

[UNCAGED.]



from the editors

Welcome back, free birds!

We are very excited to be back with you in our first “print” publication of the 2020-2021 school year! Although distance learning has limited Uncaged and our ability to print copies for everyone, we hope that this finds you online.

As always, we are continuing to post on our website, uncagedfhs.org, with current events and news in the Freedom community. This year we are also continuing to post videos such as our 73 questions and the new addition of Uncaged Asks, where we ask 100 students to answer a question!

These next two quarters in the school year will be memorable ones. Freshmen might get their first in-person high school experiences, and sophomores might be able to know what Freedom High School looks like towards the end of the school year. The struggles of junior year might be partially relieved as well with the integration of hybrid learning. And lastly, seniors will have their final semester with the amazing community of Freedom High School. Although this year looks different, I know you will all make the best of it.

As the Uncaged staff continues on to the next issue, we would like to hear from you! What have you been up to since we went online in March? Contact us with your suggestions at fhsuncaged@gmail.com.

Uncaged appreciates all the support we have gotten from the Freedom community and we can't wait for you to read this issue!



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Cover
photo by Avery Parker

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The caged bird sings with a fearful trill of things unknown but longed for still and his tune is heard on the distant hill for the caged bird sings of freedom.

Cox Farms Faces COVID-19



[Story by Morgan Maiden]
[Photos provided by Cox Farms]

For more than 45 years, Cox Farms has been a family tradition through the generations for many in the DMV area.

The Centreville farm was purchased in 1972 and has been the heart of hayrides, corn mazes and fall memories for many locals. The farm evolved from a strictly agricultural operation into an agritourism business that combines farm products with experiences.

The farm has evolved to adapt to changes in society, culture and community that impacted Cox Farms plenty of times over the past several decades. With a year of COVID-19, everything has been impacted on the farm.

"Income plummeted, projects are paused, improvements and investments are on hold," said Aaron Cox, co-owner of Cox Farms. "On the farm we have obsessed over how to make our farm more and more fun, but we've suddenly had to become very wary of 'fun,' because it draws people to linger, and that just isn't safe this year."

Every aspect of the farm looks different this year. The classic hayride moved to a drive through hayride, a "virtual" market, and a limited number of staff working the farm.

"The application process was drastically different," said Josh Dominges, senior and Cox Farm employee. "They were not during new workers this season, as they had to make "cuts" like the majority of other businesses in America. Basically, they came to me in an email offering a job this season with a fillable form with availability and such."

The farm did not have the traditional fall festival of years past with slides, but with around a team of 75 people they did their best to create a similar experience that maintained high safety standards for both customers and employees.

To follow social distancing, Cox Farm workers were given five hour shifts with no breaks to keep distance in

the break area. While in the market, workers are stationed far enough away from each other to where many could still work together while being a good distance away.

"The rules never felt oppressive or anything, rather subtly different and after the first day there everyone fell into a nice groove and began to work well within the new rule set," Domingues said.

Many students started their first jobs at Cox Farms, and have taken that job as a stepping stone, returning for seasonal work throughout their high school years.

"This season was obviously different, but I got to work alongside what I do through as the "dream team" of Cox Farms workers, veterans of two plus years all working together to provide the best possible service in a drastically new climate," Dominges said. "It was overall a great experience, good work for good money, and I was glad to have the opportunity to work alongside some great people too."

With fewer people visiting, the farm animals may have even noticed a difference, but they were given an abundance of attention from farm residents and caretakers instead.

"The baby goats that were born this spring are the most spoiled kids we've ever had," Fox said. "We even threw one of the babies a party when she turned two months old. I think she and the rest of the herd probably misses their ice cream cones full of food but overall they are content."

As the seasons change, Cox Farms keeps their gates open with seasons that will be similar to this past fall.





Missing Freshmen Moments

[Story by Pratha Ravani]

A big part of a student's high school experience is their freshman year, since it is their first year of high school. With the pandemic the new freshmen have not had a typical first year of school.

From many missed moments and not being able to participate in clubs or sports for the first semester, freshmen are missing out on their first year of high school, and instead have had an unconventional start to high school.

"I am scared about missing out on my freshman year because I know I am missing out on a lot of good opportunities," freshman Manya Mahesh said. "The first year of high school should be an introduction to the next three years, but I missed my first year. I still have not had a true high school experience."

Many moments that previous freshmen enjoyed, could not be experienced this year. A lot of freshmen are disappointed that they cannot have a typical freshman year, but at the same time, don't really mind attending school online. They are still trying, however, to get involved with the school.

"Freshmen have jumped right in," Grace Bluefeld, a freshmen history teacher and one of the SCA teachers said. "Is it hard to

join in a community that you've never stepped foot in? Of course. But ... it doesn't matter if you are in the school hallways or at home, you are still a valued member of the Freedom family."

Along with just going to school, the freshmen at Freedom wish they had been able to play sports, experience homecoming and pep rallies and joining clubs. When school starts, however, the freshmen are mostly excited to meet their friends and try and make new memories.

"Something I'm most excited about when we go back to school is actually experiencing a high school life," freshman Arya Kumar said. "You feel more mature, you have a lot of fun and you will make a lot of memories here that last a lifetime."

Most of the freshmen are disappointed about missing out on their high school experience, and can't wait till they get back to school.

"I feel very disappointed and frustrated that I did not get the experiences I deserve," Mahesh said. "I wish the pandemic was over so we could lead our normal lives again. I'm most excited to meet my friends again and be able to attend school events such as pep rallies, games and dances and experience things I have never experienced before."

To help the freshmen try and

participate, the SCA has been having many virtual events for everyone, and the freshmen have been participating.

"The SCA, officers and representatives, have done a phenomenal job putting together virtual events that all students can participate in," Bluefeld said. "The Homecoming Spirit Week went especially well I think. Yes, there were some activities from previous years that everyone was missing, like the hallways, dance and football games, but so many new great ones were added. The live, virtual scavenger hunt has been one of the best parts of this year so far in my opinion. Not to mention the amazing class movies that were made, I think I have watched each one about a dozen times!"



Social Skills Without Socializing?

[Story by Rebecca Cherian]

In life, there are many characteristics used to define individuals. Of these, one that is often overlooked is the quality of social skills. People who are fortunate enough are taught how to communicate, and their social skills enable them to effectively do so. However, due to lack of social interaction these past few months, many have found themselves communicating and interacting with others differently than before.

For some students, time away from peers has resulted in meeting every opportunity of socialization with eagerness.

"[I'm actually] more excited to do distance learning; like with breakout rooms, I'm more interested in talking to people and starting conversations, and less scared of how awkward it's gonna be like in normal school," junior Sami Fuleihan said.

On the other hand, more students now feel less comfortable speaking, and tend to experience

a greater degree of awkwardness when they try.

"Normally I would say I do talk a lot. That definitely changed during quarantine though because I haven't really interacted with people in real life that much yet; I've mainly just been with my family," junior Sumu Vadrevu said.

For high school students, the decline of social skills is paired with some negative consequences worth mentioning. For one, there is relatively low participation in the "social" aspect of distance learning, making it more difficult for teachers to teach and students to learn. Another consequence is the greater use of social media as an effort to preserve social skills, which further increases our generation's dependence on it and strains mental health. Lastly, losing social skills is untimely for upperclassmen who await important interviews pertaining to colleges and programs that play a role in shaping their futures.

In a time when physical contact is not encouraged, it's important to consider how the situation impacts younger students on the social level as well.

According to Liberty Elementary school psychologist Rebecca Fritsch-Stevenson, though younger children are in some ways more adaptable, they are missing out key

social development.

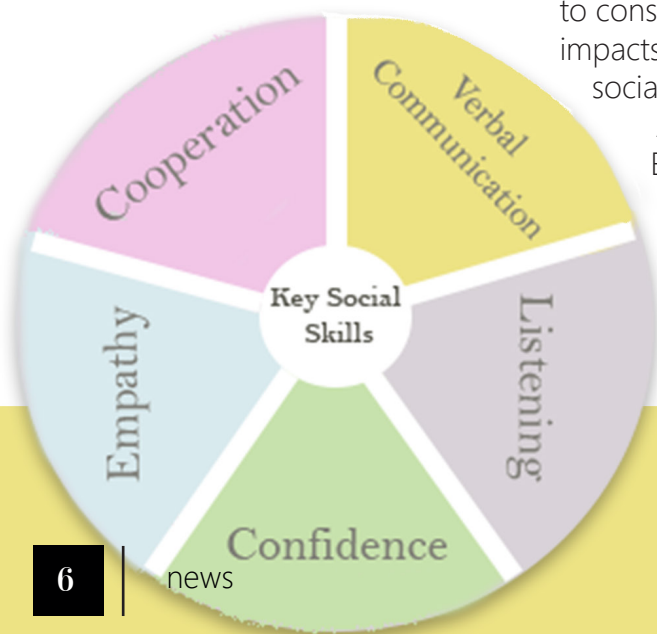
"School, clubs, sports teams, etc. provide ways for students to learn how to follow unspoken rules of society, respect boundaries, and resolve peer conflict," Fritsch-Stevenson said. "Kids just aren't getting those opportunities in the same way right now."

In response to this, elementary schools have been doing a good job of emphasizing the importance of the issue and working to further implement apt solutions.

"At the elementary level, we have talked about the importance of morning meetings and social-emotional learning to promote positive social interactions and rebuild skills for engaging appropriately with others," Fritsch-Stevenson said.

Although social development and social skills are now part of the long list of things COVID has brought change to, it's important to focus on the positives and remain hopeful for the future.

"You young people are resilient and you learn to follow what's going on," said Cristi Goldberg, FHS counselor. "You're pretty adaptable and you guys have such new and fresh ideas you'll come up with creative ways to make it happen. There may be a little period of time with difficulties communicating and being socially aware, but I don't think it will take too long."



Students Prioritize Themselves

[Story by Lindsay Brisson]

The State of Virginia went into lockdown starting in mid-late March. Lockdown took place due to an outbreak of COVID-19, which quickly swept over our nation, forcing people of all ages to develop new routines. This event led to the closing of restaurants, hair and nail salons, gyms and many other small and larger businesses. Since everything closed down, Virginia residents had absolutely nothing to do. Because the gyms were closed, those who had a solid workout routine in place could no longer get in their daily workout. Since restaurants were shutting down, the people who frequently ate out had to cook for themselves, and if a person had practically had no skin issues, the constant wearing of a mask might cause breakouts like never before.

Lockdown prohibited people from going out and continuing with their usual activities. People recognized this, realizing it was time to come up with routines to start getting into at home. Some students at Freedom High School were able to brainstorm new workout, skincare and eating methods to keep their bodies healthy, despite the inconvenience of a nationwide quarantine. Since there was an excessive amount of free time, it was not burdensome to create a daily cycle to limit boredom.

Senior Madeline Dailey is the perfect example of a student who twisted their eating habits to keep a healthy diet.

"I decided to change my habits because, with all of the free time on my hands, I could take the time to make more wholesome healthy food. I also started exercising a lot more, so healthy foods made me feel a lot better during and after my workouts,"

Dailey said, "I have had better mental health from my changed habits, and I have also noticed improvements in my physical appearance."

Many people struggled with mental health during the months of being stuck at home, so seeing how dieting and working out benefited her mental health is something that people could consider when thinking about changing eating habits.

Working out and eating healthier were not the only things that alternated during quarantine. Skincare also made evident changes, and a lot of these modifications could be because of the mask-wearing. Senior Bre Fay recognized how masks can produce acne and decided it was time to establish a change when considering her skin.

"I changed my skincare over quarantine due to potential breakouts due to wearing masks," Fay said, "It has ended up preventing more breakouts from occurring and kept my skin clear."

Junior Stephen Davis also developed a new workout routine. Over quarantine, he continued to work out until he was lifting significant amounts of weight.

"Quarantine let me bulk up so much," Davis said. "I took pictures before and after quarantine, and it motivated me so much. I was so much bigger at the start of 2021 than the start of 2020."

Quarantine may not have been an ideal situation starting at the beginning of last spring, but it has led to some notable positive changes amongst those who make the most out of all the time on their hands. Hopefully, in the upcoming months, we will be allowed to resume life as we knew it, and all of the changes made during lockdown will stay put.

2015

Quarantine Creates An Emphasis on Comfort

[Story by Camille Desjardins]

Spending three months stuck inside changed much of the way people are currently living. Recently discussions have come up about the changes in learning and exercising, but the change in fashion has been underrepresented considering many of the drastic changes that took place in the way teens dress.

The surplus of free time and lack of need to go outside has allowed several students to invest in style and learn how they want to express themselves. By spending time browsing through online websites, teens are able to see a wide array of clothes which may better suit their style than the limited display at malls or shops. Another way the Internet has inspired style change is through social media. Apps such as TikTok, Pinterest, and Instagram often have fashion accounts that give students ideas for new ways to style clothes or new pieces to invest in. Senior Chloe Tenshaw uses social media often to find

ideas for outfits.

"Whenever I feel that I am repeating a style, I always look up different ways to utilize the clothes," Tenshaw said.

Many teens have stopped investing as much in formal clothing, spending their money on comfortable clothes instead. A lot of clothes include colored leggings, expensive leggings, joggers, crew necks and even less formal tanks and t-shirts. With the ability to go out decreasing, less teenagers are going out to nice restaurants or fun parties. The need for fashionable and formal outfits has lessened, and most people are spending time lounging around at home.

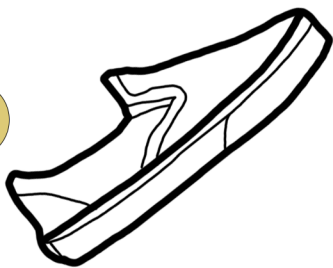
This has pushed the desire to splurge on comfortable items rather than fancy clothes since they have less of a reason to dress up. As comfortable clothing becomes more mainstream, companies have adapted to make stylish lounge wear such as colored sweatpants or leggings, which can be styled and worn out. Senior



2017



2019



2016

Sydney Lemmerman has noticed that though leggings were always worn out normally, more girls are beginning to go out in sweatpants as well.

"Sweatpants I think have become more acceptable for girls especially because before they were seen as more pajamas and not as a going out outfit," Lemmerman said.

For girls, fashion is a common interest and shopping is a regular and enjoyable activity, so teen girls have been able to invest a lot of time and thought into their style. Boys, however, may be less passionate about their general style. Teen boys tend to prefer comfortable or athletic clothing, and staying inside has kept them content with their usual outfit choices. Senior Ekrem Kaya says boys tend to stick to athletic clothing or comfortable options due to their availability and affordability.

"I think for girls there is a lot more variety on what they can choose from: a lot more brands and styles," Kaya said. "For boys it's pretty straight forward and simpler."

Another fashion factor for teen boys is the desire to fit in, which

may cause them to adhere to certain styles rather than new things they would be interested in wearing. For girls there are often pressures to dress in a way that is trendy or stylish. Junior Trevor Krall feels that boys are less likely to get involved in fashion due to societal pressures.

"Boys are often pressured by societal norms to think of fashion or style expression as feminine, unless a trend is being promoted by an athlete or rapper," Krall said.

Perhaps this time inside will be the beginning of change for fashion and the way teens express themselves. As young people have time to invest in their appearance, they may find better ways to create a style unique to themselves. Changes in trends through social media influence, extended free time and new style ideas will hopefully give rise to a normalization of self expression through clothing. Tenshaw feels that with kids being alone and at home, this self expression will become more common.

"I think since everyone has been alone for a while, we have all started to embrace our own style and become more confident in showing it off," Tenshaw said.



2018



SUSTAINABLE FASHION



“Globally, we produce 13 million tons of textile waste each year 95% of which could be reused or recycled.”

Quote from The Pretty Planeteer

[Story by Carina Funk]

[Photos by Avery Parker]

[Photo illustrations by Eliza Agi]

Freedom High School Junior Avery Parker is an aspiring photographer that has been completing meaningful and artistic photo shoots using high school students throughout quarantine until now.

Parker has always been interested in photography, but her interest in photo shoots only grew after taking classes with The Museum of Modern Art over the summer.

Recently she has been working on a couple meaningful projects, including her photo shoot with fellow FHS junior

Mia Durham spreading awareness for the Black Lives Matter movement.

“I did a photo shoot with my friend Mia over the summer, somehow trying to capture the resilience and beauty of the female African American community in wake of the Black Lives Matter movement,” Parker said. “Doing this shoot with Mia, while having her wear these older beautiful dresses, was so humbling for me and the conversations Mia and I shared is something I will remember forever.”

Parker’s most recent focus is promoting sustainable fashion, which is an inspiring and upcoming movement working to re-use and repair clothing pieces



ION



to make a conscious impact on the environment by eliminating excess waste. Big fashion companies in general are using harmful non-renewable resources which are used for a short period of time and then thrown away.

"A huge aspect of waste that not everyone knows about is that clothing is burned and just thrown into landfills constantly," Parker stated.

Parker's sustainable fashion project consists of fellow friends in her grade wearing thrifted and reused clothing and jewelry to create current looks. Parker hopes with this unique photo shoot, she can spread awareness about the detrimental effects these fashion companies are having on the environment.

"Individuals my age contribute to the destruction of our environment just by shopping from corrupt, overpriced fast fashion stores when they could be

using their innovation to shop and piece together creative looks, while being the change for our planet," Parker said.

Her inspiration stems from the sense of fashion during the 50's, 60's and 70's eras. Incorporating vintage clothing from these eras found at various thrift stores from the area and from family members, such as her grandparents and great aunts, allows her to create a nostalgic world for herself and others. This will also enable her to continue her campaign for sustainable fashion by abstaining from unnecessary textile and clothing waste.

Parker is working one photo shoot at a time to help change the world around her using local students to further impact her community and the world. To check her other photography projects, more photos of hers can be found on her Instagram page @averyclairephotography.



"Fast Fashion contributes to 10% of greenhouse gas emissions in the environment."
Quote from The Pretty Planeteer

Disco through

[Story by Eliza Agi]

Beginning with Governor Ralph Northam's decision to close schools on March 13, 2020, Loudoun County along with many other districts have had to make difficult decisions in regards to learning from a distance. This distance is creating a gap between in person and online experiences that not only affects the immediate learning, but the dynamic between individuals as well.

FHS government and psychology teacher, Holly Salyers, has experienced the change

brought on by distance learning. Her classrooms have looked and have sounded different from years past which is mainly due to the Google Meet setting.

"Students aren't necessarily able to have the same jokes or sharing looks across the classroom," Salyers said. "The inherent natural interactions between students won't be able to occur."

School not only brings the experience of learning, but also creates friendships and social skills which are being affected by COVID-19.

"Students develop a sense

nnected distance

of identity through their social relationships, especially in high school," said Suzanne Goldbecker, FHS psychologist.

By the evident usage of websites such as Schoology and Google Meets, a larger dependency on technology is created. Although there are benefits in the schooling sense, these technologies have also created a space for students to turn to social media to obtain the necessary social interactions. However, social media can raise concern due to the potential negative effects. Students can face many obstacles including the comparison of themselves to their peers which can lead to feelings of inadequacy.

"Social media use has also been linked to an increase in anxiety and depression in kids," Goldbecker said.

Salyers also highlights some negative aspects of technology in regards to learning.

"Students are often less engaged and frequently work

on other things while in 'class' time," Salyers said. "Also, I think by the end of the day, students are tired of being on screen and are less focused."

The extensive usage of technology has also led senior Taylor Lech to purchase blue light glasses to combat some of the issues caused.

"I have gotten blue light glasses because I was getting headaches and my eyes were red from being on the computer all day," Lech said.

The possibilities towards in person schooling also display the lack of normality through the implementation of safety measures that also simultaneously remove the feeling of traditional high school.

"[In person] students will have to maintain distance and won't be able to do the 'normal' interactions – filling each other's water bottles, high fives and fist bumps," Salyers said. "In some ways, I think that will be harder for students than having classes

online."

These social interactions that are commonly correlated with the "high school experience" could return with the progression of the COVID-19 vaccine. The student communities and bonds formed by peers are not ones to discount.

"When you're exposed to larger groups you more than likely have the opportunity to interact in small groups or engage in collaborative learning," Goldbecker said. "You might learn from their unique experiences or learn to adapt how you present information to a larger audience."

The unique experience that continues to change most aspects of students' lives also gives opportunities for educational advancement that has the potential to improve learning.

"Teachers are learning new ways to communicate material, and I think this will continue back in the classroom," Salyers said.

Athletes Continue to Compete



F

[Story by Michael Baker III]

[Photos provided by Stephen Davis and Carly Burns]

With the uncertainty of when students will return to the building, the decision of the Virginia High School League to move forward with sports has given Freedom High School athletes the opportunity to return to a bit of normalcy.

"Finding out that we would have the opportunity to be able to have a season was very exciting," said sophomore Kayleigh Burke. "I love playing my sports and even with all of these restrictions, it hasn't affected how much I enjoy playing and competing."

Participating in sports during a pandemic is anything but normal. Coaches, athletes, and athletic staff must follow COVID restrictions.

"Our biggest challenge is to ensure we are doing our best to keep all of our athletes, coaches, and volunteers safe," said Brad Bauder, FHS athletic director. "We have great mitigation procedures in place and we look forward to continuing to move forward during these challenging times. Our goal that we are continuously working on is to keep everyone as safe as possible."

Coaches are doing their best to keep everyone safe and ready to play.

"I think our team is handling COVID restrictions the best we can," said Ted Whitney, FHS girls' basketball coach. "Safety is our number one priority, and we are just excited to have the opportunity to play. We have lots of safety measures in place: players and coaches wear

masks, we sanitize our equipment to ensure safety, and we social distance as much as possible."

Currently, LCPS is not allowing out-of-season practice, which is limiting the number of students in the weight room and training areas.

"Our mitigation procedures do have a lot of limitations on the number of athletes that can be in the weight room at one time, so it does change things a lot," Bauder said. "Hopefully things will continue to get better and we will see more and more athletes and students back in the building."

If an athlete or coach does test positive for COVID, there are plans and protocols in place to ensure safety.

"Hopefully we won't have any athletes, coaches, or students test positive," Bauder said. If we do, our athletic department leaders and athletic trainer handle all protocols for any positive tests of COVID and work with the coaches, players, parents, and school administration as needed to make sure we are all safe."

Large crowds of spectators aren't in the stands cheering on their favorite team. The once deafening sound of excitement when a basket is made or an opponent is pinned has been replaced with the squeak of sneakers in an almost empty gym or the flop of a body hitting the mat.

Game entry fees are a portion of the athletic department's budget, so with no spectators the budget has been impacted. A game

streaming option has been offered, but Bauder doesn't have the total numbers. He is hopeful streaming will be a supplement to the budget.

"Athletic budgets are primarily created off of sponsors, donations and spectators," Bauder said. "So yes, our budget is tremendously being affected. This year LCPS is helping us out with some fees but our Booster club has done a tremendous job supporting the department."

The no spectator rule has also impacted athletes and their families. This year, there is a limit to who is allowed at the field or meet. For soccer, the spectators are allowed socially distanced outside the fence. For winter track, basketball and wrestling, no spectators are allowed.

"This was very disappointing for my parents as they love watching me compete and have never missed one of my games/meets," Burke said.

Team building is very important when it comes to pulling together a strong team. Unfortunately, the spaghetti dinners or bar-b-que

aren't an option during a pandemic.

I think the hardest part is that we lose the down time and fun time with the team," Whitney said. "We can't do team dinners or Saturday breakfasts while watching film or watch the other teams play and be together so we miss those opportunities to bond outside of basketball."

COVID has taken so much, but it hasn't stopped the FHS athletic teams.

"COVID has not changed the need to work hard, learn, and grow as a team," Whitney said. "Our team is so thankful that we have a chance to play and get back to some sense of normalcy by having sports. We look forward to a great season! Go Eagles!"



[Senior Oscar Gorman and junior Stephen Davis participate in the Winter Track program.]



[Carly Burns, Abby Church, Jennifer Luong, Ritwak Rangu and Nathan Yu take a picture with their masks after swimming with Freedom's swim program.]

Changing the Game



[Story by Bailey Elliott]

During the beginning of the pandemic, sports were a controversial topic of discussion as it was questioned how sports would be able to continue safely or if it was all too dangerous and not worth the risk. Not only are the coaches and players challenged by the new rules brought about by COVID-19, but the referees as well. With a whole new set of rules to enforce, referees work to adapt to the new normal.

It is no secret that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about many new rules and regulations to be followed in order to stay safe. There have been mandated orders, a surplus of masks and hand sanitizer, and signs labeling social distancing seen across the country. However, there are always people who choose to not follow the rules. These rules and regulations have been followed into sports as well, along with those who refuse to oblige. What about those tasked with seeing that these new rules are being followed along with the regular sport rules. Referees during COVID-19 have had a whole new task thrown at them as they now have to integrate the rules of the pandemic into the rules of the game.

Many high school students take up refereeing as a volunteer opportunity or part time job. This is true for senior, Saikiran Chandramouli, who is a referee for Loudoun Soccer. Refeing can be a challenging position already as they are faced

with angry players, coaches, and audience members and are an easy target of attack when a game doesn't go as wanted. On top of this, referees are now in charge of constantly reminding everyone of the COVID-19 rules.

"It is tricky talking to the players and coaches at a safe distance when the game gets heated. It also gets difficult to constantly remind coaches and spectator to wear a mask and socially distance themselves," Chandramouli said.

Along with the rules of the game, attire has changed as well and not just for the players, but everyone in the event area.

When it comes to packing for a game, referee Chandramouli said, "I always pack my ref bag with extra masks, gloves, [and] hand sanitizer in case another referee needs some. Before games, I remind the players, fans, and coaches of the COVID-19 protocols and that any violation of these rules will get them kicked out."

This goes for coaches, players, and audience members who wish to experience the world of sports from a safe distance.

The pandemic has brought about numerous changes throughout the world, sports included. Figuring out the ropes of COVID-19 rules and making sure that everything is as safe as possible for every sporting event can be challenging, but everyone is doing their part to work and make life as normal as it can get. Referees are working hard to adapt to the changes and make sports happen for the enjoyment of all.

Esports Team Ends Season Strong

[Story by Mika Dang]

[Photo provided by Alex Wong]

[Esports logo provided by Nick Aldana]

As schools begin to let students back into their facilities, sports are beginning to resume practice and games. Freedom High School's Esports team is no different. With practices at least once a week and official games every Tuesday, the League of Legends team has been working hard to finish their season strong.

"The only difference this year in comparison to last year is not being able to use the fancy computers and gaming chairs that LCPS provided for us!" said Michael Albert, League of Legends coach. "Competitions have, so far, been seamless due to the nature of Esports and being able to play

remotely without being physically present for competition."

The Freedom Esports team initially stemmed from the Freedom Gaming League (FGL), a gaming club sponsored by Albert, a Special Education and math teacher at Freedom High School. Members were invited to play many games, including League of Legends, Super Smash Bros., and eventually other games like Rocket League and FIFA. After hosting many in-school tournaments, League of Legends became a Tier 2 activity; Esports had reached Freedom High School, and everyone accepted this with open arms. Players became members of an official team, paid the athlete's fees to play, and even came home with their own jerseys.

But not all students are familiar with the FGL, much less the Es-



ports team. Unlike the other Tier 2 activity teams, these players aren't called to the center of the gym at pep rallies, and frankly, students are more apprehensive of the 'gamer' title than the 'jock.'

"Often, this population of students is either ignored or has a negative stigmatism towards them just because they, as well as I, like to play video games," Albert said. "The vision of the FGL is a place for ALL students to come together around the element of [esports] to both build friendships and compete against one another in a professional and healthy environment."

As his dream of a welcoming place for students continued to come true, the official esports team surfaced from the League, and Albert became the coach. This fall season, the League of Legends team's captain is Camden Hovell, a junior, and they organize practices, practice matches against other teams, and set up streams for official games.

"So far, the games have been very fun and the team has done very well even though most of us didn't know each other until the start of this school year," Hovell said.

At the end of the season, the Freedom League of Legends team is ranked seventh in the state with a score of eleven victories and six losses.



[Junior Camden Hovell participates in Freedom's Esports team.]

A Distance Learning Day in the Life

[Story by Olivia Elliott]
[Photo provided by Jocelyn Jiang]

Distance learning has many different sides. Many of the students at Freedom High School, and elsewhere, see it as a mixture of good, bad and entertaining. The list of reasons to approve distance learning is long, but comfort certainly tops the charts.

"I can wear my pajamas all day," junior Isha Gupta said.

Scheduling also becomes much easier, according to junior Jocelyn Jiang.

"I get more flexibility in my schedule," Jiang said. "Now, I can stay up a little later and wake up later if I need to because I don't need to catch a bus in the morning, and that has let me sleep a bit more than I might have with regular school."

Extra family time also makes distance learning more appealing.

"My favorite part of distance learning is eating warm, home-made meals with my mom during lunch," junior Vishnupriya Alavala said.

"My favorite part of the day is

getting to see my dog between classes," Jiang said.

There's also the comedic aspect of virtual learning keeping everyone entertained.

"The funniest thing that ever happened was when a student was watching a really loud rap music video in class without turning their mike off," Alavala said.

But the beat isn't the only thing that drops.

"The funniest thing that happened during distance learning was when someone dropped their chrome book out of the window accidentally," freshman Meha Parekh said.

Distance learning isn't all fun and games, though. While all the students had a bright side to their virtual schooling experience, discontent is also apparent. First, there's the workload.

"My least favorite part of the day is when teachers go overtime in instruction, and I miss a couple minutes of the next block or any clubs and activities I have after school," Alavala said. "Also, all class work seems like homework because we have to complete it alone at home, making me

feel overly exhausted and overwhelmed."

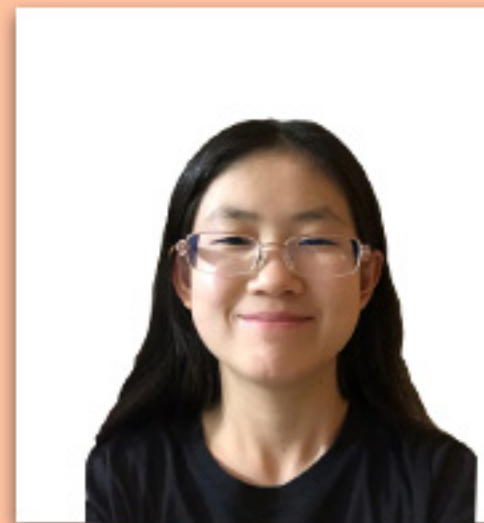
A trend is also being set of people who want more interactive classes.

"My least favorite parts are not getting to see my classmates and teachers in person," Jiang said. "In the physical classroom, it feels like there is a true relationship between the classmates and with the teacher, and that crucial feeling of support and comfort is oftentimes missing online."

And she's not the only one. Students also wish to change aspects about distance learning.

"I would change the number of kids in each class," Parekh said. "I think that with less kids, classes would be more interactive."

While distance learning may have achieved much in its implementation, there are still clearly a few kinks to be worked out.



[Student pictured: Jocelyn Jiang]

The SAT is Here to Stay

[Editorial by Karen Xu]

The Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), long held as a rite of passage during the later high school years and an important part of the college application process, has been upended as colleges and universities move to test-optional policies for this admission cycle as a result of COVID-19. But what does this really mean?

That is the question that plagues the minds of many students in the class of 2021 who are finishing their college applications. For as long as I remember, anything “optional” was always read as “recommended.” Anything that could be done to give one student an edge over another was taken advantage of. If students believed that in a test-optional world, having a score to submit would give them this edge, then students would still flock to test centers to sit down and take their SATs. And that’s exactly what happened this fall.

According to data from Freedom High School’s Counseling Department, in October of 2020, 101 seniors from Freedom High School took their SAT, a small decline from the 131 seniors who took it the previous year. These numbers are an indication of the power these college admissions exams have over students; even a pandemic could not deter students from getting their scores. Being one of those 101 seniors, I too am guilty of submitting to this power.

“Growing up, people were always like ‘junior year’s SAT year,’” said senior Eileen Choi.

Choi, who took the SAT 3 times this fall, felt that despite colleges announcing their plans to be test-optional, having a score to send in while applying could still play a role. Student skepticism about the enigmatic admissions process will likely continue to fuel the administration of the SAT.

Additionally, like many other things in a capitalistic society, money trumps all. The College Board continues to make money from administering tests, claiming that the SAT is an accurate gauge of a stu-

dent’s success in their first year of college. Colleges make money from tuition checks and to keep that money rolling in, they need a gauge of a student’s preparedness.

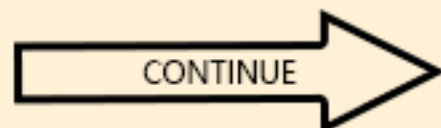
During this admission cycle, many colleges left the choice of whether or not to submit scores to the student to decide, but a handful, most notably Georgetown University, required students who had scores to report them. While Georgetown specifically said that those without scores weren’t required to submit anything, given the murkiness of admissions in general, there is doubt in students’ minds whether the university was simply making a sales pitch to attract applications (and the fees attached) or if they truly meant that there would be no penalty.

What then, are colleges using to measure a student if not through a number?

“You get to know students based on the classes that the student took and their success in those classes and see their interests” said Ken Christopher, Freedom High School’s Director of School Counseling. “I believe a lot of colleges, also, are able to kind of get to know the students based on college essays, recommendations and personal items.”

The issue with relying on this type of material is the cost for the college admissions offices of reading such supplemental materials. More often than not, these costs are passed down to students in the form of exorbitant application fees.

As much as I detest the SATs and any form of standardized testing due to the inaccuracy and inequities of such exams, they won’t be going away anytime soon. Until the cultural indoctrination that overemphasizes the importance of the number ceases, and until higher education is less of a money game and more of one about enlightening the future generations of scholars, leaders and innovators, the use of these tests will not disappear. For now, all we can do is wait and see how colleges react in the face of this unique admission cycle.



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