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

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.

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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.”

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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 COVID-19 continued to upset plans. As the 2019-2020 school year came to a close and summer began, plans for the start of the new school year were broached with a new teaching model which separated the student population with block schedule and rotation.