



EMMAUS HIGH SCHOOL

# THE STINGER

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Tents are set up with space for vaccine recipients to drive through and receive the vaccination without leaving their car.  
Photo by Alice Adams.

A medical professional leans through a car window in order to administer a COVID-19 vaccine. Vaccine recipients were required to stay in their car throughout the process. Photo by Alice Adams.

## COVID VACCINES BEGIN ROLLOUT ACROSS LEHIGH VALLEY

Kristen Heilenman  
Editor-in-Chief  
Belle Lees  
News Editor

When the COVID-19 vaccine became available, Emmaus High School track and field coach Kami Reinhard jumped at the chance to receive both doses of the Moderna vaccine.

Reinhard, a physical therapist for Lehigh Valley Health Network, received one of the 600,000 full doses that were administered in the Lehigh Valley by late February. Another 1.5 million residents received partial doses, according to the PA Department of Health. Currently, the state is in stage 1A, meaning the vaccine is being distributed to healthcare professionals, essential workers, and high-risk individuals: people who provide services to the elderly or have specific health concerns.

Along with being a physical therapist, Reinhard was “redeployed” to Lehigh Valley Hospital between March and June to work with COVID-19 patients. She witnessed firsthand the consequences of contracting the virus.

“That experience showed me the severity of COVID and what can happen because I saw people of all ages be affected, and how quickly it can affect people’s lives,” Reinhard said.

After her experience working in the hospital, Reinhard knew that she would get the vaccine as soon as possible, to protect both herself and others.

“When the vaccine came out, I mean, immediately I said I would get it because, not so much even for me, but just to protect other people,” Reinhard explained. “...I want to make sure I don’t pass it on to anybody else and to families. And even though they don’t know 100 percent yet if getting the vaccine will prevent it, it’s just one step closer, so I felt that I should take that step.”

Though many people have concerns about receiving the vaccine, Reinhard was very confident in her decision to get it.

“I’ve been following the research,” Reinhard said. “I trust the science behind it, and at this point, what I’ve seen, is it’s 100 percent effective in preventing a severe [case], you know, like a hospitalization COVID illness.”

Several other members of the EHS community have also received the vaccine; senior Emma Ferraro is one of them. Ferraro received both doses of the Pfizer-BioTech vaccine, as she works in a retirement home. The opportunity to be vaccinated was presented to all of her fellow employees. Ferraro was exposed to COVID, but never

tested positive nor experienced any symptoms.

According to Ferraro, the process to receive the vaccine was fairly easy.

“Since it was offered to all employees, all I had to do was sign up for a time slot and get the dose on the day they were administering where I work,” Ferraro said. “I wasn’t that nervous going into getting the vaccine. I knew I definitely wanted to get it. I feel very strongly about doing my part in trying to help overcome this pandemic.”

Vaccinating students is more complicated because some of the vaccines are not approved for children. The Pfizer vaccine should only be used for people 16 and older, and the Moderna vaccine should not be given to individuals under 18.

On Feb. 27, the Federal Drug Administration approved a new vaccine developed by Johnson & Johnson. The one-dose vaccine is approved for people 18 and older. Recently, there has also been a growing availability of doses of the J&J vaccine for teachers within EPSD.

While both the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines were developed using the same mRNA technology, they differ in two main areas: the time between the first and second dose, and the age of individuals in their studies.

“The reason why Pfizer can give it to students who are younger is because their studies included younger students, where the Moderna ones did not,” EHS school nurse Tracy Miller said. “So that’s the reason why theirs is approved for 16 and older. They’ve already done the research on teenagers, where Moderna has not.”

Senior Rachel Knappenberger is another student who received the vaccine because it was offered to everyone at her job. Knappenberger works at the Lehigh Valley Eye Center in Allentown, assisting with “tech work” and filing. Initially, she believed that she would be one of the last people to receive the vaccine due to her age, so she set out to get the vaccine as soon as it was offered, receiving her first dose on Dec. 30 and her second dose on Jan. 20.

“I was like ‘I’m never going to get the COVID vaccine. I’m not. I’m 17 years old. They’re not going to provide me [with] it until it’s like everyone can get it,’” Knappenberger said. “...[But] my work was like, ‘we want you guys to get the COVID vaccine, and it’s available for all people who work [here].’ I was like, ‘what better opportunity to get it.’”

Everyone in Knappenberger’s family has already been vaccinated: her dad and grandparents received the Moderna vaccine, and Knappenberger and her mother

received the Pfizer vaccine.

“We were all very much like, ‘the second we can get the vaccine, we’re going to get it,’” Knappenberger explained.

According to the PA Department of Health, common side effects of the vaccine include pain and swelling at the injection site, chills, tiredness, and headaches. However, Reinhard did not experience any of these effects.

“Not a one,” Reinhard confessed. “It was very odd. I don’t know why ... My husband got the same [vaccine], and the second shot for him, he was very ill [after] the second shot. But I didn’t have any, and I’m not sure why, but I’m lucky.”

Like Reinhard, Ferraro had minimal side effects after being vaccinated.

“A minor side effect of both doses was just soreness in the arm that I had the shot,” Ferraro said. “However, after the second dose I did have more of a reaction to the shot in that my body was sore and I felt pretty weak and tired the day after I got the shot. But it only lasted for that one day.”

While Knappenberger did not have any side effects associated with the first shot, she did experience some side effects after her second shot.

“My second dose of the vaccine, the next day, I had a couple aches and pains and a little bit of nausea. It was 12 hours after I got my shot, and then it lasted for 12 hours,” Knappenberger described. “And then, after that, I was like, ‘I’m completely fine, that was really strange.’ ‘Cause it was not like I was getting progressively better, but just feeling bad, feeling bad, [then] I’m all good.”

Based on research studies and observations, Miller links the presence of side effects to exposure to COVID-19.

“Oftentimes people who are not feeling well [after they receive the vaccine] have been exposed to COVID — knowingly or unknowingly,” Miller said. “...They are the ones who feel the crummiest after the second — and it’s usually the second dose.”

Miller encourages everyone to be vaccinated, even if they have already been exposed and the possibility of feeling unwell is present.

“Fear of not feeling well for a day should not deter people from being vaccinated,” Miller said. “We are never going to achieve herd immunity without getting the majority of the population vaccinated.”

*Continued on page 2*



# News

## Vaccine rollout grows

Continued from page 1

In general, Ferraro sees the benefits to the COVID vaccines and is thankful she was able to receive hers and do her part to “stop the spread.” Knappenberger is also grateful for her opportunity to receive the vaccine and encourages “anyone who gets the chance” to “go get it.”

Miller advocates for all students to

continually rethink the safety of their day-to-day activities.

“You’ve got to really rethink little things like sleepovers, and socializing without masks,” Miller said. “I have had several students transmit the disease during sleepovers. I think that people are on their guard when they’re in the building, and they’re off their guard when they’re at home and with their friends.”

One thing Miller recognizes is the lack of spread among students and teachers, showing the success of EHS’ hybrid model.

“There has been no student-to-staff transmission that I know of, and there has been only a few cases of student-to-student transmission, and there has been no staff-to-student transition in the building that I know of,” Miller said. “All of the transmission in the

school has been when social distancing is not or cannot be followed, so following the rules on social distancing, masks, and hygiene is still very important.”

For all seniors planning to attend college next year, Miller urges getting vaccinated due to possibly unforeseen circumstances with roommates.

“You could be living with a partyer, or someone who doesn’t follow the guidelines, you don’t know,” Miller said. “Students living in congregate living spaces are in group 1B, so it looks like seniors will be able to get vaccinated before they go to college in August.”

Ferraro hopes everyone will, at the very least, think about getting the vaccine in order to protect themselves and others.

“My overall feeling about the vaccine is positive,” Ferraro said. “I feel very lucky in that I had a good experience being able to get it. I think everyone who is able to get the vaccine should most definitely consider it. In the long run it is an important step in trying to help end this pandemic so we can all get back to normal, and also keep ourselves and our loved ones safe.”



Stations are set up throughout the site to accommodate multiple cars at once in order to increase efficiency. Photo by Alice Adams.

## COVID-19 difficulties cause fluctuations in EPSD support staff employment

Greta Miller  
Features Editor  
Heather Fabritze  
News Editor

The coronavirus pandemic has affected employment for school district workers across the Lehigh Valley — none more so than the East Penn School District’s aides and support staff.

Due to prolonged school closures in spring 2020, the reopening of schools last fall, and reallocation of staff to support hybrid instruction at the elementary schools, Emmaus High began the 2020-21 school year with nearly eight to 10 vacancies in staff. The number of applicants for these positions, particularly special education instructional assistants, has declined, leaving the Human Resources Department with minimum candidates despite mass job loss during the pandemic.

“There were positions that were particularly hard [to fill] — if we would post for a special education instructional assistant, we might have a handful of candidates that were possible,” said Dr. Kate Kieres, principal of EHS. “Now, we have some of those positions that have been perpetually open because we just still cannot fill them.”

Despite the turnover rate for staff members being nearly identical to previous years, East Penn employees were eligible to take a paid leave of absence under the CARES Act. Staff members could take two weeks — or 80 hours — of paid leave at two-thirds of their normal hourly wage to cover childcare needs, quarantine due to contracting COVID-19, or other conditions related to the pandemic. An additional 10 weeks of paid leave could be allocated in order to further meet those needs. Despite expiring at the end of 2020, this form of leave was used by some staff members in EHS, although the exact number is unavailable to the public.

Sandy Emerich, who became the Interim Human Resources Officer at Emmaus in July 2020, finds that the turnover rate at the beginning of this school year would have been “natural” in past years, despite several resignations due to COVID-19.

“We do have some staff that did opt to resign in light of COVID,” Emerich said.

“I wouldn’t say that it was an overwhelming number of staff or even a high number of staff. But we did have some that, you know, once again, looked at their situation and then made the decision to resign.”

Of the staff members who resigned, the majority were what could be considered support staff: food service workers, instructional assistants, and, of course, aides. The resignations resulted from a variety of issues, although a primary reason was childcare. COVID-19 has made it difficult for parents with young children on remote schedules to work on a regular, or even hybrid, basis, without worrying about finding other stable childcare options. Other reasons, such as finding jobs closer to home or simply desiring a larger salary, are also potential incentives for resignations this school year.

EHS has neither lowered nor substantially raised the pay of any of its employees during the coronavirus pandemic. While Kieres believes that benefits and higher salaries would make a difference in encouraging applicants, she is not sure the demand could be met, regardless.

“I would think that there are districts that offer salary and benefits to people in positions like this, but I’m not qualified enough to say whether it makes a substantial difference in the size of their applicant pool,” Kieres said. “We have wonderful, wonderful people who do these jobs. But there aren’t enough people out there for the demand for the positions, for sure.”

Emerich also presents the theory that potential applicants could be drawn more toward the safety and stability of remaining in a previous position over searching for new employment.

“I think with the uncertainty that COVID created this year, even if people had that thought that maybe they would like to look for a position in another district, they decided to stay where

they were because there was stability,” Emerich said. “...Rather than going into an unknown situation. And so it was just the security [of] kind of staying where you were.”

Despite most people getting some sense of stability from working in the same place with familiar people, not much else has remained constant for those who work in schools. EHS, as Kieres describes, was forced to “reinvent” their safety procedures in face of the pandemic, many of which have a heavy influence on how the support staff do their jobs. Aides, janitorial staff, food workers, and instructional support, however, have done their part in ensuring that the transition is as smooth as possible for students.

Kieres, reflecting on the difficulties staff shortages have prompted, credits the importance of the school’s support staff in day-to-day school life.

“And I think that’s one thing that this pandemic has really highlighted, not just in our district, but everywhere, is the really vital role that support staff members play in being able to run a school,” Kieres said. “Not just from — I mean certainly from a staffing perspective — but when we think about our special education instructional assistants, these are the folks who are one-on-one assistance for students who need an adult with them all throughout the entire school day. They are a huge, huge vital part in providing an appropriate education for students.”



Aides interact with students under new COVID-19 procedures. Photo by Meliha Anthony.

## Kindly, Krissy

### FINDING ENTHUSIASM IN AN OLD PRACTICE

Kristen Heilenman  
Editor-in-Chief

I distinctly remember learning how to postmark a letter in elementary school; however, I never thought I would use that skill, and I never did. That is, until recently.

It all started after I was accepted to college — Wake Forest University. I began meeting my future peers online, and we instantly became friends; we followed each other on Instagram and added one another on Snapchat. Wake Forest happens to attract students from all over; I have connected with people from California to Florida to London to even China. Normally, I could take day trips to visit those who live closer to Emmaus, but with COVID, I’m not able to.

These online correspondences continued for a while — we even introduced group Zoom calls with the girls who had been accepted so far — until someone brought up an idea that seemed so faint from our pasts: pen pals. In elementary school, I always wanted a pen pal, and this was a perfect opportunity; the world was shut down, and here was a way to communicate without having to look at a screen.

In December, I received my first letter, and for some reason, I was so excited. To me, there’s just something about receiving mail that is so thrilling — whether it be a letter or a package. Maybe it’s the fact that everything goes through text messages these days. Or maybe it’s the notion that you never know what’s inside until you open it. Whatever it is, that first letter brought me so much joy.

I promptly wrote my response and mailed it the next day. I remembered how to postmark a letter from my elementary school days; after writing the address, listing the return address, and putting the stamp in the top right corner, my letter was off, and I felt a newfound sense of accomplishment.

To me, the most enjoyable aspect of this experience is probably that it’s not online — it’s real. With everything being online these days — school, social media, communicating with friends, even online books — the impact from this is ever-growing, and the negatives greatly outweigh the positives. After sitting and staring at an electronic screen for 75 percent of my day, I begin to feel like a robot, with a raging migraine. Writing letters allows me to communicate with friends in a stress-free, headache-free way.

Not to mention, it presents me with something new (almost) every day. In today’s COVID-19 stricken world, each day seems like the one before: wake up, go to school, do homework, exercise, sleep, and repeat. With the never-ending cycle continuing, receiving a letter in the mail is a pleasant break.

So, while writing letters has become a new hobby in my life, I hope it won’t be short-lived. Who knows? Maybe my parents and hometown friends will be receiving letters I write next year from eight hours away.





# Students reflect on first semester

Caitlin O’Brien  
News Editor

This month marks one year since students first received word that school would be closed for two weeks due to COVID-19. At the time, most high schoolers welcomed this impromptu “coronacation,” confidently joking to their friends or bidding temporary farewells to teachers. For many, however, March 12 was their last day in the school building, and what was at first regarded as a second winter break soon devolved into our worst nightmare: a year of social isolation, national turmoil, and global mourning.

The past few months have been riddled with challenges for Emmaus High School’s entire student body, especially as the teachers and administration scramble to find some semblance of normalcy in a time when everything seems so uncertain.

Part of this effort involved an asynchronous learning plan for the latter half of last year, which utilized self-paced work, optional office hours, and a completion-based grading system. While the best solution available at the time, this schedule still lacked a crucial part of the educational experience: interaction.

In attempts to revive this crucial social component of learning, the administration drafted an entirely new plan at the start of this year that involved a novel semester block schedule and hybrid instruction. The school also reverted back to the traditional grading system, with the elimination of midterm and final examinations being the only marked difference in the current procedure. These decisions created a myriad of obstacles for both upper and underclassmen, who had to adapt to online learning, higher expectations for work, and an untested block format, beyond the already daunting task of adjusting to a new school year.

Senior Lila Benner believes that semester block scheduling, specifically, has often made learning more challenging.

“I think since the classes are so long, it’s really hard to pay attention for the full time,” Benner said, referring to the 60-minute blocks, which are 20 minutes longer than previous years’ class periods. “Since full year courses are

cut to just half the year, we’re moving much faster, which can be really difficult.”

The online format has undoubtedly thrown a wrench in many school courses that entail full-year commitments under typical circumstances, as well.

Benner, a member of ETV — a course offered at Emmaus in which students record the morning announcements for the entire school body — reflects on this challenge and her feelings about the change.

“Block scheduling affected ETV the most,” she said. “Because we didn’t have the class for the first half of the year, so there was no ETV, which was disappointing for me and other ETV members.”

Disappointment is a common theme among many EHS students, especially seniors, who have struggled to find balance the past few months between new forms of instruction, a global pandemic, and the air of uncertainty surrounding their looming futures. Despite the toll these difficulties have taken on in many high schools, several students, including Benner, have noticed a silver lining to the district’s new policies: the omission of midterm and final exams.

“I think it’s really nice that there’s no midterms or finals this year,” Benner said. “I think with the pandemic and everything that’s going on in the world right now, it would be a lot to ask of students.”

Liliana Roginski, another Emmaus senior, agrees with Benner.

“The fact that there are no exams makes me extremely happy,” Roginski said. “...Midterms always felt like an unnecessary stressor in my life, because it would be a bunch of studying, and it felt almost unnecessary in a way.”

Roginski, an Advanced Placement student, noted the effects that the semester block schedule has had on those highly-accelerated courses and examinations, which fall long after first-semester courses conclude and before the end of the second semester.

“The biggest drawback to this format is the preparation for the AP Exams,” Roginski says. “With the limited amount of time, I feel like I am not as prepared as I was in previous years, because teachers have a shorter time

span to teach us everything. Likewise, the gap between first semester and the AP exam could be a bit risky, as it’s easy to forget what you learned without consistent practice.”

Junior Kaitlyn Maley, another AP student, agrees: “I enjoy only having to focus on four classes at a time, but I really miss having those core classes. Now they only last for four months, and everything seems so rushed.”

Maley also shares her thoughts on how the school can improve the scheduling model for next year, which will follow an “A/B” block format that will bring back full-year classes. This new schedule will alternate between two sets of courses every other day as opposed to at the end of the semester.

“Make school start a little later!” Maley said. “A nice 8 a.m. start time would benefit me. When I get that extra sleep, I feel so much more well-rested, and it’s worth it.”

However next year looks, students hope the experiences and struggles of this school year will help inform a schedule and grading procedure conducive to their success and wellbeing in subsequent years.

Additional reporting by Ari Bowman.



Senior Lila Benner, member of ETV, struggled with the new limitations of block scheduling. Photo by Meliha Anthony.

# Teachers reflect on semester of virtual instruction

Caitlin O’Brien  
News Editor  
Caroline Schaffer  
Staff Writer

This past semester of virtual instruction has undoubtedly posed its own unique set of challenges for everyone, especially the teachers of Emmaus High School. Over the past several months, EHS’ educators have worked tirelessly to create worthwhile learning experiences for their students despite new schedules, shorter class periods, restructured courses, and the lack of interaction that makes education so impactful.

This has especially been the case for Pamela Hunter, who teaches multiple history and gifted education classes at EHS.

“We’re doing our best to get students back and engaged in the academic content, given the pandemic that we’re in,” Hunter says. “I’m grateful for the fact that we have the technology to do this because if it was five or 10 years ago, I don’t even know what we would be doing ... It’s a huge help that we have that resource and can connect with students on a daily basis.”

That resource, the school-issued Chromebooks, enables students to log into Zoom during typical class blocks to receive their instruction for the day. However, given the distractions and difficulties of online learning, teachers are uniquely tasked with maintaining the attention of

their students, which is already challenging at school, let alone at home.

To address this problem, Hunter employs breakout rooms, a feature on Zoom that enables her to divide her class into smaller sections for more intimate discussions.

“I think when we move to the big groups [after breakout rooms] students are much more comfortable because they’ve already done a ‘dry run’ [in the breakout rooms] and they’re comfortable with their ideas, and they feel more confident to share in such a large class,” Hunter says.

During these breakout sessions, Hunter enjoys “dropping in” to hear and facilitate her students’ discussions, often giving them group activities and progress checks, as well. She mentions that Schoology is particularly conducive to this, as teachers may use the platform to monitor task completion.

As a calculus and computer science teacher, Beth Stoudt overcomes unique hurdles of her own, given the nature of her courses. For a mathematics subject, she points out, the online format does not interfere too drastically with typical instruction.

“I have my iPad, and I project my notes just like they would see in class, so that’s fine. Plus, everything is posted on Schoology, which is helpful,” Stoudt says.

On the other hand, Stoudt emphasizes the struggles of teaching her multiple computer science classes, all of which, under usual circumstances, foster a collaborative environment among students. To address this problem, she started utilizing a website called Repl.it in her courses, which enables enrollees to write, edit, and share code, much like a normal classroom format, minus the proximity.

The adoption of new educational media and platforms appears to be a common theme among our pandemic-stricken teachers, including Hunter, who notes a degree of adaptability, openness, and trial and error on her part.

“[Online learning] is making us think outside the box and be more creative utilizing technology to the fullest capacity we can ... And when we’re not in class I’m converting more materials — adapting resources to online, changing activities that would be conducive to in-person,” Hunter remarks.

Despite these obstacles, most teachers

have persevered, although several other unprecedented challenges arose when the administration finally implemented hybrid learning for EHS in late October, giving half of the students the opportunity to attend classes in-person on a particular school day.

“I think the challenge [with hybrid learning] is making sure the students who are remote are still involved with the class that’s present,” Stoudt says. “It just seems like a lot of things to manage at the same time, and I don’t want it to be so that my students who are in class are just sitting on a Zoom call the whole time, doing what they would have done at home. It’s more problems with technology and that I’m not involving everyone equally — that’s my biggest fear.”

With the unpredictable attendance schedules, remote instruction also possesses other caveats for several Emmaus teachers who have to juggle their children at home during this time.

Shannon Petrunak teaches her English classes completely online while watching her four children, all of whom are younger than 10.

“Our biggest struggle is keeping everyone separated in their own workspace in a small house,” Petrunak says, describing this experience as “controlled chaos.” “I usually work at the kitchen table, so I relocate during meals, and my daughters work upstairs while my husband keeps my sons occupied and quiet — which is no easy feat. My husband is the ringmaster of our circus [and] we adapt and roll with it.”

Regardless of these circumstances, Petrunak sees an upside to online instruction in the form of spending extra time with her family.

“During breaks, it’s nice to check up on my girls in their virtual classes or squeeze in a hug while the boys retrieve a snack,” Petrunak says. “The extra time we’ve got to spend together, we will cherish forever.”

Overall, teachers overwhelmingly seem to miss the interactive aspect of in-person learning the most.

“I miss my students being in the classroom—I miss that personal interaction every single day, because I’m in here talking to the screen instead of my students, and there’s no one else here,” Hunter says. “It breaks my heart that the students aren’t in the classroom, but I know that the reason they’re not here except during hybrid [instruction] is for everyone’s health and safety. I recognize that.”

One day, students and teachers will hopefully be able to engage face-to-face once again, but until then, educators will continue working to ensure their students receive the quality education they deserve.



Elementary school students head for the busses after attending in-person school. Photo by Bethany Brown.



# Opinion

## Gross things we used to do before COVID

### THE STINGER

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Life as we knew it turned upside down one year ago. We acknowledge that this year brought pain to many, and its cons tremendously outweigh its pros. Despite everything, this year has gifted us one thing: copious amounts of time for reflection. This reflection period left plenty of time to think about life as it once was, the things we could never do now, just how gross our everyday lives were, and just how disgusting we as people really are.

### Nose, Lips, Chin:

Though there are things you could have said a year ago about our current situation that would have caused people to do nothing short of collapse from pure shock, this one may take the cake: the idea of being alarmed at the sight of a person’s nose, lips, or chin in a public setting.

A year into the pandemic, the concept of masking to protect yourself and those around you plays like a broken record. To add to this, we have evolved so much since the standard blue surgical masks that were once so hard to find. Many have taken this opportunity to add frills to their PPE: mixing it up with bright colors and patterns, repping their favorite team, or matching their masks to their outfits.

Regardless of how you choose to protect yourself, masking up is now an essential part of going out in public, the new standard for businesses, stores, and restaurants. Because we’ve gone so long without seeing the bottom half of faces, it

makes those who refuse to comply out of concern for their “freedom” stick out like a sore thumb.

The sight of these once-common facial features may stop you in your tracks whilst trying to buy your toilet paper or whipped coffee; both of which are essential to pandemic survival, of course. But, these people make for a fun scavenger hunt around your local markets; in addition to being a source of “fun” for employees.

### Band, Microphones, Concerts:

Even in arts, the creativity in programs like band now display a level of grossness that previously wasn’t considered. Amid the rows of sectioned off band players with shining instruments and synchronization was also the dripping puddles of drool that slid out of the woodwinds and brasses. The inevitable collection of spit on the floor was chalked up to be part of playing that kind of instrument, but looking back, those puddles only consisted of what made it to the floor. Think now about all the flutes and trumpets that produce the same amount of moisture, but instead of the spit valve and floor puddles other instruments experience, send a spray that disperses throughout the entire room.

The music industry in general seems to have had a borderline unhealthy lack of personal space, as sharing studio microphones between people was the norm. Being involved with music outside of school, there was an admitted level of naïveté and love for just coming to the studio and jamming out without having to worry about wiping down and really cleaning the microphones that were up against our mouths the

entire time. But now, even the idea of singing with friends and making music feels like something to be extremely wary of. Although the feeling of just coming in and scream-singing your favorite songs into the mic you share with your partner is missed, the realization of how much bacteria they held is valuable.

Creating and sharing music is an integral part of 21st century culture, and concerts where people gather and celebrate art have been dearly missed over the last year. In theory, concerts stand as festivals where people can come together and experience music with friends and strangers alike, but in practice, the gathering can often be sticky, hot, and overcrowded. As fans cheer and sing along with their favorite musicians, it doesn’t take long for the sweat and inevitable spray of spit to fill the air.

With this new desire to shed our old, gross habits, there is the added pressure on teachers who are expected to uphold extreme hygiene. With classrooms of just a few students a day in hybrid learning, wiping down desks, supplies, and handles are new additions to an already busy routine for educators. And that’s excluding the stress of possibly being exposed to the virus every day. Although hygiene, attention to one’s personal space, and frequent health checks have become the norm over the past months, they do not come without the weight of the pain that urged them into action in the first place.

*Read the full story online at [stingerehs.com](http://stingerehs.com).*

### Editorial Policy

The Stinger is a student-run newspaper published six times per year and continuously on its online publication, [stingerehs.com](http://stingerehs.com). The content, which is the responsibility of the student staff, is not subject to direct administrative approval. Designated as an open forum, The Stinger serves to inform and entertain readers with articles based on a wide variety of research for a broad and diverse audience on topics decided by the staff and editorial board on matters that are timely, relevant, compelling, educational, and important to the student body. The Stinger, which also serves to enrich students interested in print media studies, is a member of the PSPA, JEA, and NSPA.

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They can be emailed to the staff, dropped off in Room 559, or mailed:  
The Stinger, EHS, 500  
Macungie Ave., Emmaus, 18049.

## The ups and downs of finding love during a pandemic

Payton McGlory  
Staff Writer

Alongside the breakout of the COVID-19 pandemic and the lengthy quarantine that followed came feelings of loneliness and isolation for many people around the world, regardless of their relationship status.

Personally, I entered isolation with the mindset that I would complete everything I was pushing off before the coronavirus hit. This involved working out more frequently, reading new books, and watching movies I never could. In total, I watched over 200 movies throughout the course of quarantine, including action movies, indie films, musicals, horror movies, and even a few documentaries. However, my favorite genre to watch during this time was romance. Some of the titles I viewed ranged from classic 80s films like “Dirty Dancing” and “Say Anything,” to newer releases like “Call Me By Your Name” and the reimagined Jane Austen classic, “Emma.”

Romantic movies provide numerous leading figures who are often viewed as living the “ideal scenarios” for a relationship, such as Audrey Hepburn’s Holly Golightly in “Breakfast at Tiffany’s.” These plots, however, end up straying away from the reality of what being in a relationship nowadays is truly like. This is likely why romance movies have become so popular over quarantine while most relationships were far from thriving.

It’s extremely difficult to maintain a normal relationship dynamic with anyone when forced to isolate at home, which is why I turned to platforms such as Zoom and Netflix Party at the start of quarantine. These applications made it easier to do normal activities with my friends and family again. Still, meeting anyone new seemed like a thing of the past.

Despite these setbacks, multiple students of Emmaus High School have

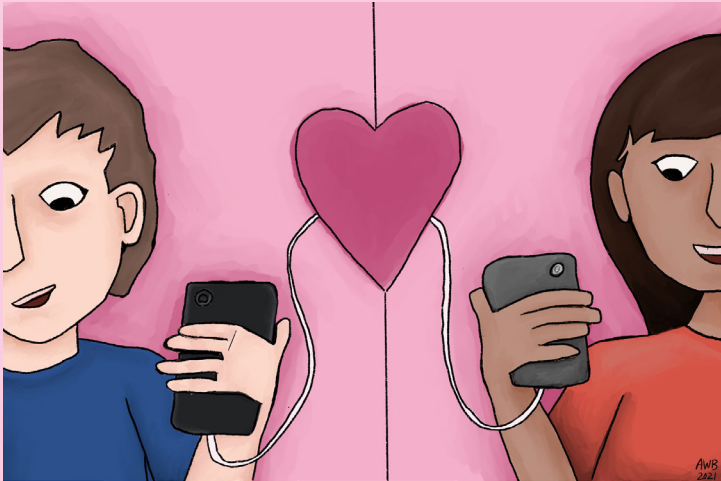


Illustration by Ari Bowman.

discovered numerous ways to overcome these barriers and find love in a time where it seemed the furthest thing from possible.

Madison Brzezinski, a current junior at EHS, said she discovered her most recent relationship at a place one would never expect: a fast-food restaurant.

“I met my ex-boyfriend during the pandemic while he was working at the Chick-Fil-A drive-through,” Brzezinski said. “He recognized me from school and we started talking and, eventually, dating after that.”

She claimed she was more receptive to meeting new people after the pandemic started, due to the prolonged isolation from society.

When asked about her relationship and the struggles they encountered due to the shutdown, Brzezinski explained many challenges due to not being able to see one another.

This was not the case, however, for EHS junior Emily Steinert who said her communication skills have evolved increasingly because of the lockdown. She met her current boyfriend, Parkland High School senior Zane Ankrom, just a month before quarantine went into effect. Like many others, she was forced to deal with navigating the dating world while not being able to go out, which she says was “definitely weird.”

“When you first start dating normally, you go out with people and go on dates, but

we couldn’t. We mainly went on hikes and random walks because his mom was very careful about the virus and took precautionary steps to stay safe,” Steinert said.

But, despite these impediments, Steinert still found ways to deepen their connection through the use of everyday FaceTime calls and messaging platforms like Snapchat.

This seemed to be the new normal for those exploring new relationships and meeting new people during the pandemic. This was made much easier by some of the top social media platforms such as Snapchat, which has features that deliver an even easier way to form new friendships or relationships, making it one of the most popular applications for teens looking to meet new people while in isolation.

The other main platform used to communicate with others while confined at home was FaceTime, a video call app built-in on almost every Apple device. Six of the seven EHS students interviewed who were in relationships over the course of the pandemic said that FaceTime was their preferred method of communication.

Maintaining a consistent and comfortable means of communication during difficult times is extremely important, especially for those in relationships.

It’s expected that these many forms of communication will continue to grow and evolve alongside the ever-changing societal norms of the dating world during the pandemic.

As the one-year anniversary of quarantine approaches, one can only hope that the students of EHS continue to keep an open mind throughout all of these new experiences. I encourage them to look to Hepburn’s famous words throughout these trying moments:

“The best thing to hold onto in life is each other.”



# Blended Learning: Is it working?

Madison Mauro  
Opinion Editor  
Sophia DePhillips  
Staff Writer

As the one-year anniversary of the pandemic approaches and the virtual spring semester for students carries on, the East Penn School District hybrid learning model has been called into question by some, and simultaneously praised by others.

Hybrid learning can be the best, or worst, of both worlds. As the East Penn community entered the 2020-21 school year, the expectation of year-long hybrid learning was in question. It’s unsure when schools in the Lehigh Valley will fully transition all students back into the physical classroom; distanced learning could be with us through the entire spring.

But at what point does the hybrid model get discarded? Should it be discarded, or will it become a permanent part of our educational landscape?

Despite arguments that online learning impedes students’ comprehension, it can offer valuable lessons in time management, collaboration, communication, and self-discipline. Although these skills are present while attending in-person learning, with adults there to consistently hold students accountable, this year students must, for the first time, rely almost completely on themselves. School in a virtual setting proposes a new application of skills that will help set students up for continued success after graduation. But adjusting to these new expectations is challenging. In a poll taken of 130 Emmaus High School students, 47% voted that they felt their academic performance in school improved, while 63% had a decline in academic performance.

Pivoting to a fully online learning curriculum is undoubtedly a difficult adjustment. Virtual learning lacks the in-person connectivity that’s crucial

for students’ ability to grasp content presented in class. When a school goes all-in on technology to deliver instruction, specifically in the hybrid model, it removes many of the supports that having a teacher in the classroom can deliver. Not to mention the actual technology that sometimes provides a roadblock to learning, such as connectivity issues and wi-fi outages.

Recently, a group of East Penn parents have pushed for the district to reopen schools and resume five-day in-person learning, seeking signatures for an online petition. They do not stand alone. In the same poll of 130 EHS students, 67% said they would prefer a return to in-person instruction.

Junior Oliva Wolf understands that hybrid learning may be the best option for some students saying that, “I think the hybrid learning implemented by the school has been really beneficial for students who want or need in-person instruction.” However, Wolf highlights the importances of safety above all else, “Although I understand that many students are suffering from mental and emotional problems as a result of the current situation, I still do not believe that safety guidelines should be ignored, specifically regarding the number of students in classrooms.”

Junior Ella Wiese believes that remote learning is the safest option the school can currently provide. Wiese began the school year attending in-person learning using the hybrid model, and by the beginning of October, she switched to fully remote due to safety concerns. She says that the decision was made because “cases started to rise and [her] family and [her] thought it would be safest to do remote. During hybrid learning, people just logged into the zoom like you did when remote, so it made sense to stay home.”

Wiese has since remained a remote learner with no plans to go back to the

hybrid schedule, saying that “it’s unsafe and also unfair to the teachers to make them be around so many people. Since cases are so high right now, it doesn’t make sense that they would offer hybrid learning, especially since it’s the same as virtual.”

There are countless variables to consider while analyzing the current state of public education. In the best-case scenario, schools can keep students and staff safe while providing them with valuable in-person instruction that gives them the tools to do meaningful schoolwork at home. At worst, teachers are forced to cut corners on instruction, schools struggle to transition students seamlessly from in-person to remote and vice versa, and students who are learning at home get left behind compared to students who choose in-person learning.

Generating a completely flawless, full-proof curriculum and instructional approach amidst a global pandemic only a few months before school is scheduled to resume is no easy feat. In addition, the resources provided to school districts are limited. Congress has yet to follow through on plans for a second multi-billion-dollar stimulus package for education, and school budgets across the U.S. are becoming thinner as the effects of the pandemic toll local and state finances. The current hybrid model is perfectly imperfect for the circumstances under which it was developed.

The path that post-coronavirus education will follow will be very long, full of pitfalls, and undoubtedly windy and complex. Although it may not be reassuring, passing the one-year mark of the pandemic has taught us all that we simply won’t know what works until it does. For those who are criticizing the district’s tireless efforts to please everyone, heed this advice.

## Connectivity issues impede education

Saraya Velez  
Sports Editor

March 13. A date that triggers a flashbulb memory for students, educators, and millions across the nation. As the anniversary date closed in, if someone were to ask a year ago, “Where do you see yourself a year from now?” no one would have guessed, “In the era of online school.”

Students and teachers alike became accustomed with virtual learning last spring following the global closure of schools. At the forefront of online learning was the issue of equity in which students had access to the materials needed to proceed with virtual learning. School districts that have a greater population of low-income families tend to lag in technological advancements that enable students to have a more comfortable learning experience. The Sunnyside Unified School District in Tucson, Ariz. is a prime example of the disparity of opportunities among students and their families. Here, many could not afford internet access. To solve this, the district presented free or reduced-cost Wi-Fi for families that demonstrated financial hardship and qualified for free lunches.

The socioeconomic status of families and the demographics of districts comparable to the Sunnyside Unified School District display a barrier between students and their pursuit of a better future. When granted access to Wi-Fi, devices often have to compete for connection, and when doing so, they have a tendency to run slower.

In addition to the connectivity issues that some low-income families are faced with, some also harbor multiple children which, in many cases, can interfere with internet connection and speed. And with the era of COVID-19,

millions have opted to work from home, some instances being involuntary. When asked, several Emmaus High School students reported being dropped from a Zoom meeting at one point or another, with some being dropped multiple times within a short period of time.

Some educators have high standards of learning for students that are unachievable in the environment that some of them are in. Some students spend more time troubleshooting than retaining the information they learn in their classes. Options are limited in a remote setting with little opportunity for interactive learning, encouraging two-dimensional thought at the expense of students’ mental health.

With connectivity issues follows a multitude of possible reasons. One is the number of users within a household. According to Abhay Bhokar, the Director of Product Management for Netgear, “When multiple devices use the same network, overcrowding occurs as they all compete with each other to connect to the same router. This means low quality or buffering.” As the number of users increases, the number of connection issues does as well.

In a survey conducted by *NBC News*, 51% of students surveyed shared that they spend more time on homework since virtual learning was initiated with the average number of hours increasing from 2.7 to three hours a night. Reliance upon internet connection is one thing that has inflated since the pandemic began. A majority of assignments were forwarded online to avoid contact between students and teachers, and pdf versions of several textbooks were provided as an alternate source. Students find themselves behind a computer screen for hours on end combating

siblings’ devices for a quick connection, while struggling to complete assignments.

Keeping pace with her advanced placement and honors classes, senior Brynn Daley tends to find herself wrapped up in situations that are seemingly unmanageable.

“Getting dropped from a Zoom meeting gets really frustrating,” Daley said. “You need a minute to really take a breath, but if it’s during a class, you need to get back as soon as possible or you’ll miss something.”

Daley also shares the burden that comes with poor internet connection and what contributes to it. Having five siblings and living with one of them full-time, she often feels on edge with classes.

The transition to virtual learning proves to be a learning curve for millions globally as we continue to navigate through what feels like countless obstacles. It’s crucial for issues such as connectivity and the undue stress caused by it to be placed under a magnifying glass for everyone to view. Although to some it may seem like just another minor inconvenience, to others it hinders their growth and serves as their justification for lost motivation. The measures that districts are taking to bridge the gap between struggling students and their education are ongoing. The reshaping of education and its aspects of connectivity marks the beginning of the end of an era contingent on counterproductive practices such as setting expectations that exceed one’s ability. If there’s one takeaway, it’s that everyone is doing their best in the conditions we’re in.

# Finding sources of light in a COVID world

Elizabeth Duerholz  
Staff Writer

Over the past year, I definitely had a lot of “the world is ending” moments, and it didn’t help that I had hours upon hours to think about them.

Then I realized--I’m not alone. During a normal year, you can catch me sprinting around my house grabbing tennis shoes before practice, memorizing my lines for the play, and studying for my math test as the door slams behind me. So last March, when activities and events came to a screeching halt, so did I.

After talking with other students at Emmaus about their experiences, I discovered many of us have had cancellations during the pandemic but managed to create positives in our own, unique way. I found that along with many of my peers, I was disappointed in how the end of last year played out.

In the spring of 2020, I was one busy freshman. I love tennis, and at the time, I was playing two times a week indoors to prepare for the fall season. On top of that, we were a week out from performing the school musical, Hello Dolly!. We came so far and worked so hard: rehearsing 4 to 5 hours every day after school. Similarly, I had been preparing for the Spring Chorus Concert along with other members of Bella Voce. I couldn’t wait to finish off the year strong. But then, school and tennis shut down, the musical and concert were cancelled, and all of a sudden, achieving my goals became an impossible feat.

During the chaos, my excitement lied within making it to the end of the year, where a vacation to Bald Head Island, N.C., awaited me. We take semi-annual trips to the island, with the company of my extended family from the South. I only see them a few times a year and I am always excited for those trips. When we didn’t go this year, I was devastated.

It took awhile, but I came to the realization that not all is lost, and I continued to look forward towards the future as a promise of hope. For many high school students, including myself, that meant further exploring college and career paths. I enjoy having a plan laid out for me, so I found comfort in researching future careers in law, communications, or my most recent possibility, psychology.

I then began to see some positives drifting into my life. We had been given the gift of time with no commitments. I was bored, to say the least, so productivity and the development of new hobbies and goals became more of a requirement than a luxury.

One of my aspirations is to be an excellent baker like my grandmother. After quarantining with a pack of sweet-toothed family members, I improved my craft: baking everything from chocolate chip cookies to my brother’s 12th birthday cake.

I find reading a great way to decompress, but in a normal year, the only reading I had time for was school-related. Over the summer, I picked up reading for pleasure and continued into the new school year.

I also gained a new appreciation for poetry. One day, I had the sudden urge to write my thoughts down and it seemed the best way to do so was in poem form. Poetry became one of my favorite hobbies and the best way to cope with the quarrels of the world. I developed a new goal of writing enough poems to fill and publish a book one day.

I related to many students when they discussed using quarantine to connect with family and for overall relaxation. Spending time with my friends has usually been a given that I’ve taken for granted. Now, I take every chance I have to call, text, FaceTime, or get together outdoors with my friends and family. Over the course of a year, I have had more meaningful conversations with my close friends and family at home than I could have ever had before. For myself, I have been trying to work on my mentality--worrying less about being perfect and doing everything right, and more about simply enjoying life.

COVID temporarily discouraged many students, including myself, but I believe it gave us all time to reflect on our lives and what truly matters. I’m certain if you ask any of your peers, they will tell you the world is not ending. In fact, they will probably astonish and inspire you with their positivity and drive to continue to succeed.







6 FEATURES

Coronavirus by the numbers:

First death in the USA:

Feb. 29, 2020

There are nearly 29 million confirmed cases of COVID-

Rylee Dang  
Features Editor  
Sydney Howard  
Staff Writer

An announcement pours over the speakers at Emmaus High School during eighth period on March 12: “Empty out your lockers in case we do not return to school.”

The auditorium, packed with students shoulder to shoulder, bursts into chatter as they wonder if the announcement is serious and school will not be in session. Gossip continues as students leave for the day, and concern about the pandemic brewing in Wuhan grows. What was once a virus in a country on the other side of the world blew into a deadly national pandemic, breaking down the concept of what everybody knew as “normal.” The inside joke of never returning to EHS instantly became a reality.

Dr. Kate Kieres was prepared for an announcement from Gov. Tom Wolf in the coming days, outlining instructions for high schools’ operation with the impending virus. On March 13, as students were at home for a teacher inservice day, the principal received the message that Pennsylvania schools had to shut down for the next two weeks in light of the growing danger.

“At the time we were just anticipating that we were going to be closed for a couple of weeks and that was sort of a catastrophe,” Kieres said. “I was just sort of in shock and everybody was uncertain about what was coming... As a principal, my mind was just swirling in terms of all of the things that we would need to do in order to try and support students, support teachers.”

School was on a hiatus for the next three weeks, as families stayed at home with their eyes glued on news broadcasts and press conferences. It was not until April 6 that school was back in session -- online, albeit -- as students began learning one lesson per week, assigned to them through Google Classroom. According to the *New York Times*, that same day, Pennsylvania reported 1,485 new coronavirus cases, with 129 of them in the Lehigh Valley.

Senior Grace Comfort was in a state of disbelief with the announcement of the school closure, as her thoughts raced to unfinished business like AP exams and not being able to say goodbye to her teachers.

“You always think, ‘oh, that happens to other people, and I wish I could help them,’ or ‘I wish I could have resources that would make this better for them,’ but you almost kind of think ‘oh well just it’ll just never happen to me.’ Then when I realized this is happening everywhere... I was just like, ‘oh so this is a more serious problem than it was kind of made out to be,’ and I was, really, I was in a lot of disbelief.”

Most of all, Comfort misses the feeling of being in the school: walking down the hall, senior traditions she isn’t able to take part of, and seeing her teachers face-to-face, not through a screen. Comfort’s only normal school year was her freshman year, as the flood of 2018 affected her sophomore year, and the coronavirus pandemic took over her junior and senior year, respectively. However, she believes that while it is unfortunate that she only had one year of a true “high school experience,” she is better for it.

“Ninth grade was the only normal year of high school that I had, and it’s definitely interesting, and it makes you more of a resilient person which I’m grateful for,” Comfort said. “But it definitely makes you sad thinking about just the connections that I missed out on this year... I just miss smiling and waving to people in the halls. I am very much that person [and] I feed off of that, so I miss that for sure.”

The duration of the pandemic was still unknown to many during the shutdown, but as cases rose and awareness of the virus’ dangers grew, it became clear that the pandemic would not be over any time soon.

“There was this pretty quickly dawning awareness that we were entering something that no one was really prepared for, and that it wasn’t something that was going

to be resolved quickly,” Kieres said. “I would say within those first two weeks, it was pretty clear to me that it was a longer haul than two weeks.”

Closing Businesses

On March 19, 2020, Gov. Wolf announced the closure of all non-life-sustaining businesses in order to slow the spread of COVID-19.

Jobs, money, food, and livelihood were jeopardized and put on the back burner for millions of Pennsylvanians who were suffering along with the entire nation. No working citizen could have prepared for what was to unexpectedly come: unemployment, and especially filing for it.

The national unemployment rate started at 3.6 percent in January, and skyrocketed to a record of 14.7 percent in April amid statewide shutdowns. As of last November, it’s decreased to 6.7 percent; however, people of color still struggle with unemployment above any other racial group.

George Lewis, vice president of communications and marketing at CACI International Inc., realizes that although unemployment rates are dropping, certain populations are having more difficulty than others.

“It is positive news that Lehigh Valley’s unemployment rate continues to recover, but the recovery has not been linear nor equal among all industries and regions,” Lewis said in a press release, “We continue to track the data, which has changed as recently as the last few weeks and is not reflected in the November numbers.”

While millions grappled with ways to keep their businesses open, adjusting atmospheres to accommodate the

nationwide pandemic and Wolf’s protocols, a flood of relief for many soon came. On March 25, Wolf announced financial aid to small businesses through a new program under Pennsylvania Industrial Development Authority’s (PIDA) called the Small Business First fund.

However, a staggering three months later, Wolf

announced that Pennsylvania would be moving from the red to yellow phase. This allowed restaurants to open outdoor dining, reopen child care facilities, and businesses with in-person operations. Meanwhile, spas, hairdressers, gyms, and massage therapy businesses remained closed. International mail was also impacted, as packages and mail were delivered at slower rates than normal.

Hailey Stefanov, junior at EHS and small business owner of Hailey Paige Jewelry, has been hit with shipping delays.

“I didn’t have any problems with shipping delays or rates until November [or] December,” Stefanov said. “The post offices were getting hit with cases and the packages were piling up. Since so many of the employees were getting sick and it was the holiday season, orders were taking anywhere from four days to four weeks to arrive.”

Despite mail delays, retail store closures, and other pandemic impacts, Stefanov has pulled a positive out of the pandemic’s reign of terror on small businesses.

“I think the pandemic helped me because I was forced to start selling online,” Stefanov says. “It allowed me to expand my audience and achieve my ideal demographic.”

Mask Mandate

As the concern for safety grew with the number of cases, systems had to be put in place to stop the spread.

Gov. Wolf recommended that all Pennsylvanians wear masks in early April, and quickly moved to require masks in public on April 18. This meant that in all grocery stores, restaurants, and offices, customers were required to wear masks unless eating or drinking. The introduction of wearing masks was a struggle for many,

as it was just another item people had to remember to take with them along with their keys and wallet.

Sophomore Robert Sallash realizes the importance of wearing a mask in public, regardless of the fact that it took time to get used to.

“At first, I was very upset to have to wear a mask, but then as time went on I began to get more used to it,” Sallash said. “I realized that if I wore it I could do more things and not feel as worried about getting sick myself or getting others sick.”

Wearing a mask is no new concept for senior Johanna Lettera, as she works for Lehigh Valley Hospital as a dietary aide and has witnessed the evolution of coronavirus firsthand. As the virus ramped up, so did sanitation, and the protection employees had to wear.

“Obviously we were wearing masks before the public was wearing masks, so at the beginning that was something that I was more mindful about... that was starting to be like a mandate for us,” Lettera said. “And then it started getting into if you’re going up on patient floors, it’s wearing protective eyewear goggles, things like that, because they didn’t know how much protection people needed against it. So I think that I was just more aware of how it could be spread so easily rather than like the average Joe Schmoe that walks on the street, you know.”

Return to School

Through the summer, instead of basking in the sun and traveling to new places, the warm months of 2020 were spent huddled indoors, as cases and deaths skyrocketed all throughout the country.

August quickly neared, and the new school year was now approaching. However, returning fully in person was not an option due to the number of cases in the Lehigh Valley, which had now reached 1,061, according to the Pennsylvania Dept. of Health. A hybrid model was introduced to students for the new school year, which entailed splitting students based on their last name, and attending school in-person for two or three days each week. Students also still had the option to remain completely virtual due to safety concerns or preference.

Sophomore Hannah Horvath chose to attend school remotely, due to concern for caring for her three-year-old brother while her parents were at work.

“I’m fully remote just because sometimes my brother has off, [and] we have to help watch him so it’s just easier to stay home and I feel like I manage my time,” Horvath said. “I definitely like going in just because you get to have more social interaction, but at the same time I like how I get to manage my time differently like day to day just depending on what I have to do.”

Changing conditions and a lack of students in the building has proven difficult for many teachers. Social studies teacher Eric Luckenbill loves making new connections with his classes and students every year, but seeing his students on a two-inch box on his computer screen provides a completely different environment for his class.

“I didn’t realize how much I missed having students in the classroom until we got back to hybrid and I got to see kids in person. That meant a lot to me, and it gave me hope that we would be able to get through this thing,” Luckenbill said. “Wearing masks is a bummer, but I’ll wear three masks if I can get a classroom full of kids again.”

Hands-on experiences have been eliminated, as social distancing and remote learners have limited the resources that the school has been able to provide for them. Art teacher Lexi Soboleski has been assembling kits for her students during the course of the year so they can still make art, even while at home.

“We’ve had to adapt all of our projects and ask ourselves some new questions: How can we send clay home? How does paint travel best? What tools are safe to send home, and for the ones that aren’t, what are alternatives?” Soboleski said. “Putting together art kits for students was fun in a way, but having to send kits home for every single student limited the scope and scale of the projects that students usually create.”

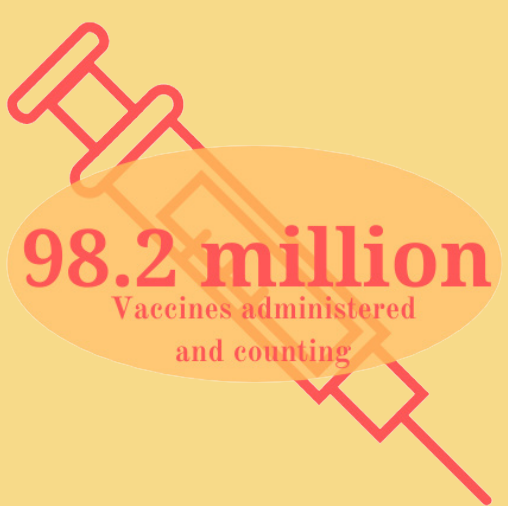
“There was this pretty quickly dawning awareness that we were entering something that no one was really prepared for, and that it wasn’t something that was going to be resolved quickly”  
-Dr. Kate Kieres



There are more than

524,000

deaths due to COVID-19 in the United States.



Statistics according to CDC.

# A year of COVID-19

How one virus flipped the world upside-down



(Top right) Let's Play Books! in Emmaus closed temporarily due to COVID-19. Photo by Alice Adams. (Middle) A student logs on to remote classes. (Bottom) Students return to school during the pandemic wearing masks. Photos by Meliha Anthony.

## Vaccines

Within a tragic, endless nightmare, a glimmer of what many thought was lost has surfaced: hope. COVID-19's year-long reign of taking lives, shattering all ties of health, ripping apart friends and family, and reducing lives to a relentless everyday cycle, had been plunged into a new needle. In December 2020, the reality of a functioning vaccine was just around the corner and being distributed worldwide. The first person to get vaccinated in the Lehigh Valley was Mel Branco, a nursing director from Coopersburg. Her team has spent months on the frontlines battling the virus at Lehigh Valley Hospital while cases and deaths consumed Pennsylvania and the nation. "We're still in it with the long haul," Branco said in a Lehigh Valley press release. "But with the vaccine here I feel like someone turned the light on at the end of the dark, long night." Across the state, more than 1.98 million people have been vaccinated, while the Lehigh Valley Hospital strives to vaccinate at least 5,000 per day. Although skepticism and worry about the safety of the vaccine due to the short amount of time it has been manufactured has frightened many, Madison Dennington, a junior at EHS works as a dietary

aide at South Mountain Memory Care, an assisted living facility. Dennington, who received the two full doses of the Pfizer vaccine was reluctant before she fully agreed to receive it. Dennington wasn't the only one with concerns about the vaccine. According to an AP-NORC poll in mid-May, fewer than 50 percent of Americans said they would get the coronavirus vaccine. Fast forward to today, 11.5 percent of the U.S. population has been vaccinated for COVID-19. "The day after I got my second shot, I tried to tell myself I wasn't feeling it because I didn't want all the people who were against the vaccine to say anything," Dennington said. "I already heard enough from them." Sonia Iparraguirre, a registered nurse and the first to receive the vaccine at St. Luke's Hospital, strives to inform and assure her community of the vaccine's safety. "I want people in our community to know that the vaccine is safe and that if they want it, they should get it," Iparraguirre said in a St. Luke's press release. "It protects their health and the health of our community."

## Current Day

While healing and "moving on" may be viable solutions for some, for others, that is not the case. For millions of families worldwide, many will be emerging

out of this pandemic without their mothers, fathers, grandparents, neighbors, and community members. Many died without their loved ones by their side, communicating their last words through a phone while doctors and nurses held onto their weak hands. With the looming national death toll of 524,000, according to the CDC, nothing is comparable to the feeling of losing a loved one. Questions still arise if the deadly impact of COVID-19 could have been lessened with harsher precautions and earlier governmental action. As to where coronavirus came from, the world is still searching for a direct answer that is responsible for the havoc this virus has wreaked in every country, in every community, and in every person's life. Most importantly, mental health during the pandemic has been challenged for many. According to KFF.org, 56 percent of young adults have reported symptoms of anxiety and depression. Days are repeating and seemingly endless. Job losses, universities and schools closings persist for months on end. Whether it's friends, family, pets, a job, food, school, a good book, your phone, a TV, many components have distracted or helped many through the toughest times. With the world healing its several wounds, some bearing scars, the beginning of the end seems to finally be upon us.

Additional reporting by Eleanor Creelman.



# Arts & Culture

## New Zealand fest reminds artists of past concert experiences

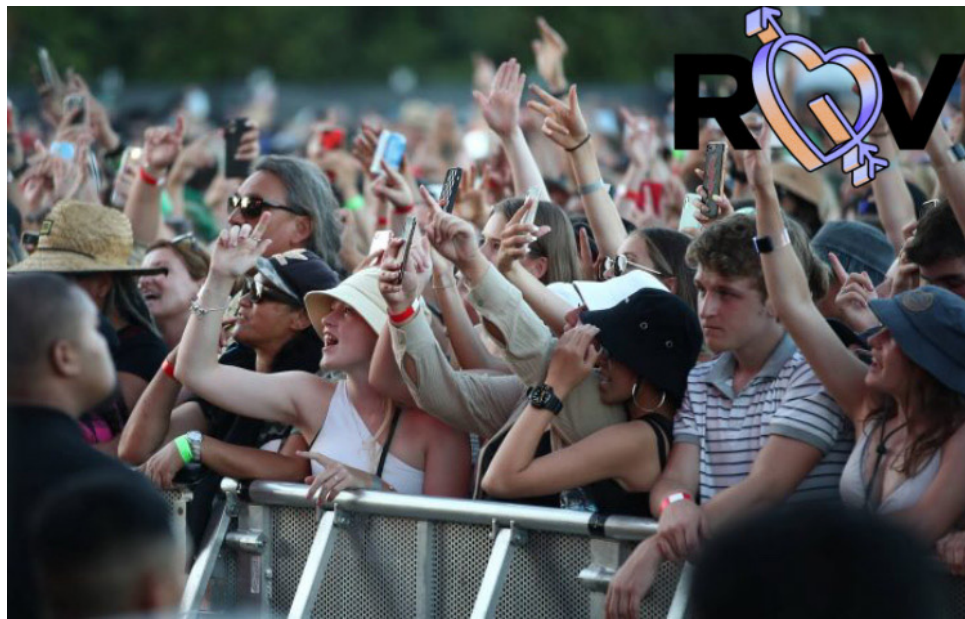
Jacob Welsko

Arts & Culture Editor

With artists like The Weeknd announcing 2022 tour dates in early February, music fans and concertgoers grow even more anxious for the permanent return of live performances.

Since COVID-19 put the traditional concert experience on hold for many months, artists have improvised by playing shows from home as well as smaller, distanced venues. Concert attendees became even hungrier for live shows when New Zealand held a festival in late December. According to New Musical Express, 20,000 people attended Gisborne's Rhythm and Vine Festival to witness acts like BROODS, Fat Freddy's Drop, and Bennee. The COVID-scarce New Zealand, which reportedly has fewer than 80 cases of the coronavirus at the moment, had audience members on top of each other and packed on the concert grounds from Dec. 29-31. Photographs from the event almost seem eerie and look like lost artifacts from the pre-pandemic world.

New Zealand provided another festival in early January. The Bay Dreams Festival rocked on Jan. 3 and included performances from EARTHGANG, Friction, HP Boz, Holy Goof, and more who were listed as "internationals confirmed to quarantine." In a recent interview with Billboard, Atlanta duo EARTHGANG's Olu (a.k.a Johnny Venus) described the experience as "ecstatic [...]. It was amazing, it was magical, it was a reminder of how magical it can be." When discussing the strict quarantine for international



Attendees watch the Rhythm and Vine festival in Waitangi.

artists, Doctur Dot said, "They had us like all in separate hotel rooms. And it was like [the] military outside. We got the COVID test about three, four times [a week] maybe. Like every two days, they would do another test. It was a very serious process," according to Billboard. Perhaps these stern quarantine guidelines are what need to be incentivised in order for artists to make their ways back to concerts.

Evidently, New Zealand plans to continue holding more festivals in the very near future. On March 27 and 28, CubaDupa will make a comeback after being cancelled last year. The event expects to bring some 100,000 attendees together to see a wide array of various artists. So,

with New Zealand's return to normalcy and usual live experiences, where does that leave the rest of the world?

Despite opposing COVID-19 conditions around the world compared to New Zealand, many acts have rescheduled their postponed tour dates from 2020 to this year. For instance, according to Billboard, Queen and Adam Lambert are still set to commence the European portion of their tour in May. Other artists, from Foo Fighters to Justin Bieber to Green Day, will also return to the stage for 2021. Rock band Mötley Crüe will join Poison, Joan Jett and Def Leppard for The Stadium Tour, marking their first gigs together as a band again since 2015's "final" tour. All of

these shows tentatively plan to occur this year, but with the state of the pandemic, everything is still up in the air. Luckily, as many entertainers plan to reclaim venues, new restrictions and protocols have been put in place to accommodate concertgoers.

Ticketmaster produced a webpage full of event information such as ticket flexibility, safety requirements, and FAQs. Masks will obviously be required by audience members, social distancing will be expected, and hand sanitizer stations will be provided. In addition, the concert grounds and surfaces will be thoroughly sanitized and cleaned before, during and after events. Along with these new regulations, fans will be subjected to designated entry times in order to "promote social distancing and reduce exposure," as well as being asked to submit no contact temperature checks before entering. Lastly, some shows will be drive-in only, meaning spectators will be requested to stay in or close to their vehicles during the time of the performance.

Everything is subject to change within the age of the coronavirus, but with new rules and regulations set in place for concerts, there is still much optimism for their permanent restoration. Hopefully, as more and more shows take place in the forthcoming months, nothing too severe or detrimental will happen to prevent safe and exciting concert experiences from materializing.

## COVID-19 LIMITS MOVIE THEATERS' APPEAL

Thomas Hartill

Arts & Culture Editor

The landscape of the movie theater industry is rapidly changing. It had been changing even before every theater shut down amid the COVID-19 pandemic. But even more so than the industry as a whole, the movie-going experience has dramatically shifted.

If one can find the courage to do so, it would be beneficial to think back to March of 2020, an important month to say the least. Even prior to the full lockdown, movie theaters seemed to be in a peculiar situation. While many publications scratched and clawed for any chance to declare the oh-so-dramatic "death of the movie theater," things actually seemed to be going pretty well. Yes, streaming services slowly bit out a larger and larger chunk of the market, but 2019 saw record highs for many box office statistics, including the release of *Avengers: Endgame*, the latest film to become the highest grossing of all time. On top of this, more and more films reached the one billion dollar mark, including *Joker*, and foreign films like *Parasite* carved out a greater portion of public discourse than ever before.

In any case, the future looked bright for movie theaters. That is, until a pandemic caused the closure and subsequent downfall of countless theaters around the globe. From March to July of 2020, a majority of theaters across the country remained shut off from movie-goers. Countless anticipated films saw their release dates pushed back to 2021 and beyond. The films which kept their release dates found themselves relegated to a new trend of digital releases, something which no filmmaker wants to happen to their films.

Thus, when cinemas began their reopening across the United States last summer, many wondered what the movie-going experience would look like. Despite this, it appeared not many were curious enough to actually go see this first hand. Box office numbers reflected attendance even lower than was allowed with the reduced capacity regulations. Major blockbusters like *Tenet* received a modest but frankly disappointing profit. A majority of films screened were previously released classics with very few new films included. Attendance very rarely reached above 10 movie-goers, leaving the theaters

with a cold, isolated feeling; a feeling which has become increasingly familiar in the past year. Even disregarding the condition of movie theaters when they are open, one cannot even guarantee how long they will be open, as can be seen by the temporary closure for the month of December and the condition of some theaters only being open on the weekends.

Looking back on the days of highly anticipated superhero blockbusters feels like a distant memory. To put it simply, movie theaters are not the same as what they used to be. What audiences love about movie theaters is not the large screens, the blasting speakers, or the concerningly overpriced popcorn. What audiences love is audiences. To go to a movie theater is to escape one's troubles, if only for a brief moment, but what makes it so special is the other 50 people seeking the same escape. What makes it so special is the shared experience of laughing together, crying together, and going on a journey together.

On the other hand, that isn't to discredit the benefits of the big screen itself. As is the case with many films, a core part of the experience is the grand scale of the auditoriums. Watching a film like *Dunkirk* on a tiny iPhone screen simply does not do it justice. Even a TV screen may prove good enough for rewatches, but nothing can beat the experience of watching the pro-

jector light up and witnessing a technical marvel unfold in front of your eyes.

So, while theaters may be operating, it would be a gross mistake to consider it anything near what they used to be. While cinemas in their current state do offer a grand format for audiences to watch new releases, the lack of a consistent, large group of people to share the experience with is truly detrimental. It hurts to look at what once was a vibrant part of American culture, now left scrounging for any support it can find. While COVID-19 has affected an incomparable number of industries and businesses, it is clear that movie theaters have taken some of the heaviest hits. One can only hope that 2021 brings a new rebirth of such an integral part of American culture.



Emmaus Theater.  
Photo taken by Alice Adams.



# Television and film incorporate coronavirus on screen

Adithi Katikhaneni  
Arts & Culture Editor

The entertainment industry was no exception to the countless businesses forced to reinvent themselves after the pandemic struck. But after the pandemic disrupted the production of many fan favorites, some popular networks took advantage of television’s rebirth in late 2020 to create entertainment that reflected reality more accurately than ever, resulting in modern media now preserving masked faces and virtual gatherings in Hollywood’s version of a time capsule.

Creators during this era are given unlikely circumstances that open more doors for experimentation than anticipated. Globally, the way people live their lives now looks very different, and reality TV shows have picked up on this as a way to not only remain consistent with pandemic protocols, but also immortalize the pandemic’s effects on people’s lives through their art. As commercials with masked characters promote video chat formatted shows like NBC’s “Connecting…” and “Social Distance,” viewers are exposed to an ultra-realistic view of daily life, something that can be celebrated when acknowledging the flexibility of the creators to so seamlessly adapt to the new normal.

Historically, during times of suffering like the current pandemic, audiences preferred uplifting, lighter shows. But nowadays, one look at a prime time program guide reveals heavy stories like “This is Us,” “NCIS,” and “Law & Order: SVU.” This contrasts with periods like the post World War II era, when viewers indulged in happy-go-lucky sitcoms and network comedies as a way to forget the trauma and move forward---a trend that remained prevalent until about 30 years ago, when psychologically complex stories like M\*A\*S\*H began making their way into nightly television.

Although the expectation for emotional complexity grew in audiences’ tastes,



“This Is Us,” “Grey’s Anatomy,” and Law & Order: SVU” showcase characters in masks in many recent episodes.

these films rarely ever aired during times of crisis, which is why it is puzzling that viewers now still lean toward such emotionally taxing shows.

Temple University’s film history and theory professor, Chris Cagle, comments that this continued preference for negative television could be because network television shows simply are not the place that viewers seek out lighthearted content when streaming services like Netflix, Hulu, and YouTube specialize in on demand uplifting entertainment.

“Network television still continues today, [but] sitcoms don’t do nearly as well as they used to,” Cagle said.

Despite the love for comedic distractions, network television shows simply are not the place that viewers seek out light-hearted content in a time when streaming services like Netflix, Hulu, and YouTube specialize in on demand uplifting entertainment.

Another facet of incorporating COVID

in television is the fact that from a big picture perspective, there is no other time to do it.

“A year from now, people don’t want to see [the pandemic], so the best time for this is now,” said Cagle. It’s expected that, in the ideal post-pandemic world, people would like to learn from the lessons this past year has taught them, without having to be reminded of the experience in television shows.

As writers chose whether or not to take advantage of this new opportunity for realism, titles like “Grey’s Anatomy,” “NCIS,” “South Park,” and more began portraying life post March 2020, mirroring the effects of the pandemic with varying degrees of accuracy.

Returning for a 17th season, the acclaimed medical drama “Grey’s Anatomy” made the seemingly obvious choice to acknowledge COVID-19--even devoting the entire season to the pandemic. In contrast to other dramas that made weak

attempts to demonstrate social distancing and consistent mask wearing, the show set in Seattle Grace Mercy West Hospital upholds strict protocols. Journalists from the Business Insider, who worked with medical professionals, described it as one of the most accurate representations of life as a front line worker. The writers take care to avoid overdramatizations of the very real struggles that healthcare workers, patients, and general citizens live with every day, demonstrating an admirable level of research and thought.

However, this authenticity to reality is lacking in other TV dramas. As some writers incorporate the pandemic in their works, shows like “NCIS” and “All Rise” set their scenes of life-like crime and justice in fictitious socially distanced settings. With inconsistent masking and frequent breaches of social distancing, these productions failed to accurately portray the virus and the crucial safety protocols that groups like the World Health Organization and Centers for Disease Control beg the public to follow. These shows may have been better off opting out of this creative decision, as they fell far short of what audiences would expect.

To viewers like sophomore AnneMarie Mont, a regular watcher of television shows like “Grey’s Anatomy,” these sloppy productions feel as though “they are just using [the pandemic] for a story line,” something that she says “just feels wrong---it’s disrespectful.”

However, regardless of the creative liberties taken by writers during this time, and how “lifelike” their creations may be---TV shows inevitably end. Viewers sit down, press play, and enjoy a made-up storyline that, after the span of about thirty minutes to an hour, will be over. As the credits roll, the viewer is suddenly alleviated of the plot’s stress and emotional turmoil, something that unfortunately cannot be done in reality, no matter how hard they try.

# Local restaurants to support during pandemic

Jacob Welsko  
Arts & Culture Editor

Although the pandemic inflicted a strain on most dining establishments, there still stand many local restaurants that offer delicious food with a side of safety.

Since COVID-19 has put the dining experience on pause, most small and locally owned restaurants had to think fast to stay afloat during this time. While some close food joints offer distanced dine in, a large portion of restaurants have moved to takeout only to cater to customer’s appetites and safety concerns. Here are four local eateries with quality food choices to support and check out.

**Brookside Deli** is a quick and convenient restaurant for takeout whether you’re craving a burger, chicken sandwich, deli club or soups and salads. The clubs offer various meats from turkey and ham, and are jam packed with whatever toppings and condiments a customer’s heart desires. The BBQ bacon burger is a beautiful mess of sloppy goodness for \$7, best served with a side of the deli’s fantastic, fresh french fries. Although the menu is fairly expansive, Brookside Deli does not sacrifice the quality of their items for the quantity of them. Brookside Deli gives customers the options of takeout and delivery.

**Cumin N Eat** is an exquisite Indian restaurant packed with enough variety to send any customer

home satisfied. The chicken fried rice for \$12 is an excellent choice and comes in a stuffed container filled to the brim with rice, chicken and egg bits. Their butter naan bread (\$3) makes for an incredible addition to this dish. Also, throw in some spicy masala fries (\$3) for a flavorful blast in one meal. Cumin N Eat allows for dine in, curbside pickup and no-contact delivery.



Spinach pie with cheese cigars from Sahara.

**Sahara Mediterranean Cuisine** is a solid choice for dining that has a plethora of appetizers and an array of salads, platters and sandwiches. Their hummus (\$6.99) can bring anything to life, and compliments their chips excellently. Additionally, the cheese cigars (\$4.99) and spinach pie (\$5.49) make for solid appetizers before digging into the main course. Speaking of main courses, the chicken shawarma sandwich (\$9.99) is a cornucopia of flavors through its marinated chicken, lettuce, tomatoes, pickles and damped with garlic sauce wrapped nicely in a pita bread. Lastly, order some fresh french fries (\$3.99) to really complete the eating experience. Sahara provides curbside pickup for customers.

**Asian Bistros** is a surefire cuisine with a fairly extensive menu catered to any eater’s palette. Customers can never go wrong with getting the chicken with broccoli (pt. \$5.99 and qt \$9.99) or the chicken fried rice (small \$4.50 and large \$7.50). Both dishes are enhanced with an accompanying egg roll (\$1.50) on the side. Asian Bistros offers both curbside pickup and contact free delivery.



Asian Bistro’s chicken fried rice with egg roll.



 **Brookside Deli in Macungie: 4.5/5**

**Cumin N Eat in Allentown: 4/5** 

 **Sahara in Allentown: 4/5**

**Asian Bistros in Trexlertown: 4.5/5** 

All photo taken by Jacob Welsko.



Cumin N Eat chicken fried rice with butter naan bread.



# SPORTS

## Athletes continue despite fan limits

Saraya Velez  
Sports Editor  
Madison Mauro  
Opinion Editor

Balancing the pandemic’s impact on virtual learning, mental health, and friendship, student-athletes have not only been stripped of their normal sports season, but they’ve been forced to put their passion on hold.

Last August, the Pennsylvania Interscholastic Athletic Association issued a press release in late August regarding the plans for the fall sports season following a compromise with Gov. Tom Wolf’s staff. Schools across the state would have authority over how they proceed with sports adhering to their own health and safety guidelines in lieu of the organization providing a “one-size-fits-all” plan. The East Penn School District partnered with the Lehigh Valley Health Network to ensure there was and continues to be a solid and frequently updated plan moving forward. Wearing masks, practicing social distancing, and checking temperature before every practice are few of the many guidelines athletes have to follow.

Although there is a general consensus as to what guidelines are required among all sports, some are molded to fit the sport at play. In past volleyball seasons, after each set, each team will switch sides of the court, but in compliance with the guidelines set by the EPSD Athletic Department, they were not authorized to

do so. Groups are prohibited from coming in direct contact with others and the mixing between groups should remain limited.

The precautions implemented for the 2020-2021 season impacted thousands of athletes across the state. The sense of normalcy was lost and athletes had to adjust to face new circumstances. This meant limited crowds for all student athletes.

Senior Brandon Camire, running back of the Emmaus High School football team, experienced the solemnity of a pandemic-era sports season. Compared to his previous three years playing for Emmaus, this fall’s practices were limited into brackets of six players per training session. Yet, Camire and his team persisted through the unusual circumstances and focused on improvement, rather than what they had lost.

“The spectator part was more of an experience thing,” Camire said. “I’m sure every senior would want as many people as they could going to their games, but I’m happy with the ones I got.”

While his final games were different, he remained optimistic. Camire plans to attend Delaware Valley University in the fall to continue his athletic career.

Girls’ volleyball team managed to play several games under altered conditions, which junior setter Kassidy Hallman describes as a “different atmosphere.” In the beginning phases of returning to

athletics, the girls were not allowed to enter the gym or touch equipment.

With an abbreviated season and games out of the ordinary, Hallman understands the importance of putting forth her best effort not only for herself but her teammates.

“We all knew we weren’t guaranteed a full season, so it was important for us

to be there for each other and work hard for the team,” Hallman said. “I hope next season we can have more spectators to bring the special energy back into the gym.”

As she moves toward senior year, Hallman anticipates a different atmosphere of fans at the games. She hopes to return to a final season for where she and her teammates can hear the loud crowds that contribute to an unimaginable energy.

Achieving normalcy during uncertain times is no easy feat, yet boys soccer drove home a fantastic championship season, despite rather empty stands. The team was awarded the District 11 4A championship trophy.

EHS senior Edward Zellner said that the key to his success this season in soccer was keeping a determined mindset.

“I don’t think COVID really affected our spirits at all,” Zellner said. “We all knew the precautions we had to take to be able to play, and we all took them seriously. If anything, it made us even more motivated to play.”

Zellner feels that when an audience is cheering him and his teammates along, particularly when a goal is scored, it encourages him to play better and motivates him to push himself.

“The sound of playing in front of people gets me excited because it means that I’ve got to give it my all and makes me play better,” Zellner said. “There’s always some nervousness with all the eyes you have watching you. You make one little mistake and everyone sees.”

Yet, closing the season with a championship title is encouraging within itself, regardless of the number of fans who were there to see the team earn it. Zellner hopes to always continue to play, and has yet to decide where he will study Business Administration this fall.

As the second semester carries on and spring sports begin, recognizing that although the physical environment that student athletes are surrounded by may be at a loss, EHS student athletes have triumphed with their respect for new regulations and adamant positive attitudes during these difficult times.



Fans watch the varsity football game in near-empty bleachers. Photo by Alice Adams.

## Sports triumph despite Covid-19

Erick De La Rosa  
Sports Editor

Emmaus High School athletics were able to once again compete this school year after being shut down in March of 2020, leading to a whole year of student athlete triumph.

Five district championships and a state championship were brought home this year by our various sports teams, an impressive feat any year, but made additionally harder by the copious amount of COVID-19 regulations and restrictions that teams had to overcome. Each athlete, especially seniors, were forced to play every match like it was their last, because in some cases it was, and with the ever-changing coronavirus, situations could’ve changed at any moment. Here are some highlights from some sports.

**Field Hockey:** The Emmaus Field Hockey team was, once again, extremely successful. The team was able to win their 13th state championship, the first one in four years, bringing another banner back home where it belongs.

**Boys Soccer:** The boys soccer team had one of the most successful seasons in school history. Despite losing multiple starters due to graduating seniors, the team was able to repeat as district champions after an amazing 14-2 season.

They would go on to win their first state playoff playoff games in nearly 20 years, ultimately falling in the semi finals.

**Swim:** The Emmaus Boys Swim and Dive team continued their dynasty, going 10-0 in the regular season and winning their 14th straight district championship. The girls were not far behind hoisting an impressive 8-2 record. All of this success despite the teams having to compete virtually.

**Football:** The EHS football team was able to go undefeated in its shortened season, winning all five games. In the final match of the season, the Hornets took on arch rivals, the Parkland Trojans. A thriller down to the wire, the Hornets won 13-6, winning their division in the process.

**Girls Cross Country:** The girls cross country team won its second district championship in a row, but even more impressive was maintaining an undefeated record for a third straight season, going 39-0. The season culminated in a

great effort at states where the girls took fifth place.



Top: Senior Brandon Camire protects the ball while running. Photo by Alice Adams. Bottom: Senior Maddie Brown dribbles the ball during a soccer game. Photo by Bethany Brown.

## An athlete’s perspective on this year’s seasons

Eleanor Creelman  
Deputy Editor

It’s a Tuesday night, there’s a boys basketball game. I run through my mental checklist; I’m wearing my greenies, my bodysuit, shell, skirt, water bottle, poms, bow, and of course, my mask.

Our team mask looks kind of cute, in all honesty. There’s a little hornet half shielded by the big “E” for Emmaus on the bottom right corner. Being black, the new addition to the uniform kind of throws off our green, gold, and white color scheme, but fashion may suffer so safety can prevail. As the virus has done to all other areas of life, COVID-19 has immensely changed sports at the high school level.

Before I get into it, let me refute what your initial thought may be: “But cheer isn’t a sport.” Competition cheer absolutely counts as a sport. No doubt. If you disagree, take a look at some routines All Star cheer teams put together and ask if your favorite quarterback could do half of these stunts. Or, go binge the Bring It On movies. Either way-- strength, team work, communication, as well as competing, all present themselves in cheer. Some of the most agile, powerful, and dedicated athletes take part in Emmaus’s competition cheer program, which largely goes unrecognized.

To circle back around from that tangent-- things have changed. Football games once featured a rambunctious atmosphere from players on the sideline, raising their arms saying “money play” and imitating a Mr. Krabs laugh, a zealous student section dressed in Hawaiian attire, and parents’ authoritative, or celebratory, screams from the stands. This year, a somber cloud cast over the energy of fans and players. A decrease in enthusiasm and an increase in a despondent demeanor became evident.

Obviously, dedicated parents found their way to the bleachers, a few dozen students with nothing better to do, and the football players hoping to get a minute on the field came out to watch the games. But the enthusiastic nature of the Friday night culture suffered cosmically.

As cheerleaders, keeping the crowd and players motivated, engaged, and excited is a pillar of the activity. But our chants can only sound so loud through our masks, accompanied with the new spread out line-up, and the crowd’s spark needs more fuel than a simple ignition.

For me, someone who feeds off of others’ emotions, observing people and their behavior during games fascinates me. I cannot tell you a single thing about the mechanics of football, but without looking at the field, I can tell you exactly when we get the ball back, make a bad play, or when the coaches decide we do have a chance to win this game.

I miss when cheering was normal. When I got to sit knee to knee with my friends during basketball games and whisper about how cute the other team looked. When someone would frantically braid my two-foot long hair at 7 a.m. in the humid cabin at camp. When we would have team workouts in the musky weight room after other teams used it to filth. All the quirks, positives, and ‘less than positives’ made cheer a convivial and unique experience.

I truly commiserate with other athletes who are missing previous seasons. I know it’s hard. But, unfortunately, things returning to the exact state as they were ‘pre-COVID’ seems improbable. Not to regurgitate the cliches we have all been fed for months now, but if there’s ever been a time to practice your patience with others, it’s now. We all just need to take precautions and hope things may return to normal-- or at least close to.



# EHS athletes adjust to masks

Kristen Heilenman  
Editor in Chief  
Sophia Clements  
Staff Writer

When the coronavirus hit, all sports -- locally and nationally -- were put on pause: the 2020 Olympics were postponed, professional sports were delayed, most high school spring sports seasons were cancelled. One year later, sports have continued, with the inclusion of masks, of course.

At Emmaus High School, all winter sports teams had to wear masks during practices and games, with the exception of the swim team while members were in the water. Currently, this protocol is still in place for spring sports, as well.

While this mandate was put in place to ensure the safety of all coaches and athletes, some, such as senior and captain of the girls' basketball team Stephanie Klemick, stressed the difficulties wearing a mask brought at the beginning.

"[Wearing it was] very, very sweaty, not gonna lie, and it makes breathing a little bit harder," said Klemick. "And I feel like now I've kind of gotten used to it, so it's not that bad anymore, but in the beginning, it was definitely something to get used to."

Senior wrestler Kordell Waiters found a way to adapt to wearing a mask for physical activity.

"Usually during the season I'll go for runs, and now, I'll wear a mask when I go for a run,"



Players on the EHS girls' basketball team playing with masks on. Photo courtesy of @EHSGBB on Twitter.

Waiters said. "Just to try and get my breathing adjusted to wearing a mask so that it's easier for me when I'm competing."

Along with wearing masks, athletes and coaches are required to get screened before each practice or competition. Here, their temperature is taken and they are asked a series of questions to see if they have an COVID-related symptoms.

Varsity boys' basketball coach Steve Yoder acknowledges many differences for the 2020-21 season compared to previous years.

"This year's season has brought so many unique challenges. While the game itself is the same, virtually every other variable has changed," Yoder said. "Daily [temperature] checks, masks, school closings

from COVID, shortened season, limited practices, and other things."

One club sport that was significantly impacted by mandatory masks was ice hockey, as junior Aaron Kirk detailed the numerous struggles players on the team experienced.

"It was terrible, especially for hockey players because of how cold it is. The moisture gets stuck in the mask, they get soaked, and nobody could breathe," Kirk said. "It also took away our eyesight at the bottom, so we couldn't see where the puck was on our sticks, and if it got in our feet we were screwed and someone was going to try to blow us up."

Because of this, the high school's ice hockey league re-

laxed the mask requirements, as the masks were impacting player's safety.

With limitations on how many individuals can be inside the building, and specific rooms, at a time, the high school created live streams, so players' families and friends can watch in a safe way at home. Waiters sees the benefits and disadvantages of these.

"I feel like having live streams is cool because everyone who even wouldn't normally come to the matches could still watch from different states and stuff," Waiters said. "But at the same time, it's still not the same as having fans in person."

While many restrictions may have stopped teammates from doing their normal routines and celebrations, Klemick realized

that her team dynamic has improved through the tough times.

"Our team chemistry and relationships with each other are better this year than ever," Klemick said. "Which is kind of ironic because of COVID, but I think that the atmosphere is just really nice with all of the girls who have such great attitudes."

Waiters also sees the bonds strengthening between athletes on the wrestling team as well.

"I think we became close because, at the end of the day we were only hanging out with each other, we weren't really seeing other people," Waiters said. "Whenever we would get the chance on the weekends we would all hang out [and] just try to get a better team dynamic since we can't really socialize with other people that much."

For Yoder, he is happy to give his players the ability to play and compete.

"At this point, we are happy when we get to practice," Yoder said. "And yes, practices were modified tremendously due to the boys wearing masks, six feet [apart] protocols, and other variables. That said, the boys have been resilient, and are happy to have the opportunity to play."

Although wearing a mask is a new challenge for athletes, many overcame this obstacle and had successful seasons amid the coronavirus pandemic.

*Additional reporting by Victoria Bruckler.*

# Despite virtual meets, swim caps a solid season

Sydney Howard  
Sophia DePhillips  
Staff Writers

Competing against their own teammates, hardly setting foot in the water, and keeping a team bond while mostly seeing each other through a screen, are just a few of the many hardships faced by the Emmaus High School swim team through their 2020-2021 season.

The pandemic has thrown a wrench into how regular swim meets would normally occur for the members. But junior Abby Hark, a member of the EHS girls' swim team, is proud of how her team has persisted throughout this challenging season.

"Seeing our team persevere through a season during a pandemic, but still manage to swim fast and have fun, has made me happy to be able to call myself a swimmer each day," Hark says.

During meets, each socially-distanced, masked swimmer sits in the stands and awaits their turn to enter the pool deck below to swim in their respected events. The scores and times from each event or dive are then taken, and compared to other team's schools in order to determine the winner.

"We do not know who wins the meet until hours after the competitions as we need to await the computerized results from the other team and then merge them with ours," says EHS swim team coach Tim O'Connor. "It is all really strange."

The annual District XI Championships were held in person. The EHS girls team took second place while the boys team brought home their 14th straight title.

For members like Peyton Rautzhan and Connor Shriver, their senior year is spent in these socially distanced meets rather

than swimming in the pool beside their teammates and other competing schools.

"Virtual meets aren't like in-person meets, and I would much rather be racing against the other team in person than virtually," says Shriver. "But with that

“Seeing our team persevere through a season during a pandemic, but still manage to swim fast and have fun, has made me happy to be able to call myself a swimmer.” - Abby Hark

being said, I think we have really adapted as a team and bring a lot of energy even without spectators or the opponent in the pool."

Observing the activity in other sports throughout the pandemic at EHS and other schools, some members of the swim team question why they can't be in the water with each other, with proper distancing.

"It is very frustrating considering how spaced out swimming is as a sport already," says Shriver. "I think we have ample space to have in-person meets, and our lanes are 7 feet wide, and we don't require physical interaction with a ball or with other athletes to compete."

Rautzhan also believes that despite their virtual meets being effective, they are not fair to the team as competing swimmers.

"Swimmers are missing out on many things that other winter athletes have, such as actual head-to-head competition," Rautzhan says.

But despite the hardships and challenges thrown their way, EHS' swim team continues to persist and keep their heads above the water. Even with strict guidelines in place, teammates and coaches manage to be thankful for what they have, and the bond that they share together.

"Some schools and athletes across the country are missing out in their sports entirely," O'Connor says. "I am thankful for being able to have even virtual meets in the first year of a pandemic."

Along with finding ways to be thankful comes the waves of support and encour-

agement each teammate shows towards one another on and off the pool deck. The swim team began creating lively new ways to support each other from the stand such as making pom-poms, dressing in fun colors, and playing music between events.

"A positive thing about this year is how well all the swimmers have really supported each other throughout all of this," says Rautzhan. "We all realize how difficult this year is, so sportsmanship and camaraderie, I feel, is at an all-time high."

The Emmaus swim team looks ahead to days when normal swim meets and competitions can resume; where high-fiving, hugging, and embraces can be expressed openly. But one thing that has never ceased is their comradery, an unbelievable team bond, and an absolute love for swimming.



The EHS boys' swim team after winning their 14th consecutive District XI Championship. Photo courtesy of @ehsmensswim on Twitter.



# Emmaus community rallies for homeless youth amid pandemic

Madison Mauro  
Opinion Editor  
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After her parents went through a difficult divorce, Emmaus junior Bri Diehl spent time going back and forth between houses, but in her heart she recognized the truth as life grew more difficult: “I always knew I was going to end up homeless.”

Hundreds of homeless youth are in plain sight every day in the Lehigh Valley. Homelessness is not the person sitting on the side of the street asking for spare change. It is not the man curled up in a sleeping bag as cars speed by under an overpass.

It can be your lab partner in Honors Biology class or your little sister’s bus buddy. Attending school, spending hours unbothered and unnoticed, as they navigate not only puberty but an adult world into which they’ve been involuntarily thrown.



As the coronavirus swept the globe and devastated families across the U.S. since last March, students who could once depend on school for shelter and a warm meal had to fend for themselves amid a nation of frantic, self-concerned people. The already challenging situation of managing school for homeless students became practically unthinkable. Facing the effects of the pandemic in a sound and stable home gave way to anxiety, depression, and self-doubt.

Students facing homelessness are no strangers to these feelings either, according to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, which states that 16.7 percent of U.S. youth aged six to 17 experience a mental disorder and 20.5 percent of homeless U.S. youth have serious mental health conditions. Staring down the unknown of the coronavirus while confronting the unknowns of one’s health and safety each day is a pain that no one should have to brave, including East Penn students.

Ahead of the pandemic, homelessness among children spiked with an estimated 1.5 million students nationwide reported being homeless at some point during the 2017-18 school year, according to the National Center for Homeless Education.

In March of 2021, there are about 20 homeless/displaced families living in the East Penn School District, according to Dr. Thomas Mirabella, director of student services. In March of 2020 the average number of homeless families jumped to 30.

“We consistently have a number of students and family for a myriad of reasons experiencing homelessness throughout the school year and into the summer-time in the EPSD,” Mirabella said.

Karla Matamoros, the district’s

home and school visitor, feels that looking back at some of the numbers, the pandemic hurt East Penn’s ability to identify families in need as well as affected the willingness of people to come forward.

Diehl understands.

Privacy is a luxury that most homeless students miss, the EHS junior said.

When her parents separated in August of 2019, she and her younger brother moved out of the only home they had known for 12 years to live with their father.

While living with her father and brother, she received news in May of 2020 that her step-father had passed away. In turn, the child support that her mom had been providing for Bri and her brother became unavailable, and Bri’s younger brother moved to Tennessee to stay with their mom. In April, her father lost his job due to the pandemic. He joined the 20.5 million unemployed Americans at the start of the pandemic, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

At the end of May, the Diehls officially moved out of their home and stayed with their cousins in a town about 50 miles outside of Pittsburgh for a month. But for the past nine months, Bri and her father have had to live in a local hotel.

“I don’t always stay at the hotel, sometimes I sleepover at a friend’s,” she said.

While transitioning to the hotel, Bri was forced to sacrifice not only her time and privacy, but two of the things she held dearest: her pets.

In order to abide by the housing rules of the hotel, Bri had to surrender her cat, Candy, and hamsters, Nilla and Mocha, to her friends. Caring for pets in their given circumstances was an extra expense they could not afford.

Prior to the coronavirus, Bri worked sporadically as a babysitter for up to 24 hours a week. Unable to work during the first few months of quarantine, Bri began to notice her and her father’s financial means stretching thinner. Currently, she works at Bear Creek as a “snowsports desk lady,” scheduling ski and snowboard lessons for kids. Through this struggle, she has turned to those around her to comfort her whether it is family or friends, she maintains a close connection.

“I make sure that I keep my relationships strong with my boyfriend, my friends, my family,” Bri said. “I don’t turn away from them even when it gets bad.”

Recognizing the struggle that the Diehls have endured, Monica Hamilton, a family friend, took the initiative in creating a GoFundMe page in response to their financial burden. Hamilton, a single mother of three, first met Bri in May of 2020, and since then, both families became close.



Bri Diehl is among 30 families experiencing homelessness in the East Penn School District. She works during the school year to support herself and her father during their economic insecurity. A GoFundMe set up by a close family friend emerged so the Diehls could place a down payment on an apartment after living in an area hotel for several months. Photo by Meliha Anthony.

Initially, Hamilton was unaware of the circumstances that the Diehls were in, and when her son revealed their situation, she felt compelled to take action. She describes Bri as a “humble and gracious” person and is very grateful to have met her. She believes that kindness eventually comes full circle and was more than willing to pay it forward.

“I thought that if [the com-

I had to learn the hard way that home isn’t a house, it’s in people that you love.”

- Bri Diehl

munity] could even get half the goal, if people could give just a little bit, it was worth a try,” Hamilton said. “I was hesitant because the last 12 months, the past year, was really hard on a lot of people, and I didn’t know what the reaction would look like.”

Despite the hesitation Hamilton had going forward with the GoFundMe, she recognized that it would yield a good outcome in that the Diehls would soon have a place of their own.

“It’s hard to ask for help, and it’s hard to accept help, and it’s hard to admit that you need help,” Hamilton said. “I’m grateful that Bri let me do this for her, and I’m so thankful to the community.”

Hamilton’s intention was to share the GoFundMe to a few close friends and potentially raise \$1,000, but as the news of it

spread, it reached \$6,500 within the next few days. She was “blown away.” Within four days of the initial posting, the goal of raising \$5,000 was exceeded with a total of \$7,290 raised, as well as \$775 in GIANT food store gift cards. Classmates and community members rallied in support of the family as it was shared over several social media platforms.

What was heartwarming to Hamilton was that it was not only adults donating, but also children her son’s age contributing what they could to the cause with their personal money.

Hamilton described the overwhelming support in an update on the GoFundMe post and expressed her gratitude for those who may not have known the family prior yet contributed by either donating directly to the cause or shared it via social media.

After seeing the support her family received on social media and from GoFundMe, Bri was hopeful for her family’s future.

“It made me smile all day when it got big, and I couldn’t thank everyone enough,” Diehl said. “It was a feel-good moment.”

Currently, Bri and her father have the money necessary for a fresh start in a new apartment with their dog, Roxy.

Following the overwhelming support of the community toward the Diehl family, in the matter of a few days, a new GoFundMe page began to circulate social media. Posted to the Emmaus High School Families Face-

book group, the purpose of the GoFundMe is to raise money for Marec and Jason Pun, who are living in the same hotel as the Diehl’s. In less than two weeks, the Pun family was also able to reach their set goal of \$5,000.



However, these are two families among the 57,971 homeless families in America, according to Endhomelessness.org. Homeless students in the United States were formerly called the “invisible million.” Now, as the percentage of homeless youth climbs, this obsolete label remains overlooked, and these students remain invisible.

The state requires each school district to identify families that need support; one way to do that is through the networking of community organizations -- and East Penn has quite a few, from food pantries to home relocation and rent assistance programs.

“I think that getting the word out...is probably going to open to other readers to be not only sensitive, [but] hopefully we can get more students who may be suffering right now or may be in need to come forward,” Matamoros said. “It can be myself, a school counselor, the principal, anyone, they could just send an email.”

While Diehl not only had to sacrifice her pets and her privacy, she said she “had to sacrifice being a kid.” But she knows there is more to life than four walls and a roof.

“I had to learn the hard way that home isn’t a house, it’s in people that you love.”