

National

THE FREAKOUT OVER

MASKS IN SCHOOL

BY ELISE CRAIG



Protesters before the start of a school board meeting in Marietta, Ga., in August. Arguments rage on across the country on whether to require masks in schools.

The school year has barely begun, but there has been a lot of fighting over mask mandates in schools ... by adults. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommends universal masking in K-12 schools. But that hasn't stopped schools from becoming a cultural battleground where parents, teachers, administrators and even government officials fight about whether kids should wear them. Sometimes they even get physical. In August, an Austin, Texas, parent ripped a mask off a teacher's face. In Las Vegas, police had to respond

to a school-board meeting that became too contentious. And in Sutter Creek, Calif., a parent allegedly hit a teacher in a mask-related dispute. It has been very dramatic. But what do the actual subjects of the mask mandates — or lackthereof — think about the whole thing?

Gracie Keuhner, 13, of Seminole, Okla., has been surprised by how controversial the issue has been. "I thought people would be more civilized when they talk about it," she says. "I wish everyone would calm down a bit." Though Oklahoma's governor has prohibited mask mandates in the state, Gracie and most of her classmates have chosen to wear one

anyway. "It's really just about saving lives," she says. "It shouldn't be too big of a deal."

Nora Sanchez, 11, of Corpus Christi, Texas, sees it differently. She finds that masks get in the way of her in-school speech therapy. "I think it should be up to the kids, since it's their own body," she says. Though Nora's school district does require masks, her parents have allowed her to opt out, and she is now the only student in her class who doesn't wear one.

When Owen S., 10, of Tampa, Fla., started summer school last month, he was one of the only kids in his school to wear a mask. After a couple of weeks of

in-person class, Owen's school district decided to put a mask mandate in place despite an executive order by Florida's governor, Ron DeSantis, against them. His mom was one of several parents who sued the governor, arguing that the executive order was unconstitutional and put their children at risk — and they won.

Though all three students have heard about parents fighting over masks, none of them have heard criticism from their classmates about their choices. "Maybe grown-ups think masking is really bad for kids and affecting them so much, but it's not that bad," Owen says. "It's not going to ruin our lives. It's fine." ♦

HOW I BECAME A

FIREFIGHTER



BY CAPT. PARKER WILBOURN

AS A KID, I wanted to be a firefighter or a police officer, but I didn't know how to do it. I didn't have the grades or the money for college, so when I got out of high school I decided to join the Air Force. I served for four years, and I considered making it my career. But I still wanted to be a firefighter.

I went to community college, which the military paid for, and got my emergency medical technician license. E.M.T.s can work on ambulances and provide basic medical care, like CPR. Then I started volunteering at firehouses and applied to the regional fire academy in Sacramento. To get in, you have to pass a written test and a physical test, in which you do things like go through an obstacle course while carrying a chain saw and use a stair-stepper while wearing a 70-pound weighted vest. I passed, and after I finished the fire academy, I went to paramedic school, which a lot of firehouses require. Paramedics can provide a higher level of care than EMTs, including giving people medicine and administering IVs. After all that, I was picked up as a firefighter by the Sacramento Metropolitan Fire District.

Ten years later, I'm a captain who runs a firehouse. I get there at 7 a.m., and I check to make sure my gear is ready for the day, that batteries are charged and that we have an adequate air supply. Then we go on calls: house fires, plane crashes — any incident that requires help. We're essentially problem solvers. We also go to every major wildfire in the state of California, including the recent Caldor fire. Our role might be preparing properties for a fire coming their way by doing fuel reduction — hosing down roofs, removing pine needles — or hitting the fire lines directly with hoses.

I'm at a point where I don't get scared, but there are certain things you'll never forget. I was sitting on the road the other day, looking at flames 150 to 200 feet high in the air in front of me, and it makes you feel small. You have to have respect for Mother Nature. *Interview by Elise Craig*

ALERT YOUR PARENTS: THEY'RE ALREADY LATE ON THEIR

HOLIDAY SHOPPING

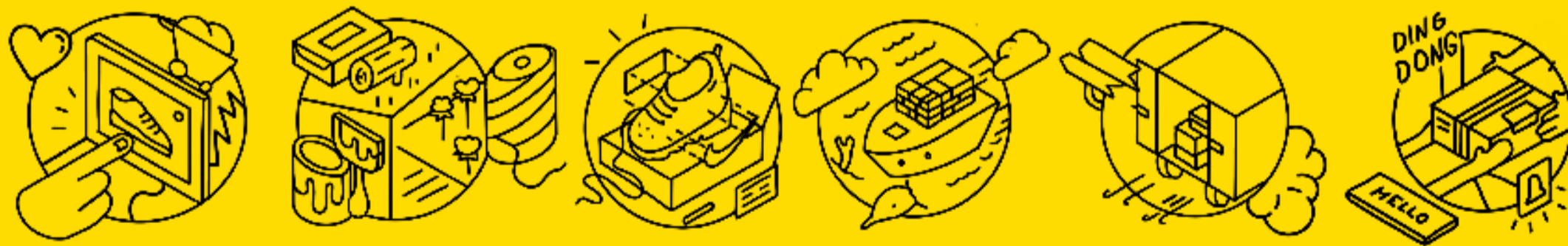
BY DEBORAH B. SOLOMON · ILLUSTRATION BY ANA CUNA

IF YOU HAVE ORDERED ANYTHING ONLINE LATELY — whether it's a new bike, a pair of sneakers or a laptop — you may have noticed: Everything is taking a really long time to arrive at your door. And you have the pandemic to thank.

Everything we buy goes through what's known as a "supply chain"

— a series of interconnected actions that involve dozens, sometimes hundreds, of companies and countries working together to ensure that you get what you want, when you want it. The process is usually seamless. But the pandemic has thrown the global supply chain for a loop. About 90 percent of the things we order are made in Asia, where

a lot of factories have shut down to keep their workers safe (and many still haven't returned to work). Now, getting things made and delivered is taking a lot longer, and certain items, like toys and computers, are more expensive because it costs more to make them. Here's how a typical supply chain works now, and where the chain is breaking.

**1. YOU PLACE AN ORDER FOR A BIKE, SNEAKERS OR A LAPTOP**

People have been doing a lot of shopping while stuck at home during the pandemic. Before the pandemic, we got our stuff pretty quickly once we ordered it, because companies stored big supplies of products in warehouses or were able to have things made quickly. But the pandemic has forced factories around the world to periodically shut down in order to keep their workers safe, and many people still haven't returned to work. All that means companies no longer have big inventories on hand.

2. THE MANUFACTURER GATHERS MATERIALS

Bikes need rubber for tires, aluminum for the frame and various types of plastics and metals for brakes and other parts. Shoes need foam for the sole, and plastic all over. A manufacturer must find suppliers who make and sell these raw materials. Then the manufacturers use the materials to create parts of your item. One bike manufacturer may use as many as 50 different suppliers to create brakes, wheels, grips, pedals and other parts. But this process has slowed now that so many manufacturers have shut down.

3. YOUR ORDER IS ASSEMBLED

Once manufacturers have all the parts, they must put them together in factories. But the pandemic has slowed this process too. For example, a Covid outbreak this summer in Vietnam forced large factories to shut down, delaying the assembly of shoes for big companies like Adidas and Nike.

4. IT GETS ON A BOAT

Your item will be sent to the United States on a giant container ship. Usually, it takes two to three weeks for the ships to arrive. But ports where boats depart in Asia are busy, and there are fewer containers available. One of China's biggest ports, Ningbo, also shut down for nearly two

weeks this August after a worker tested positive for the coronavirus. Now, it can take up to 12 weeks for a ship to get to the United States from Asia, says Robert Handfield, a business professor at North Carolina State University.

5. IT'S TAKEN TO A WAREHOUSE

Once the boat docks at a port, giant cranes put those containers onto trucks. Those trucks bring those items to huge warehouses or distribution centers, where they will be sorted and labeled. This process is slower because of boat traffic at American ports, also caused by the huge number of orders as well as a shortage of truck drivers.

6. IT FINALLY ARRIVES AT YOUR HOME

When your package leaves the warehouse or distribution center, it is put on another truck (or multiple trucks) and then delivered to your house. During the pandemic, many delivery companies have had trouble keeping up with the number of orders. The Postal Service also increased its prices for postage.

All of these delays stand to have a big effect on holiday shopping this year. We may not get our stuff on time, and we're going to have to pay more. Handfield's advice: "If you want it, you better order it now." So start making that wish list. ♦