

Finally here: 9th graders come to class

120 students start on-campus hybrid learning

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

More than six months after the start of school, 120 ninth graders finally had their first day at school when hybrid learning began March 11.

Dean of Students Ana Campos said the students had a lot of anticipation for their first day of in-person school. She said that it felt great to have their first day of high school, something they've been waiting all year for.

She said she saw varying levels of confidence about finding their classes, but she said the stress was lower than a typical September.

"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 counselor programming.

On March 8, when seniors came to school, English teacher Steven Gevinson said he was impressed with the administration's organization and described the first day as a success. Mr. Gevinson also appreciated seeing his students face-to-face for the first time all year.

"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

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

all the safety issues it just seems to me like it was well 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 grader Katie Sasamoto-Kurusu said that an unexpected issue she encountered was what to do during free periods.

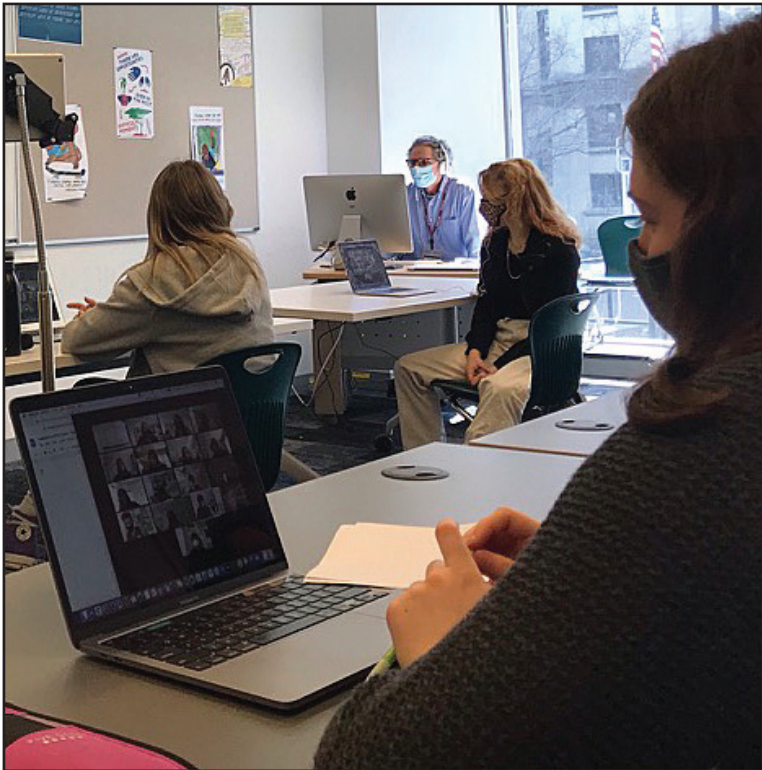
"We didn't really know what to do," Katie said. "I appreciated the teachers telling us where we could go because I didn't know. There were people going outside in the Secret Garden area. We sort of just walked around and eventually settled at a hallway to just chill out until fourth period."

Lunchtime 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. "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."



MIDWAY PHOTO BY MYLES COBB



MIDWAY PHOTO BY AMANDA CASSEL

BREAK FOR LUNCH. Ninth graders Malacai Sanders, Siddharth Misra, Kian Quinn-Calabrese and Maximilian Mathias relax during their first day of hybrid learning on a bench near Jackman Field at lunch March 11. 77% of ninth graders chose to take the hybrid learning option and will attend classes on campus for two days every two weeks.

CALLING FROM CAMPUS. Senior 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.

QUICK Q

How was the return to school different from your expectations?

STELLA STURGILL:

“In my first class, the teacher was muted, and no one at home could hear her. In the second class, it was really chaotic because I would hear my classmates who were there speaking, and then three seconds later they would be speaking on the Zoom, too.”

ZARA SIDDIQUE:

“I honestly didn't know what to expect. I wasn't sure how everything they described would work, but everything went seemingly flawlessly. I was surprised at how safe it was.”

EMMETT GOOLSBEE:

“Class was a bit more boring than I thought it would be. I had pretty high expectations for how it would be socially, and the return was even better socially than I expected. There was much more free time to spend with friends and the facility didn't make it a prison.”

NATALIE DAMER-SALAS:

“The teachers were less strict and it was easier to socialize than I thought. I also expected to be more lost, but I got to all my classes on time.”

Most experienced administrator leaving U-High

by **NICKY EDWARDS-LEVIN**
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

After 17 years at U-High, assistant principal Asra Ahmed will leave Lab after this school year to become upper school director at Waynflete School, a N-12 private day school in Portland, Maine.

Ms. Ahmed came to Lab as a high school counselor in 2004 after working as a public school social worker. In her years as a faculty member, she was the chair of the learning and counseling department, and served as high school faculty chair. In 2011,



Asra Ahmed

Ms. Ahmed transitioned to an administrative role, becoming assistant principal, and she is currently U-High's longest-serving administrator.

According to Principal Paul Beekmeyer, who arrived in 2019, Ms. Ahmed has been integral with the leadership team in keeping consistency throughout U-High. In her years as a faculty member and administrator, there have been five different U-High principals.

"Ms. Ahmed has been such an important person for U-High. With all the changes in leadership, she is the person, with Ms. Campos, who has kept stability in this school. If you wanna know why there's any stability, it's not because of the principal turnover — it's because of Ms. Ahmed and Ms. Campos,"

Mr. Beekmeyer said. "They provide support to the faculty, they provide 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 contingency 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 sort of removed from being with students a lot — at least in my position — 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 graduate 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.

"When I do get to be with students or have my advisory, those are the highlights of my day."

ASRA AHMED,
ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL

"She's the one who put it all together, who figured out all the details and all the rooms, and that's a lot of work," Mr. Beekmeyer said. "She is a tremendous asset to this school, and it's a tremendous loss."

Ms. Ahmed said she will miss Lab dearly.

"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."

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

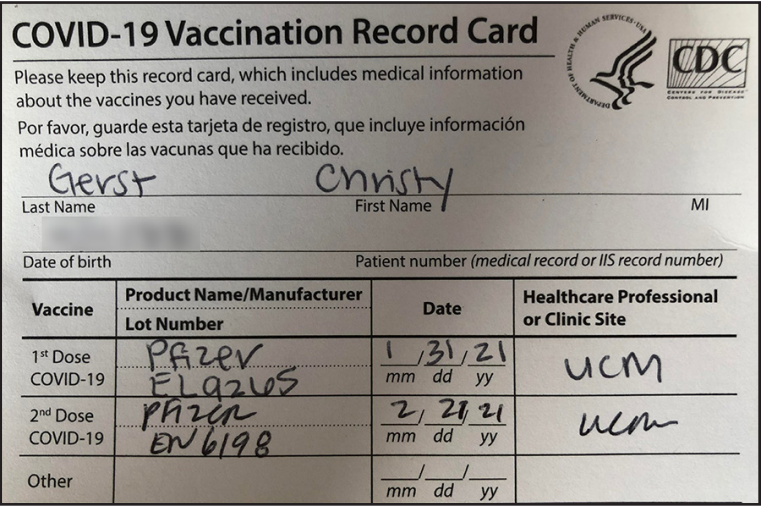


PHOTO COURTESY CHRISTY GERST

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



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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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