Finally here: 9th graders come to class

120 students start on-campus hybrid learning

By ELLA BEISSER & AMANDA CASSEL
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More than six months after the start of school, 120 ninth graders finally had their first day at school since the COVID-19 pandemic threw many aspects of their lives into upheaval. For sixth months, the class has been split into two groups — one which came to school in-person each day and the other which learned virtually.

On March 9, after the two groups switched, 120 ninth graders returned to Lab with these new protocols

"I imagine that had to do with the fact that they at least know their classmates even if only over Zoom and they have already met their teachers," Ms. Campos said.

For the rest of the spring, students 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 counselors programming.

On March 9, when seniors came to school, English teacher Steven Gervinson was impressed with the administration’s organization and described the first day as a success. Mr. Gervinson also appreciated seeing his students face-to-face for the first time all year.

"The technology is pretty fabulous, and even someone who’s not very good at it, I still did it," Mr. Gervinson 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 thought out and well put together."

Class of 2024 president Zoe Nathwani found it was much easier to engage in classes in person.

"It was so nice to see people again," Zoe said, "and I thought it was a lot easier to focus during classes."

Ninth grade Katie Sasamori-Kurisu said that an unexpected issue she encountered was what to do during free periods.

"We didn’t really know what to do," Katie said. "I appreciated the teachers telling us where we could go because I didn’t know. There were people going outside in the Secret Garden area. We sort of just walked around and eventually settled at a hallway to just chill out until fourth period.

I usually provided students with the opportunity to engage socially, Katie said.

"I feel like the normal part of seeing friends is the most important part of school aside from the academics," Katie said. "But it was easier to socialize than I thought. I also expected to be more lost, but I got to all my classes on time."

During lunch, students were provided with the opportunity to engage socially.

"I feel like the normal part of seeing friends is the most important part of school aside from the academics," Katie said. "During lunch, I could tell a lot of people were getting out more like they used to, and people were playing football. It just sort of made me feel like it was more like school.”

According to Principal Paul Beekmeyer, who arrived in 2019, the continuity, they’re the reason why the schedules work.

The process of finding a new assistant principal to take her place will begin shortly, according to Mr. Beekmeyer. Ms. Ahmed will remain at U-High through the end of the school year, and will work to finalize both student and school-wide schedules as well as on continuing plans for bringing all students back to campus next fall.

Ms. Ahmed said that above all, she will miss the U-High community.

"As an administrator, you get so much more of removed from being with students — it’s about me and I’ve missed that. When I do get to be with students or have my advisory, those are the highlights of my day," Ms. Ahmed said. She said that in many ways, she grew up at Lab, and leaving the community will be like leaving home. Her daughter graduated in 2020, and her son is in grade 6.

“I came when I was young-ish — I raised my daughter at Lab, I’ll miss that faculty community that I became a part of, I went to grade school at U of C, so I’ll miss the campus,” Ms. Ahmed said, "but really, more than anything, I’ll miss the people. I have friendships with people — it’s not just professional relationships, we know each other as human beings. It’ll be hard to leave that.”

Mr. Beekmeyer said Ms. Ahmed was crucial in getting Lab to return to in-person instruction this year.

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"I’ve grown here, it let me grow and the community supported me from the first day I walked in the building, so I feel really grateful for that and I always will."

120 Percentage in hybrid

- of 9th graders: 77%
- of 10th graders: 79%
- of 11th graders: 81%
- of 12th graders: 60%
- of faculty members: 81%
New director well liked at current school

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

by MEENA LEE

TOUCHING THE DOOR

As of March 1, Laboratory Schools faculty and staff have received their COVID-19 vaccinations from University of Chicago Medicine. Nearly 90% of the staff that were able to be vaccinated, despite some experiencing flu-like symptoms. Ms. Gerst said.

“They’re really cool in the office of the right in the middle of our main building, so we’ll often see her pop out to get something,” Mr. Przybylo said.

Ms. Gerst calls the middle of our building “central,” and she’ll normally just go right in to students. So it’s nice to have those interactions—outside of the office—where 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 normally really fun.”

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

“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—run cross country, she’ll say—’Hey hey, how’s the cross country season going?’ Or, ‘How’s 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 Ms. Gerst.

“I think she’s been really good at recognizing that her perspective is not necessarily the right one 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,” Ka- vi said.

In his experience, Ms. Jueds thinks about the big picture when it comes to addressing 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 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 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 expe- rience,” Mr. Magill said.

As part of the interview process, Ms. Jueds met with community leaders in interviews conducted with the final two candidates. An East President Omar Siddiqui parti- cipated in the interviews. According to Omar, student leaders were imp- ressed by Ms. Jueds’ experience in DEI work and commitment to transparency.

“She seemed like really, really clear on what the students had to say,” Kavi said. “She’s already dealt with some issues that we’ve had in the past and having a good relationship with student leaders, which is why students must work together to continue communicating with classmates who are on the other side 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 oth- er and less time on their comput- ers talking with friends in between classes, Magill said. This will result in a second wave of social isolation for students continuing distance learning.

Since the start of distance learn- ing, Magill said the student body at school feel they are performing individually.” We need to figure out how to do that socially that dam- ages focus and mental health will increase for students that are spending home while their peers interact in person.

While this challenge seems in- surmountable, students have been persistent and creative in their online learning — such as on- line game nights or study sessions calls — in connecting with one another even as the partial return to school continues.

Students should commit them- selves to communication goals like calling three friends a week. Communi- cation has always been hard for students, and today connect- ing with friends and family must continue communicating despite new barriers.

CLEARE CONNOR

Wearing just one mask is not enough

The Centers for Disease Con- trol and Prevention released a new research on Feb. 10 that found two masks worn properly can provide a surgical mask offers substantially more protection against the coro- navirus than wearing a single mask, as the ear loops of surgical masks to make the mask fit tighter.

Wearing masks alone is not enough: everyone should dou- ble up their mask and make sure their disposable masks are securely fitted to their face. In a test, one-way pollen- like aerosols decreased by 95.2% with two masks compared to just one. Pollen such as ragweed and birch are among a person’s ears can block out virus to the eyes and also protect against getting infected with viruses. The significant benefit of dou- ble-masking makes it smart to wear two. There is a high risk of face mask to face mask to prevent the transmission of coronavirus. The United States reached 4,000 cases of the virus.

Additionally, knot disposable masks around your ears and make sure they snugly fit on your face to minimize the chance of infection contracting the virus.

Ms. Gerst also said of her 15 minutes watching the 15 minutes allocated for ob- served after her shot, she said Ms. Ribbens said the unusual re- actions commonly associated with the second dose.

Ultimately, she had the regular symptoms associated with the sec- ond vaccination.

Ms. Gerst said the period to work on their group projects.

Every single one of my days is crazy busy, and I sort of expect- ed that I would push through, no matter what,” Ms. Gerst said. “I had a lot of things going on, but I worked through it.”

Mr. Scoll, on the other hand, has experienced some symptoms and not- ed that many of his colleagues also had no symptoms. Ms. Ribbens saw that despite being vaccinated, she is still some- what worried about the new vari- ants of the virus. However, Ms. Ribbens said she is still extreme- ly grateful for receiving her two vaccine doses.

“I feel very privileged to be part of that,” Ms. Ribbens said. “Some people in other places have not had that opportunity for hours and hours, but we could just go right in.”

Additional reporting by Amanda Cassel and Caroline Holmner

Amanda Cassel graduated from Harvard University, graduating magna cum laude. Earned bachelor’s degree at Harvard College.


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

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

Career: Worked as a lawyer from 2001 to 2006, working civil rights cases. She went on to work at George Washington University Law School. From there, she moved to be the senior associate dean of undergraduate students at Princeton University.

A poster of the Westtown School in Pennsylvania, where she has served since the 2018-19 season.

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