

How does the end of the 2019-2020 school year compare to the start of this school year?

As a result of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, many aspects of everyday life are being adjusted to keep people safe and in compliance with the [Center for Disease Control and Prevention](#) guidelines. In today's world, it is now normal to never leave your house without a mask and hand sanitizer, as well as actively participate in social distancing.

In an effort to lower the number of COVID-19 cases and prevent overburdened hospitals, many places where large crowds could gather have since been closed down, including concert venues, movie theaters and schools. Instead of attending in-person schooling, many districts have shifted to online learning through sites like Zoom, [Microsoft Teams](#) and Canvas, all online platforms that support educational institutions.

For students at [Marjory Stoneman Douglas High Schools](#), Friday, March 13, was the last official day of physical school they attended for the 2019-2020 school year. Since it was the week before spring break, many students were under the assumption that they would simply be getting an extra week of break. Little did students know, online school would continue for the rest of the school year and into the 2020-21 school year.

Students began virtual school on Monday, March 30, after spring break. Students were told that school was going to remain the same and be structured as similar to physical school. However, it turned out to be very different from the last school year.

The start time for school is now 8:30 a.m. instead of 7:40 a.m., which allowed students time to sleep in. The end of school changed from 2:40 p.m. to 3:10 p.m.

The first online class of this school year was held on Teams and was extremely strange for students and teachers alike since nobody had used Teams before. Everyone was trying to figure out how to work Teams and understand how classes were going to work from then on.

While some students thought that the teachers would be required to host live meetings for their classes every day over Zoom, not many teachers ended up having live sessions at all.

When a live session was held, it was rarely ninety minutes long and was predominantly used as a forum for students to ask questions about the upcoming work rather than a lecture.

During the switch to online learning, teachers assigned far more homework than they did in physical school. However, some students claimed that there was not much instruction for any of the given assignments, and quickly became agitated.

“The teachers put out a lot more work last year since we have switched from online school to regular school and I became frustrated very quickly,” junior Michelle Keane said.

As the second semester of the 2019-2020 school year continued online, the instruction and the work that was given is discouraging for some teachers and students . Nearing the end of the school year, many students were trying to finish the year with good grades, instead of trying to learn.

“Last [school] year was easier since I knew what my classes were like and the type of work I needed to do in person, but I quickly became unmotivated to do school since the teachers did not help us figure the work out,” sophomore Emma Betancourt said.

Compared to online learning last school year, the structure of online learning for the 2020-21 school year is altered completely. Every teacher has an easy to navigate Canvas page and students follow a continuous schedule and move from one meeting to the next, with five minutes of break time in between.

Before school started, the administration began reaching out to parents on tips and tricks their students can use to have a successful year in the form of tutorial videos.

Students started school on Wednesday, Aug.19, and began first period at 8:30 a.m. Students log onto Canvas and then Microsoft Teams to join their classes. Many students were hesitant about the shift from Zoom to Microsoft Teams for the live classes, and many students did not adapt quickly to Teams and seem to not like it more because it is harder to use.

“Personally, I do not like Teams as much as Zoom because it is harder to use and to operate. Zoom lets us see more people clearly, while Teams only shows a few,” sophomore Morgan Fink said.

The school day starts off with period 1 or 5 for 90 minutes before getting a short break of five minutes. After attending period 2 or 6, there is a thirty-minute lunch break. To finish off the day, students attend periods 3 or 7 and 4 or 8, and at 3:10 p.m. the school day is complete. This schedule is well-liked by many students, however, some consider the 30 minute lunch period too short for their liking.

“A thirty-minute lunch is way too short because we are on our computers for three hours before lunch and we need a longer break before our next class starts,” Betancourt said.

This school year, Canvas is also utilized very differently. It contains each class' agenda for the entire first nine weeks and has all assignments visibly laid out. According to students at MSD, the Canvas is much easier to navigate and is more organized than last school year.

Although it is only the third week of school, most students have noticed how the workload is much lighter compared to last school year.

“Last year was more chill and easy, while this year is a lot more structured,” senior Josh Kramer said.

The workload is more dispersed, and teachers are assigning deadlines more ahead of time than they did last year. Teachers are giving students more time to do assignments and are understanding that students are learning how to manage this version of school at their own pace.

This year, the administration has prepared and educated their teachers with their expectations for online learning. Throughout the summer, the staff attended training given by administration in order to effectively prepare them.

“Administration has been very supportive in the development of the online learning curriculum and they’ve provided tons of resources for teachers to utilize their own planning,” English teacher Kristen Coniff said. “We were able to prepare more effectively rather than having to react to circumstances out of our control.”

Overall, the end of the 2019-2020 school year was a rather difficult and confusing time for students and teachers alike, as they quickly switched from in-person schooling to sitting behind a screen for hours at a time. Therefore, the staff and administration has strived to make the start of the 2020-21 school year much more navigable and more structured.