

the INDEPENDENT

Volume XXVII Number 5

Manchester Essex Regional High School 36 Lincoln Street Manchester, MA 01944

March 15, 2021

Pooled testing, modified COVID-19 protocols established

School Committee votes to reduce physical distance to three feet

By Madeline Lai
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Pooled COVID testing and vaccinations for all teachers have given comfort to the school community about returning to in-person instruction, Principal Patricia Puglisi said. With the School Committee approval of going from six feet to three feet of distance between desks, moving to a full-time in-person learning model is plausible, she said.

On Wednesday, Feb. 24, pooled testing began in the school when students, faculty, and staff in the building began to be tested weekly in groups of five to 10 tests, school nurse Cyndi Aldrich said.

Compiling tests into groups

rather than testing each swab individually is much more efficient and cost efficient, she said.

Aldrich said the procedure for pooled testing is simple and effective in determining quickly if anyone in the school has COVID-19, and the pools can include students, faculty, and staff in the school.

"It is a PCR test... You can put five to ten samples in one pile or

one pool, so then that pool gets tested. If it comes up negative, then everybody is clear. If it comes up positive, then we need to call the group mem-

bers in for rapid antigen tests to find out who is positive in that group," she said.

Aldrich said another reason why the school went with the pooled testing method is because the state is willing to fund this type of testing.

"Pooled testing is a tool that

'I want to get tested knowing that I did my part to keep everyone healthy.'

- CEECE CARVALHO



MARY BUCKLEY-HARMON PHOTO

Sophomore Grace Gerhardt was tested for COVID-19 by staff member Genesis Hartley. So far, all pooled PCR tests at the school have had negative results since testing began on Wednesday, Feb. 24.

we can use to monitor COVID in the school. The Department of Education, DESI, has a program where they are subsidizing the testing until the end of March, so they are helping the schools pay for this," Aldrich said.

Puglisi said that families must sign permission slips to be able to participate in the weekly testing; she believes more students will want to participate once testing becomes more familiar in the school.

Sophomore Ceece Carvalho said she was happy to be tested for COVID-19 if it meant feeling more comfortable at school and helping others to feel more safe as well.

POOLED TESTING, page 2

Students use Week of Gratitude to thank teachers, staff members

By Eli Heanue
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

To continue a tradition, the peer mentors program and the school counseling office worked together to organize the Week of Gratitude this year, finding new ways for students to express their appreciation during remote learning.

Guidance Director Beverly Low said the Week of Gratitude typically precedes February break and gives students and teachers a nice relief after the first wave of college decisions.

"When I came in 2014, it was an idea I stole from my past life working in higher education. It started with seniors writing



MARY BUCKLEY-HARMON PHOTO

The Independent staff received a handwritten thank-you card from guidance counselor Gillian Polk.

thank-you's to teachers for writing them recommendation letters, and then it really blossomed," she said.

'That little moment where you get an email that is not work-related can make your day.'

- BEVERLY LOW

do things electronically this year, and we don't have a way to track that. In the past, students would write paper cards, and the peer mentors would run around and deliver them, so we could see

With changes to how students sent thank-you cards this year, Low said it was difficult to gauge how many people participated in the Week of Gratitude.

"People could

how many notes there were," she said

This year, in particular, Low said it is important for students to thank teachers and show their appreciation.

"My hope was that people maybe took a couple of minutes to express their gratitude. That little moment where you get an email that is not work-related can make your day. Teachers had to learn to use a lot of technology in a short amount of time, and it's nice when that effort is recognized," she said.

As well as giving students the opportunity to thank their teach-

WEEK OF GRATITUDE, page 2

Students to return for MCAS testing

Sophomores not required to make up missed biology test

By Emma Ketchum
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Starting in the first two weeks of May, students will come to the building for MCAS testing, Principal Patricia Puglisi said.

The freshman class will only have to take the biology test, while the sophomores and juniors will take both the ELA and math tests, she said. The current sophomores do not have to make up the missed biology test from last year due to COVID, she said.

Guidance counselor David Conwell said it has been difficult to schedule the MCAS due to AP testing occurring at the same time, but the administration has been able to schedule the MCAS in the first two weeks of May, with AP testing in the second two weeks of May.

The ELA testing days will be on May 4 and 5, the biology testing days will be on May 9 and 10, and the math testing days will be on May 11 and 12, Conwell said.

Puglisi said the exam is the "Next Generation" MCAS test, which is taken completely online rather than on paper.

All students will be brought

to the building, with about 13 people per classroom, and the students not testing will stay at home, Conwell said. He said the administration was able to learn a lot from how the PSAT testing went and will run MCAS similarly.

MCAS testing will be able to run easier compared to the PSAT testing because of the availability of teachers who do not have to be on Zoom, Conwell said.

Students can leave the building after they have completed the test and will only have to complete asynchronous assignments with no Zooms, or they can stay if it is their cohort day, Puglisi said.

English teacher Elizabeth Edgerton said that although it has been a year since the juniors were supposed to take the MCAS, they will still be just as thoroughly prepared to make it up. Conwell also thinks the students are well prepared.

"MCAS testing targets specific skills and is a great opportunity for students to show what they know," Conwell said.

He said it would have been difficult for sophomores to back-track to biology from freshman year, but their biology MCAS has been completely canceled.

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Virtual talent show spreads art throughout the community

Senior shares video on various social media platforms

By Amy Vytopilova
INDEPENDENT STAFF

Senior Sylvie Oldeman put together her second virtual talent show to spread arts throughout the community.

The show, which includes students of all ages, is streamed on YouTube as “Talent Show 2021” by Virtual Talent Showcase and available on the “Manchester the What When Where How?” Facebook page for the Manchester-Essex community.

Manchester Parks and Recreation reached out to Oldeman, hoping she would do a second show after the first one, which took place last April, she said.

“They reached out to me and said can you do this again? They thought it was really great for the community... They helped out a lot with outreach,” Oldeman said.

Freshman contestant Lily Fran-



COURTESY OF SYLVIE OLDEMAN

Senior Sylvie Oldeman organized a virtual show to share talent in the community through YouTube and Facebook. She performed the song “Hiding In Your Hands” from “Dear Evan Hansen.”

coeur said it is important that the talent show is shared for others to see.

“You look at the video and see people from all grades sharing their talents, and I just think it’s kind of cool to see what everyone can do,” Francoeur said.

Oldeman said the pandemic has limited exposure to the arts for students, and she wanted to expand the options, so she created a virtual video to share with the community.

“I started it last year because I felt like there wasn’t much go-

ing on for the arts, and I thought it was important for people to be able to express themselves and also for other people to see these videos,” she said.

Junior contestant Charlie Weld said the talent show was a way for them to convey their love for arts

and share their talents virtually.

“It’s an attempt that a lot of people right now have a lot of creative energy pent up, and there’s no outlet for it... It is kind of a result of having to find new ways in a virtual setting,” Weld said.

Weld said since the pandemic hit, she has had to adjust and adapt to sing through a virtual device.

“I think especially during this time I have had to learn to produce a lot of my own stuff and how to record on my own...I use garage band on my computer and I lay down tracks, I lay down my guitar, I lay down my main vocals and then I put more vocals on top of it,” Weld said.

Oldeman said she sang “Hiding in Your Hands” from the play “Dear Evan Hansen”, but there were other acts besides singing, such as playing piano and other music related talents, telling jokes, doing gymnastics, and performing magic tricks. The show ranges from elementary to high school students.

Pre-Med Club officers create HOSA chapter

By Ema O’Neil
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Pre-Med Club officers have been working together to implement a new HOSA chapter that provides students with opportunities to pursue their interests in the healthcare industry.

HOSA, which stands for Health Occupations Students of America, is an international student organization that is endorsed by the U.S. Department of Education. Their mission is to empower students to become leaders in the global health community through their conferences, competitions, and educational opportunities.

President of the Pre-Med Club, Lukas Shan, thought of implementing HOSA in March of 2020,

but he decided to wait until now because of the pandemic, he said.

Shan said he brought the idea to Principal Patricia Puglisi earlier this year. After doing extensive research, Puglisi approved of the organization and allowed Shan to implement it as a chapter.

“I think HOSA provides some great opportunities for kids to learn more about what exists in health care and the pathways to get there,” Puglisi said.

Volunteer adviser of MERHS HOSA, Maria Burgess, and the Pre-Med Club officers said they then met with the Massachusetts HOSA state adviser, Dr. Jaime F. Vallejos, who guided them through starting

a HOSA chapter.

The officers first needed to get an idea of how many students wanted to participate in the chapter. Through social media posts, creating a Google Classroom, and offering an informational meet-

ing, they said they gained interest from many students. They then filled out a state application for Burgess to register nationally.

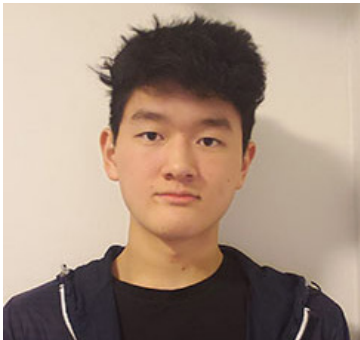
Despite many challenges caused by the pandemic, many of the of-

ficers said that the process of creating a chapter was easier than they previously thought.

“HOSA provides a lot of resources for new schools, which helps a lot with establishing a

‘HOSA provides some great opportunities...to learn more about what exists in health care and...pathways to get there.’

-PATRICIA PUGLISI



Pre-Med Club president Lukas Shan and treasurer Katie Kuhl think that HOSA will benefit them by providing resources.

chapter,” said Katie Kuhl, treasurer of the Pre-Med Club.

Shan said that the chapter will wait until next year to participate in competitions. This year, he plans for members to attend the conferences that HOSA provides.

“There is just so much that we still need to get used to in terms of how to properly run a HOSA chapter,” Shan said.

Unlike DECA, the HOSA chapter will be a student-led club rather than having corresponding

classes. Shan said that he doesn’t think classes to prepare students for HOSA competitions is necessary because the school already provides classes that aligns with the organization’s goals.

All of the Pre-Med club officers said they have high expectations for this opportunity and are excited to see it implemented.

“I think this is a really great chance for students to take their interest in medicine and bring it to the next level,” Shan said.

CONTINUATIONS COVID-19 MODIFICATIONS CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

“It is fantastic news that the state has opened up testing for teachers and school staff. I know already a number of our faculty members have been able to receive their first shot,” she said.

Due to the School Committee vote to reduce the distance between desks, classrooms can be reconfigured to accommodate this change, Puglisi said.

“In the high school and middle school, we have looked at our classrooms, and we have determined that we can fit 26 students in a typical classroom at four feet distance... That also includes maintaining a space at the front of the classroom for the teacher, who would be able to remain six feet away from students,” she said.

Puglisi said an obstacle for returning to a full-time in-person schedule would be the lunches because there are not enough seats for six feet between each student.

It is likely some students will choose to continue learning remotely, so the spacing difficulty will not be an issue, she said.

Puglisi said there will be a request sent to families pending School Committee approval, which asks families to commit for the remainder of the school year to being remote or in-person. The estimated start date for in-person learning is April 26, she said.

“I think having everyone come back resolves student concerns, so I am hoping more students will come back to school... I’d love to have more kids feel that excitement of being together and coming to school,” she said.

WEEK OF GRATITUDE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

-ers, Low said that the Week of Gratitude can have a positive impact on students’ well-being.

“I had a conversation with a student last year who told me it felt really good to take a second and pause and think about all the

people around him. Sometimes, pausing, reflecting, and taking [a] minute to observe how someone has had a positive effect on you can be very beneficial,” she said.

In order to tailor the Week of Gratitude to the conditions of the pandemic, peer mentor coordinator Stephanie Pratt said the peer mentors set up options for remote students to deliver cards.

“We worked together and ended up putting out a box in front of the school where remote students could drop off letters,” she said.

Unlike previous years where there would be announcements and posters in the school for the event, Pratt said this year the peer mentors advertised the Week of Gratitude outside of school.

“I helped reach out to people and tried to get more students involved this year. We also let students know about the box outside so that they could deliver their thank you cards without having to enter the building,” she said.

Along with helping organize the Week of Gratitude, peer mentor Ema O’Neil said she participated in it.

“I wrote two cards, thanking teachers that I thought I had learned a lot from this year, and I got emails back from them, which was really sweet,” she said.

Although fewer students ended up writing thank-you cards this year, O’Neil said she thought the Week of Gratitude was a success.

“I think, considering being remote and the pandemic, it turned out well. This year wasn’t as successful as past years, but it still gave students a good chance to show appreciation,” she said.

Science Department Chair Kristin Umile said, from a teacher’s perspective, the Week of Gratitude is a nice relief from the stress of the school year.

“It’s just a nice week to stop thinking about all the chaos and focus on the things that make your day run smoothly and to

be appreciative of those parts of your life and the work you do,” she said.

During the pandemic, Umile said the Week of Gratitude did not have the same effect it normally has on the school.

“There’s an energy about it when people are doing it in person, and you can see all the cards in the guidance department. Everyone is excited, and it just breathes happiness. This environment is not very conducive to that, but there is a time to be thankful, right now is the time,” she said.

Umile said that this year, she received a virtual thank-you card from a student.

“I had one student reach out to me. She sent me a lovely email, thanking me for whatever, whether it was school or just being someone to listen when she needed me. It’s always nice to get something like that from a student and to feel appreciated,” she said.

Sophomore hopes to expand woodworking hobby, sell projects

Student improves designing skills, works to run small business

By Eli Heanue
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Sophomore Jack Crompton has been doing woodworking for the last two years, designing cutting boards, coasters, and other wooden creations, and he hopes to develop his own business.

So far, Crompton said he has been showcasing his work through his Instagram: @woodworkingwithjack.

“My proudest accomplishment so far had definitely been selling my first item. It was a jewelry box,” he said.

Sophomore Madoc Harden, who bought the jewelry box, said he encourages other people to purchase Crompton’s products.

“I bought the jewelry box for my girlfriend for Valentine’s Day, and she loved it. Over the course of a month, I was able to talk to Jack about the design of the box and the type of wood I



@WOODWORKINGWITHJACK/INSTAGRAM.COM

Sophomore Jack Crompton built a table for his grandmother. He has other designs on his Instagram page @woodworkingwithjack.

wanted, and he designed and finished it phenomenally,” he said.

Crompton said he values being knowledgeable about the different purposes of various types of wood.

“It’s very important to choose

the right type of wood. There are softwood and hardwood. Furniture is typically made out of hardwood, mainly oak. For cutting boards, you would want something with a closed-grain, like walnut, cherry, or maple,”

he said. In order to make his projects look professional, Crompton said he puts a lot of time and effort into each one.

“The jewelry box probably took around 10 hours of work. The coasters only took about two hours, which is pretty good. I want to work on cutting down my time spent on each project,” he said.

In addition to making his projects appear professional, Crompton said he tailors his designs to each individual.

“Normally, I ask what measurements they want and what wood and other materials they want. Sometimes, to make sure what I’m making will look good, I plan it out in an online 3D-design program,” he said.

To expand upon his current works, Crompton said he hopes to take on more ambitious projects in the future.

“I made a table for my grand-

mother. It took about a day and a half, and it was one of my more difficult builds. I am also planning on making a memorial flag case for my grandfather because he was in the Army and the Coast Guard,” he said.

English teacher Mary Buckley-Harmon said she found out about Crompton’s hobby through

his writing.

“I had them write a journal about either 2020 or 2021, and he talked about how, in 2020, he focused on some goals for himself, and one of them was woodwork-

ing,” she said.

With proper advertising, Buckley-Harmon said she thinks Crompton could have great success turning his skill into a business.

“I think he needs to get the word out that he does this because I think people would really want to support his work,” she said.

‘I think he needs to get the word out that he does this because I think people would really want to support his work.’

- MARY BUCKLEY-HARMON

Student-run small business sells clothing, donates money to CityReach program

By Isabella DiPasquale
INDEPENDENT STAFF

Seniors Fotini Parianos and Cosima Massillon created FoCos Society, a small business in which they sell custom clothing and donate half of the profits to CityReach, a program that supports homeless people in Boston.

FoCos Society currently sells products including sweatshirts, T-shirts, sweatpants, and masks, available with various custom designs, Parianos said.

She said she creates custom designs for their apparel and then uses a machine to transfer the images onto the products.

“I have been doing art throughout all of high school, so I thought it would be really fun to continue that in more of a business-type setting. It is really fun to use my creativity with it

and get to actually make things for people and sell them,” Parianos said.

Parianos said that she and Massillon had been wanting to start a small business for a few years but decided to make it a reality for their senior SCORE project.

“We didn’t have a SCORE project, so we thought why not incorporate us wanting to make a business with SCORE, but we also felt like we needed to give back to the community with our project,” she said.

Massillon said she has previously worked with the CityReach program in Boston, so she decided to donate half of the profits from the business to CityReach and put the other half back into the business. Customers can also receive extra money



COURTESY OF FOTINI PARIANOS

Senior Cosima Massillon organizes new clothing inventory to sell to other students to raise money for homeless people in Boston.

off future purchases when they donate to the CityReach GoFundMe, she said.

“We are calling it Project Give

N’ Take because every time we sell a sweatshirt or something, if you come pick it up, you can drop off anything that you

don’t want anymore that could be passed on to someone else,” Massillon said.

She said that Project Give N’ Take also provides customers with an outlet to provide other donations, such as canned goods, clothes, and other supplies.

Parianos said that their parents have been incredibly supportive of their business and have helped her and Massillon with advice and marketing and provided them with a space to work in.

“The support from our families has definitely been our biggest influence. My mom is basically our adviser for the project since she has so much experience [with running businesses],” she said.

She said that they plan to deliver the donations at the end of their SCORE project but hope to continue the business into the summer and possibly during college. Their business can be found on Instagram @focos_society.

Fulbright scholar fills in as English substitute for third quarter

By Wyeth Takayesu
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Sophie Wetzig, a long-term substitute, is covering for English teacher Angie Rice while she is on temporary leave for the third quarter.

Wetzig, a Fulbright scholar who taught English in Germany, graduated from Columbia University in 2017 with a master’s degree in fine arts and creative writing. She received a bachelor’s degree in German and English from Gordon College.

While Wetzig aims to become a writer, she said she thoroughly enjoys teaching and has taught English as a second language in Germany as well as creative

writing courses in New York.

“I liked teaching in Germany quite a bit. I always liked [teaching],” Wetzig said. “I don’t have the same background as a lot of school teachers, but I like it very much so now.”

Due to the need to hold interviews online and the lateness into the school year, English department chair Debra Isensee expressed how finding a substitute was difficult.

“We were very worried that we wouldn’t find anyone qualified,” Isensee said. “We were very, very lucky to get her. All of us feel very fortunate to have her.”

Wetzig said that teaching online by learning new digital

platforms has been her biggest challenge.; however, the transition was made much easier by her new coworkers.

“People-wise, the adjustments have been so easy. Everybody at the school is so friendly, and the other teachers have been so helpful,” she said.

Freshman and English 9 CP student Lila Mulvey said Wetzig has adjusted very well and said she enjoys having her for a teacher..

“She’s nice, gives relatively little homework, and is very helpful in class,” Mulvey said.

Outside of school, Wetzig said she enjoys both the snow and reading. Being able to go for walks in the wintry weather has



COURTESY OF SOPHIE WETZIG

English teacher Sophie Wetzig teaches her grade nine English class over Zoom and encourages them to share her love of reading.

been a great joy, she said.

“I love snow, I love the way ice forms, I love seeing all the little snowflakes, the dry snow, the wet snow; it’s been so nice to have it around again,” she said.

Along with her love for snow, Wetzig said she loves to read.

Wetzig said her favorite book is George Elliot’s “Middlemarch”, a classic novel tackling human motivation and choice. Wetzig said she hopes to one day write books of her own, utilizing her passion for both reading and writing.

COVID-safe activities increase with the warm weather

Early spring climate allows people to spend more time outdoors, enjoy new hobbies

By Jordie Cornfield
INDEPENDENT STAFF

As flowers begin to bloom and the days become longer with spring’s arrival, there are many new opportunities for COVID-safe activities.

Students have been taking advantage of the sunny weather by spending more time outside.

“I’ve spent a lot of time outside. I’ll walk down to Singing Beach with my friends

to see the sunrise,” sophomore Sadie Mello said.

Singing Beach is a popular destination, whether it be to watch the sunrise, play catch

with a pet, or have a picnic. Students can aid both the environment and the community by picking up litter. Beach clean-up can also be utilized as community service for college requirements.

Students have also begun preparing for upcoming sports seasons, sophomore Juliana Saunders said.

“I’ve been going on runs a lot to get ready for sports in the fall,” she said.

‘I’ve spent a lot of time outside. I’ll walk down to Singing Beach with my friends to see the sunrise.’

-SADIE MELLO

Many students have discovered new hobbies, such as cooking.

“I’ve started baking and cooking with my little sister,” Mello said. The kitchen isn’t the only setting

for food. With the warm weather, group picnics can be held with 6 feet apart seating.

Tie-dying T-shirts outside is one of many artistic pursuits that



COURTESY OF JORDIE CORNFELD

Due to the warm weather, many people are finding themselves outdoors more often and participating in activities, such as taking their pets for a walk, going to the beach, and having picnics.

Teen ambassadors invited to join revived welcoming committee

By Caroline MacKinnon
INDEPENDENT STAFF

After years of dormancy, the Manchester Welcome Committee is resuming meetings and other activities and is also seeking members for the new teen ambassador program.

“The Welcome Committee has been in town for quite a long time, and it’s been dormant the past few years and even more so during the pandemic,” committee member and longtime Manchester resident Christine Metrano-Barber said.

The committee will welcome new residents into town and familiarize them with the different workings along with stores and businesses in Manchester,

Metrano-Barber said.

“We are going to give [new residents] welcome baskets, filled with all different things from town like coupons and flyers, as well as an ambassador or contact person, and that contact person will stay in touch with them for as long as they need them,” she said.

The committee in past years included ambassadors of many different ages to cater to all new residents, Metrano-Barber said.

“My idea was to have people from all walks of life, so whatever the person or family moving into town requires, we would have an ambassador that would match their needs,” she said.

The Welcome Committee is

inviting high school students to join for the recently added teen ambassador program.

“I think it would be incredibly hard to be a teen moving into a new school to begin with, so I wanted to do this teen ambassador’s program with all different types of teens whether they are involved in drama, athletics, part of the LGBTQ+ population, and others that could really make any teen feel welcome,” Metrano-Barber said.

Due to the pandemic, in-person gatherings and activities for new teen residents aren’t planned for the near future, she said.

“Unfortunately, because of COVID-19, it will most likely start with Zoom, but sometimes that’s easier for kids to get to know each other too because so many [teens] are on social media, and it’s more second nature to them,” Metrano-Barber said.

Sophomore Emery Weber-Provost, who joined the teen



COURTESY OF CHRISTINE METRANO-BARBER

The Manchester Welcome Committee greets new residents by preparing welcome baskets with gifts from local stores.

ambassador program, said she is excited to help other people feel comfortable.

“[The program] will give them a teen in their grade that

can answer questions as well as introduce them to new people and overall make them more comfortable, which is really important,” Weber-Provost said.



Izzy Thurlow and her friends are working with the Ipswich YMCA to coordinate COVID-friendly and socially distanced events in order to connect local students.

Teen board works with YMCA to plan safe events

By Carson Komishane
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Junior Izzy Thurlow works with three other teenagers in the area alongside Ipswich YMCA directors to connect local students through their interests and needs, YMCA executive director Chris Bevilacqua said.

He said some of the past programs created by them include outdoor movies, strength training, volunteer opportunities, basketball leagues, movies in the pool, and dodgeball nights, which are all catered towards teenagers.

“I think the Halloween teen

movie night outside was really great. The teen board did a great job setting it up, designating socially distanced seating for safety, providing free food, and ensuring everyone had a good time. We had teens come from three different towns,” Bevilacqua said.

Junior Sam Rosen said she attended the outdoor Halloween teen movie night with friends in October.

“It was a great event and a perfect way for me to get out of

the house safely. I loved being able to watch a movie outdoors with my friends,” she said.

Thurlow said her group works with the YMCA over Zoom to coordinate and plan events tailored towards teenagers as a way to increase engagement at the facility.

“I really enjoy getting involved in the community around me alongside other teenagers and coordinating events that I think my peers will enjoy,” she said.

The group sets up meetings over Zoom to talk to the directors of the YMCA and meets separately with just the group alone to coordinate and plan,

‘I can’t wait to see the results of the wellness classes.’

- IZZY THURLOW

Thurlow said.

In the future, they plan on creating in-person and virtual mind and body yoga classes to reduce stress and anxiety, Bevilacqua said.

“The teen board did a lot of work surveying teens to understand what programs would be helpful in supporting them through COVID. The yoga classes were a common request, so I think they will be a great resource,” he said.

Thurlow said she is excited for the future events as well as the upcoming wellness classes and possibility of more safe outside activities.

“I can’t wait to see the results of the wellness classes and I hope people that attend them will enjoy them as much as we do,” she said.

Fall II season

Should the extra season remain in the athletics schedule?

Pro

Ryan Olivier-Meehan

Massachusetts should permanently implement the Fall II season into the athletics season because of the positive effect it has had on student athletes this year.

According to a report published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, eleven of the 14 studies found one or more positive associations between school-based physical education and indicators of academic performance.

By adding the Fall II season, students have more opportunities to participate in athletics seasons without the risk of conflicting sports schedules.

This season, there are 47 students registered for football, which is the most students playing in almost a decade, athletic director Jordan Edgett said.

“A lot of kids played other fall sports that would have conflicted in normal years and came out and played this season because there wasn’t a conflict anymore,” he said.

The timing of the season better fits the sports played during Fall II. This year football games are scheduled to be played between March 19 and April 23. This means there will be an improvement in weather compared to normal years, when the preseason ends early October and the final games of the season are played in the cold of November.

Track and field also benefits from the later start date of the Fall II season. Without an indoor track, athletes would regularly be running outside throughout December and January. The weather conditions in those months pose inherent risks to athlete health and increase the likelihood that practices are postponed or canceled.

Senior Pippa Cox-Stavros said, “The worst part of winter track is having to deal with the weather, so competing during the Fall II season has made practices much easier to deal with.”

In order to successfully implement the Fall II season, all schools would have to agree on it. therefore, this change will benefit the entirety of student athletes in Massachusetts.

Con

Hadley Levendusky

Despite the increased amount of participation in sports during the Fall II season, after this year, the Fall II season should not recur.

With the Fall II season starting in the winter, there comes along an added risk with injuries in all sports. In the late winter, the weather can be unpredictable with a higher possibility for snow, leading to a greater risk for injuries.

The cold air makes it harder for athletes to catch their breath due to its affect on their respiratory systems.

Additionally, the cold air causes muscle tightness and makes it harder for athletes to stretch. This can lead to strains and tears in athletes’ muscles during practices and games.

Having athletes continue to play sports in the cold would not allow them to play to the best of their ability and have an added risk for the amount of injuries.

With the Fall II season happening late in the winter, there is always the possibility of a snow storm happening in late March and April. Snow removal can take a while and is a costly job for the school.

Snowy fields could also lead to cancelled games and practices.

With football moved to the Fall II season, many families were disappointed to not be able to have a final Thanksgiving game against Georgetown. Alumni also come back to support the Hornets and reconnect with old teammates.

Losing the rivalry game tradition was especially hard for many seniors who have played three Thanksgiving games.

Due to the Fall II season, all sports that were moved will have a shorter season. The addition of a new season has impacted all other sports by making their seasons shorter as well. If Fall II season were to stay, athletes would not have as many games as a regular season has.

With shorter seasons, the turnaround time for sports with a postseason would be very quick. Athletes who play more than one sport wouldn’t have the normal amount of time to prepare for their next season.



ISABELLA DIPASQUALE ILLUSTRATION

College rejections could be beneficial for students

By Ema O’Neil
INDEPENDENT STAFF

College acceptance rates are showing a decline as more students are not getting into their top schools. Although rejection can be difficult, high school students should have a positive mindset and consider other options.

According to CNBC, the pandemic is making it harder for students to get into the nation’s most elite schools.

Harvard University’s early action acceptance rate sank from 13.9 percent to 7.4 percent. Yale’s fell to 11 percent from 14 percent, and UPenn’s from 20 percent to 15 percent.

“We knew this was going to be a very competitive application cycle, and it turned out to be even more difficult,” said Christopher Rim, CEO of Command Education to CNBC.

These statistics can mostly be attributed to the large numbers of students who decided to defer their enrollment for the fall of 2020 to have a “normal” college

experience once COVID restrictions were lifted. This led to more applications, CNBC said.

According to the Wall Street Journal, at Harvard and Yale, restrictive early action applications rose 57 percent and 38 percent. This increase in applicants resulted in the massive decline in acceptance rates.

Rim also said that since these schools became “test-optional” for the first time, students didn’t need a certain SAT or ACT score to apply.

Although these factors are creating difficult circumstances, students must realize that getting rejected from their top college does not mean the loss of an excellent educational opportunity. The online world has created many opportunities for

students to receive an education elsewhere.

EdX is a nonprofit online university-level course provider created by Harvard and MIT. The organization offers hundreds of courses that cover a variety of subjects, many of them being available for free.

In order to receive college credit for these courses, students

must pay a small fee. However, by investing in these courses, students can pay less money than they would be for college, and still receive the same quality of education. Then these

students have the opportunity to apply next year with college credits.

According to edX, Arjun Kohli, a college student at Stanford, has been taking online courses on edX since 8th grade. Now, he uses the courses to explore career paths and continue to learn more about topics he is interested in.

Students must realize that getting rejected from their top college does not mean the loss of an excellent educational opportunity.



WIKIMEDIA.ORG

Harvard’s acceptance rate dropped to 7.4 percent from 13.9 percent during the 2020-2021 acceptance season.

“The edX platform is incredibly versatile and allows me to vary my pace as I progress through the course materials,” Kohli said.

Students can also look at rejection as a sign to take a gap year. Gap years have proven to help students to become more employable and perform better academically.

According to Gap Year Association, 97 percent of students said that taking a gap year improved their self-confidence, 84 percent said it increased their academic motivation, and 98 percent said it helped them explore new cultures.

It is also important to not have your mind set on one school.

There are thousands of colleges and universities offered in the U.S., and being stuck on one can make the rejection much harder.

According to College Covered, Micheal Aliva, a former West Lincoln High School student in North Carolina, had this exact mindset during his application process. He said his heart was set on North Carolina State, and the rejection felt like a punch in the gut. However, he got accepted into East Carolina University, his safety school, and ended up loving it, he said.

“I’m glad I didn’t get into my first-choice school. Getting rejected was a great thing for me professionally and socially,” Aliva said.

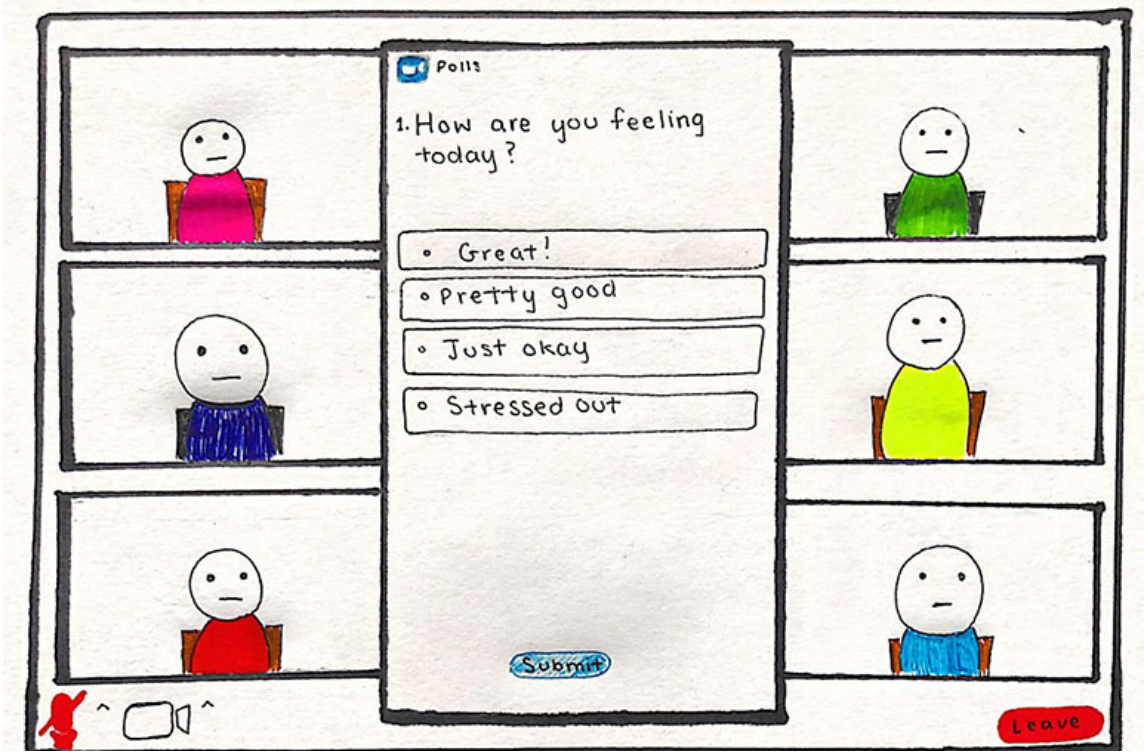
STAFF EDITORIAL

Classes should include routine mental health check-ins

The United States has surpassed one year since the beginning of mass shutdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic, and people are tired. High school students have spent the past year growing up in an environment of tension, stress, and anxiety—and they have to attend school while the world churns around them. Education is vital, and online school helps students maintain a routine, but this alone is not enough to offer students a semblance of normalcy.

Academic demand has increased tenfold since online school began in the spring, yet the mental health check-ins of April 2020 have long melted away in most classes.

pandemic, teachers often had mental health check-ins with their students at the start of each online class period. The frequent “How are you feeling today?” Zoom polls may have seemed insignificant at first, but now, the absence of these check-ins seems to enforce the belief that this routine is normal, easy, and akin to a traditional school year. Academic demand has increased tenfold since online school began in the spring, yet the mental health check-ins of April 2020 have long melted away in most classes. Social studies teacher James Walliman has structured his classes to include a regular emotional intelligence component. He said he thinks it is vital for people to openly discuss emotions and mental health. “I just hope that students realize that having emotions and quieting themselves to face those emotions and to dig further and



ELI HEANUE ILLUSTRATION

further internally is okay,” Wallimann said. He said he believes emotional intelligence is important because the country is experiencing a “mental health emergency.” For teachers who are not as comfortable with emotional intelligence, building a short mental health check-in into the beginning of class at least once per week can serve to remind students that feeling stressed, anxious, and overwhelmed is common and expected. Realistically, public schools must adhere to a set curriculum in order for students to succeed in subsequent years. This cannot be changed. Rather, teachers and administration must validate students’ feelings and support them

as they continue to learn and grow in a changed educational landscape. It is natural to struggle in times of crisis. While expectations remain high, teachers should build acknowledgement and emotional check-ins into class. Their students need a reminder: overwhelmed is normal.

Normalizing volunteering brings happiness, fulfillment for youth

By Carson Komishane
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Normalizing and including volunteering in education should be required in schools to create a sense of community and selflessness. According to an article called “Volunteering and its Surprising Benefits” by HelpGuide, volunteering, especially from a young age, has a big impact on both the lives of the people volunteering and those they are helping. Volunteering creates an outlet for children to explore their inter-

Volunteering creates an outlet for children to explore their interests as well as make new friends.

ests as well as make new friends and improve their social skills with a new group of people. Normalizing volunteering at a young age would connect the community and prompt more children to offer to participate in volunteering in the future. Volunteering should be encouraged in the community but also in school. Elementary school students, teachers, and parent-volunteers should be required to participate in any kind of volunteering in or around the community. Children follow the actions of adults, especially their teachers or parents, and this would encourage



VIRGINIASTATEPARKS/FLICKR.COM

According to Virginia State Park staff, including children in volunteer work is important to the upkeep of their state parks. them later in life to pursue volunteering on their own. According to an article called “Youth Volunteerism” by galaxydigital.com, normalizing volunteering at a young age improves kids’ grades, success, and happiness at school. Also, teens who volunteer are less likely to participate in risky behaviors due to their psychological well-being. Helping others through volunteering also teaches important life skills such as respect and responsibility that they may learn and experience in school but may not experience in the normal world. The idea of normalizing volunteering is increasingly important once children enter high school.

Instead of requiring volunteering, it should be taught at a young age to jump at the opportunity to participate and help the community. Even normalizing volunteering to teenagers is important as they grow up. According to an article called “Teaching teens to volunteer” by childrensmid.org, it is the key to their future. Society is too focused on achievements and grades that teenagers often lack empathy and gratitude. Encouraging them to volunteer on their own creates a new source of joy. According to “The Benefits of Volunteering for College Students,” by galaxydigital.com, college students partake in volunteering less than parents and high school students. However, the benefits of continuing volunteering allow them to improve their resume and make connections in the real world and live a balanced life, and by volunteering when they are younger, college students are more likely to participate.

Faculty Adviser
Mary Buckley-Harmon

Editors-in-chief
Madeline Lai
Olivia Turner

News Editor
Carson Komishane

Features Editor
Eli Heanue
Ema O’Neil

Opinion Editors
Madeline Lai
Olivia Turner

the
INDEPENDENT

The Independent is published monthly throughout the school year. It is a product of the Manchester-Essex Regional High School Journalism class. Editorial space is available to all MERHS students, faculty, and community members. All submissions must be signed and put in the newspaper mailbox in the front office of MERHS. The Independent reserves the right not to print letters and to edit the content for clarity and length. While letters can be critical of an individual’s actions, they cannot slander or libel. The staff editorial may be considered the opinion of the staff of The Independent. By-line opinions are written by individual staff members and should not be considered representative of the entire staff. The Independent staff hopes that all Manchester and Essex citizens will take advantage of this forum. The paper is meant to serve the school community, and we are open to suggestions to help it better serve its purposes.

Manchester-Essex Regional High School
36 Lincoln St, Manchester MA 01944
978-526-4412 newspaper@mersd.org
online at <http://www.merhs.mersd.org/domain/702>

Sports Editor
Emma Ketchum

Arts Editor
Isabella DiPasquale

Staff
Jordie Cornfield
Hadley Levendusky
Caroline MacKinnon
Ryan Olivier-Meehan
Wyeth Takayesu
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Cheerleading team benefits from COVID changes to practices

Cohorts maintain safety, strengthen team bonding, stunts

By Madeline Lai
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Although the logistics of the cheerleading team have been adjusted this year due to COVID-19, they have been able to overcome obstacles and make the most out of the season, coach Liz Coggeshall said.

Coggeshall said practices have run smoothly because of the work and dedication of the senior captains.

“I couldn’t ask for better captains. They are responsive and have a positive attitude. They all take on

leadership roles during practices,” she said.

Coggeshall said the adjustments this season amid the pandemic have changed the logistics of practices, but they have been manageable to conduct.

“We have six cohorts with four girls in each one. That group is their stunt group, and they also workout together for conditioning in their cohorts. When we are all together as a group, we maintain a six foot distance, and when we are inside an indoor gym, we cannot yell the cheers, so we speak them,” she said.

Senior captain Dede Rodier said the new cheerleaders have caught on to the cheers and stunts relatively quickly compared to last year.

“I think the juniors are adapting really well. We have a bunch of juniors



COURTESY OF ABBY LEVENDUSKY

The cheer team is excited for the upcoming season, despite the COVID adjustments, with new junior girls who have adapted well to the stunting and dancing, senior captain Dede Rodier said.

who are very good at tumbling and dancing. We started stunting, and they are all picking it up really quickly,” she said.

Senior captain Faith Burroughs said most girls on the team do not participate in other sports, so they all have been extra enthusiastic about cheering this season.

“Everybody has just been really excited to get out and do something,” she said.

Senior captain Eva Parker said the changes to practices due to the coronavirus have actually had a positive impact on the way practices are run.

“It is a good sport to have cohorts with. It works well because we can break off in our stunt groups and stick together. It is fun for team bonding too because it helps us get a lot closer to our stunt groups, so it seems to be working out really well,” she said.

Coggeshall said she anticipates a fun, successful season for everyone.

“I am excited to watch the girls grow and learn and work together as a team,” she said.

Track team remains optimistic about upcoming season despite COVID-19

By Ryan Olivier-Meehan
INDEPENDENT STAFF

Despite having to accommodate COVID-19 precautions, the track and field team season is in progress and quickly approaching competition.

Head coach Mark Dawson said the team has benefitted from the increased number of athletes as a result of the implementation of a Fall II.

“We have a lot of numbers, which is a big advantage for track as it allows us to cover all the events and end up scoring more points. We have one of the top boy milers [senior captain Will Kenney] in the state, so he’s going to win his race, but the other team will normally take second and third. With the larger numbers this year, we’re hoping



WILL KENNEY PHOTO

The track team is preparing for competition with the advantage of having a bigger team this season, coach Mark Dawson said.

to place more in those events,” he said.

Dawson highlighted how the logistics of traveling to meets throughout the season will be affected by COVID-19 precautions.

“The bus company has released a seating chart for us to follow, and we are also required to travel with the windows down. To accommodate the larger team, we’ll also be using at least two busses to safely transport every-

one,” he said.

Senior captain Josef Vytopil said that while COVID-19 has had a serious impact on the season, it has allowed for some unique benefits.

“We have almost a month and a half of practice before our first meet, so it’s given us a lot more time to prepare, which is especially nice after such a long off period,” he said.

Senior Olivia Renzi said that she’s excited for dual meets to start in April. Despite there being no championship this year, she is optimistic about the abilities of the team.

“We have a lot of new athletes on the team who have been doing

really well in training, so I’m excited to finally start competing because I think we’ll do well,” she said

Senior Captain Pippa Cox-Stavros said that she believes the team has been happier training in the nicer weather.

“It’s been great not having to worry about ice or snow in practice and I think everyone’s been in a better mood during practices because it’s been warmer out,” she said.

Despite the difficulties associated with competing in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, Vytopil remains enthusiastic about the upcoming season.

“It’s definitely going to be weird, but I’m just happy we’re having a season,” he said.

‘We have a lot of new athletes on the team who have been doing well in training, so I’m excited to finally start competing...’

- OLIVIA RENZI

Football team starts off season with many new players

By Hadley Levendusky
INDEPENDENT STAFF

With many more players on the team this year, the football team is excited to start off their season, coach Jeff Hutton said.

Coached by Hutton, this year’s captains are seniors Joe Daly, Gavin Glass, and Will Levendusky.

“We have a lot of new kids on the team, and so far it has been great to have more players on the field,” Glass said.

The team has been practicing after school since Feb. 22 and have had one scrimmage against Ipswich.

Since the football season was switched to the Fall II season,



COURTESY OF ABBY LEVENDUSKY

Senior captain Will Levendusky said the team practices in pods while staying socially distanced and wearing masks.

use social distancing, and wear masks while we are playing,” Levendusky said.

Hutton said those adjustments have been easy to make.

“The hardest part is trying to play a sport that is all contact and having to find a way to limit contact,” he said.

Along with many the other

sports this year, the Cape Ann League has sent out rules for who can attend football games this season.

For home games, the only spectators allowed to watch are immediate family members. Masks must be worn at all times. No spectators are allowed to watch or attend away games. As in the previous sports seasons, fans will be able to watch via live stream on Facebook live and YouTube live.

“As for many athletes, it is a little weird to not be able to have fans beside our families at games, but I am still very excited to have a season,” Levendusky said.

The Hornets lost their first game 13-33 against North Reading. Their next game will be on Friday Mar. 19 against Triton.

Sophomore has two poems published in two anthologies

Student uses poetry to express her emotions

By Isabella DiPasquale
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Sophomore Jordie Cornfield has two poems that will be published in two anthologies to be sold at Barnes and Noble.

Cornfield said that she has been writing poetry for years and started submitting her work to the Beverly Poetry Contest in 2019. She said that after receiving third place in that contest, she was inspired to continue to submit work.

After submitting one of her poems titled “Gray Static,” she received a letter from the publishing company Eber and Wein, notifying her that her work

would be included in the anthology “Upon Arrival.”

“The poem is about a recurring dream that I have had since I was 6 or 7 where I couldn’t fall asleep because there was like TV static in my mind,” she said.

The anthology was published in March 2020, and shortly after, she was notified by Eber and Wein about another contest to include work in their “Best Poets of 2020” anthology, Cornfield said.

Cornfield said that she is excited to have two of her poems published before the age of 18.

‘She is a writer that puts in that attention to detail that really pays off in the end for an effective piece of writing.’

-ALLISON KRAUSE

“It is really exciting, and it has been really interesting to see how different people interpret my poetry and hearing everyone’s feedback,” she said.

Cornfield said her second poem “Kids My Age Are Partying During a Pandemic and I’m Conflicted” is about her experience during quarantine.

“It is basically about wanting to



Sophomore Jordie Cornfield submitted her poem “Gray Static” to publishing company Eber and Wein. It was chosen to be included in the anthology “Upon Arrival” to be sold at Barnes and Noble.

be included while at the same time, not wanting to spread the virus,” she said.

Cornfield said that the first anthology is already being sold, and the second will most likely be available in a few months.

She said that some of her most successful poems were formed from a stream of consciousness.

“I started really writing poetry when I had some difficult stuff go-



JORDIE CORNFIELD PHOTOS

ing on, and I used it as a way to get my emotions out without the fear of judgement,” Cornfield said.

English teacher Allison Krause, who teaches Cornfield in both her English and creative writing classes this year, said she was thrilled to hear about Cornfield’s success.

“She is just a phenomenal writer, and I am really happy for her. I think it has been really inspiring for the students in creative writing

and for me to see that these types of things can happen,” she said.

She said Cornfield is a leader in class and has a clear passion for writing, which she demonstrates through the time and effort she puts into her works.

“She is a writer that puts in that attention to detail that really pays off in the end for an effective piece of writing,” Krause said.

‘Walk Backwards’ celebrates platonic love

By Olivia Turner
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Singer-songwriter Maude Latour’s most recent single “Walk Backwards” fills a gaping hole in the music industry. Its subject matter: platonic love.

Latour, an unsigned musical artist, is breaking into the industry independently while studying at Columbia University in New York City.

In a TikTok video, she said she wrote “Walk Backwards” about the strength of her friendships.

“I’m sick of how society prioritizes romantic love, especially for women,” Latour said.

The lyrics reflect this sentiment in a way that is noticeably scarce in today’s music, which is primarily focused on romantic relationships.

She begins singing, “I guess I’ll never understand/ The line between our love and romance/ ‘Cause when I look at you I/ Fall right into a dream.”

In a TikTok video, Latour identified her friendships as beautifully complex.

“My friendships blur the line between romance and platonic love,” she said.

Amid uptempo drumbeats and synth tones, Latour pipes a unique nostalgia for the present into the ears of her listeners.

The track sounds like skipping on concrete; an invigorating bass bounce is layered with higher percussion instruments that accent Latour’s vocals.

The title lyric is a personal anecdote from Latour’s own friendships. In the chorus, she sings, “You live east so I/ Walk

backwards, babe.”

On TikTok, Latour said the lyric is a reference to watching the sun set in the west as she walks home to her apartment in the east, a feeling she associates with her summer friendships and the love she experiences with her best friend.

Latour, a philosophy major, writes much of her music about love, the universe, and human connection. “Walk Backwards” continues this thread in her discography.

While previous songs have addressed the serendipitous nature of romantic love (“Isn’t it amazing?/ Despite all the space in the world/ I’m close to you”), “Walk Backwards” does the same for friendships: “I can’t believe I found you/ Within the Milky Way/ So I say thanks to an un-



SPOTIFY.COM

Singer-songwriter Maude Latour writes about her love for friends rather than romantic love, which is prioritized in music today.

known force.”

In this way, Latour comments on the preciousness of friendship; it is as sacred as love.

“Walk Backwards” is an anthem for friends and the relationship they share, something Latour is not afraid to call love.

Bake up a batch of spring inspired cookies

By Jordie Cornfield
INDEPENDENT STAFF

Spring is coming, and what’s a sweeter way to celebrate its arrival than sugar cookies? Here is how to make flower-shaped raspberry-lemon sugar cookies.

Before gathering your ingredients, you’ll need to make a batch of simple syrup. Boil a 1:1 sugar to water ratio with a fruit of your choice.

For this recipe, use 1 cup of sugar, 1 cup of water, and 1 cup of frozen raspberries.

Before you start cooking, you will need a stand mixer. Have the whisk and paddle attachments handy.

Sugar Cookie Recipe

One tablespoon lemon juice	¾ of a cup powdered sugar
One ¾ teaspoons vanilla extract	One large egg
1 cup (two sticks) unsalted butter	Two teaspoons cornstarch
One teaspoon cream of tartar	One teaspoon baking soda
½ teaspoon baking powder	One tablespoon lemon juice
1 ½ cup cake flour/all-purpose flour.	A small dash of salt

Step one: Preheat the oven to 375 degrees and spray a cookie sheet with cooking spray to put aside.

Step two: Set up your stand mixer with the whisk attachment and cream together the butter and powdered sugar at speed six until light and fluffy.

Step three: With the stand mixer still going, turn the speed to 5, then mix in vanilla extract, lemon juice, and egg until combined.

Step four: Switch the whisk attachment to paddle attachment.

Step five: Add baking soda, baking powder, cream of tartar, and cornstarch on speed 6.

Step six: Turn the speed down to 1, slowly add in your cake flour, two tablespoons at a time, until just combined.

Step seven: Pour your batter into a floured Tupperware, and let sit in the refrigerator for 30 minutes.

Step eight: Once your 30 minutes have passed, roll out the dough and make it into flowers. Bake for 8-10 minutes.

Frosting Recipe

Raspberry	Vanilla
1 cup unsalted butter, cut up into smaller pieces	1 cup unsalted butter, cut up into smaller pieces
1 ½ cups powdered sugar	2 cups powdered sugar
1 ½ teaspoons vanilla extract	2 ½ teaspoons vanilla extract
½ cup of milk	½ cup of milk
½ cup raspberry simple syrup	

Step one: Cream your butter until smooth using your stand mixer’s whisk attachment at speed 5.

Step two: Slowly add the powdered sugar at speed 4, ensuring that the mixture is not lumping.

Step three: Add the milk and vanilla extract.

For the raspberry frosting:

Step four: Add the raspberry simple syrup

Once your cookies are out of the oven, let them cool for 30 minutes to an hour. It is essential to let your cookies cool before icing because otherwise, the frosting will melt. Once finished cooling, decorate your cookies as you wish.