

Directions for your two page spread in your Reader’s Notebook:

1. Read and jot on one page in your Reader’s Notebook. Keep track of thinking as you read.
Non-fiction jot ideas:

*key ideas	*quotes	*questions	*key vocab	*important people	*sketches
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2. Write a full page response to ONE of the prompts at the end of the article or an idea of your choice on the next page in your reader’s notebook. This is your chance to communicate your thinking about one idea.

‘Online School Is Not the End of the World’

Students tell us how they feel about the prospect of returning to the classroom.

By Lora Kelley, Editorial Assistant. *The New York Times* July 25, 2020

We’ve heard from the adults about reopening schools: Teachers have presented safety concerns, politicians have presented political concerns, health experts have presented health concerns, parents have presented parenting concerns, and so on.

But what about the people who will actually be sitting in classrooms (or not) come September?

We wanted to hear directly from the students, so we invited readers to ask their kids how they felt about going back to school, and if they do go back, what precautions they think schools should be taking.

Kids don’t get to set their own bedtimes; there’s a good reason they aren’t determining state reopening timelines. But they do have a lot at stake, and a lot to say. More than 600 parents wrote in on behalf of their children, ages 5 to 17. Overwhelmingly, we heard that students were nervous and confused and in many cases, afraid for themselves, their parents and their teachers.

Many were uninspired by the idea of more remote classes. Online learning “sucks,” said Anthony, 15, “but I’d rather do that than die!”

And yet they also missed their friends and the library and rituals of the classroom. Eugene Koesmadjie, 11, summed it up like this: “What I feel about going to school is that I think it is wonderful.”

Below is a selection of comments from students across the country, presented in their own words. They have been condensed and edited for clarity.

‘After one virus the world has totally turned upside down’

I personally do not think that it is safe to go back to school. Although I love school because it is the best place to enhance my mind in knowledge, I know that after one virus the world has totally turned upside down. Times are really dangerous now because this new virus is killing thousands of people in seconds, even though they don’t feel it until it’s too late. Although there are mixed feeling about this topic, I truly believe that if we continue the distance learning even during the school year, we can gradually cease the flow of the virus.

Online learning is honestly not so bad because it is a way to help us learn while protecting our lives, and during this grave crisis this is the best way to learn. As the schools are starting to reopen, I feel that the teachers and principals should continue doing the distance learning because although this virus is not spreading so much, the pandemic is not over. — *Jediael Chintha, 12, Hanover Park, Ill.*

‘The teachers should make a game out of what we are learning’

I’ll feel sad if the library is closed because of bacteria and germs. All of my teachers have said, “You have a great mind for reading.” Reading is what I do in my free time. Another thing I do is writing stories for fun with my friends.

To make school safer I will want smaller classes. There should be different times for lunch. When going outside, there should be only one or two classes outside at the same time. At the end of the day the teachers should sanitize everything. Teachers and children should wear masks except when we eat. Also, we should only do two days of distant learning and three days of real school. Students should bring their own pencil sharpeners, tissues and sanitizer to school to keep things safer.

Teachers should record what they are teaching. Then they can give the videos to parents if their children don’t understand the lesson. The teachers should make a game out of what we are learning. It can be a fun review so students can learn and have a good time. Students and teachers should have one on one meetings. One on one meetings would help improve their grade if they do it right. Teachers can do their best with games for online learning and sharing screens so it can be fun during this hard time. — *Mia Greene, 9, Philadelphia*

‘I realize that I am extremely lucky to have a computer to learn’

While I wish we could go back to school feeling safe and sure of ourselves, I don’t think it’s a very realistic idea. It is impractical to have teachers be the “mask police” in addition to their teaching responsibilities.

If we were to go back to school, however, I would suggest staggering the number of students on campus each week. Presumably, water fountains would be removed and doors would be kept propped open to help students avoid contact with door handles. Because classrooms would be unable to accommodate as many students, public and outdoor venues such as parks, beaches and amphitheaters could be used to teach students, too.

Online learning has been difficult for me. It is much more challenging to connect with teachers and peers through a screen. But overall, I realize that I am extremely lucky to have a computer to learn with and a quiet space to work in this troubling time. — *Anya Shah, 13, Los Angeles*

‘It is inevitable that I will bring the virus home to my family’

I don’t feel comfortable returning to in-person classes. Living in N.Y.C., between relying on overcrowded public transit lines and school buildings that are undersized for the number of kids they serve, it is inevitable that I will bring the virus home to my family. I don’t see how they can cut the education budget and still hire people to do testing, extra teachers and extra cleaning staff.

I’m typically a pretty antisocial person and even I find online learning very isolating. It’s very hard to meet people online, because typically meeting people in person happens through some shared experience like being at the same table or working on a project together. Those opportunities are no longer available.

I wish they could fund schools better in the first place. I have thought about this a lot but there is no silver bullet. — *Wilson Prieve, 15, Brooklyn*

‘While I am not super worried about dying from the virus, I do not want to get it’

I am not super comfortable returning to class. This is mainly because I do not have confidence that everyone in my area has been in quarantine. While I am not super worried about dying from the virus, I do not want to get it. Also, while I will not go to school without wearing a mask, I find masks hard to breathe in and am not looking forward to long school days in them. However, I acknowledge that health care workers do it every day and really appreciate it.

I think that if everyone in each school isolated for three weeks before school started, and social distanced from all strangers, then the risk of having an outbreak in a school would be pretty low. Masks and distancing in the school should still take place just in case. Americans are not good at giving up their freedom for the greater good. Citizens of the United States will continue to get sick with Covid-19 until there is a vaccine. That is just the sad truth.

Online school is not the end of the world. It has turned out to be mediocre. Some teachers adapt well, while others do the bare minimum. But I can’t say that isn’t true with in-person school. Some teachers and classes are better than others. Overall, I would say that online school is comparable to in person. The main difference is that after-school activities and electives are not the same.— *Oliver Stockman, 16, Swarthmore, Pa.*

‘I will only get to attend school once a week’

Being a senior was something that I’ve looked forward to since my freshman year. Taking the hardest classes, having a spot in the senior parking lot and being able to get the best out of high school all in one year. Now, many of the typical “back to school” activities like homecoming, senior fun day and painting cars are no longer able to take place. My school has over 2,000 students in attendance, with about 500 kids per grade. This large number of students means that I will only get to attend school once a week in person, and with a group of people grouped by last name.

The portion of my junior year that I did complete through e-learning was not the worst experience. Teachers made assignments on Google classroom (our learning platform) and students had to complete the assignment by 11:59 p.m. on the day it was due. To me, this made life much easier, as I got to wake up much later and actually get sleep, as well as have time to eat. This made for a much easier school year. Although my senior year experience is affected, I feel as though I will be less stressed overall and be safe at the same time, which is all that one can ask for through a pandemic. — *Riya Goel, 16, West Orange, N.J.*

Possible Response Ideas (see the directions at the top of the article):

- What are your thoughts about returning to school? WCS just released the plan. Are you planning to return to school or do the virtual school for a semester or more? Explain.
- Pick a word/line/passage from the article and respond to it.
- Discuss a writing technique or strategy used by the editor in this piece that you think is good/interesting. Explain.
- Respond in your own way. Be creative! Write a poem, news article, comic strip, etc.