

Students Worry About School Reopening



Barlow classroom set up for limited seating and social distancing. — Chloe Rozendaal
Photo

When Joel Barlow High School closed in March, most students expected to return after a two-week vacation. Five months later, students are unsure if school will ever return to normal and seniors are wondering if they will get any aspect of the last year they envisioned.

The current plan for reopening has the student body divided alphabetically, with only two days of in-person instruction out of five for the first four weeks. With some colleges shutting down one week into the fall semester, student and parent confidence in returning fully to school has diminished.

“I think that four weeks will keep getting extended like quarantine was,” said senior Reese Costenbader.

Senior Rene Itah said, “I honestly don’t believe that splitting the kids up by last name makes any sense. Nothing short of fully online learning can keep everyone safe.” In order to prevent an outbreak, Itah also said “the school needs to make sure that students feel comfortable staying homesick.”



Barlow hallway divided for social distancing. — Chloe Rozendaal Photo

Even with social distancing and face coverings, will the virus still spread when students are in close quarters? The fear of a mass outbreak is further complicated by the fact that many youths can be asymptomatic carriers who pass along the virus to unknowing family members or school staff.

“I think once schools reopen, cases will surge again with everyone being in the same building,” Reese said.

“Every day staff will enter the school to work and be at the mercy of the lowest common denominator,” said Alisha Gorder, parent of Barlow junior Anya Gorder. “It’s a tremendous leap of faith for all of us.”

Aside from Covid-19 worsening, the fast approaching flu season prompts further

concern. According to Johns Hopkins Medicine, the 2019-2020 flu season had 39 million cases and 24,000 deaths. Assuming that vaccine numbers remain the same, how many will shrug off potential Covid-19 symptoms as being the flu or a cold, and how many will report flu symptoms as Covid-19? How will hospitals manage this tsunami of patients? The upcoming flu outbreak compounds the likelihood of a return to distance learning.

“Everyone gets sick during flu season, ” said Anya, who will start the school year completely online. “Add Covid and it just gets bigger.”

Another of the many unknowns racing through the minds of students is the prospect of a second wave. Historically, as with the 2009 H1N1 virus and the 1918 Spanish flu, colder weather brings an onslaught of new cases. It is also still unknown if a person can get Covid-19 twice, which could exacerbate the second wave.

“I definitely expect a second wave, but I hope we’ll be more prepared this time around,” said senior Chloe Rozendaal.

Barlow students will come back to school on Sept. 8 starved for social interaction. After months of not seeing classmates in-person, enforcing social distancing guidelines seems to be an impossible task.

“A lot of kids won’t take this seriously,” said Chloe. “Everyone my age thinks they either won’t get symptoms or they’ll recover quickly.”

“People are socializing in large groups already,” said Anya. “We need our friends. We need to socialize. I want to see my teachers and interact with them and have real conversations. That’s just gone.”

The overall mindset of invincibility among young people will likely result in a defiance of social distancing during school.

In response to the question of whether or not students will ever fully return to school, Rene sums up the student perspective: “I really don’t know. It all depends on how responsible people will be in terms of getting tested and staying home if they’re sick.”

As summer winds down and the first day of school inches closer, students have much more than first-day jitters to worry about. Regardless of the school year pans out, however, one thing is certain: Students will adapt and persevere.