

Finally back: In-person classes begin

First hybrid day opens with relief, smiles, nerves

By **ELLA BEISER**
& **AMANDA CASSEL**
EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

After nearly a year of distance learning, seniors and faculty returned to campus for their first day of hybrid learning March 8.

Dean of Students Ana Campos said it was wonderful to see students but said the school felt very empty.

"We knew that the seniors were the smallest number of students returning, and I think that I knew that, but it was really noticeable today in terms of the number of people that were around," Ms. Campos said.

For the rest of the spring, student who opted into hybrid learning will come to school in person for two consecutive days every two weeks — an "A" day and a "B" day — following the same block schedule in place all year. "C" days will continue to have online office hours, assemblies and counselor programming.

English teacher Steven Gevinson was impressed with the administration's organization and described the first day as a success.

"The technology is pretty fabulous really, and even someone who's not very good at it, I still did it," Mr. Gevinson said. "I don't think we lost much time, so as complicated as it is, and as many disadvantages as there are, and all the safety issues it just seems to me like it was well thought out and well put together."

Mr. Gevinson also appreciated seeing his students face-to-face for the first time all year.

"It felt natural to be back together, to be able to even just to look people in the eye. I mean, it's not nearly the same as an actual face,"

Percentage in hybrid

77%	of 9th graders
79%	of 10th graders
72%	of 11th graders
60%	of 12th graders
81%	of faculty members

Mr. Gevinson said.

Junior Ariana Vazquez chose hybrid learning and said watching the seniors return in person built her anticipation for her own return after spring break.

"I'm pretty excited because at least I'll get 12 days of a normal junior year," Ariana said.

Senior Isha Nayak returned to school to achieve some normalcy for the end of the school year.

"I thought it was really cool to be in class because when a teacher made a joke you could laugh and they would hear it," Isha said. "Both of my parents are vaccinated, so I thought it was pretty safe at home for me to come back."

Isha was not disappointed and found that in-person school was similar to how she remembered.

"I am a fan of in person," Isha said. "I just think it's different when you can actually see people and make eye contact, just things you normally do."

Ms. Campos also enjoyed seeing students in the halls interacting.

"It's just really — I can't even describe it," Ms. Campos said. "We're coming up on the year anniversary when we all had our last day, so the idea that we are finally back is just really special, especially seniors."

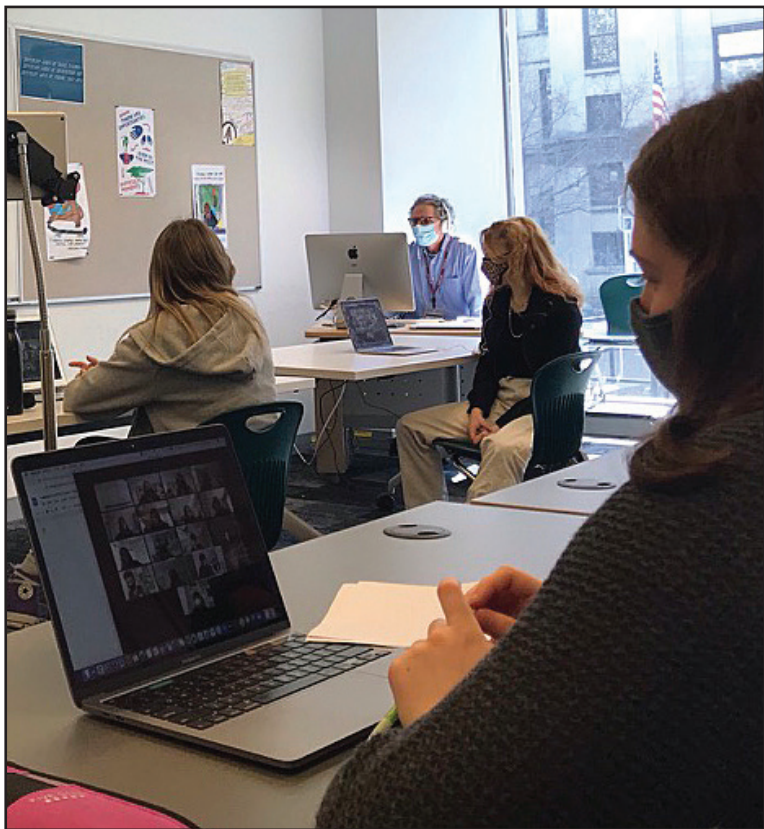


TAKING A BREATH.

Seniors spread out on Jackman Field during lunch on the first day of school. Students were allowed to choose between Jackman Field, Café Lab and approved rooms for clubs. Most seniors spent the hour on Jackman Field, eating, chatting or playing catch with a football. ArtsFest Committee was also distributing materials and T-shirts for March 17.

BUILDING COMMUNITY.

Izzy Kaufman-Sites zooms into her "Stars and Dust" English class from the middle school library. The class is primarily made up of seniors who opted in to hybrid learning. Rather than joining breakout rooms for small group work, in-person students discussed short stories together.



MIDWAY PHOTO BY AMANDA CASSEL

QUICK Q

How was the return to school different from your expectations?



NOORASAD:

"It exceeded my expectations. I thought it was going to be really awkward and there would be a disconnect between the teachers and the people at home and the people at school, but it's actually been a lot better and seeing my friends has been way better than I thought it would."



ETHAN LEE:

"I didn't really expect to be in Zoom that much. It's kind of disappointing to be in a class with your friends, but still on Zoom. Other than that, it was good to see my friends again."



JAVIER SAEZ:

"When you have this different setting, you feel like you have to start again. I'm always nervous before classes start, because I don't know the students and it's exciting. And, last year when we went remote, we had already met. But this year, today, was like the first time we met."

Student Council plans welcome-back activities

by **SAHANA UNNI**
MIDWAY REPORTER



Omar Siddiqui

In an effort to welcome students back to in-person school after almost a year of distance learning, Student Council members are planning grade-specific and inter-grade activities for the spring.

Many of these activities will focus on introducing ninth graders and new students to Lab, as well as making the campus feel welcoming through decorations.

"There's a lot of trying to infuse life back into the physical campus,

and we've been working on creating videos and tours for freshmen, because a lot of the new kids haven't been to Lab yet," Omar Siddiqui, all-school president, said.

One of the challenges in planning an event is the capacity limits based on health guidelines. Based on current University COVID-19 restrictions, no student council event will be able to have more than 100 people in attendance. Furthermore, every in-person event must be approved by the U-High administration, and then further by university administrators.

As many students will take the option of continuing with distance learning throughout the year, Student Council is planning in-person activities that will also allow

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— OMAR SIDDIQUI,
ALL-SCHOOL PRESIDENT

students to participate in remotely.

"Student Council has been holding remote game nights, and those are going to be transitioned in person or into a hybrid where people can still Zoom in," Omar said.

Socializing online has been dif-

ficult for many students, so these activities will allow students to spend time with each other in person.

"In-person events have more people coming, so it will help people really connect with one another," Class of 2023 president Fermi Boonstra said.

According to Fermi, when the activities are fully planned, students will be able to sign up through a Google form on Schoology.

The administration has already held Friday mixed-grade activities, which have given many students the opportunity to socialize. This is something the Student Council activities will also focus on.

"It was nice to see people that I hadn't seen in a long time and to

socialize with people I don't usually talk to," junior Kira Sekhar, who attended a Friday in-person event, said.

Student Council is working to ensure students feel welcome as they transition into hybrid, and that they get to know each other and their grade's representatives.

Omar said, "We have a lot of Lab School traditions that we're trying to carry over in whatever way that we can."

Student Council members also published a video where they outlined various back-to-school guidelines, from rules to follow when eating to an Australian-voiced Q & A section impersonating Principal Paul Beekmeyer.

Additional reporting by Amanda Cassel and Nicky Edwards-Levin.

New director well liked at current school

Students call Tori Jueds approachable, friendly; will begin at Lab in August

by **ELLA BEISER**
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Progressive, down-to-earth and welcoming are words used by students at the Westtown School to describe their head of school, Victoria “Tori” Jueds, who will take over as the director of the Laboratory Schools Aug. 16.

Ms. Jueds will finish the year at her current job at Westtown School, a pre-K to Grade 12 college preparatory day and boarding school in West Chester, Pennsylvania, where she has served since 2017.

Ms. Jueds is very accessible to students and receptive to what they have to say, said Kavi Gandhi, a senior and the student body president at Westtown, where students address teachers and administrators by their first names.

“What’s really cool is her office is right in the middle of our main building, so we’ll often see her pop out and just stand,” Kavi said. “We call the middle of our building ‘central,’ and she’ll normally just stand there and talk to students. So it’s nice to have those interactions. We’re all in love with her dog, she brings her to the office, pretty much every day. So, if we’re not seeing Tori around we’re seeing Phoebe, who’s her dog. We’ll sometimes just go into her office to pet the dog and say hi, which is nor-

mally pretty fun.”

Ms. Jueds also makes an effort to be present for students at their performances, athletic competitions and other school events, according to Kavi.

“A student to her is not just a face that she’ll see in the hallway. I think she really strives to know who that student is,” Kavi said, “so in a lot of my interactions with her — I run cross country — she’ll say, ‘Oh hey how’s the cross country season going.’ Or, ‘How is this class that you’re taking.’”

Ms. Jueds also listens to the student body and takes action to address the issues they have, according to Kavi.

“I think she’s been really good at recognizing that her perspective might be incomplete and really striving to hear that other side of ‘Let’s learn where this person is coming from’ in whatever incident or issue they’ve experienced,” Kavi said.

In his experience, Ms. Jueds thinks about the big picture when issues arise among individual students, and looks to see if it is indicative of a larger problem at the school.

According to Interim Director David Magill, what distinguished Ms. Jueds as a candidate were her experiences in education and in diversity, equity and inclusion-



Tori Jueds is head of school at the Westtown School in Pennsylvania.
SOURCE: WESTTOWN SCHOOL

Biography:

High School: Graduated as valedictorian from Philips Exeter Academy in 1991.

College: Earned bachelor’s degree at Harvard University, graduating magna cum laude.

Post-graduate: Returned to Cambridge and earned a law degree from Harvard Law School.

Career: Worked as a lawyer from 2001 to 2006, working civil liberties cases. She went on to work at George Washington University Law School. From there, Ms. Jueds worked as senior associate dean of undergraduate students at Princeton University.

work in the legal field. Mr. Magill also described how as head of school at Westtown Ms. Jueds led the transition to distance learning and return to in-person learning.

“She’s already dealt with some of those issues at her own school — the going remote and in person and also having a boarding school associated with it all, so she’s experienced,” Mr. Magill said.

As part of the hiring process, Ms. Jueds met with community leaders in interviews conducted with the final two candidates. All-School President Omar Siddiqui participated in the interviews. According to Omar, student leaders were impressed by Ms. Jueds’ experience in DEI work and commitment to transparency.

“She seemed like to really, really care what the students had to say,”

Omar said, “and she kind of had a clear vision of where she wanted Lab to be and where she wanted Lab to go.”

Kavi said Ms. Jueds’ first year at Westtown during the 2017-18 school year was mainly spent observing and trying to understand the community before deciding about the school’s direction.

According to Kavi, since Ms. Jueds has been head of school, Westtown has hired diversity coordinators and expanded DEI programs in lower, middle and high schools.

“I think she really tries to resemble that in all of her work that she’s not just an administrative figurehead,” Kavi said. “She is the person who’s running a school for students and to cultivate a next generation of thinkers and leaders.”

Teachers grateful to receive vaccinations

by **MEENA LEE**
CONTENT MANAGER

As of March 1, Laboratory Schools faculty and staff have received their COVID-19 vaccinations from University of Chicago Medicine. Teachers feel grateful that they were able to be vaccinated, despite some experiencing flu-like side effects.

Phase 1B of the vaccine rollout plan, which includes K-12 educators, was initiated Jan. 25, and teachers were able to sign up for times to get vaccinated at the University of Chicago Medical Center.

When math teacher Joseph Scroll found out he was getting vaccinated, he felt relieved and was glad that his family could be safe.

“I think to most people the vaccine really represents the end of all this,” Mr. Scroll said. “So, I was really just excited. It has obviously been wearing on all of us for the last year, going to sleep every day and not knowing if you’re going to be OK.”

According to history teacher Christy Gerst, the vaccination process at the university hospital was well-organized and efficient. Two vaccine clinics were set up where employees signed patients in and checked their health information, Ms. Gerst said.

“Once you sit down for the shot, it’s a couple of minutes,” Ms. Gerst

said. “Then you remain 15 minutes for observation to protect against the allergic reactions that are being recorded, and that is it.”

P.E. teacher Deborah Ribbens encountered more trouble with her first vaccination. After waiting the 15 minutes allocated for observation after her shot, she said she felt extremely dizzy and faint, which is an uncommon reaction to the vaccine.

“They took me into an observation room to lay down,” Ms. Ribbens said. “Apparently, my blood pressure, which is always very normal, shot up very high.”

After two hours, Ms. Ribbens felt well enough to leave the hospital. Ms. Ribbens said the unusual reaction made her nervous to get her second dose.

Ultimately, she had the regular symptoms associated with the second vaccination.

“It just felt like I had the flu and I had the chills,” Ms. Ribbens said. “My brain was in a fog and I felt extremely tired.”

Ms. Gerst also experienced side effects with her second vaccination. She said she had symptoms that according to the CDC, were to be expected, such as chills, fever, nausea and aches that lasted about 24 hours. These symptoms made it hard for Ms. Gerst to actively participate in class the next day. Instead, she gave her students

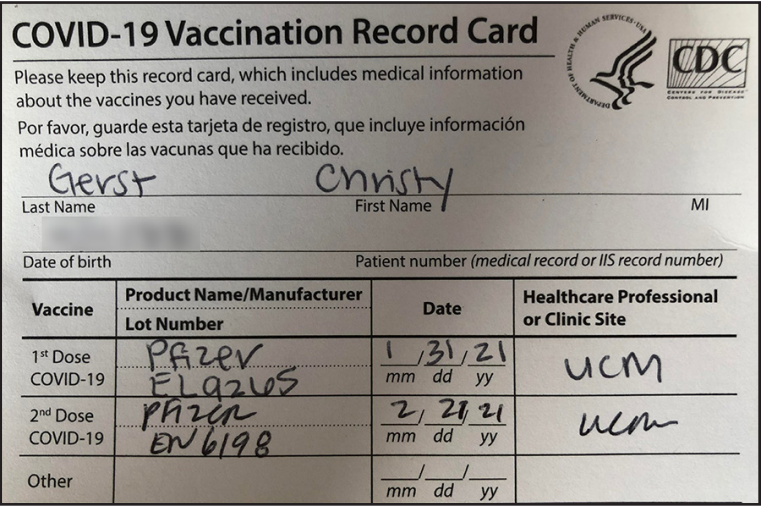


PHOTO COURTESY CHRISTY GERST

ALL CLEAR. History teacher Christy Gerst was complimentary of the University of Chicago’s organization throughout the vaccination process. After her second dose, Ms. Gerst said she experienced flu-like symptoms as expected on the CDC website.

the period to work on their group projects.

“Every single one of my days is crazy busy, and I sort of expected that I would push through, no matter what,” Ms. Gerst said. “I had a lot of things going on, but I wasn’t able to with the chills.”

Mr. Scroll, on the other hand, experienced no symptoms and noted that many of his colleagues also had no symptoms.

Ms. Ribbens said that despite

being vaccinated, she is still somewhat worried about the new variants of the virus. However, Ms. Ribbens said she is still extremely grateful for receiving her two vaccine doses.

“I feel very privileged to be part of the U. of C.,” Ms. Ribbens said. “Some people in other places have to wait in line for hours and hours, but we could just go right in.”

Additional reporting by Amanda Cassel and Caroline Hohner

OPINION

JUST A THOUGHT

Hybrid and remote students should remain in contact

After almost a year of distance learning, some U-High students began a hybrid learning system that brings each hybrid-learner to the campus for two days every two weeks along with their hybrid-learning grade members. Other students made the choice to opt out of this long-awaited opportunity, remaining in distance learning due to health concerns or other personal reasons.

These separate learning models will create further division, which is why students must work together to continue communicating with classmates who are on other sides of the school’s divide.

Hybrid learning puts the student body into separate groups as in-person students have more time to spend with each other and less time on their computers talking with friends in between classes or after school, which will result in a second wave of social isolation for students continuing distance learning.

Since the start of distance learning, 42.9% of Lab middle and high school students feel they are performing worse than they usually do, according to Lab’s January “All School Survey.” While hybrid learning is meant to remedy this, the social separation that damages focus and mental health will increase for those watching from home while their peers interact in person.

While this challenge seems insurmountable, students have been persistent in staying connected during online learning — such online game nights or study session calls — and will continue supporting each other even as the partial return creates more separation.

Students should commit themselves to communication goals like calling three friends a week. Communication has always been hard for teenagers, and today connecting even harder. Students must continue communicating despite new barriers.

— CLARE O’CONNOR

Wearing just one mask is not enough

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released new research on Feb. 10 that found wearing a cloth mask over a surgical mask offers substantially more protection against the coronavirus, as does tying knots on the ear loops of surgical masks to make the mask fit tighter.

Wearing a mask alone is not enough: everyone should double-mask when going outside and make sure their disposable masks are securely fitted to their face.

In lab tests, exposure to infectious aerosols decreased by 92.5% with two masks compared to just one. A mask looped and knotted around a person’s ears can block 63% of dangerous particles from escaping, significantly more than only 42% of particles when unknotted. When both an infected and uninfected source wear double masks, the cumulative exposure from potentially infectious aerosols of the uninfected person was reduced by 96.4%.

The significant benefit of double-masking makes it smart to wear a cloth mask over your standard face mask to prevent the spread of the virus until the United States reaches herd immunity. Additionally, knot disposable masks around your ears and make sure they snugly fit on your face to minimize the chance of infecting someone else.

— BERK OTO



CATCH A BREATH. Boys basketball players line up during a break in practice March 3 before taking on drills. Just two weeks after having their season canceled, the university announced U-High athletics would have a shortened winter season. Practices started days after the announcement — with masks and social distancing.

MIDWAY PHOTO BY MIRIAM BLOOM

U-HIGH MIDWAY

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