

zephyrus

The official student newspaper of Edina High School

Thursday, March 17, 2022 | Volume 42, Issue 4 | 6754 Valley View Rd. Edina, MN, 55439 | www.edinazephyrus.com

TWO YEARS

OF

This issue of Zephyrus commemorates the two-year mark since COVID first shut down schools in March 2020. A brief school closure—an ‘extended spring break,’ as many of us anticipated—progressed into a global pandemic that altered our lives. “900,000 deaths,” Owens Pierre emphasizes in her opinion piece, and yet still, “what was once a global health emergency has suddenly become yesterday’s news.” But the pandemic persists, and so do its stories. What was online learning like for teachers, many of whom had their own families to care for at home? What was it like for healthcare workers amidst the pandemic? How did students adjust to the toll that distance learning took on their mental health? It’s these stories, among a multitude of others, that we uncover in this issue.

See “A letter from the Zephyrus Editorial Board,” Page 2

COVID-19

“It’s the opening scene [of a] movie where something goes horribly wrong”: An Oral History of the COVID-19 pandemic

As the two-year anniversary of lockdown approaches, the impact of social and physical isolation lingers. Teachers, students, healthcare professionals, and administrators endured the various stages of COVID differently—from vaccine hesitancy to educational disparities, Edina community members represent a myriad of pandemic experiences. An oral history is the most comprehensive approach to telling these unique stories: all interviews have been edited for length and clarity, though each sentiment remains the same.

Interviews conducted and edited by Claire Chen, Mia DiLorenzo, Celeste Eckstein, Dedeepya Guthikonda, Sage Jezierski, Isadora Li, and Hannah Owens Pierre
Photos by Dedeepya Guthikonda and Isadora Li, design by Izzy Wagener

Angela Kieffer



PART ONE March 2020-May 2020

On March 12, 2020, the Edina Public Schools community received an email explaining the district’s decision to enact an extended Spring Break to prepare for the possibility of distance learning. COVID-19 was spreading rapidly and information about the virus was limited, while the impact of its contagion shut down the world.

Troy Stein (Activities Director, Assistant Principal - Edina High School): “I have a brother in the military in Okinawa and we had been texting and I think he had mentioned word of COVID-19. They had heard about it in the military and he had just casually mentioned that.”

Gretchen Gosh (High School Lead Nurse - EHS): “I remember [the beginning of COVID-19] vividly. I was in a meeting here at

school with colleagues and it must have hit social media or hit the news that day. We walked into this meeting in the morning and someone was like, ‘Did you guys hear about COVID?’ And at that time, I mean, my feeling was ‘Oh no, what is it?’ You know? And so I think initially, my feeling was like, ‘Oh, this will kind of come and go, it’ll pass.’”

Stein: “There were state tournaments that were going on and the high school league suddenly announced they weren’t going to allow the girls’ basketball tournament to continue to play. They had actually already started the game and the girls were warming up on the court, and then an announcement came that the game couldn’t go on... There was a sense that bringing lots of people together for sports was now not going to be a good idea.”

Angela Kieffer (High School Counselor - EHS): “I had heard rumblings of COVID early on in the

middle of February, maybe even earlier. But it felt like it was somewhere else, right? It was in China. It was in Italy. It was in other places. But the first time I remember really realizing it was on its way here was March 12. We had conferences and the next day was a professional development day. It was Friday the 13th. We were all told to sit six feet apart and spread out. We weren’t wearing masks yet. And Mr. Beaton was telling all of us that we were going to have the next two weeks to get ready to teach online. We had that following week off [for] spring break. And so in those two weeks, we were told to get ready because Monday after spring break, we would be teaching online. It was like all these things were adding up and all of a sudden you realize the severity. There had only been minimal cases in Minnesota at that point, like less than ten. But you could definitely feel this kind of doom starting to come over.”

See “PART ONE continued,” Page 12

PART ONE continued



Joy Dunna

Ian Alexander (EHS Class of 2020, University of Minnesota Class of 2024): “Nobody thought that we wouldn’t be going back to school the next day. People were like murmuring about COVID... my friend described it like it’s the opening scene [of a] movie where something goes horribly wrong and this is the first part of it.”

Joy Dunna (Social Studies Teacher - EHS, Gustavus Adolphus College class of 2020): “The last conversation I had before we were all sent home indefinitely was with a professor... he was going to a meeting and it was Friday and I said ‘Oh but like I’ll see you on Monday,’ and he goes ‘Yeah I hope so,’ and I said ‘Do you really think we’re going online?’ and he goes ‘No, I still like, have hope,’ and literally two hours later, we got an email saying ‘go home, get off campus,’ and it was pretty heartbreaking.”

Hayley Guevara (Language Arts Teacher - EHS): “It was really hard because I didn’t have a workspace; my husband worked in the living room and my third grader was in the

kitchen and my eighth-grader was in the other space. I was kind of bouncing back and forth between my bedroom and the corner of the dining room. And so the one time I did a synchronous lesson I was in my bedroom, and I had my back positioned against the wall so that my students didn’t know I was teaching in my bedroom.”

Guevara: “So the first couple of weeks I didn’t put make-up on for the first time in my whole life. I would wake-up, drink coffee, and get my kids settled because they were also doing online learning... It was like a constant putting out fires, like I would open my inbox at around nine o’clock and there’s like 25 emails saying ‘Ms. Guevara I can’t access the video you linked’ or ‘I can’t open the ABA’ and so those first few weeks were very frustrating just trying to learn how to adapt to online, but then after that I settled into the groove of it. It felt endless, like the days were looped together and after a while I kind of lost all sense of time and such.”

Kieffer: “It was a lot to take and a lot to process. My job here shifted significantly because I couldn’t get a hold of kids, so kids that were struggling pre-pandemic really

struggled during the pandemic because you just couldn’t get a hold of them... Because I think those became uncertain for people all of a sudden. And as a counselor, I really started to focus just on the kids that were really struggling. So what do we do to help you log into school? And make sure you can do work? I can remember coming here one day and getting textbooks and driving to some of my students’ houses and bringing them textbooks because it’s so hard for them to do school online that their parents thought if they had the book, they could get more done... The fun part of being a counselor was sort of gone.”

Blanca Diaz de Leon (Spanish Cultural Liaison - EHS): “All the restaurants were closed. All the offices were closed... so they were out of jobs from one day to the other one. They needed to pay rent. A lot of emotional domestic violence. Students didn’t want to get up to attend classes.”

Kieffer: “Taking care of my kids while working at the same time was super challenging. And I was lucky that I had older kids... My kids at least were bigger, grown up and could take care of themselves. But you’re definitely torn. I could see my own kids, especially my senior become very, very depressed. And it was like, well, I care about you, but I really still have to do my job. And they would only have maybe an hour or two of school a day. But I still work for eight hours a day. So that was definitely really being kind of torn in two places, and seeing the toll first that it took on my own kids while knowing that’s what was happening to other kids.”

Stein: “Early on, there was enough flexibility... that we could take advantage of that and we could go outside and play, or we could do hikes and find time. But then as it continued on, there became more structure and [we] became more committed to the distance learning concept. And it just started to wear on everybody.”

Kieffer: “I was struggling with loneliness, definitely. But I didn’t really let myself, because I felt like I had to fill everyone else’s bucket. I had to be okay so that the kids I was responsible for, whether it was my own kids or the kids here at school, were okay. So I felt like I always had to fake it. Fake it ‘till you make

it, right? I had to be okay, so that everybody else could either fall apart or see that it was okay to not be okay. So I don’t know that I really let myself very often not be okay.”

Stein: “It was intriguing to me. I’ve been a lifelong educator. You know, I was a middle school math teacher, high school math teacher, so I live in the educational system, and it was still overwhelming to be a parent in that situation. I remember thinking: ‘If you’re a parent and you’re not in that system, how hard must this be at home?’”

Julie Greene (School Board Member - Edina Public Schools): “I got COVID in April of 2020. We had a board meeting while I was in quarantine with COVID. And at that time, I wasn’t public about it. Some people knew, but at this point, testing wasn’t readily available and I think the significance and seriousness of what all of us were up against, kind of hit home. I remember particularly in that meeting really trying to balance

them ended up being alone in their apartments. They wouldn’t go to class because it was online, they couldn’t come back to see their family or stuff like that. So it has been very hard, very long. And we couldn’t even go out. If you wanted to go out for groceries, for example, you had to fill out the form and explain all the reasons. Your form had to be very precise and true, because if you didn’t have a good reason to be out, or if anything was wrong with your form, you could have a 135 Euro fine for being out.”

Stein: “I think back to that spring when we delivered diplomas on buses to seniors. We didn’t have a graduation ceremony, so the admin team got on a school bus, and we had routes set up. We spent an entire Sunday delivering diplomas to the first senior class and I think of how hard it would be for a senior to lose that opportunity that they thought was going to be that moment where they walk across the stage with all their classmates.”



Stephen Sanger

being human.”

Justin Garcia (French Department Intern - EHS): “So the first [lockdown in France] was very, very harsh and serious... From the perspective of French students, a lot of us live away from our families and our friends in order to study in bigger cities. And a lot of

Alexander: “It was partially fine because you were a senior and you were kind of leaving and it kind of sucked that you couldn’t dot the ‘I’s and cross the ‘T’s but also like there was certainly unfinished business but it was like ‘oh, we’ll get to that eventually.’”

PART TWO June 2020-August 2020

As the 2019-2020 school year came to a close and summer began, many remained locked down as COVID-19 continued to upset plans. The hope for a two-week break from school disappeared as social distancing, testing, and masking became the norm.

Stephen Sanger (Science Teacher - EHS): “In the summer of 2020, my family and I stayed pretty locked down the whole time. Luckily in the summer, the weather’s nice so you know, meeting friends and stuff, we’d just meet outdoors and

there were a lot of walks, we went camping a few times. I definitely socialized less than normal and when I did it was always outdoors.”

Stein: “I remember the tipping point of the summer that sticks out was right around the Fourth of July. Because I think we had started we had started allowing sports to continue after sports shut down all spring. And then come about mid-June, the governor had given the okay to start youth sports and so some of that was happening. Around the Fourth of July, there was a really big spike in

positive COVID cases, which was affecting some of our summer programs—not Edina High School, but some of the summer programming offered through the community. So we were fielding those questions and calls like ‘What do we do and how do we manage this?’ And I distinctly remember, it was after the Fourth of July, it was like the fifth or sixth of July or somewhere around that. I remember I was picking wild black raspberries. And I remember I was on the phone all day long, talking to health officials, in terms of what the protocols are because there were no

protocols that were really known in terms of establishing close contacts. ‘How long they would have to be out if they tested positive, or you determine a close contact, and then what’s the process? Where do you report it to?’ Then families were asking questions. So I just remember, I was on my cell phone all the time, and looking to find out and because I was on the phone so much. I was like ‘Well, I don’t have to sit in my house to do this.’ I remember just trying to be outside to do it.”

PART THREE September 2020-November 2020

The start of the new school year brought hybrid learning, a new teaching model which separated the student population with alphabetically organized cohorts that went to school on specific days. The new system seemed to be a step in the right direction, but an unexpected spike in cases forced the school back to

distance learning.

Ava Lainey Christensen (Student worker - Current EHS Junior): “I did have a moment of wondering if this was the right job for the time because, you know, not knowing what school was gonna look like the next year, I didn’t know whether I would have to be in person or whether I

could be online. I didn’t know what any of that was gonna be like. So I didn’t, I couldn’t ensure that the safety protocols that I take myself would work. But I feel like during the summer, I don’t know that I was worried about COVID and stuff. But I also knew that we get tested at The Waters. When [COVID] was really bad a couple months ago, it

was every week. But now I think it’s every other week or something. But we do get tested. And I do know that the people there are very on top of it. I personally was willing to take responsibility and be very on top of my personal hygiene and protection on that side of things.”

Continued on edinazephyrus.com