouldn't want to do online learning, I know it benefits everyone by preventing them from getting sick from the virus.

Sarahi Yupit, 16, sophomore, Richmond High

It is hard to concentrate at home during distance learning because I don't feel motivated to do the work since there is nobody my age whereas at school I feel motivated..it seems like it's easier to do the tasks and stay on task. There are teachers who teach the actual material. They also motivate you to do your best.

Niya Mason, 16, sophomore, Richmond High

At school, I feel like I was actually learning. But for distance learning, it feels like I am not learning to my full potential. The work definitely keeps me on my toes but I don't feel like I'm learning. When I'm physically at school, it's different since I can ask questions, learn more about the subject and be there in person. However, it just seems like, in online learning, teachers are constantly pushing work. I'm not learning because I am constantly struggling to turn the assignments in on time."