

# THE LONG HAUL

PAGE 20



# DEAR READERS,



**F**OR MOST OF US, THIS SCHOOL YEAR marks the start of a new beginning. Whether you are a freshman starting your high school journey, a sophomore or a junior readjusting to campus culture, or a senior preparing for the next chapter of your life, this semester has brought changes to all of our lives.

The past few years have changed our community in many ways, too. With a new administration and a return to live performances and brick-and-mortar instruction, our school will never be the same as it was before the pandemic. And we like to think that our student body will not just accept that, but embrace it.

On *The Muse*, we've developed a habit of referring to this year as a Renaissance. We've returned to our newsroom with a mission to tell the untold stories of our student body. In this issue, we examine the unseen beginnings of student-driven Prism preparation, the athletes behind the school's first cheer team, and the impact

of quarantine procedures on student performance. And after two years, we revisit an investigation of student complaints about understaffed and overcrowded district transportation.

No matter what changes may befall our campus, you can trust that *The Muse* will always be there to cover it. We're so proud of the challenges our publication has overcome, and we hope that you will share in our celebration of new beginnings.

WITH LOVE,

Alissa <sup>Soprano</sup>  
Gary <sup>Lead</sup>

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# MUSE IN REVIEW

Following up on the past and relating it to the present

## Burdened Buses

Volume 17 Issue 1  
Fall 2019

“The dependability of buses is not all that students have called into question. Many also feel that their safety is compromised — no matter the length of their ride.” The article “Burdened Buses,” published in *The Muse* Volume 17.1 in 2019, explored the issue of safety students encountered when riding Palm Beach County School District buses. Lack of air conditioning, crammed seating, and inconsistent schedules created



discourse between the Florida Department of Education and students and parents. Simultaneously, bus driver shortages increased pressure on

existing drivers. Two years later, questions surrounding student bus transportation have resurfaced in response to new pandemic-related guidelines and

restrictions. For more information on bus transportation this year, see “The Long Haul” on page 20.

## Sick and Silent

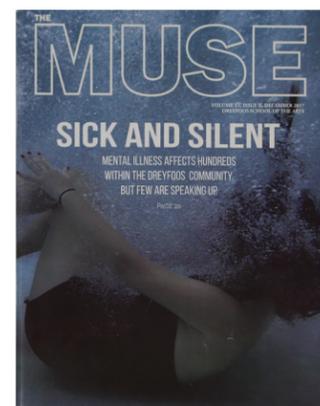
Volume 15 Issue 2  
Winter 2017

“Mental illness affects hundreds within the Dreyfoos community. Many who suffer compare their experiences to the sensation of drowning, of fighting against the current, but each wave is an unanswered call for help. Negative

stigmas attached to mental health and lack of education on mental illness have created a bleak reality: society is sick and silent.” “Sick and Silent,” published in *The Muse* Volume 15.2 in 2017, followed the 2017 Netflix series “13 Reasons Why.” The article uncovered the reality of the students and staff’s relationship with mental health and advocated

for more “awareness, education, and openness” to destigmatize mental illness. In this issue of *The Muse*, the staff editorial, “It’s Time to Take a Break,” argues for mental health days to be considered excused health-related absences, on page 14.

by Sandra Nemes  
design by Katie Davis



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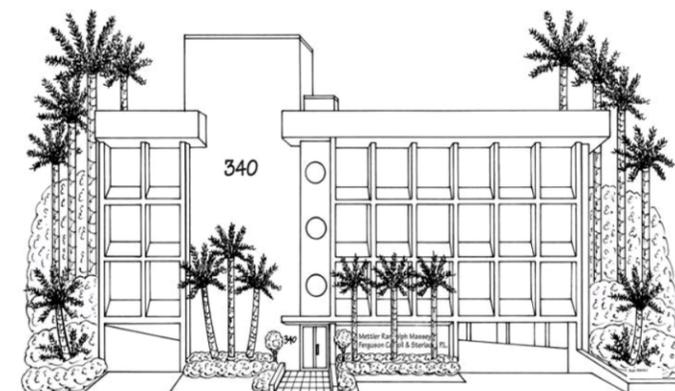
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## MUSEUM PHOTO GALLERY

Theatre senior Schnadé Saintil cheers during the closing song of The Collective's first lunch performance Sept. 24.

*Photo by Sofia Hennessey-Correa*



Communications senior and middle hitter Hannah Ehrich-Pollock jumps up to spike the ball while warming up for the girls volleyball game against Boynton Beach High School on Sept. 2. The team won all three sets of the game, leading to their first win at home.

*Photo by Lexi Critchett*



Strings senior Juan Guerrero watches for cues from orchestra director Jeffrey Adkins while playing his viola at the first philharmonic concert of the year on Sept. 30. Not only was this the first opportunity for the philharmonic orchestra to perform in front of a live audience since 2019, but it was also Mr. Adkins' first time on stage with these students since replacing former orchestra director Wendell Simmons last year.

*Photo by Allison Robbert*



Student-run band, The Collective, performs covers of different songs in front of the cafeteria on Sept. 24. Principal Blake Bennett, The Collective's sponsor, spoke at the concert about her excitement for their future performances.  
*Photo by Allison Robbert*



Dance senior and First Priority officer Kailey Worontsoff waves people down during Club Rush to get them to join. Club Rush, hosted by SGA at the beginning of each year, is a chance for students to join clubs and get more involved in the school community.  
*Photo by Lexi Critchett*

For the first time in over two years, dance senior Tori Gilbert performs in front of a live audience at the Dance Senior Solo Showcase Sept. 24. Her ballet piece "La Bayadere Variation" was one of the 19 dances in the showcase.  
*Photo by Lexi Critchett*



Cheering for the girls volleyball team as they score against Boynton Beach High School on Sept. 2, communications sophomore Arik Karim and communications senior Christian Chantayan pump their fists in the air and stomp their feet on the bleachers. While COVID-19 restrictions limited the audience last year, this school year has returned audiences to full capacity. "Being around other people and having that energetic atmosphere was amazing," Chantayan said. "It's great to finally be able to cheer again for Dreyfoos."  
*Photo by Lexi Critchett*



Vocal senior and fourth-year varsity swimmer Ava Neary practices at the Gaines Park Community Center pool, where the swim team meets after school. Neary competes primarily in freestyle at meets and helps train newer team members. "(My favorite part of being on the team) is going to dinner after meets," Neary said. "It's definitely a great feeling, just making friends."

*Photo by Allison Robbert*

Orchestra director Jeffrey Adkins conducts students through their pieces during the philharmonic concert Sept. 30. While the concert was amongst some of the first in-person performances since 2019, it also marked Mr. Adkins' first in-person year as orchestra director.  
*Photo by Allison Robbert*



# M.

Visit [themuseatdreyfoos.com](https://themuseatdreyfoos.com) for diverse and intriguing stories and important information in an easy and digestible format.

Featured Story: "Immunity: Senior Dancers Take the Stage"

*photo by Allison Robbert*



Strings sophomore Sabrina Garine finishes her freedom week poster illustrating "The Declaration of Sentiments." Students in Samuel Mick's AP World History class created Instagram post posters, each acknowledging a different declaration that has influenced history. The lesson and project aimed to help students learn more about the various declarations by capturing them in a way that was easy to grasp.

*Photo by Sofia Hennessey-Correa*

*design by Isabella Diaz*



# IT'S TIME TO TAKE A Break

In the wake of rising stress, anxiety, and depression, mental health days are more necessary than ever.

**A 2019 CDC SURVEY** captured a grim picture in Florida: 1 in 3 high school students reported persistent feelings of sadness and hopelessness to the point where they stopped engaging in usual activities, with nearly 1 in 5 "seriously consider[ing] attempting suicide." With these numbers reverberating across the nation, it's clear that there is a mental health crisis among teenagers.

Understanding school is a major stressor both academically and socially, some states have offered a novel measure: mental health days for students. In 2018, Utah passed legislation that enabled students to take a day off for mental health reasons as an excused absence. States like Oregon followed suit, allowing students up to five excused absences every three months as either a sick or mental health day.

Although a growing movement has made this idea a reality, bills to establish mental health days have stalled in the Florida legislature. In their inaction, policymakers are ignoring the voices of millions of students whom this measure would impact: A May 2020 Harris Poll of over 1,500 teenagers found that 78% believed that schools should support mental health days.

This all comes in the midst of a youth mental health epidemic. A 2017 study published in the

Journal of the American Medical Association discovered that the teen suicide rate was at its highest point in nearly two decades. Using data from the CDC, the study reported that there were 47% more suicides among the high school age group in 2017 than there were in 2000. Another survey from the Pew Research Center found that 7 in 10 teenagers see anxiety and depression as major problems among their peers. Especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, mental health days are a necessary step forward towards addressing the deterioration of mental health among our youth. Number after number reveals the emotional plight students are enduring, and it's time that lawmakers listen to the stories behind the statistics.

These excused absences are distinct from "sick days," in which the issue, whether physical or mental, is severe enough to require a doctor's note. Mental health days are not a solution to long-term problems such as a mental health disorder or chronic sleep deprivation, but they do allow students to take a step back during extenuating circumstances to rest and recalibrate before the next day. Although students would be missing a day's worth of school, forcing them to come to school when their mental health is suffering means they aren't learning in the first place, resulting in a loss of engagement in the classroom and extracurricular activities in the long run.

Establishing these days would also help open the conversation up around mental health and combat the norm that portrays asking for help as a weakness. By passing legislation that implements excused absences, lines of communication between students, parents, and teachers regarding students' mental health would be established, decreasing stigma and potentially encouraging students to seek help. This is particularly pertinent as a 2018 report from the National Council for Behavioral Health found that 49% of Generation Z is worried about external judgement when they say they've sought mental health services. This stigma deters students from discussing their mental health with friends and family and serves as a barrier against them seeking support.

Schools around the country are already instituting mental health programs to promote awareness, support, and education. At our school, Lady Gaga's Teen Mental Health First Aid and Suite360 programs informed students about the mental health resources accessible to them and how to recognize symptoms of mental illness. Although these programs offered educational resources about mental health, Florida must go beyond just requiring instruction time in classes if they want to do more than patch a bullet hole with a bandage. Students can't effectively improve their mental health if they are overwhelmed with academic responsibilities and

social pressures, meaning that these programs, and consequently students' lives, would be enhanced if this policy were implemented.

mental health more than words on a PowerPoint. And the reality is that on some days, teenagers simply need a break.

Mental health days are by no means a panacea to all of Generation Z's woes. Establishing more emotional and mental health support and reducing the societal stigma around mental health are all essential measures to prioritize our students' well-being. But ensuring that students are not overloaded is a prerequisite to facilitating a healthy environment and making the topic of

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Photo by Lexi Critchett



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photo: a. robbert

THE

# LONG HAUL

Students deal with

# PALM BEACH DISTRICT SCHOOLS

district transportation difficulties





### VISUAL JUNIOR MONTOYA

Magdaleno can not afford to be late. While his mom is busy working two jobs, he picks up shifts at Designer Shoe Warehouse after class. School transportation is one of the only ways to prevent interference with his mom's morning meetings and to get home on time. However, the bus being late or absent often disrupts this routine, causing him to be late to school or to his job.

His bus's scheduled arrival time is 7:17 a.m. Recently, it has arrived closer to 7:40 a.m.

"It definitely stresses me out," Magdaleno said. "I have about three unexcused (tardies). (My mom) gets very stressed. A few times, she almost didn't take me (to school) at all because she had such busy days."

Magdaleno is one of many students facing problems with their school transportation schedules. In a casual survey conducted by *The Muse* through English classes in October 2021 of 325 students, 32.2% of students said their bus is late "very often."

"(During) the first week of school, (the bus) was late every single day," theatre sophomore Mason Harris said. "But then the second week, (it) was super early. It was inconsistent. We didn't



Theatre sophomore Hanna Shea and theatre sophomore Blake McCall laugh as they walk off the bus in the morning. *photo: a. robbert*

know what to expect."

The bus irregularity is part of a county-wide issue. According to a 2021 WPBF 25 News article, the Palm Beach County School District currently has a shortage of 146 bus drivers. This means drivers have to take on additional stops, which increases the duration of the bus ride. In fact, 37.4% of students surveyed saying their bus ride was longer than an hour, and there are new drivers who may not be familiar with the routes.

These shortcomings have had an impact on daily life for students like strings senior Liam Jackson. Jackson, who rides bus R28, reports being "significantly" late to school at least once a week. He often does not

have time to drop off his violin in the music room, so he carries it up four flights of stairs to his first class of the day.

Facebook group. Parents report various issues about bus air conditioning, length of bus rides, and buses showing up late.

**"I HAVE ABOUT THREE UNEXCUSED (TARDIES). (MY MOM) GETS VERY STRESSED. A FEW TIMES, SHE ALMOST DIDN'T TAKE ME AT ALL BECAUSE SHE HAD SUCH BUSY DAYS."**

"I tend to eat breakfast at school," Jackson said. "Often times, (breakfast will) be closed by the time we get there, so I'll have to wait until lunch. I have gym before lunch, so it's hard to do gym while hungry."

Parents have voiced their complaints regarding school transportation on the "Dreyfoos Parents"

"Does anyone know all the bus stops for C009?" one parent asked the Facebook group. "My daughter does not get home (until) after 5:30. As a dance major who takes many dance classes every evening, this is not working."

Parents on Facebook also report instances where their children did not have proper

air conditioning on the bus. Although air conditioning is not required on Florida public school buses, as reported in a 2019 NBC article, students can still feel the effects of prolonged heat on bus rides. 45.8% of students surveyed said they have experienced nausea or headaches due to lack of air conditioning on a school bus.

usual, leading to more students on the bus than normal. This can cause issues with seating and space.

"We're supposed to have assigned seats," Harris said. "... But no one stays in (them). I'm supposed to sit in seat one, but every day I get on the bus and move to seat eight because someone decides to take it. The most annoying part is

**"THE MOST ANNOYING PART IS THE PEOPLE ON THE BUS THAT KNOW (IT'S) SUPER CROWDED, YET THEY CONTINUE TO TAKE A SEAT FOR THEMSELVES"**

"I'm wondering if my daughter's bus A.C. is broken, not being used, or just non-existent?" one parent said on Facebook. "It is so hot on the bus and her ride is over an hour both directions ... She's got a headache every day from the heat."

Crowding is another issue. 34.4% of students surveyed said people have had to sit on the floor on their bus. With the shortage of drivers, buses have had to take on more stops than

the people on the bus know (it's) super crowded, yet they continue to take a seat for themselves."

Most of these complaints fall on Assistant Principal and Transportation Liaison Ronald Lewis. Mr. Lewis serves as a connection between school-level concerns and the district transportation department.

"Bus assignments are all done by district transportation,"



During their morning bus ride to school, dance freshman Peyton Ford, vocal freshman Kira Hanlon, and communications sophomore Nikita Kohring scroll through their phones. *photo: s. hennessey-correa*

**28.7%**  
OF STUDENTS SURVEYED SAID THEIR BUS DRIVER **DOES NOT ENFORCE MASK POLICIES.**

**83.8%**  
OF STUDENTS SURVEYED SAID THEIR BUS HAS BEEN **LATE.**

**18.4%**  
OF STUDENTS SURVEYED SAID THEIR BUS HAS **BROKEN DOWN.**

**28.7%**  
OF STUDENTS SURVEYED SAID THEIR BUS HAS **NOT SHOWN UP TO SCHOOL BEFORE.**



Strings sophomore Danae Scott gets on the bus in the afternoon.  
photo: a. robbert



Bus driver Evangelia Patterson waits for her students to board at the end of the school day. "They have drivers doing three codes, and that's a no," Patterson said regarding COVID-19. "You're not supposed to have all these kids on the bus. These drivers are tired, and it's just so much on them. We need help. We need money." photo: a. robbert

Mr. Lewis said. "As far as the shortage issues, ... it's a lot of communication to try and figure out which bus is picking up which route on which day."

The school district did not respond to a request for comment on this issue.

Although air conditioning is not required on school buses in Florida, state statute 316.6145 requires all buses made after 2000 to have seatbelts. While buses meet this requirement, seatbelts do not prevent injury if students do not wear them. 92.5% of students surveyed say no one wears seatbelts on their bus.

Magdaleno remarked with a smile that more people get hit by the seatbelts than wear them.

"Parents have told us our entire lives to wear a seatbelt in the car, but as soon as we get into the bus, it's a lack of (enforcement)," Jackson said. "Another reason I don't typically wear it is because they're disgusting, with a bunch of gum on them. I do not like having to touch them."

Despite these complaints, the driver can make all the difference for the students. At a time when bus drivers are desperately needed, bus drivers interviewed said they try to make the bus experience a pleasant one for the kids. When asked what difficulties she has had during the pandemic, bus driver Darlene Richardson was more concerned with the struggles of others.

"It's probably more difficult for the kids because there are so many changes," Ms. Richardson said. "I'm just proud to be back to work and be able to assist the kids to make sure they get back and forth (from) school on time."

**"I'M JUST PROUD TO BE BACK TO WORK AND BE ABLE TO ASSIST THE KIDS TO MAKE SURE THEY GET BACK AND FORTH (FROM) SCHOOL ON TIME."**

by Jenna Lee  
photos by Sofia Hennessey-Correa, Allison Robbert, Sophia Roberts  
graphics by Allison Robbert  
design by Madeline Kahn

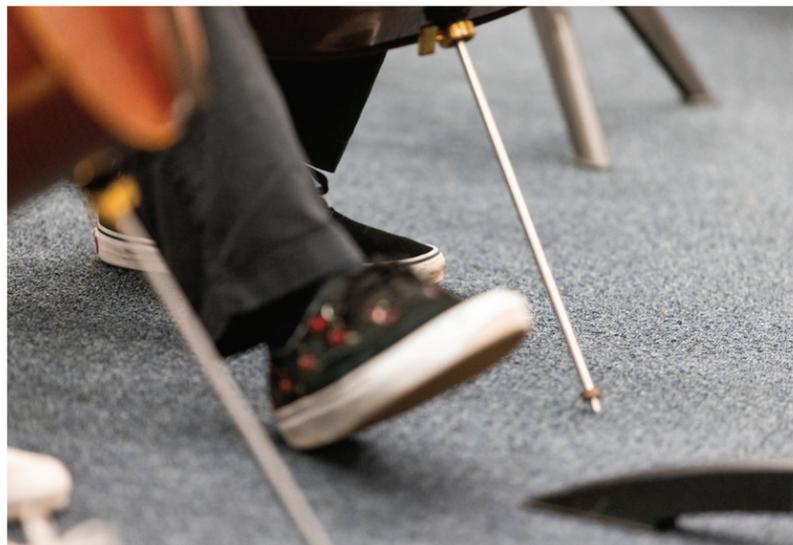


# Redefining



## PRISM'S RHYTHM

Music students prepare for their biggest performance of the year



**V**OCAL SOPHOMORE AILEEN Pereda stepped into the music hallway of Building 7 during lunch expecting to find a space to practice her group's a cappella piece. She was instead met with an indiscernible swarm of sounds: drums, horns, pianos, violins, voices harmonizing in D major. The notes escaped through the frayed, stained, said-to-be-soundproof practice rooms, now completely occupied for the return of Prism.

Students swung right back into the cadence of audition preparations for the biggest music performance of the year, resuming the music department's pre-pandemic Prism routine.

"We're finally getting some normalcy back," Pereda said. "So why not do something that's going to make us stand out, that's going to challenge us? I really just started (the ensemble) out of ambition, and it ended up working pretty well."

Prism auditions were held on Sept. 20 and 21 in the band room, where ensembles performed in front of a panel of music teachers. Students began their preparations before the school year by organizing their own ensembles and selecting sheet music. Months of hard work led up to this audition.

"The fact that the freshmen last year didn't get to experience (Prism) made us a little bit upset," Pereda said. "Prism means the Dreyfoos experience. It's hard to be a music major and not experience Prism."

"Prism really sets us apart from all the other schools and all the other majors," vocal junior Daniella Salazar said. "It's a form of community. I remember sitting in a freezing basement for seven hours, and I was like, 'Oh wow, I really am a vocal major here at Dreyfoos.'"

Prism is the music department's holiday concert, performed at the Kravis Center's Dreyfoos Hall. This is the only event during the year that combines the talents of the strings, band, piano, and vocal departments into one collaborative performance.

"It's very hectic," orchestra director and strings alumnus Jeffrey Adkins said. "It's a really large production because of the sheer number of groups involved and lots of moving pieces. I remember getting to perform in jazz ensembles and the string ensembles ... It's a great memory."

Practice rooms were at full capacity for the comeback of Prism, with students scrambling to Building 7 after the lunch bell in hopes of claiming a practice room for their group to rehearse in. Prism requires a significant commitment from all members of the music department for the show to run.

"(We invested) money and time," strings junior Sofia Plaza said. "It cost \$105 to have it all arranged. We all have our different things, ... so the only real time that we could rehearse was before school."

**We get here at 7:30 to 7:45 (in the morning) to start rehearsing. It's just a lot. It's hard."**

The investments poured into Prism this year were reflective of the gravity of its revival coupled with the students' heightened desire to compensate for missed concerts in 2020. Due to the pandemic's unpredictability, students like strings junior Aine Mullen are seizing each opportunity they come across.

"After (COVID-19), I'm paranoid now," Mullen said. "I got to do something this year because last year nothing happened. What if that happens again in my senior year? ... I feel like I have to try to do anything that I want to do in junior year, I should just go for it because senior year might just be shut down."

For some students and teachers, this year's concert carries a certain weight.



Strings senior Sydney Felton rehearses "Winter Wonderland" with her small group.

"There's a little bit more urgency because we haven't done (Prism) in a few years, so I feel like with any performances this year, people aren't taking them for granted because we were locked out last year and couldn't do any performing," vocal teacher Ken Taylor said. "People are excited to do that so there's been a renewed morale (of) people wanting to do this and be involved."

As the Nov. 30 performance draws near, preparations, rehearsals, and coachings will continue to gain momentum. In this span of time until Prism, the music department reunites while they prepare for the approaching concert.

"The fact that we get to experience Prism this year is really going to give us more of a sense of family," Pereda said. "And a sense to get to know everybody else in the music department. I'm going to get to know the strings, piano, and the band majors, along with getting to know my choral family even more."

*by Daisy Li  
design by Manha Chowdhury, Alissa Gary  
photos by Lexi Critchett*

HIGH  
JUMPS,

HIGH  
SPIRITS



**P**lanted in front of the bleachers, the conversations of 12 students echoed across the gym. They waited for their cheer coach to lead them into warmups. The gym door creaked open, and one-by-one, each member of

the new cheer team stood and got into formation. Within minutes, the gym was filled with the sound of Ciara's "Get Up."

This team, one of three additions to school sports this year, was founded by

communications junior Dakota Moss and vocal sophomore Lily De Leon and coached by dance teacher Branndi Lewis. Though the team was just established, they are already preparing to spread school spirit across campus.



De Leon jumped at the opportunity to cheer with longtime friend Moss and start the school's first cheer team. When De Leon saw Moss post on Instagram about the cheer team, she swiped up and said, "I'm doing this with you."

Pulling from her experience as captain of her middle school cheer team, De Leon considers herself a perfectionist. She also carries that perfectionism into her performances, whether it be for the cheer team or for her vocal pieces.

"When a pyramid locks in, or an elite stunt sequence locks in and you hit that, the feeling is so cool, watching the videos (back) and seeing how sharp it looks," De Leon said. "I think it's the same feeling (as hitting a note)."

# LILY

Moss finished the 2020-2021 school year with a goal to start a cheer team.

"I feel like (cheer) was definitely a big part of the school that was missing, especially the spirit and pep," Moss said. "I get to work and practice with a bunch of girls that also have the same passion as me."

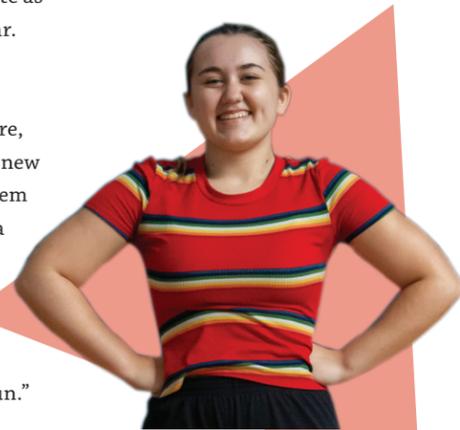
Moss got her start in cheer in middle school, and she's stuck with it ever since. Her enthusiasm remains consistent while learning different cheer formations and motions.

"I loved stunting and spacing and (other cheer techniques)," Moss said. "In our first practice we actually stunted a bit, which was really exciting and made me really happy because it's one of my favorite parts of cheer. Learning the routines and dances (is) also really fun. I enjoy every aspect of it."

In the future, Moss is excited for the team to compete. For now, the team plans on doing spirit cheer; they'll be cheering for school sports, but won't compete in cheer competitions against other schools. Another one of the cheer team's goals this year

is to acclimate the team to techniques and moves that could help them compete as early as next school year.

"I haven't done real competition cheer before, so I think it would be a new experience ... It does seem really exciting to have a routine to compete in front of other people," Moss said. "The rush of competing is really refreshing and really fun."



# DAKOTA



Vocal senior Dariel Peguero has a different perspective as a member of the cheer team. He's the only male member and the only base on the team. During stunts, Peguero catches and throws other teammates.

"I felt that if I was on the cheer team, they would use more power and explosiveness, which would make (the tricks) look better and (they)'d get

a better reaction from the crowd," Peguero said. Unlike some members of the team, Peguero has never participated in cheer before, but he is getting used to things pretty quickly.

"It's been really easy to know what I'm doing. It's been easier to fix the mistakes that I'm making," Peguero said. "It's just small minute things, (like) setting someone higher or making sure the angle of our hands is right so we don't throw them in a certain direction."

"It's definitely beneficial to have (Dariel) on the team because of his strength, so that they can throw higher," Moss said. "In past experiences, me and my other base would have to go and dive for someone, but (Dariel) just easily grabs them from the air and sets them back down."

# DARIEL

# MS. LEWIS

Ms. Lewis usually spends her time pirouetting and doing grand-jetes, but recently she's taken on coaching the cheer team. As a former "dazzler" — half cheerleader, half dancer — at the University of Florida, Coach Lewis can bring her cheer experience to the team.

"(As a dazzler), you perform in front of 90,000 people every weekend, and it's just a huge adrenaline rush," Lewis said. "When it comes to the dancing part (of cheerleading), I model a lot

of what was done on my college team."

Ms. Lewis's approach to coaching is hands-on: not only does she teach the team different routines and cheers, but she also warms up, runs laps, and conditions alongside the team.

"When you're doing more physical activity, I feel like it's very important to physically demonstrate it," Lewis said. "That way the student understands what and how to do something."

Members of the cheer team notice Ms. Lewis's interactive coaching methods.

"It shows me that she's a very motivated and hardworking person and she genuinely cares about the things that she does," De Leon said. "You can tell that she's passionate and that she enjoys this."



by Sheevam Patel, Shreya Srinivasan  
design by Gina Bernstein, Isabella Tickner  
photos by Lexi Critchett  
photo illustrations by Gina Bernstein, Caitlin Villacrusis



# MIKE BURKE KNOWS HE CAN SKATEBOARD ALSO, HE'S GOT THIS

Challenges in academia and public health cannot stop the superintendent's moment

*Since the reporting of this story, Mike Burke has been formally offered the position as Superintendent of Palm Beach County.*

**M**ike Burke is a lot of things.

For one, his, "How are ya?" comes across more as an exclamation than a question.

Quick to break a smile; quick to share a quip about skateboarding with his dog in his free time, when he can shred the gnar, not in the limelight of a county bitterly divided over COVID-19; even quick to log onto a Google Meet interview just weeks after a face-to-face feud with Florida's governor about mask mandates, adamant that he will be quick, too, to lose his salary should it mean protecting his children, meaning Palm Beach County's children.

Mr. Burke is the newly appointed Interim Superintendent of Palm Beach County School District, at least till next spring.

## He Used to Be the Right Hand Man

"I know the district well," Mr. Burke said.

He's been in the school board business since graduating college in '89. Until now, Burke has served as the Chief Financial Officer of the School District.

"Being in charge of finances really helped prepare me because whenever you're making big decisions on how to run the district and run our schools, there's always a financial impact." Mr. Burke said.

After serving under seven superintendents and being a right hand man, Mr. Burke has found himself answering a job search and ready to rise to the occasion.

"I've been here a long time," he said. "I had some ideas on how to go about the work."

## Whatever He's Doing, He's Doing it Fast

"So, I've already started," Mr. Burke said, laughing.

"I like to move fairly quickly," he says. Though he may be hired permanently, Mr. Burke is only guaranteed the superintendent gig till next spring.

"I didn't want to take a whole lot of time, you know, making sure everyone was happy and comfortable with things," Mr. Burke said. "I feel like sometimes, there are just things you need to do. You need to do your job and execute."

This position is a vague description about managing a school district. So what exactly did Mr. Burke already start?

For one, he alludes to structural changes in the district's employment sector. He has gotten the board to approve raises for substitute teachers. Now, Mr. Burke is set on recruiting more bus drivers amid a county-wide shortage. He's been negotiating with the Classroom Teachers' Union to compensate for extra efforts during the pandemic.

"My thought is, yes. Here, I've got a trial period as Interim (Superintendent) to give the board a good test drive," Mr. Burke said. "To see if they are happy with the way I'm doing things."

Mr. Burke also emphasizes implementing habits of routine communication.

He cracks yet another smile.

"No surprises."

## Oh, and There's a Pandemic.

"People were much more optimistic about this school year," Mr. Burke said, though he was quick to admit that "all went through the window with the Delta Variant."

Managing a school district through an unprecedented public health crisis makes the job uncharted territory.

Mr. Burke navigated implementing a mask mandate, despite Governor Ron DeSantis repeatedly stating it should be an optional facet of this COVID school year. School nurse Darlene Vargas O'Connor, while sanitizing the health ward, stressed the timeliness of such a move by Mr. Burke.

"With this year, I do know that the whole mask mandating was a plus, that even those people who are vaccinated should still wear masks," Nurse Darlene said, mentioning new COVID variants. "We're still in the middle of a pandemic, you

know? I really think it's absolutely important."

Mr. Burke said, "I was trying to do as much as I could within the law," initially begrudging in allowing mask opt-outs to occur. That is, until he saw surrounding counties defy the governor, and decided he wanted in.

"My whole thing when I took the job, even before the governor was coming out with these rules, was, I'm gonna err on the side of safety," Mr. Burke said. "The safety of our students and staff is the most important thing."

For him, being bold comes with the territory.

"Now we'll get to see," he says. "I just got a letter last Friday from the Commissioner of Education saying we are under investigation for noncompliance."

He makes a face.

"I have to respond by tomorrow."

## Bringing Back The Fun

Ruling as superintendent during COVID has meant seeing American education take a downturn. Mr. Burke said he has been eager to get back to speed with Palm Beach County's previous energy, including football games and spirit weeks.

"We've reinstated sports and activities and the band," he said.

Behind Mr. Burke, taped onto the wall, is a map of the county. It's a small detail, but it frames his office that is otherwise bare. The scene is calm compared to the volatility surrounding local and state politics, where the governor has proposed to pull salaries in an attempt to put pressure on Mr. Burke's and other superintendents' mask mandates.

“My whole thing when I took the job, even before the governor was coming out with these rules, was, I'm gonna err on the side of safety.”

The *Palm Beach Post* quoted Mr. Burke on Aug. 10 stating, "I didn't get into this job for the money."

"The students come first," Mr. Burke said in the interview with *The Muse*. "I felt like the governor's approach by penalizing school districts by withholding the school board members' and superintendent's salaries." He pauses to sigh.

"I was insulted by that. That suggests that we would make a decision out of our own best financial interests and at the sake of our students' and staff's safety."

"Oops," Mr. Burke said, and he shut off his phone. It was a rock song ringtone.

Maybe because rock songs interrupt the 197,000-odd students under his wing, Mr.

Burke mentions that he's taken up skateboarding with his dog for fun. He's even bought an electric deck, to match his dog's pace.

In life's uncertainty, this might be a few months of a new job till the dust settles into a previous normalcy.

But as for right now, this is his moment, his dog the right hand man and all.

by Kaja Andric  
photo courtesy Mike Burke  
graphics by Angelyna Rodriguez  
design by Mariana Colom

# “ ” A NEEDED SACRIFICE

As students returned to the classroom on Aug. 10, new Palm Beach County School District COVID-19 and contact-tracking protocols took effect



**P**ens, pencils, and paper replaced the color-coded text of Google Docs and Microsoft Word on the first day of school. Teachers instructed students in person rather than a rainbow of initials on a screen. Group projects were no longer a silent break-out room, but instead a classroom buzzing with conversation.

Ever since March 2020, the definition of normal has been upended by the COVID-19 pandemic. While the first month of the 2020-2021 school year was spent in completely virtual school, and the rest in hybrid learning with some students returning to the classroom and others opting to stay virtual, the 2021-2022 school year marked the return to full in-person learning.

In April, former Superintendent Donald Fennoy announced that Palm Beach County would return to full brick-and-mortar learning in the new school year ending the previous hybrid learning environment. According to the Sun Sentinel on April 9, former Superintendent Fennoy explained in an email statement concerning hybrid learning that he “cannot overstate the academic, social, and emotional benefits of returning to in-person instruction.”

The removal of the hybrid option has left quarantined students with Google Classroom assignments and a lack of live instruction. Palm Beach County School District protocols state “Students who test positive for COVID-19 will not be assigned to distance learning when self-isolating or in quarantine. While students must remain home, makeup work will be provided to the student.”

Visual junior Zofia Killeen said, when referring to the challenges posed by the lack of virtual options, that being contact traced can become “a huge problem.”

Since the return to full-capacity classrooms, the COVID Dashboard of Palm Beach County School District has reported COVID cases across all public schools. As of Oct. 4, the Palm Beach County School District has reported 6,044 total confirmed COVID cases with 830 employees and 5,214 students having tested positive across all public schools in the district.

As of Aug. 18, new COVID protocols dictated that students who come within six feet of a confirmed symptomatic COVID case within 48 hours for longer than 15 minutes will be contact traced. They will then be notified by an administrator and quarantined.

However, based on a student’s vaccination status, the length of quarantine varies. If students provide proof of vaccination to administration, they will not have to quarantine. Unvaccinated students must quarantine for seven days or provide a negative COVID PCR or rapid test four days after exposure in order to return to campus.

Without the option of hybrid learning, teachers are finding new ways to educate students who are quarantined for extended periods of time.

“You’re dealing with more absences than you usually would,” social studies teacher Michael Esopakis said.

**“It’s like a new frontier of accepting work later, allowing students to have more time, and using digital platforms like Google to make sure kids don’t fall behind.”**

As more students are added to the “Q (present),” which marks quarantined students on SIS, teachers are using Google Classroom to communicate and update students on assignments given in class.

“I’ve had a few teachers make an agenda,” digital media freshman Abby Vaknin said. “(Teachers) put the materials online so they can see what we’re doing.”

Other teachers have taken approaches beyond posting assignments and make up work on the Google Classroom.

“One of my teachers will record the classes and post it on Google Classroom if

there are people who are contact traced,” dance sophomore Maia Derrevere said.

Nevertheless, students face the challenges of catching up on instructional time missed during increased absences and quarantines.

“If we had the option to do virtual learning, we would have stayed on track,” Vaknin said when speaking on time she spent at home for a non-COVID related sickness. “It kind of sucks that you have to catch up. You can’t if you’re really sick. You can’t do the work while you’re at home. I think that could be difficult and I know when I (was sick), it was really hard for me to catch up again.”

Consequently, for some students, the elements of collaboration that were brought back by in-person learning were made difficult by the increased absences and quarantines due to new protocols.

“It’s been hard when other people aren’t there if you’re doing a group project, because then you’re stuck in a situation,” theatre senior Lily Counihan said.

In addition to the challenges posed by contact tracing and quarantining, new difficulties have emerged for students and faculty with the return of after-school activities and artistic performances on campus.

“We’re working on performances right now for dance so if people are contact traced and out for a week, they miss a lot of content that we learn,” Derrevere said.

During the 2020-2021 school year, art department performances were unable to host full audiences due to COVID restrictions. These restrictions caused most art department performances to be moved online or performed in front of reduced audiences.

“(Being online) definitely impacted the experience of a performance,” piano senior Alice Chong said. “It wasn’t the same as being on stage and having everyone look at you. It was just kind of like you’re at home and there’s the camera.”

The new COVID protocols have permitted socially distanced audiences to return to campus allowing for some of the first in-person performances since the pandemic.

“It was nice to get back into in-person performances again, because I think a part of being a music major was performing,” Chong said. “I think a part of me was lost when we did performances online because it just didn’t feel the same. So when we did return, it was a little nerve wracking at first to get everything back together, but after that it felt like the same again.”

Other extracurriculars, like sports, have been impacted by the absence of students thus far.

**“A lot of the girls couldn’t come to practice because a lot of the girls on the team were exposed,” communications senior and member of the Girls Volleyball Team Hannah Ehrich-Pollock said. “It’s just being careful during practice and washing our hands because you’re touching the same ball as everyone else.”**

The school district has taken steps to mitigate the spread of COVID. The reintroduction of a mask mandate that eliminates the ability to opt-out of wearing a mask — an option that had been taken by more than 10,000 district students — is just one of the recent actions meant to limit the spread of COVID within schools. However, controversy still exists between school districts’ mask mandates across the state and Gov. Ron DeSantis’ administration.

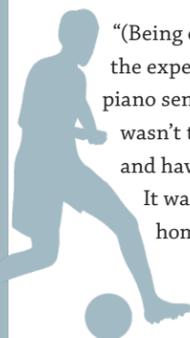
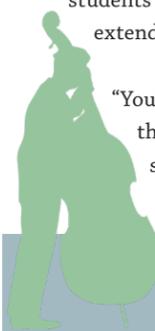
NPR explained on Aug. 31 that “despite a judge’s ruling last week declaring that the Florida governor’s ban on mask mandates in schools is unconstitutional, the State Board

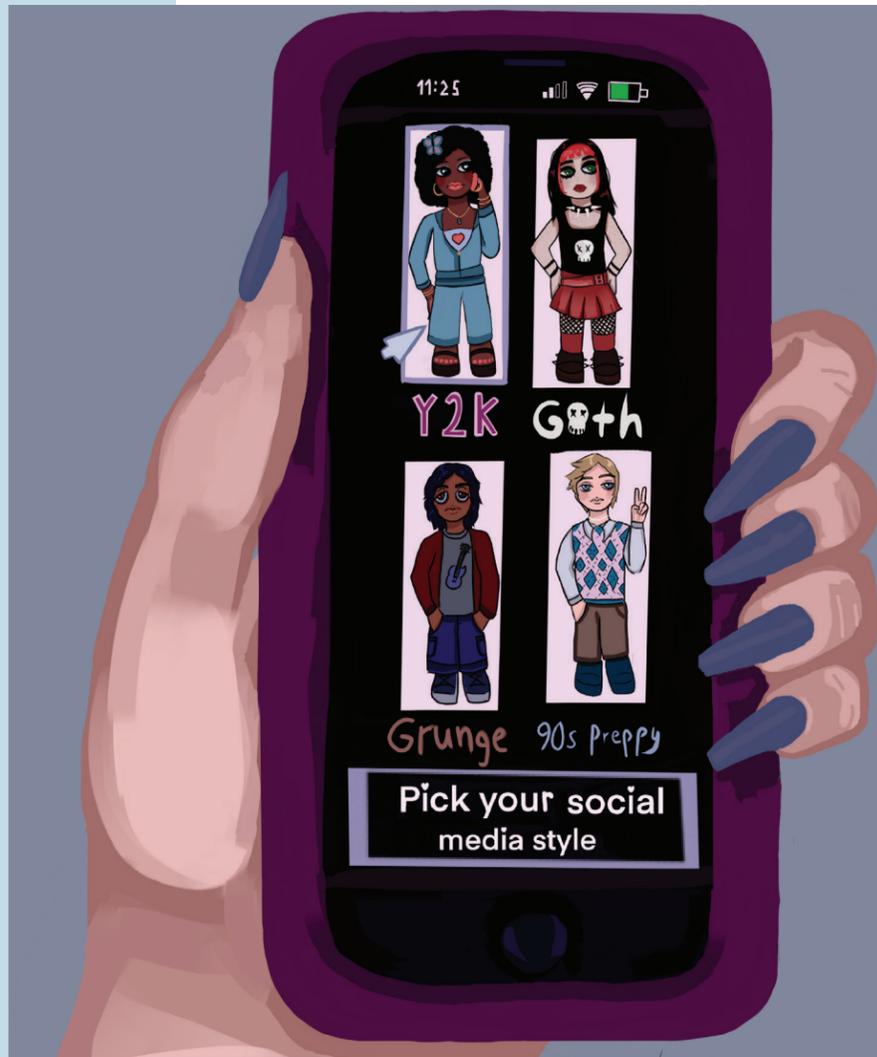
of Education has forged ahead with its threat to withhold school board members’ salaries in districts that require the face coverings in classrooms.”

No matter the policy, students and teachers remain flexible and are working to adapt their educational practices and methods in order to prepare for whatever the future holds.

“It’s a sacrifice, but it’s a needed sacrifice,” Mr. Esopakis said. “It reminds me of a John F. Kennedy quote, ‘Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country.’ Every now and then, we have to step up and do something that might not be comfortable for the betterment of our surroundings.”

*by Melodie Barrau  
graphics by Alana Cavanagh, Sophia Roberts  
design by Allison Robbert, Capri Wayne*





Editorial Cartoon:  
**Pick Your Social Media Style**

Fashion styles from the 1990s and 2000s have made a recent resurgence on social media, the trends seeping into school culture. It's common to see students in fishnets and spiked chokers next to those in sweater vests and long dresses. No matter their style, students are guaranteed to find fashion inspiration online.

*graphic by Angelyna Rodriguez*

## About Us

*The Muse* is a nationally-recognized and award-winning newsmagazine. The publication has won numerous awards from the National Scholastic Press Association including a Pacemaker in 2004, 2008, 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2018. *The Muse* also won a Silver Crown from the Columbia Scholastic Press Association (CSPA) in 2011 and 2013. *The Muse* won a CSPA Hybrid Gold Crown award in 2015, 2018, 2020, and 2021 which recognizes the best print editions and websites in the nation. *The Muse* has also won The Palm Beach Post General Excellence Newspaper Award in 2012, 2014, 2016, 2017, and 2018, The Palm Beach Post General Excellence Website Award in 2019 and 2020, and the SunSentinel High School Journalism Awards Best Overall and Best Social Media in 2020. This publication is completely funded by its subscribers, advertisers, and donors. Over 1400 students and a multitude of subscribers receive copies or digitally access the magazine annually. All aspects of the magazine are written and designed by the students. This publication is produced by 61 staffers, grades 10–12, from the communication arts department, the strings department, the theater department, and the digital department. We would like to thank the School of the Arts Foundation for its continuous support. Your donations are greatly appreciated by the staff.

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