
SUMUS LEONES

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Winter Sports and Musical Paused for Omicron

By: Alice Pittard, freshman

When students returned to school from winter break on January 6, practices for winter sports and the musical were temporarily stopped or made virtual, which continued until January 17 (although some sports still have additional restrictions). This was because of the surge of the COVID-19 variant Omicron, which could make those practices unsafe.

Mr. Torrence, an upper school science teacher and the wrestling coach, stated, “Every [sports] team at Latin had an outbreak the week before [winter] break.” In addition, he said that somewhere between 10-40% of Latin athletes tested positive for COVID-19. With all this, it was necessary to cancel sports practices, or make them virtual.

In-person musical practices were moved online, which students said was frustrating for several reasons.

Nora O’Donovan, a seventh grader in the musical, said that Zoom had many challenges, “like sound issues, lagging, and finding spaces wherever [you’re] taking your call to have enough room to dance and sing without disrupting your siblings or parents.”

Several other difficulties were mentioned. One was that staging, placement, and dancing are all harder online. Another

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was that Zoom is not very engaging. With all these challenges, some students questioned if the decision to stop in-person practices, for both sports and the musical, was fair. After all, people still eat lunch indoors and maskless.

Aitana Camponovo, a freshman participating in winter track, said, “It does make me realize how unreasonable the decision was since we are still doing various things inside that aren't COVID-safe. I assume that Latin wanted to limit students being close to each other for as much time as they possibly could, or else they wouldn't have cancelled the after-school activities. In my opinion, though, if students are outside like we normally are in track, it probably would not have made as much of a difference.”

However, some students agree with the decision. Belle Steinberg, a freshman and part of the musical, stated, “I think the biggest difference between rehearsals and indoor eating is length, so that ... we can spend hours in rehearsal possibly needing to be near each other while lunch is quick and isn't necessarily unsafe.”

Mr. Torrence also agreed that it was the right decision, saying, “The way Omicron was spreading really rapidly, something needed to be done and when people are eating lunch, they are not as close as when people are competing in sports.” He then added that when you're playing sports, you're breathing hard, which makes it easier for COVID-19 to spread. Therefore, even sports like track could be risky.

No matter if everyone thought it was fair, the sentiment was mainly that people were happy to be back. Nora O'Donovan said, “Personally, I really love in person rehearsals so I hope it will stay the same for now and everybody stays safe.”

Mr. Torrence added, “It's important that we try to get back to a sense of normal while also being safe.” Fortunately, practices can now be in-person again while still keeping COVID-19 cases to a minimum.



The middle school girls basketball after winning the PCSAA championship.



The upper school wrestling team.



The musical performers practicing their *Pippin* choreography.

Social Media's Impact on Current Events

By: Maggie Southworth and Lydia Park, freshmen

Social media is one of the few things that connect people globally. In a study done by Statista, it showed that out of the 333 million people that live in America, about 295 million of them had social networking platforms in 2021. With social media being a part of so many American lives, how has it affected what we know?

With the creation of the first social media platform in 1997, its growing popularity has made a noticeable difference in the following generations concerning the amount of known information. Upper School English teacher, Mr. Baum shared how, "It isn't that long ago that I was in ninth grade, but just in the past 10-15 years, the amount that teenagers know about the world around them has increased so much. Social media provides a huge pipeline of information, and people of all ages can use it to learn about people, places, and issues they might not otherwise hear about."

For some people, social media's ability to quickly spread information has made it one of their main sources to receive information. Freshman Basil Mann commented, "Social media spreads information faster and reaches more audiences. I know a lot of people who try to avoid politics and don't really check the news; but a lot of people are on social media, so I think it reaches them better than most news sites do."

While social media can be used to spread knowledge at a faster rate, some commented on the downsides of having social media involved in current events.

Mr. Baum spoke about the dangers of social media potentially leading to ignorance, "When each of us has a personalized feed based on the data that computers have gathered, we are susceptible to an "echo chamber" effect, where we keep hearing the same narratives and the same opinions... If you are only subjected to a narrow set of ideas, that could certainly contribute to ignorance."

Freshman Belen Gonzalez added, "[Social media] can inform people, but also lets people share their ignorant opinions and invalidate others opinions," explaining the conflicts that can arise from ignorance online.

Along with that comes the difficulty of trying to find reliable sources online. Eighth grade science teacher Ms. Barlev shared, "Following well-known news sources, local organizations and even some politicians can be helpful for learning about the depth of political issues. However, people also have to take everything they read with a grain of salt. Who wrote it? What are their personal motivations? What are they trying to convince you to believe and why?"

Should Schools Be Open During a COVID Surge?

By: Nick Kempf, freshman

With COVID cases on the rise because of the Omicron variant, there is talk of whether schools should temporarily go back to online learning. Many schools are considering whether they should temporarily make schooling remote with protests taking place at schools such as Banneker, Walls, Wilson, Duke Ellington and Dunbar, according to an article by the Washington Informer. Schools must not only take into consideration student safety, but also the mental health and stress levels of students as well as how much and how well students are learning.

While mental health may not be seen as important as keeping students safe from the virus, freshman Maeve Marchand says, “Everyone is going to get COVID at some point in their life, and I don't think we should be damaging [children's mental health] to avoid something that will inevitably happen.”

Since COVID is not very deadly to students, she believes that we should focus more on improving the mental health of students. It is possible that some students will benefit mentally from remote learning, but if students are able to interact with peers and teachers it will most likely improve mental health due to decreasing social isolation which is a main cause of depression. It can also help get students to be more physically active which benefits mental health as well as fitness.

Even with the perks of remote learning such as sleeping in later, not having to commute, and being able to have more control over your schedule, a majority of students still disliked virtual school.

Freshman Madeline Sickel says, “It was annoying to be on Zoom for so long.”

Freshman Max Aaron added, “It was too difficult just to get through the day and get all my work done.”

Freshman English teacher Mr. Baum states, “It is a dangerous disease, and because it's infectious, the dangers are far reaching.”

While there is a low chance students will be severely impacted by the virus, there is always the chance something could happen or that they pass it to someone who is severely impacted by it.

Upper school English teacher Ms. Hamd raises the point of equitable learning. She says, “I think that everyone would be better served during a surge if we had virtual school for a brief and limited period of time.”

She believes remote learning will help create a more equitable learning environment. If students get COVID they will have to do remote learning for 10 days which will create a difference between the learning experience they get and the experience students learning in-person will get.

Mr. Baum also remarked that he noticed signs of burnout in many students. “Whether we realize it or not, each one of us has been operating in some sort of "survival mode" for a long time, and that takes a toll.” While he can’t say for sure what the cause for the burnout is, he speculates it may be from students stressing over COVID.

While having in-person school would provide better learning for students and would probably have a positive impact on student mental health, some think that school should temporarily be remote because of the unsafe conditions, the stress COVID causes students, and the inequitable learning experiences students will get is school stay in-person. Even though the situation is delicate, Mr. Baum has hope that we will be able to get through it.

“Latin has done a good job testing and communicating about positive cases. While I feel it’s a risk to be in person during a surge, we have the benefit of a couple years of experience with this pandemic.”

Rumors of Skittering

By: Aitana Camponovo, freshman

A Physics lesson last week was interrupted by a mouse spotted squirming under the door, running in and out the room in a span of less than ten seconds. Afterwards, class moved on once again as per usual, but students still have a lot to say about that morning.

“When I saw the mouse, I felt shocked, ” says Amal Buba, a freshman who had front-row ticket seats to the sighting. “Honestly I’ve heard countless rumors, however, I assumed they were gone.”

Living in a big city, seeing mice may not be an unusual sight for most people, but that doesn’t make it any less disgusting.

When asked about the mice sighting last week, Mr. Keller, ninth grade Physics teacher, responded, “I haven't seen a lot of mice around, but they’ve certainly been seen. I don't see scat or anything in the morning, so it's just the one we saw the other day.”

Ms. Austin, ninth grade and AP English teacher, said, “I didn't see the mice, but I saw the droppings.”

Based on the mouse’s favorite hangout spots, it seems that they prefer the south side of the school more than the north. Could this mean that the high schoolers are at fault for this new infestation?

Approaching the situation from a moral perspective, Mr. Keller sympathizes with the mice.

“Why is it that every species that survives in human society, the things that thrive in our buildings and our communities, we dub as a pest?”

Is it right to drive these mice out and take away their only home as a means to get rid of them, when they never really did anything wrong to us in the first place? What must these mice have done to humans to be considered a hindrance?

Stepping aside from what may be right or wrong, one thing is known for sure: when mice are dirty, they carry diseases, such as hantavirus, salmonellosis, and listeria through their droppings, saliva, and nests. They breed quickly and destroy wires, walls, and lunchboxes in a matter of days.

Although eliminating the mice may be unethical, there is no doubt that they bring more harm to the Latin school community than good.

“I actually read somewhere,” Ms. Austin started, “that mice procreate every two weeks or something like that. You'll have dozens or hundreds without knowing, so it's not about just catching one.”

Just how many mice families might there be occupying Latin at the very moment you're reading this?

After either hearing the rumors or seeing the mice for themselves, it is no doubt that the students and faculty of Washington Latin have started making new lifestyle changes to accommodate these new visitors.

“[The mice] haven't been a distraction in class, but they've changed my habits. I try to not leave my lunch bag around, for example,” Ms. Austin reveals.

Though they may not directly affect the flow of class, mice may cause anxiety for some students.

“After seeing the mouse it made me uncomfortable, and the sight of it made my stomach turn,” Amal admits.

A lot of the time, teachers are not able to notice when a student is feeling sick just from looking at their face, or, realistically speaking, the top half of it. After that morning in physics class, Amal spent the rest of the day thinking about the mouse she saw and how disgusting it was. Disturbances like these could cause other students to feel uncomfortable and find it difficult to feel motivated. Though these one ounce creatures may seem innocent, they could do a lot of damage to not just the school, but to the mental health of many students.

Before anything else, first, it must be made clear that mice infestations are a completely normal occurrence, especially for public facilities such as schools.

“I think it's a very DC problem,” Ms. Austin says.

Mr. Keller also adds on, saying, “I don't think I've ever worked in a school building that doesn't have mice.”

It is not Latin's fault, but the city's. Or, moreover, a worldwide one.

"At my old school, we didn't have any mice, but I could walk in the classroom and find a rat snake," Mr. Keller adds.

As a community, cleaning up after ourselves and making sure to not leave food lying around is one of the most important things we could do to prevent any more surprise visits. As always, it is important that we work together to make the school a more sanitary place all day, every day.

Anyways, "The education you receive here is quality, and as long as there's no evidence that it's interfering with the kitchens and the school is making sure that that area of the school is protected, then I would think [they are] not [a threat to Latin]," Ms. Austin explains.

Risks During Winter Break

By: Sadie Greenhalgh, seventh grade

From December 20th to January 3rd, Washington Latin went on winter break, without anyone knowing what new variants of the COVID-19 virus would emerge. In the middle of winter break, a new variant, Omicron, spiked. It was more contagious than previous variants, causing more cases each day. Many teachers and students were faced with the difficult task of deciding whether to continue their holiday plans, leaving many taking on big COVID risks.

“I went to a wedding in Puerto Rico over Christmas for my college friend Soli and her husband Ramon,” eighth grade English teacher Ms. Breitman recalled. “The service was outside and people wore masks so that was very safe, but the reception was indoors. While people masked on the dance floor, they ate indoors... something I rarely do. Puerto Rico had strict COVID rules, so that people had to show their vaccine records in restaurants and at the wedding everyone was required to take a rapid test at a lab the day beforehand.”

“My family and I flew to Minnesota,” seventh grade English teacher Mr. Green remarked. “We were definitely nervous. My wife and I are vaccinated and boosted, and our daughter is vaccinated, but our son is two and not able to be vaccinated. Plus, he is least likely to keep his mask on. We were debating whether to travel at all up to the night before we were set to leave. We ultimately decided we did not want to spend another holiday season away from our parents and siblings, and we are happy we went. [But] Minnesota had the highest COVID numbers in the country when we first arrived there, so we steered clear of any indoor activities.”

Freshman Lucia Claire performed unmasked in thirteen performances of the Nutcracker and the Mini-Nut, an abbreviated version of the Nutcracker. Her roles were an icicle, a flower, and understudy Marie. “I felt comfortable performing in the Nutcracker without my mask,” she expressed. “I chose not to wear it because my family felt comfortable, and the whole performance experience is totally different for the audience and performers if you can see facial expressions. Towards the last shows we were definitely more precautionous being mask-less backstage because we were so scared of the show getting shut down, or of having to put in more understudies than we already had in.”

“I thought the protocols [for the audience] were fair and effective,” freshman Sarah Schifferle explained about the rules for Lucia’s performance. “You had to show proof of vaccination to get in and you had to wear a mask, both of which seem fair since the vaccine has been out for a while now and is free and very accessible.”



The opening of one of the Mini-Nut performances Lucia Claire performed in.



Eighth grade advisories ice skating during winter.



Mr. Green's children on their way to Minnesota.

Seeking Spanish

By Ry Shapiro, seventh grade

In order to graduate from Washington Latin, upper school students must complete at least two years of a modern language, in addition to many other requirements. The current language options are French, Chinese, and Arabic. With Spanish, the second most spoken language in the United States, notoriously not. And, although the school has tried to incorporate the language in emails and supported the creation of a Spanish club, the language remains firmly unavailable. So, why? Why is the administration able to acknowledge the need and importance of Spanish, but not offer it?

The school has considered the languages they teach very carefully and they believe adding Spanish or any other language for that matter would be way too expensive and to get rid of a language that is already being taught would cost jobs and disrupt learning as Mr. Porcelli says.

“Every human language offers unique insights into our common human heritage and carries invaluable cultural knowledge,” said Mr. Porcelli, the chair of the Modern Language Department. “No language is more important or less so than any other... In my time at Latin we have had students who speak or would like to speak Somali, Spanish, Japanese, German, Amharic, Russian, Italian, Ebo, Wolof, Korean, Tagalog, Punjabi, Urdu, Hindi, ASL and others. That is why we offer the opportunity for students to pursue a Seal of Biliteracy which certifies students’ abilities to read, write, speak, and understand a language other than English.”

“By the time that I arrived in 2016, our world language programs had already been established,” stated Head of School Mr. Anderson. “For us to introduce a new language would be prohibitively expensive. And for us to phase out an existing language could cost jobs and potentially disrupt student learning.”

However, Mr. Anderson definitely understands the demand for Spanish. He added, “It would likely be easier to find Spanish language teachers than French, Chinese, or Arabic. There would be ample opportunities to practice the Spanish language here in Washington, DC. And there is a demand for the teaching of that language from students and their families. As such, we would certainly give it careful consideration.”

When asked why she started the Spanish language and culture club, science teacher Ms. Crespo, who is the advisor of the Spanish and culture club responded, “I love my culture and wanted to share it with others.”

Ms. Silva, a student support teacher and also helps lead the Spanish club, added on when asked the same question. “I decided to join the Spanish Club because I love Spanish as a language, I love sharing the culture behind Spanish-speaking countries, and I love helping students pursue interests of their liking. Spanish is my first language and dear to me. I worked hard to learn it and preserve it. By sharing it with students, I am honoring my ancestors.”

“I definitely feel that Spanish should be a language offered at Latin! I think there are many practical reasons why we should add Spanish to our curriculum.” Ms. Silva, a student support teacher and a leader of the Spanish club explains, “It’s an accessible language given the foundation students have from Latin, and it’s a popular, useful language that is spoken across the country more and more every year. It’s also a language already spoken by some of our students. It’d be great to help those students hone their skills. Spanish can even lead up to college credit via AP classes! Shifting gears and putting our WLPCS goggles on, Spanish is certainly on track with the classical mission! Spanish Literature is rich, and teaching Spanish as a language can open students up to reading the original versions of quite a few rich texts! Older texts like *Don Quixote*, modern texts like *Love in the Time of Cholera*, and rich texts in between ask the same large questions that our already-rich curriculum asks. It’d be great to provide students with the tools to access these works.”

Many students have strong opinions about why Spanish should be a language at Latin.

“I think Spanish should be a language at Latin because it’s the closest language to Latin because it has mostly the same roots,” seventh grader Dewi Briscoe expressed. “I’m not saying that other languages shouldn’t be taught because every language is special and amazing, but I feel that Spanish should especially be taught at Latin because it’s the closest language we have today to Latin and Arabic and Chinese are farther away,”

“Si. I think Spanish should be a language at Latin because of its coherent value,” seventh grader Zane Wood stated. “It is one of the most popular languages out there and a large percent of South America and North America speak it. Learning English to Spanish is simpler than learning English to Chinese. When you learn another language, then you use more of your mind.”

Why don’t we have Spanish as a language at Latin when we have teachers that want to be Spanish teachers?

“I would be open to being a Spanish teacher, and would probably enjoy it a lot. I’d need some training to learn how to teach Spanish since new language acquisition is tough, but I’d certainly take joy in teaching Spanish,” Ms. Silva explained.

"There are 37 million Spanish speakers in the United States, according to Pew Research Center. Mr. Mullings, sixth grade Civics teacher and assistant principal in residence stated. Furthermore, Spanish is spoken by more non-Hispanic homes than any other non-English language. As a diverse-by-design school, I believe it would be incredibly valuable for the students of Latin to have the opportunity to learn Spanish. "

As for the chance of Spanish at the new Cooper campus, former principal Dr. Smith says it is definitely a serious consideration.

"It's under consideration as one of the languages we will be teaching at Cooper Campus," says Dr. Smith, who is helping develop the curriculum for the new campus. "We probably will decide in the middle of next year, because we won't start it until seventh or eighth grade, and next year there will only be a fifth or sixth grade at the campus."

Lunch Lamentations

By Ruby Churches, Oluwamayowa Akinsanya, and Isabella Lee, eighth grade

What is one of the best parts of the day for Latin students? A lot of kids would say lunch! Students can eat their long awaited food, catch up with their friends, and get a break from learning in the classroom. However, with the pandemic persisting, lunch has drastically changed. Obviously, in order to eat your lunch, you must remove your face mask, eliminating a major defense against catching the COVID-19 disease, leaving only a divider between you and potential germs. Additionally, now that it is winter, Latin students spread germs more easily by being packed inside. This begs the question, is lunch inside Latin safe?

“I think that they need to be realistic about where they are putting people,” says Ms. Malchionno, an art teacher. “Sometimes they will say, ‘this advisory needs to stay here’ and then their room is tiny. So why are they in there? Versus, the art advisory has to be in the MPR, but it's actually bigger and more spacious in the art room.”

Ms. Goldstein also commented on improving lunch safety, “We could be better about making sure every single kid has a divider, and, even more important than that: once you finish your meal, you put your mask back on, because I think that's the piece that really [is getting overlooked] we keep our masks off, even when we're done eating.

Lola Orlove Rodriguez, eighth grader, commented on improving safety when students are eating lunch in advisories versus choice seating. “If we were all with our friends, and in our own groups, we'd be kind of like if we were in our own pods, like before [with hybrid] .”

Jonah Cohen, another eighth grader, agreed with Lola. “You hang around each other a lot and build up an immunity within the group.”

Ms. Sisk, the eighth grade Latin teacher, believes safety has more to do with the room. “I think it has everything to do with the size of the classroom and the number of people that are expected to eat in it. Every classroom is a different size, some classrooms are bigger than others, like the science classroom is probably the biggest classroom that you have. I think bigger classrooms could be made possible, but I still think they should have dividers in them, or something else that helps people actually stay apart while eating. Having access to windows that open is a big factor.”

The lunchroom's plastic dividers were also a discussed subject.

When asked about the effectiveness of the dividers, Ms. Sisk stated, “If they are not being used properly, of course they don't work. If things aren't being used as we intended them too, of course they're not going to be effective. Are they hypothetically the most effective? Sure. Is that what is happening right now? No, I think eating outside is the best option but that's not possible.”

Ms. Goldstein added, “I think they are helpful, every little piece we can put in place to try and reduce risk is worthwhile in my book.”

Who's your fantasy valentine?

By: Lydia Park, freshman



Freshmen Brooke Roberson and Ruby-Rae Mccants both agreed on, "Michael B. Jordan."

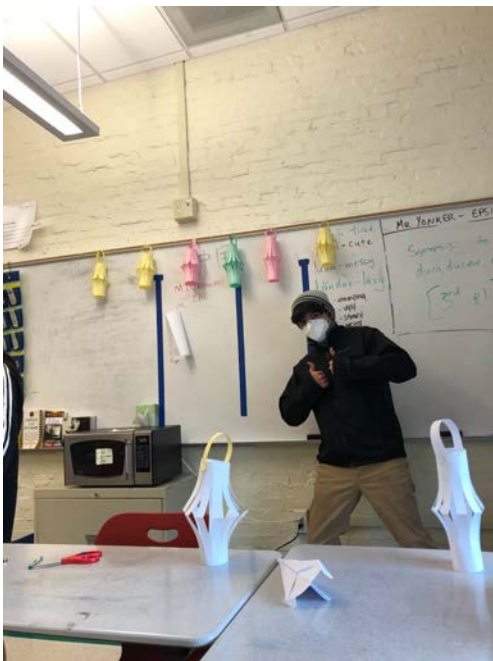


Eighth graders Abby Hawkinson and Noa Smudde, "Chris Pratt."



Eighth grader, Musa Abbas, "My mom."

Photo Gallery



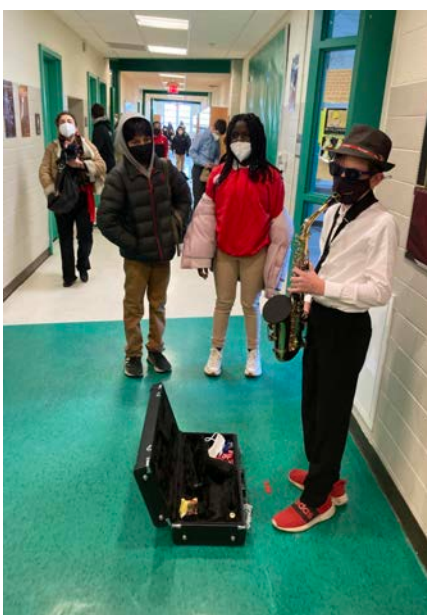
Students at break (photo credit: Lydia Park)



Eighth graders making valentines.



Eighth graders and Ms. Barlev dressed up for Valentine's Day.



Seventh grader Andrew Wysocki's saxophone serenade for Valentine's Day.



Upper schoolers reading their poems and performing songs at The Hook.