

School online puts student rights on the line

KASEY LIU

“Turn on your camera,” your teacher says. Whether or not you feel comfortable with this, you may wonder, “Can they force me to turn my camera on?” The simple answer is yes.

Many policies, such as the use of cameras and microphones, recording classes, and taking attendance cause students to feel uneasy. While the policies implemented are formally allowed, there are some limiting factors.

In Article 14.5 of the California Education Code, the California Distance Learning Policy states, “Distance learning may include video or audio instruction in which the primary mode of communication between pupil and instructor is instructional television, video, telecourses, or any other instruction that relies on computer or communications technology.”

The use of “video or audio instruction” may vary from school to school, but for Carlmont, teachers are officially allowed to require cameras to be on, according to Principal Ralph Crame.

“The best practice is that the videos be on, so we can require that,” Crame said.

So technically, teachers are allowed to force the use of cameras and microphones on Zoom. However, this may not be the morally responsible action for teachers to take.

In a poll asking Carlmont students about their comfort level with the usage of cameras, only 16.7% of those surveyed reported that they felt completely comfortable with turning cameras on.

Lotus Tang, a sophomore, shares this sentiment.

“I don’t like having my camera on. Sometimes I have to go to the bath-

room, and it doesn’t make sense for teachers to make me keep my camera on when I’m going to the bathroom,” said Tang.

Some teachers, such as physics teacher Gregory Fung, are quite understanding of such student circumstances.

“It’s important to respect student privacy. I think it’s my job as a kind person to be flexible to those who have situations where they’re not ready to be seen on screen, or for everyone to see their whole rooms,” Fung said.

Despite their flexibility, teachers still strive for the contact with students gained through visual meetings. According to Crame, teachers choose their profession largely to have exchanges with their students. During distance learning, when connections are hard to form, the use of cameras helps to lessen the gap between teachers and students.

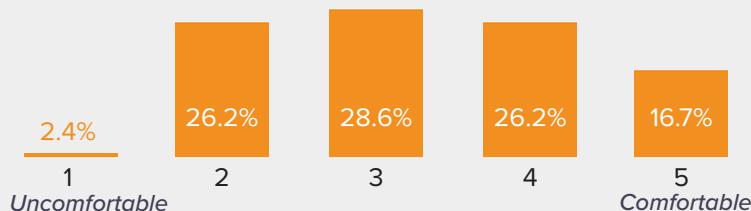
However, for students who don’t feel comfortable with using video conferencing, Crame suggests making your own video invisible to yourself so that you aren’t constantly distracted by your appearance.

“I think as young adults it’s important to be comfortable with who you are and comfortable with yourself because beyond high school, colleges and other industries are going to require video conferencing like this,” said Crame.

However, if a student feels unbearably uncomfortable with using their camera, Crame recommends having a discussion with your teachers.

“There will always be a way to accommodate whatever it might be,” Crame said.

How comfortable are you turning on your camera?*



How comfortable are you using your microphone?*



*42 students surveyed

FAQs

Seona Sherman

“How lenient should teachers be with testing?”

In Article 14.5 of the California Education Code, the California Distance Learning Policy states, “the state should ensure that the same standards are applied to distance learning for course and program quality, course content, pupil achievement levels, and coherence of curriculum that are currently applied for those purposes to traditional classroom instruction at public educational institutions.”

This implies that teachers should maintain the level of strictness that they normally would, even for tests. However, Crame disagrees, explaining that teachers’ leniency and policies are subject to change.

“Teachers are adapting, and they’re taking account of what’s best for them and what they’re looking for in a given assessment,” Crame said.

Varun Avari Kapoor

“What is the official camera and microphone policy?”

“The official video policy is that the cameras are required to be turned on,” Crame said.

However, as described in the article, many teachers are flexible and are encouraged to make accommodations for their students.

Due to distractions such as dogs barking or family conversations, Crame expresses that the microphone policy is slightly different.

“Usually teachers are asking students to be muted until they’re going to speak, because there might be background noise,” Crame said.

Nicole Marengo

“How are teachers supposed to take attendance?”

Crame states that teachers are allowed to take attendance based on if they see you and if you have your camera on.

“That’s really the only way to verify you’re actually on the other end of the computer and not out playing with a dog or making dinner,” Crame said.

Aiden Abrari

“Are teachers allowed to record Zoom meetings? What do teachers do with the class meeting recordings?”

According to Crame, teachers are allowed to record class meetings at any time, and do not need permission from students or parents. Many students have concerns with teachers recording everything.

“Having recorded sessions of everyday class just takes away people’s privacy and makes them feel unsafe, especially since the online platform is so open and untrustworthy,” Seona Sherman, a junior, said.

While teachers are allowed to document meetings, they are not allowed to publicly post the recordings. They can only publish the recordings on Canvas because it is a password-protected page that students have access to.

“Teachers use the recording to self reflect on how they are doing. It serves as a record of what they covered and they can go back and refer to if needed. It can also benefit students who may have missed the class,” Crame said.



KASEY LIU