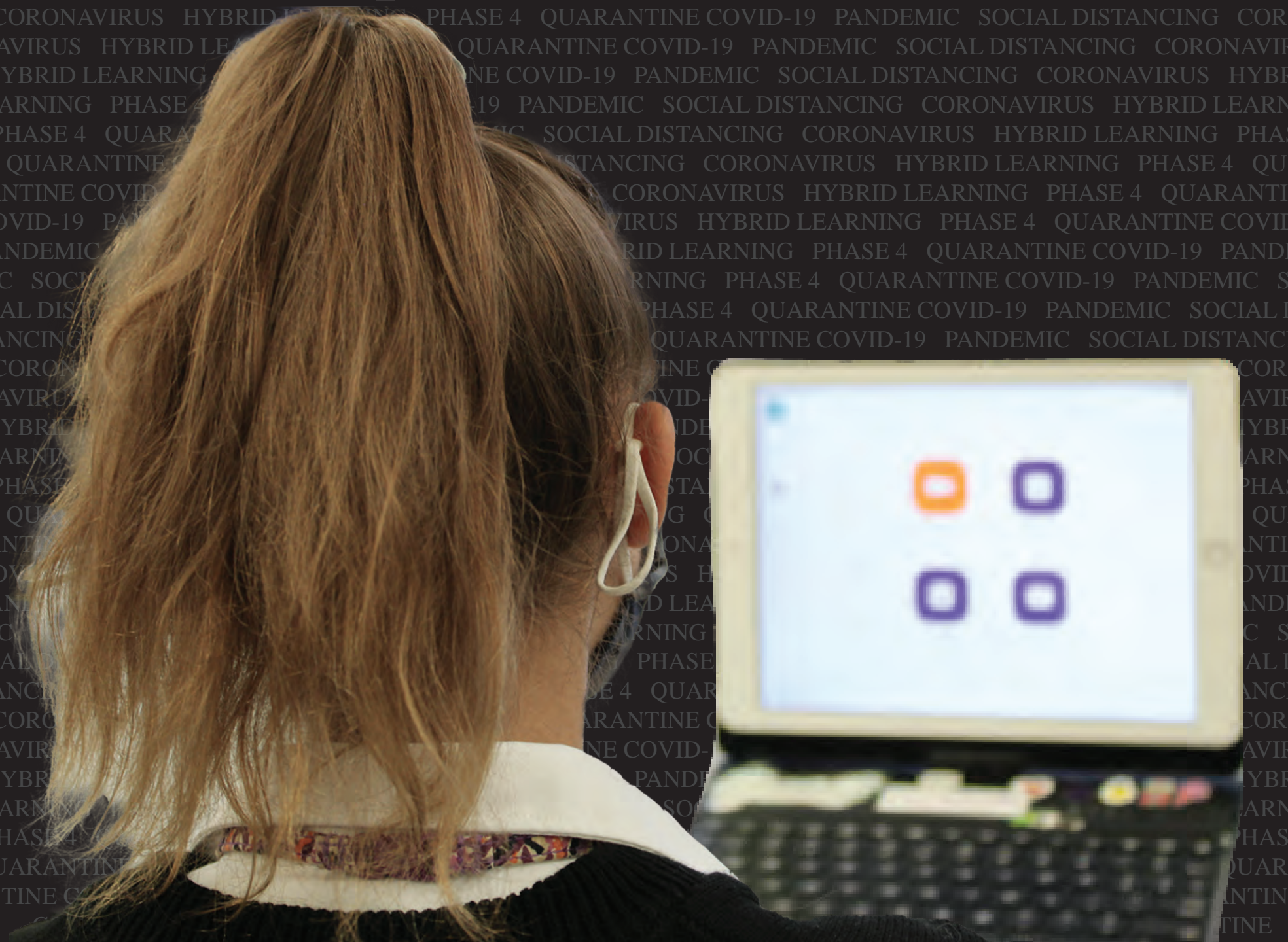


NEWSPRINT

# THE NEW NORMAL



# SEPTEMBER

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# Clare's Corner

## We are all in this together

STORY, PHOTO AND GRAPHICS: CLARE JONES, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The simple days of the public receiving information from morning newspapers or watching the six o'clock news have evolved into a 24-hour news cycle complete with social media, cable, and streaming news services. Despite an increasing array of media platforms and more airtime for a variety of stories to be covered, major media often fails to report stories that include young people's perspectives.

Unlike traditional media, Mercy has an established student voice that reflects our student body's diverse interests, where social issues that directly impact us are discussed. Through clubs like the Girls Reaching Environmental Enlightenment Now (GREEN Club), Black Awareness Society for Education (B.A.S.E.), Human Relations Council (HRC), Female Empowerment Movement (FEM Club), and Youth Mercy Associates, to name a few, Mercy allows opportunities for students to learn and constructively advocate topics that drive our passions, while also providing conduits to understand our peers better.

Currently, Mercy's student body is part of Generation Z (those born from 1996-2015), the most ethnically diverse generation to date. As a big tent generation, we advocate for a variety of the most prevalent social issues that impact us as those just now coming of age and, in general, as human beings. Unlike the generation before us, Gen Z has a broad constituency that has chosen to advocate for social issues such as preserving the environment, combating racial and gender inequality, and respecting religious freedoms.

For example, on a global scale, Greta Thunberg, a Generation Z environmental activist, has propelled people all over the world to recognize the importance of renewable energy and of reducing our carbon footprint. Despite Thunberg's weekly school climate strikes, known as "Fridays for the Future," where worldwide students participated in their own local demonstrations to promote the preservation of the earth, the media stopped covering her peaceful strikes and inspiring message. Is it because this issue is no longer important? Unlike Thunberg's challenges of being heard by the media, Mercy's GREEN Club provides students

an opportunity to express and support daily habits for a healthier environment both in and out of school. The Mercy administration's support of the GREEN Club's recycling bins, compostable plastic in the cafeteria, and paperless digital assignments successfully support student advocacy for preserving the environment.

Similarly, social inequality movements have sparked an increase in Gen Z's commitment to improving racial injustice and gender biases. Mercy clubs like B.A.S.E., FEMClub, and H.R.C. provide focused platforms to recognize disparities and provide solutions from the perspective of Mercy students. While not all students may be victims of racial and/or gender injustice, one's friend, neighbor, or schoolmate may have been affected by the intolerance, which makes the incidents personal, nonetheless. In contrast, few Gen-Z activists' perspectives are featured in the platforms externally. Malala Yousafzai's viewpoint was highlighted in mainstream media more so from her being a victim of a violent shooting than her advocacy for Pakistanian women's rights to an education. And, we cannot overlook the many civil protests from Gen-Z regarding overcoming racial injustice and gun violence. However, Gen Z's perspective on these issues is overshadowed by the unfortunate incidents occurring at the rallies.

Furthermore, while Mercy is a Catholic school, we remain respectful of other faiths and each student's religious freedoms. By respecting prayers that celebrate the Jewish holiday such as Rosh Hashanah and the Muslim holiday Ramadan, we strive to educate students on the importance of being respectful of religions other than your own and to be more inclusive of the world we live in. Gen Z's religious freedom advocacy efforts are so significantly underrepresented that there is no highly visible activist to note.

Rather than waiting for older generations to provide platforms to hear us, we have taken control of our narrative by using technology and instantaneous communication to aid the causes we want to champion.

I am so proud to be a Mercy girl,

where the importance of respecting others is highly valued and encouraged—being open to respecting others' cultures for students to feel safe to express their views, even if they are different from their own.

Let us take charge of our futures and embrace both our similarities and differences to build upon the Mercy legacy as a high school that not only provides superior education, but also supports the development of future leaders who are globally aware of the diverse causes that impact our current and future society.



# A new era of standardized testing

STORY AND GRAPHICS: DELILAH COE, WEB EDITOR

**M**ercy High School students start preparing and worrying about standardized testing, especially the ACT and SAT, from the minute high school starts. We are told about the importance of these tests from day one, take the PreACT and PSAT sophomore and junior year, and have preparation for them in our math classes. Many students complete hours of tutoring, classes, practice tests and studying in preparation for admittance to their desired college. The pressure of these exams are extreme because they can limit students' likelihood of being accepted when applying to college, but what happens when the tests that they have been preparing for start to get canceled? Does that cause more stress and anxiety, or perhaps relief? It all depends on the specific college, the student and their current situation.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic many colleges have stated they are going test-optional for the Class of 2021, while other universities have instead decided to become test flexible. To ensure that all colleges are giving all applicants an equal opportunity, test optional colleges have issued statements to emphasize their proper procedural admission protocol.

Test optional colleges that are popular within the Mercy community include Grand Valley State University, Indiana University Bloomington, Loyola University, Michigan State University, Marquette University and Notre Dame University.

Test flexible schools, such as the University of Michigan and Purdue University, encourage students to submit a test score, whether it be an official ACT or SAT test or any other standardized testing result. If they are unable to take an official exam, students will still be considered. This flexibility also brings a different aspect to stress concerning whether students should submit mediocre test scores or take a risk by not submitting a test score at all.

Every student remains in a difficult situation. While some were afforded the chance to take the test, many students would prefer to retake the test to improve their overall score. For example, senior Katie Kim had the opportunity to take the test and has chosen to submit her score.

"I feel slightly less stress, but I still feel pressured to

submit my score," said Kim.

Contrastly, Jordan Maloney has still not gotten to take any standardized tests.

"I'm happy I didn't have to stress about it at the time, and it honestly doesn't worry me, because personally I'm not a good test taker," said Maloney.

In years prior to the pandemic, colleges looked at both grades and test scores for the admissions process. Now that schools are going test optional, the review process has changed. To adjust, the NACAC (National Association for College Admission Counseling) has created a document that states test optional universities are truly test optional and will not judge students differently with or without a standardized test score.

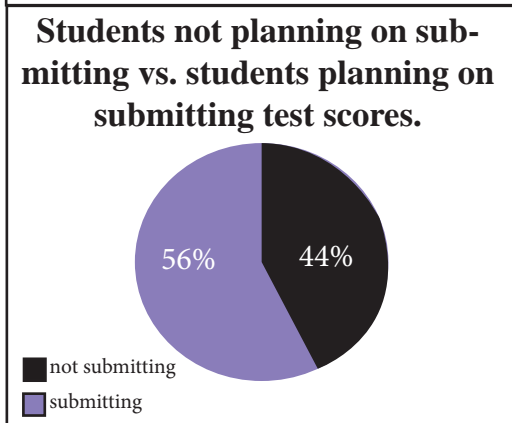
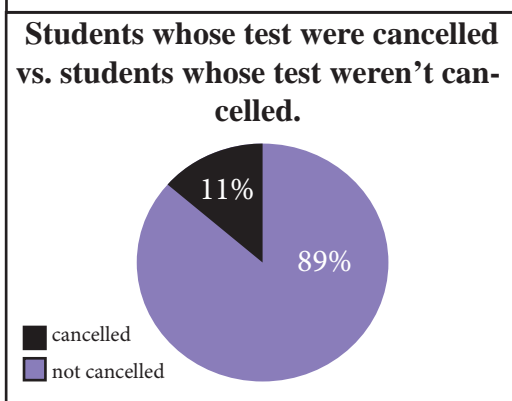
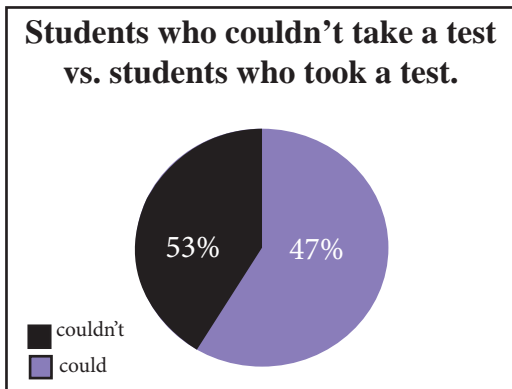
This new approach is forcing colleges to take a more holistic review toward their applicants. Instead of just looking at test scores and grades, the colleges will review a more in-depth look into the applicant's essays, school courses, AP and honors classes, community service, outside jobs and other factors. Mrs. Holly Markiecki-Bennetts, the past president of the Michigan Association for College Admission Counseling and a current counselor at Mercy, thinks that this change could be an advantage for students.

"If you look at the way the tests were developed, they are just not good," said Mrs. Bennetts. "I would love every school to be test optional."

Although COVID-19 has brought many worries and struggles to high school students worldwide, it is changing the college admissions process - perhaps for the better.

"There were some schools that were considering going test optional, so when this happened, it pushed the needle," said Mrs. Bennetts.

Test optional could become the new way of the future. Even though this alters the traditional college admissions process, it could change the way colleges consider prospective students. Instead of high school students worrying about one test throughout high school that defines them, they can focus on their grades, sports, and other extracurricular activities that may make them more appealing to colleges.



Based on a Newsprint poll with 195 responses.

<p><b>Test Optional Schools:</b></p>	
<p><b>Test Flexible Schools:</b></p>	



# Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

## Mercy introduces new position to create a more equitable learning environment

STORY: MADDIE SULLIVAN, COPY EDITOR PHOTO AND GRAPHICS: CLARE JONES, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Mrs. Traci Smith strolled through the halls carefully studying the nuances of her new surroundings on her first day working at Mercy. She was met with some friendly “hellos” as she sauntered down the freshly waxed floors to her makeshift office. The office needed some serious TLC, but Mrs. Smith knew she was where she needed to be.

Over the summer, Mrs. Smith was hired as Mercy’s first Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI). This new position was created to specifically address one of Mercy’s critical concerns: equitable treatment for all Mercy students. Smith’s role aims to highly encourage Mercy to build upon its multicultural community. “My hope is that everyone feels welcome here,” said Mrs. Smith.

After earning a Bachelor of Arts in Secondary English Education and Organizational Studies from the University of Michigan, Smith completed her graduate degree from Harvard University in Urban Education and policy. Subsequently, Mrs. Smith pursued a career as an educator and has been teaching for over 16 years. She most recently taught English at De La Salle High School and Detroit’s University Prep High School.

“I want to make sure that students feel like they have a voice and not feel like they have to shy away from [speaking up],” said Mrs. Smith. Although Mrs. Smith is not assisting students in a conventional classroom, she wants to be an educator and administrative resource about best practices regarding equity and inclusion for all Mercy students. While this is Mrs. Smith’s first time officially holding an administrative position, she has contributed to

facilitating inclusion and diversity at her previous school environments. For example, Smith worked with the school’s administration to ensure that marginalized and minorities students are fairly represented in the school’s advanced programs such as Honors classes and Advanced Placement (AP) courses. Furthermore, Smith has encouraged minority students to apply for



Mrs. Traci Smith’s office is located at the Reception area and she welcomes students to stop by her office when the door is open. Photo by Clare Jones

academic honor programs such as the National Honor Society (NHS) and Language Honor Societies. “I felt called to this position because I have been a student at predominantly white institutions and I know how it feels to be the only person of color in a room” said Mrs. Smith. “I’ve experienced feeling like an outsider, I’ve experienced microaggressions, I’ve experienced outright discrimination, but despite all that I was able to thrive,

so I want to help students of color and students who are marginalized in any way thrive.”

Mrs. Smith is excited about her new position and has already begun working with groups such as Mercy’s Council On Racial Equity (CORE), the Mercy Board of Trustees Racial Equity Task Force, the Human Relations Council (HRC) and Mercy’s Link Crew.

Not only will Smith be working with the Mercy students and the school administration, but will also be engaging with parents to ensure she has feedback from a variety of perspectives that accommodate the needs of the Mercy community.

“I think Mercy does an excellent job at many things, [especially being] inclusive and welcoming,” said Mrs. Leigh Coleman, CORE member and Mercy parent. “[However], I think to make Mercy more just, we have to look at ourselves and make some changes.”

Mrs. Smith’s focus for this year is modifying the school curriculum and implementing additional training for the teaching and staff about how to best address controversial situations that could possibly occur within a school environment. Some topics that Mrs. Smith wants to address in particular are microaggressions, racism, trauma and grief, empathy, and the internalized oppression of women.

One of Mrs. Smith’s first initiatives as the Director of DEI is to create a book study for the staff. The book study will consist of reading and analyzing literature about racial issues through enlightening literature such as *So You Want to Talk About Race* by Ijeoma Oluo.





# A decade of Link Crew

STORY AND GRAPHICS: GRACE O'DEA

A freshman sits at the desk in her room the morning of August 19, anxiously waiting to tap a Zoom link. She is preparing to begin her first day of high school and thinks of all that could go wrong during an orientation presented through a screen. She taps the link that takes her to a Zoom call with the other hundreds of incoming freshwomen just as nervous as her. Her worries are soon eased when she discovers a new sense of home within her Link Crew.

Mercy High School's Link Crew program is designed to welcome freshwomen to a new school environment. The program is celebrating its 10 year anniversary at Mercy this fall. The program is owned by The Boomerang Project and was brought to Mercy by Mrs. Trish Brown, the ninth grade counselor. Mrs. Brown discovered the Link Crew program at an informational session at North Farmington High School.

"It's all about students helping students," said Mrs. Brown, who now co-leads Link Crew with science teacher Mrs. Sara McGavin. She knew Link Crew was exactly what Mercy needed the second she learned about it.

What Mrs. Brown liked most about Link Crew was the way it celebrated ninth graders. She also liked how the program is almost entirely student-led, making it both a way of welcoming freshwomen and teaching older Mercy girls about leadership.

"Link Crew is the perfect mix between friendship and mentorship," said senior Link Crew leader Dalia Housey. Freshwomen are put in crews of about 7-10 students and led by their Link leaders for the entirety of the school year. The leaders' goals are to help their crew members learn to adjust to the Mercy environment and be there for them through the trials and tribulations of freshman year, while also celebrating their successes.

This year's Link Crew includes 40 leaders, with 20 individual Link Crews. Each Link Crew is assigned a specific color and name.

Not much has changed about Link Crew in the decade it has spent at Mercy. "We've got a lot of traditions," said Mrs. Brown. "We've got a lot of things that we've been doing for a really long time."

Despite this year's Link Crew mostly same.

small changes to program, the curriculum has remained the

But one significant change has been

made to Link Crew this year: being online.

"The Boomerang Project designed a fully virtual program," said Mrs. Brown. She explained that the first semester will consist of a completely virtual Link Crew experience, while the second semester will be decided on later this year.

Link Crew leaders, who would typically have one in-person training day, instead had two training days spent on Zoom. There they learned about different leadership strategies for the year and how to best help their crew members succeed, as they would any other year.

Freshwoman Welcome Day was also hosted on Zoom. Mercy's new students spent their first day as high schoolers watching a welcome video, and getting to know their fellow crew members. Although the Freshwoman Welcome Day agenda was set up similarly to how it would be any other year, it was still a unique experience considering it wasn't in person the way it usually is.

"I was worried about if my iPad wouldn't work or if my WiFi went down," said freshman Lena LaJoy. "Just because it was my first day and I didn't know what I'd do." LaJoy and her peers shared their anxieties about having weak internet during their first day of virtual orientation.

First-day worries weren't only present for freshman, though. Crew leaders themselves were anxious to see how the virtual experience would play out.

"I was honestly kind of nervous," said Housey. "I had already been used to [Link Crew] being in person." Besides having to adjust from in-person to online Link Crew, other worries stemmed from how the freshwomen would respond to a virtual first day experience.

According to Housey, "It's harder to engage people virtually because in person there's more of a connection." Freshwoman Welcome Day is about helping introduce new students to a group of girls so that they'll know people before entering the school year. Engaging with the other girls in one's crew is critical, but can be hard when it's not done face to face.

However, Link Crew seems to have risen to the occasion by getting the freshwomen within their crews to branch out and interact with their fellow crew members on the first day.

"[Crew leaders] helped us all get to know each other," said LaJoy, "and it was just a fun time." Freshwomen played games to help them break the ice with their fellow crew members and leaders. They were also given some advice to guide them through their first year of high school and make the transition from



middle school more manageable.

Link Crew leaders put a lot of thought and time into planning for their crew members, so they could make sure their freshwomen had the best first-day experience possible.

"Overall, I think things went really well," said Mrs. Brown, who received lots of positive feedback about Freshwoman Welcome Day.

Link Crew remaining virtual for the entirety of the first semester is no huge obstacle for the program and only poses a slight change to how Link Crew operates.

According to Housey, "The message and what we're trying to accomplish hasn't changed. The connections haven't changed; you can still make connections. We just have to think of new ways we can create these bonds." Link Crew is centered around guiding freshwomen and giving them the tools they need to make their first year at Mercy as prosperous as possible, which can still be done through a screen.

Regardless of how the Link Crew experience looks, the goal remains the same. Crew leaders still look forward to being there for their Crew Members every step of the way through their freshman year, whether by helping them or celebrating them.

"We are excited to have our new students here at Mercy," said Mrs. Brown. "We have their back . . . We're going to totally support them through this entire year."



Senior Link Crew leader Dalia Housey joins a Zoom call with her fellow link leader and the rest of her crew on Freshwoman Welcome Day. Photo used with permission from Dalia Housey.



# Personalizing parking

STORY AND PHOTOS: CLARE JONES, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF AND RACHAEL SALAH, DESIGN EDITOR

## Olivia Palm

Living in Michigan, it is common to see Mercy students wearing Patagonia winter apparel as the seasons begin to change and the cold weather creeps in. Olivia Palm has taken her favorite clothing brand and designed her own personal “Palmagonia” brand to create her parking spot.

“I was so happy we got [senior] parking spots, despite us only being at school two days a week,” said Palm. “Because of the coronavirus, there are not a lot of senior privileges we can get, so having a senior parking spot was even more special.”

Palm spent two hours painting the base coat and two and a half more hours designing her spot. Olivia was thrilled to have a parking spot on the athletic and auditorium side of the school building because it was more convenient for her to access and leave her extra curricular activities. She is a sprinter on the track team and a part of the costume crew for school’s theatre production.



Olivia Palm sits proudly on her senior parking spot that is inspired by the clothing brand Patagonia. Photo by Clare Jones

## Sam Diaz

Inspired by the American artist Keith Haring, Sam Diaz ‘21 has created her own version of Haring art to design her senior parking spot.

“I am very happy with how my parking spot turned out,” said Diaz.

Diaz chose to have her personalized spot on the school’s auditorium side because she is currently swimming for Mercy’s Swim and Dive Team; Diaz is one of the captains. Diaz is also a student who profoundly enjoys the value that art brings to our society and how art pieces can tell a story and express significant meaning to its creators or the individuals who observe the work. Sam is enrolled at Mercy in the Advanced Placement (A.P.) art curriculum, where she plans to learn and perfect her skills to become a designer.



It took Diaz four hours to complete her parking spot design. Photo by Clare Jones

## Avery Swickard and Delilah Coe

Both girls decided to design their parking spots based on their shared love for the cartoon show *Rick and Morty*. Both Delilah and Avery have been longtime friends and have gone to school together since fourth grade.

“I am very pleased with how our parking spots turned out. I was really nervous that they were not [going to] look as good as I wanted them to,” said Coe.

Coe and Swickard are the only seniors who decided to combine their spots to create one expansive design. The girls brought tape, paint trays, chalk and small paint brushes to perfect their final design.

Swickard and Coe’s design can be found near the flagpole entrance in the second row.



Swickard and Coe pose proudly as they display their finished dual design. Photo by Rachael Salah



# The new normal: student & teacher perspectives

STORY AND GRAPHICS: **MEGAN MALLIE, ASSOCIATE EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

With all of the new changes made to Mercy’s learning process this year, it has not been a typical back-to-school process. Both students and teachers have had to adjust their routines to fit with Mercy’s new hybrid model, which has come along with its benefits and challenges.

**M**ercy art teacher Mrs. Darlene Earls talks to her ceramics students, guiding them through the steps of shaping a handle out of clay. However, her demonstration has a slight twist—her audience is virtual on an iPad screen, and her classroom seats are empty.

For many Mercy teachers, adjusting to the new hybrid learning model has been a challenge, one they have had to face head-on. Lesson planning, Schoology updates and Zoom meeting after Zoom meeting have filled the new school schedule. Teachers have had to find creative solutions to overcome various problems, such as maintaining student engagement virtually or in person.

Mrs. Earls has made many alterations to her lesson plans, and what she has found to be incredibly difficult is separating the students at home from those physically present. “I have to make two different lesson plans or do something in school that they can do at home,” she said. “That’s been the hardest thing for me.”

Another challenge has been the hands-on learning aspect of the art classes she teaches. Mrs. Earls teaches two ceramics classes and three photography classes, both of which involve physical student interaction. Including setting up, cleaning up, starting the Zoom call, and managing the shortened hours, Mrs. Earls has found it challenging to fit everything into such a short window of time.

“I used to have [my students] five hours a week, now I get [them] for an hour and a half of in-person contact,” she said. “Every minute I have with each person is precious.”

Mrs. Earls’ new schedule now includes searching for materials for her virtual students to utilize while not in class, such as YouTube tutorials. She also spends a lot of time planning out assignments on Schoology to avoid miscommunications between her classes.

“I put it all on Schoology step by step,” Mrs. Earls said. “I have to make more accountability checkpoints.”

One of the aspects of the hybrid model that has been surprisingly difficult for Mrs. Earls has been the smaller class size.

“There’s not as much conversation, and that might be just the mask; it might be there’s fewer people,” she said. “Everybody seems to be a little bit inhibited. . . . When the kids are home I feel like they’re not getting as much [socialization] as they need.”

Something she appreciates about the hybrid model has been a bittersweet realization.

“The great thing is that it did make me know what I love about teaching,” said Earls. “I like being in the presence of kids, but when they’re absent from the learning process there’s really a longing that I have. . . if anything it made my heart grow fonder for teaching.”

Science teacher Mrs. Mallory has also had difficulty with the hands-on aspect of learning. She teaches an I-Explore class, two Chemistry in the Community classes, and two biology classes. However, she has had to make the group work individual assignments in I-Explore, and she has not been able to have her students in biology use the microscopes yet.

“Some things I haven’t quite figured out how to make collaborative,” Mrs. Mallory said. “I think that group work is almost more of a challenge than having to deal with the physical step.”

Another difficult aspect of the hybrid model for Mrs. Mallory has been the lack of social interaction and discussions in the classroom.

“I think that I’m fairly social, so I tend to engage more with those people [in class],” she said. “With Zoom it’s just so much slower to have those interactions.”

Although the way she has been teaching has not changed, her lesson plans have. Mrs. Mallory analyzes what activities are most beneficial to work on when physically present, and gives the other half of the class online an assignment that they can complete easier on their own. She also uses Swivl every day for the online and GOAL students so they can be a part of the class.

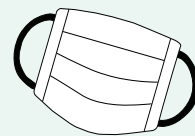
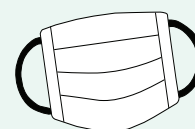
Something else Mrs. Mallory has noticed has been how much her students enjoy being physically present at school.

“I expected people to be complaining a lot,” she said. “But people realize what a blessing it is to be in person and be with other people. . . we’re starting to realize how beautiful it is to be together in school.”

Senior Isabella Morganti weaves her way through North hall from her calculus class across the school to her Advanced Placement (A.P.) Latin class in South hall. The one-way hallways make her would-be-convenient walk across the school a hassle. It makes her appreciate her extra time at home.

“A good thing is that I have more time,” Morganti said. “I don’t have to drive to school and I don’t have to drive home so I get all my homework done faster.”

Changing her study habits have also been key to Morganti’s academic success; however, she has struggled with participation during in-class discussions.



“A disadvantage is really just [that] asking questions is harder to do because sometimes they’re very specific to that moment, and then once that moment has passed it’s kind of irrelevant,” Morganti said. “It would just be so much easier if everyone was in class. . . it’s kind of hard to go between people in school and online.”

One thing Morganti was surprised she liked about the hybrid model was the flex day every Wednesday. She makes good use of the time to

catch up on homework, study or relax in the comfort of her own home. She appreciates it especially because of the break she gets from her three back-to-back AP classes.

“They’re not really hard to learn virtually,” Morganti said, “but [I prefer] in school definitely because I feel like I pay attention better and it’s easier to ask questions.”

# What Mercy is doing to help stop the spread

STORY AND GRAPHICS: **MADDIE SULLIVAN, COPY EDITOR**

**A**s students and staff were preparing for their return to in-person classes at Mercy High School, Mr. Gary Bank, the Mercy Site Manager and Systems Administrator, was working tirelessly to make sure the school was as equipped and safe as possible for the first day of school.

Mr. Bank is a part of the Mercy Return to School Response Team, a group of Mercy administrators and staff who have been working since spring to develop the framework to allow for a safe reopening of school in August.

One of Mr. Bank’s roles within the Response Team is to make sure the school is supplied with adequate personal protective equipment such as face shields, face masks, and disinfectant products. Other advanced sanitary devices, such as electrostatic sprayers and special chemicals that counteract the coronavirus, have been purchased and are used regularly to keep the school clean.

“Once students leave for the day, our maintenance team comes in and disinfects the entire school,” said Mr. Bank. “Every room, every door knob, every light switch [is disinfected] to make sure that we can start every school day with a clean school.”

Along with the daily disinfection performed by the maintenance staff, the Response Team has also implemented a classroom disinfection policy, which requires all teachers to sterilize the desks and shared objects in their classroom between each class.

The Response Team was also able to replace every sink in the school with new sinks. These new sinks offer desirable features such as touchless faucets and touchless soap dispensers. In addition to the new sinks, there are sanitation stations located throughout the school, such as in

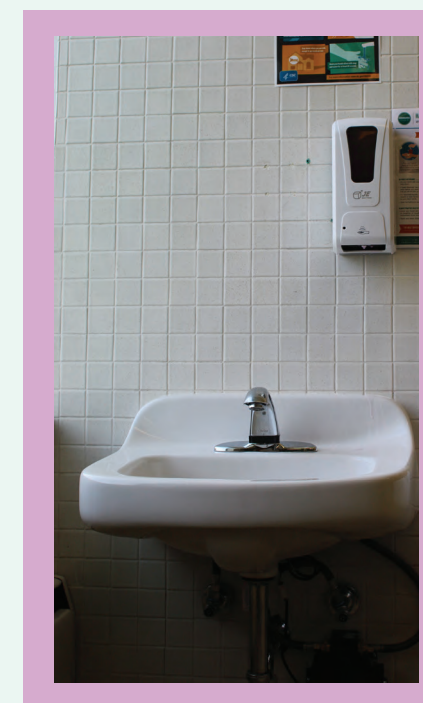
the North hall near the media center. Mr. Bank also aided the Response Team in setting up the protocol for the one-way hallways.

“We thought that giving students direction in the hallways with the arrows would benefit everyone,” said Mr. Bank. “There’s very few spots [in the school] where you would cross paths with someone else.”

The restrictions put in place by Mercy due to the coronavirus have also been very impactful on Mercy’s athletics program.

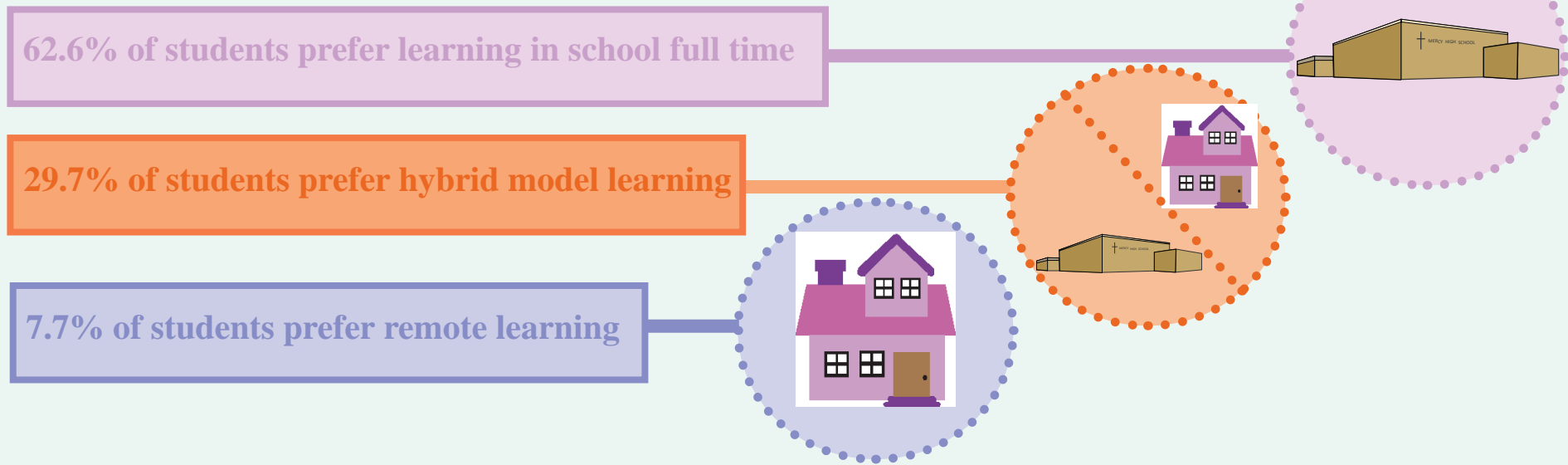
Athletes are required to undergo a coronavirus screening before all games, refrain from sharing equipment, and wear masks upon entering and exiting the building. Additionally, athletes who participate in contact sports (volleyball and field hockey) must wear masks during play.

“There are so many precautions now that need to be taken,” said Mrs. Kate Scalzi, the Assistant Athletics Director. “But if it keeps everyone safe and it keeps everyone playing, it’s worth it.”



Stationed around the school are various new and improved safety implementations including automatic sink faucets and soap dispensers, and hand sanitizer stations located throughout the one-way hallways. Photo gallery by Megan Mallie and Maddie Sullivan.

Based on a Newsprint poll of 195 responses:





# Traditions through thick and thin

STORY, PHOTOS AND GRAPHICS: CAITLYN BEGOSA

**D**ancing for eight years and ready to meet new people, freshman Katelyn Cronan jumped at the chance of joining the Mercy Varsity Pompon (MVP) team. Cronan was surprised one day to see her house decorated head to toe with maroon and gold streamers by MVP seniors officially welcoming her to the team.

Even though the usual decorations include toilet paper and silly string, MVP found a way to adapt to give new members a warm welcome and maintain traditions through COVID-19. This tradition is just one of the many events the team has to help build unity.

MVP revolves around the trust and friendship developed between its participants. Through traditions, the members get acquainted with one another more and can bond.

“The more they know each other, they’re going to trust each other more,” said MVP Coach Katherine Munson. “Pompon is such a uniformed sport that if [the members] don’t trust each other, [they’re] not on the exact same page, then the routines and dances don’t come out as crisp and clean as [they] should.”

MVP has many traditions, but several have had to adapt to fit health requirements for COVID-19.

Every summer, MVP attends an overnight camp for a week at Davenport University in Grand Rapids to learn new routines and bond together as a team. Due to health requirements, the camp was canceled, but the coaches have planned a two-day excursion in late September.

“It’ll just be a little bit of a different experience,” said Coach Munson. “But we will absolutely have some form of a camp [this year].”

Another tradition MVP has is “bigs and littles.” Bigs are upperclassmen and littles are underclassmen. Each upperclassman is

assigned an underclassman to guide and help throughout the school year. This tradition immensely helps the freshmen as the upperclassmen mentor their littles on how to be on a varsity sports team and help to guide them through their first year of high school.

“Over the season, [bigs] are basically [the underclassman’s] big sisters,” says senior Lila Bidoul. “She comes to you for everything: for help, school, pom, or just life, and then [bigs] mentor her to be better at everything.”

Currently a little, Cronan has received a plethora of advice from the upperclassmen, ranging from pom routines to what she can wear during the school day.

“They just helped me with a lot of things,” said Cronan. “I’ve asked a lot about coming to that first week of school and what I need to do, like what kind of sock and shoes I can wear.”

For many events like this, each member participates and prepares to be able to introduce these traditions to new members of MVP.

“I think the traditions are important to be passed down from player to player, especially as people graduate and move on,” Coach Munson said. “It strengthens the team unity when we know what to expect as well, and it’s more fun for the upperclassmen that they get to introduce things to the new girls.”

By maintaining social distancing, MVP was still able to have their annual summer meetup, finally getting to meet their teammates of the new season after attending virtual practices during quarantine. The bigs gave their littles goodie bags, and the whole team did activities to help strengthen their bond.

MVP also had to alter their practice schedules and routines. The usual pattern of having practice everyday before school at 6 A.M. in the

gym was completely replaced with virtual practices on Zoom, a video conferencing communication application. They have also practiced outside on the track field after school. The style of routines also had to be changed for health requirements.

“We can’t hook up for the kickline,” said Coach Munson. “There is no touching. We have to stay six feet apart, which changes all of our formations. We do pom in different formations where we’re close together, and now we’re spread apart, and we can’t do partner work.” Despite this colossal challenge, MVP adapted their routines to still give a stunning performance.

These traditions and the memories they made along the way stay with each MVP member even after they graduate Mercy.

“[On MVP,] you make memories together that you’ll remember for the rest of your life,” said Bidoul. “So even when you go to college or graduate, you’ll still remember the pom team.”



Photos by: Caitlyn Begosa



# Want to avoid lunch hassle? Make your own!

STORY, PHOTOS AND GRAPHICS: JULIANNA TAGUE

In the age of mask wearing, contact tracing and social distancing, most of us have had to give up the routines we've been accustomed to for the sake of safety – and Mercy life is no exception. Along with the many other precautions being taken this semester, students have waved a temporary goodbye to the snacks, salad bar and Slushie machine the cafeteria once offered. And while a walk through the socially-distanced chair maze for a tasty sandwich or wrap is always an option, many of us are turning to lunches we can make at home instead of purchasing meals at school.

If you ever find yourself wondering what to eat on a day where your cohort is in-person, your fellow Mercy girls have developed recipes for quick and easy lunches you can make yourself.



Photo by Julianna Tague

## Avocado toast: a trendy & tasty snack

Channel your inner millennial Instagrammer and try out this egg-cellent recipe from Angelina Hamati '23.

Directions:

1. Fry an egg in a pan using oil. Sprinkle it with salt while it cooks.
2. Spread the flesh of an avocado on a slice of toast. Add a pinch of pepper for extra flavor.
3. Once the egg is done, lay it on top of the avocado.
4. Enjoy!

## Pita rollups: teen-tested and approved

Meghan Acho '21 is a lunch-making professional. She reports that this veggie-packed wrap is wildly popular with teenagers who frequently come to the sandwich shop where she works. See for yourself!

Directions:

1. Spread guacamole over the inside of a slice of pita bread.
2. Arrange smoked turkey, cucumber, carrots and Swiss cheese on top of the guacamole.
3. Roll the sandwich and slice it in half.
4. Enjoy!

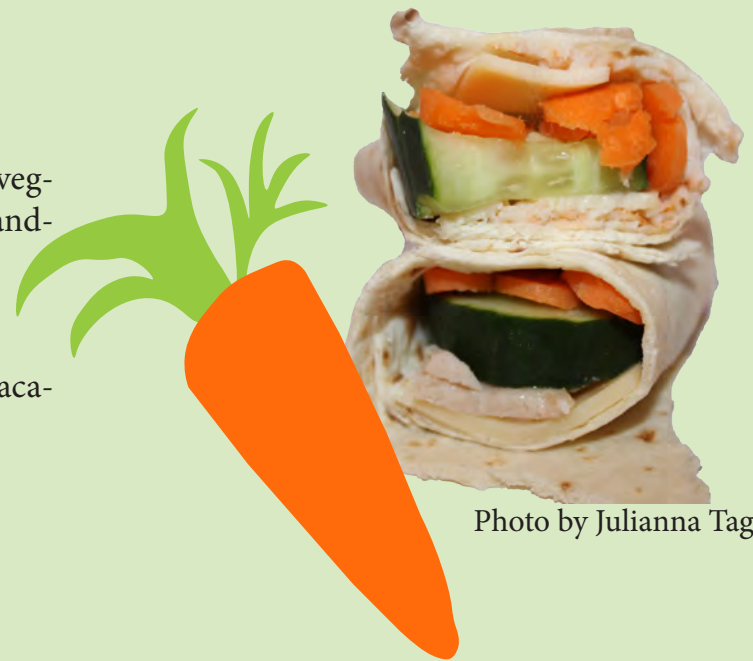


Photo by Julianna Tague



Photo by Julianna Tague

## Smoothie bowl: an edible rainbow

Sophie Palizzi '22 suggests a smoothie bowl for a healthy meal that caters to those with a sweet tooth. Try it out!

Directions:

1. Mix a banana, a handful of strawberries, a prepackaged frozen berry mix and a few cups of milk or yogurt together in a blender until smooth. TIP: For a thicker consistency, limit the amount of milk or yogurt you use!
2. Pour into a bowl and top with nuts, coconut, granola and honey.
3. Enjoy!



# A summer in quarantine

STORIES AND GRAPHICS: FATIMA SIDDIQUE

While many people have been focusing on the negative impacts of COVID-19, it's important to shed light on the various ways people have managed to look on the brighter side. As summer approached and the number of cases went up, the idea of a fun and exciting break was lost as concerts and parties were cancelled and a nationwide lockdown was enforced. Despite quarantine, some Mercy girls managed to make the most out of their summer as they traveled across the country (while maintaining social distancing, of course).



Maya Goudesene (right) and her sister Sydney (left) enjoy the beautiful scenery after a two mile walk. Photo used with permission from Maya Goudesene.

Senior Maya Goudesene's typical summer involves traveling with her soccer team across the country, but as COVID-19 hit, she was forced to spend her summer in a surprising new way. Although quarantine imposed on Goudesene's passion for soccer, it enabled her to break from her stressful environment and instead go white water rafting in West Virginia. Goudesene stayed with her family and friends at Adventures On The Gorge, a resort that offers rock climbing, mountain biking and hiking.

"It was a very fun, active five days," Goudesene recalls. "It was one of the highlights [of] my summer."

Besides white water rafting, she took part in zip lining, nature walks and rock climbing.

Quarantine hit Goudesene very hard in terms of finding things to do over her break, but it gave her a chance to branch out and spend more time outside, resulting in quite a relaxing and refreshing summer. Her trip to West Virginia made the experience all the better and had her missing soccer a little less. Instead of the usual hectic schedule that comes with being a travel soccer player, Goudesene spent a week outdoors with her friends and family.

"This is the first time I've ever gotten a proper summer because before quarantine, I was spread so thin," Goudesene said. "Despite how bad COVID [is], it was able to give me a break from trying to stay afloat and just live."

Sophomore Allison Koehler worried that her trip to the Grand Canyon would get canceled after the same happened to her cousin's wedding and a summer concert. However, as lockdown regulations became more lenient, Koehler boarded her flight to Las Vegas at the beginning of August, hoping that this trip could salvage an otherwise uneventful summer. Koehler and her family continued to socially distance on the flight and kept their masks on when in close proximity to others. After a day in Las Vegas, they caught an early morning charter flight straight to the Grand Canyon. There, Koehler spent five days on the river: five days that made her summer one to remember.

"It was so amazing," Koehler said. "We jumped off waterfalls and went through crazy rapids;



Allison Koehler (left) and her sister Jessica (right) sit on a raft going down the Colorado River. Photo used with permission from Allison Koehler.

it was an incredible experience." Allison and her family planned this trip through Arizona River Runners, a rafting company known to take their campers through famous rapids and down waterfalls deep within the canyon.

While Koehler's trip was riveting and filled with thrilling activities, it was also a chance for her to unwind and enjoy her summer. As Koehler spent most of her time outdoors in open spaces, there wasn't much worrying over contracting the coronavirus.

"It was so peaceful," she recalls. "We were practically camping under the stars all night. Honestly, if anyone could take this trip, they totally should."

Although coronavirus affected Koehler's summer in many ways, it ended up turning out for the best, as she experienced a once in a lifetime trip during a peculiar summer.



Elizabeth Thweny and her brother spending time outdoors at Myrtle Beach. Photo used with permission from Elizabeth Thweny.

While others had to maintain social distancing and keep their masks on during their trip, senior Elizabeth Thweny traveled to Myrtle Beach where, at the time, few coronavirus cases were reported. Thus, few restrictions were enforced.

In early June, Thweny and her family flew to South Carolina while maintaining social distance and keeping their masks on until they got to Myrtle Beach and were able to leave thoughts of the virus behind.

"It felt weird being on a plane because I thought the virus was everywhere," Thweny said. "But I made sure I wiped my seat down good."

Thweny's family traveled for her brother's baseball tournament but could do other things like spend time in the pool, go to the beach and even go go-karting.

Thweny recalled a night at the boardwalk where she tried the slingshot with her dad.

"I was scared at first, but when I did it, I had so much fun that I kept saying I wanted to do it again," Thweny said. "It's a ball that you sit in and it slingshots you into the air."

Thweny and her family even went to Broadway at the Beach, a shopping center and entertainment complex, and were able to buy some clothes.

Thweny was lucky to have a somewhat normal summer experience; traveling when COVID-19 cases were lowest. Her trip was barely affected by the contagious disease. In fact, her trip to Myrtle Beach was a nice and safe way to escape it all.