

COVID-19'S EFFECT ON WORKING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

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Photo by Kayla Alexandre

It was the middle of March, and sophomore Sophia Lamar had a tough decision to make. COVID-19 cases were rising, and she had to decide whether to quit her job at Publix or continue to work during a pandemic. The sophomore had been working at Publix for almost a year but was worried about her family's safety, especially her grandparents. Lamar loved her job, so she decided to give it a try and stay at first, however, she ended up quitting in the beginning of October.

Like Lamar, many other working high school students have been affected by the pandemic. Some have quit their jobs, while others' pay, work hours, and schedules have been affected.

"When COVID[-19] first started happening, and I was still working, I was still 14, so I could only work two and a half hours after school no matter what," Lamar said. "I did start to get scheduled a little bit more for shifts because so many people had called out."

Lamar's schedule became unpredictable, and she didn't know when she would be called in. Senior Liam Swanson had a similar experience with his employer, Sola Bistro and Wine Bar, in Park Avenue until he quit in August.

"The restaurant wasn't making a lot of money," Swanson said. "There was not enough money with the restaurant to hire new employees, so it affected my work, and I had to work long hours."

The restaurant was struggling, and it only had two employees, Swanson and a chef, which meant the senior took care of all the shifts from Wednesday to Sunday.

Unlike Swanson, senior Cole Best now works fewer hours due to the pandemic. Best is employed by Winter Park Bounce, a company that provides bounce houses for children's parties.

"Last summer, I was working Saturdays and Sundays all day, every day, and we were just slammed with business," senior Cole Best said. "But right at the beginning of COVID[-19], business went down a lot, so a lot of people

haven't been able to get as much work, including me."

Best has worked for Winter Park Bounce for about a year and a half now and with less demand, his pay has decreased.

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- Cole Best, Senior

demands cut his pay down significantly. Like Best, Swanson's pay also went down during the pandemic.

"When there's not many people in the restaurant, I don't make very good tips," Swanson said. "There were some days when nobody wanted to go out, and I wouldn't make anything."

Swanson was paid minimum wage plus tips, so working hard and not getting paid much was difficult for him. Pay hasn't been the only

"My pay at first actually went down a lot," Best said. "I was making about half in a day what I usually would because of the amount of demand."

Best said that his pay relies on the number of units they deliver, so the cancellations and

thing affecting student workers; Lamar said that new safety precautions have also made it hard for the workers to connect with their customers.

"As somebody who works there, you want to be nice to your customers," Lamar said. "You can't always talk to them if you're passing by, but a smile is usually helpful and...not seeing the smile under the mask is definitely different."

Best and Lamar both said they understand that the safety precautions are necessary, but they still find them stressful to do each day. Even with all these challenges, all the students believe that their jobs will help them in the future and give them helpful skills for later in life.

"The thing I hope to learn from my job would probably be that to be successful, and to make a living and be happy, you're going to have to work hard for it," Best said. "Nothing is going to be given to you, so [I am] hoping to just learn these basic working skills and work ethic."



Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, many have decided to quit their jobs to attempt to keep their families and themselves safe. Publix has protected their employees by putting up plexi-glass screens and adding sanitizers to their registers.