

WISSAHICKON SILVER LININGS

2020-2021 SCHOOL YEAR
ANNUAL REPORT



**Stories from our School Community:
Weathering the Pandemic**



Silver Lining: a positive outcome or aspect of a bad situation; an unseen benefit or element of hopefulness.

A Note from the Wissahickon School Board and Administration:

The 2020-2021 school year was like no other. Whereas we ended the last three months of the previous school year with the COVID-19 pandemic underway, this full school year, from beginning to end, took place within the constraints of the pandemic.

In this year's Annual Report, we spotlight how our students, educators and families handled this extraordinary year, demonstrating incredible flexibility, resilience and positivity no matter how difficult and different it was. We are pleased to share some of their stories, including:

- ▶ how they adapted to virtual, hybrid and/or modified in-person learning.
- ▶ how they handled the challenges of the past year and found unseen benefits and strength.
- ▶ what they learned as a result of living through a pandemic.

These are *Wissahickon Silver Linings*. Enjoy!



Dr. James Crisfield Superintendent

Dr. Crisfield summed up the 2020-2021 school year with the three Cs - Community, Compromise and Civility – and the three Ps – Perseverance, Poise and Pride.

“COMMUNITY: If we've learned nothing else during this global pandemic, we now know we need each other more than ever.

COMPROMISE: The pandemic reminded us of the critical role that compromise plays in our society. Our students, staff and families dealt with virtual learning, hybrid and/or a modified in-person learning experience all year long. Nothing was “normal” and didn't meet all our preferences, but the school community was awesome nonetheless because they embraced the moment and embraced compromise.

CIVILITY: Our community made it through this year gracefully and civilly. It was nowhere near easy, and yet we supported each other, kept any objections to a low, respectful din, and gave us a real reason to hope for our future because we made our present work.

PERSEVERANCE: The willingness and ability of our students and our staff to stick with it this year, under ridiculously trying circumstances, was inspirational.

POISE: Our community did things that are very hard with poise and dignity. Despite the trying circumstances, they were fully engaged in teaching and learning; they raised money for awesome charities; they helped each other with incredible displays of compassion; they made some really great music and art; won some really hard fought athletic contests, and did all of that with a poise we will remember for a long time.

PRIDE: After everything a global pandemic could throw at us, we persevered, and for that we should all be incredibly proud – proud of our flexibility, grit, compassion, and every silver lining that came about as a result.

FAST FACTS: 2020-2021

STUDENT ENROLLMENT

Total Enrollment	4,796
Students of Color	38%
Students from Low Income Households	22%
Students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)	19%

STAFF

Total Staff	690
Number of Faculty	370
Percentage with Master's Degree	84%
Average Years of Teaching Experience	13.8



CLASS OF 2021

Total Graduates	352
Attending 4 Year College	73%
Attending 2 Year College, Trade or Technical School	17%
Taking a Gap Year	2%
Enlisting in the Military	1%
Pursuing Full-Time Work/Other	7%
Attending an Out-of-State College	40%

LOOKING AHEAD: 2021-2022 School District Budget

\$111 Million
Total Budget

21.72
Millage Rate

2.85%
Property Tax Increase

\$125
Annual property tax increase
for a household with a median
assessed value of \$209,000

Where the Money Goes

68%

Classroom Instruction Expenses
Teachers & Assistants, Textbooks, Materials, Supplies

27%

Classroom Support Expenses
Student Services, Guidance, Library, Curriculum Development, Transportation, Health Services, Nursing, Technology, Operational Leadership Administration, Business Office, Maintenance, Community Relations, Human Resources, Utilities

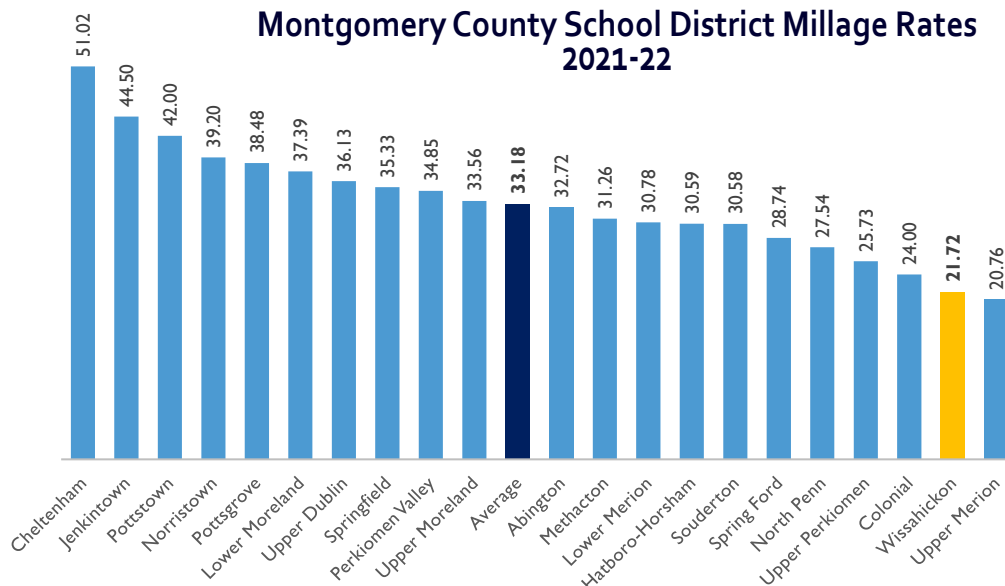
2%

Noninstructional Services
Student Activities, Community Services

3%

Other Expenditures and Financing Uses
Debt Services, Fund Transfers

Montgomery County School District Millage Rates 2021-22



Property taxes in Wissahickon are well below the average and second lowest among the 21 districts in Montgomery County.

(To calculate your property tax, multiply the assessment of your property by the millage rate and divide by 1,000)

Highlights of a Unique School Year

Instructional Programs

The 2020-2021 school year required the Wissahickon school community to exercise extreme flexibility as the school district adjusted instructional programs and protocols based on fluctuating COVID-19 case rates and changes in health/safety guidelines. Throughout the year, families were given the option to choose the instructional model (100% virtual, hybrid or 100% in-person) that best suited the needs of their student and family.

The in-person classroom setting was modified to provide 6-foot physical distancing with more limited movement and face mask requirements. Virtual learning featured synchronous online instruction provided by WSD teachers with a blend of whole class direct instruction, small group instruction, student collaboration opportunities, and independent work to allow for breaks and off-screen time. Hybrid or blended learning featured alternating in-school and at-home learning days with teachers providing instruction to virtual and in-person students at the same time.

Elementary Schools

- Wissahickon's four elementary schools started the school year with two instructional program options – 100% in-person and 100% virtual. Wissahickon was the only school district in Montgomery County to offer five days in school from the beginning of the year.
- Before the start of the second semester in January 2021, families were given the option of changing their student's instructional model.



Middle and High Schools

- Wissahickon Middle School and High School began the school year with a 100% virtual model.
- On November 9, 2020, the schools introduced a hybrid learning option. WMS/WHS families were given the option to change the instructional model for their student at this time and again before the 3rd and 4th marking periods.
- In March 2021, the revised health and safety guidelines which reduced the social distancing requirement in the classroom from 6 feet to 3 feet, allowed WMS/WHS to provide a 100% (five days a week) in-person option for the remainder of the school year in addition to hybrid and 100% virtual.

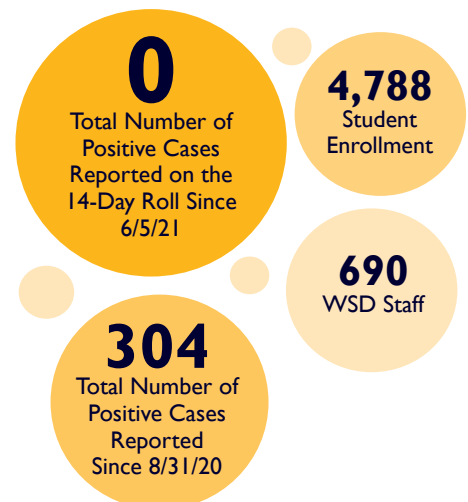
Health and Safety

Throughout the year, the district followed the guidance of the Pennsylvania and Montgomery County Departments of Health, the Pennsylvania Department of Education, and/or state officials, adjusting programs and protocols as needed.

Face masks were required to be worn throughout the school day all year long and a 6-foot physical distancing standard was maintained in all in-person classes until health guidelines were changed to allow 3 to 6-foot distancing in March 2021.

The district used email and a COVID-19 monitoring dashboard, updated daily on the district website, to notify the community about positive cases. The WSD Nursing Department conducted contact tracing to identify potential exposures while the schools conducted cleaning of affected areas. Staff and students followed the Department of Health Exclusion and Return to School Guidelines, including recommended quarantine.

COVID-19 MONITORING DASHBOARD



Virtual School Board Meetings



The School Board of Directors held virtual meetings via Zoom throughout the school year which allowed the community to attend and participate online. This format proved to be beneficial as families tuned in to listen to discussion regarding the school reopening plan and required health and safety requirements, while in the comfort and safety of their own homes. For some meetings, more than 3,000 community members logged in to learn about the district's plans and provide feedback to the board and administration. As a result of this successful format, the Board decided to hold meetings in the 2021-22 school year in person with the additional option for the community to join via Zoom.

Pictured left to right (front row): Tracie Walsh, Vice President, Ronnie Hayman, Joseph Antonio, President, Marshall Bleefeld; *(back row)* Zeffy Karagiannakis, Paul Badger, Amy Ginsburg, Ron Stoloff and David Frank

Athletics, Extra and Co-Curricular Activities and Outdoor Celebrations



Masks up! Game On! Sporting events were up and running throughout the year with modifications to comply with safety measures, such as wearing a face covering. Students discovered creative ways to continue co-curricular, extracurricular and community service activities through virtual meetings and competitions and socially distanced in-person and outdoor activities. More than 250 students participated in a variety of fund raising activities for Mini-THON this year, successfully raising more than \$40,000 to support Four Diamond's mission to conquer childhood cancer.

Concerts, plays, art shows and other programs were offered virtually and end-of-year celebrations moved outdoors, including junior and senior proms, promotion for 5th and 8th grades and senior award ceremonies.

Free Meals for All Students

To ensure that students had a nutritious daily meal during the pandemic, school districts received federal funding to provide free breakfast and lunch throughout the school year. The WSD Food Services Department provided meals to students attending in-person as well as Grab and Go meals for students who were 100% virtual. In total, they served 67,790 bagged breakfasts and 56,703 bagged lunches. Combined with in-person service, Food Services provided a total of 116,331 breakfasts for the year and 216,763 lunches.



What did you learn this year as the result of living through a pandemic?

During a normal school year, students in Mrs. Rachubinski's 6th Grade Gifted Design class make Rube Goldberg Machines in the WMS MakerSpace. This year, students couldn't use the MakerSpace for health/safety reasons, so Librarian Mrs. Conger helped find virtual alternatives. She became a Minecraft Certified Educator and co-taught with Mrs. Rachubinski to introduce the class to using Minecraft for their projects. Nineteen students successfully created Rube Goldberg Machines in Minecraft and showed their work using Flipgrid videos.



Janice Conger WMS Librarian

“Our students are amazing when we give them the right tools, allow the curriculum to drive the instruction, and are willing to get out of our comfort zones and put in the time to learn something new. In this case, necessity was the mother of innovation. If it were not for the pandemic closing the Makerspace, I would never have taken months of my own time to learn how to use Minecraft as a virtual instructional tool.”



**WHS/NMTCC
BIOTECHNOLOGY STUDENTS**

Six WHS students enrolled in the Biotechnology program at North Montco Technical Career Center, which is designed to teach students about careers in pharmaceutical and biotechnology companies, as well as research and clinical laboratories. In 2020-2021, much of the instruction focused on the pandemic — how different types of science are used from testing to treatment, lab and research safety, different types of vaccines and lab testing procedures.

Students learned about enzyme-linked immunosorbent assays, or ELISAs, and their use in testing patients for COVID-19 antibodies or active infection, as well as PCR, polymerase chain reaction, a test for COVID-19 that allows medical professionals to detect RNA specific to the virus within days of infection, even when the individual is asymptomatic.

Students in the program included Emmaline Barbash, Sein Moon, Rohan Singh, Adam Bush, Jacky Zheng and Ben Klein.

Adam Bush, Senior

Attending Juniata College to Study Biology

“To me, working through the pandemic gave my career path a deeper sense of urgency and importance. **Learning about and applying experiments that are currently being used to help handle the ongoing pandemic proved to me that my field of study was not just interesting or just enjoyable, but also deeply important to the global community.**”

Ben Klein, Senior

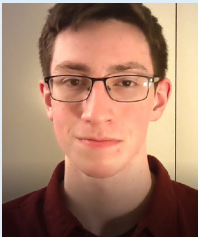
Attending Wake Forest University to Study Molecular Biology/Biochemistry

“While PCR has a multitude of uses throughout the science world and we would have practiced it regardless of the pandemic, we benefited from living through the pandemic. **Practicing this process and its use for COVID testing helped us connect the real world to the classroom.**”

Wissahickon High School Theater Company



The annual WHS musical, *Working*, was a unique and amazing production with the Theater Company never able to rehearse in the same room together. All rehearsals were held virtually via Teams meetings and performances took place in the students' homes. Using study files and pre-recorded performance videos, the students rehearsed their singing, dancing and acting parts at home and filmed their performances in their kitchen, basement, or dining room "stages." Their recordings were shared with Choral Director, John Conahan, who compiled them into the final performance video which was streamed to audiences.



Lin Kohne, Junior

Lin, who was 100% virtual this year, is actively involved in choral and theater activities at WHS.



Working is undoubtedly the strangest musical I've been in, but even so, I had a lot of fun. Rehearsing via Teams proved challenging at times but I always found a way around the problems they posed. I spent my free time rehearsing and made sure to check in with other cast members so we could help each other. Learning the dances was one of the more familiar things about *Working*. Our choreographer made guide videos to teach us the dances which wasn't all that different from how he usually teaches us. Mr. Conahan (choral director) brought the show to life. He made guide tracks for every song in the show, ran the singing rehearsals and taught us the music. But I don't think I'll ever know how much time he took to edit the final video – we weren't the only ones learning new skills! The final product looked great and I had a blast watching the show. **I hope that I never have to do another virtual musical again, but I'm eternally grateful that I was able to do this one.**

Katie Lu, Junior

A virtual student, Katie was the first place winner in the annual play writing competition hosted by Philadelphia Young Playwrights. Katie's play, *Pandemic*, was selected by their Literary Committee to be professionally produced and was streamed "radio style" in February.



As a Chinese American, the anti-Asian rhetoric and hate crimes that came with the pandemic made me and others in the Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) community question our cultural identity and belonging in America. I became interested in Asian American history, learning the story of my own family immigrating to the U.S. and the inspiring stories of many others. In all of these stories, I was moved by their hope for a better life and perseverance to keep fighting in spite of so many forces of prejudice against them, and I wanted to shed light on these experiences through play writing.



KATIE LU, JUNIOR

How did you feel about virtual, hybrid or modified in-person learning and adapt to the challenges?



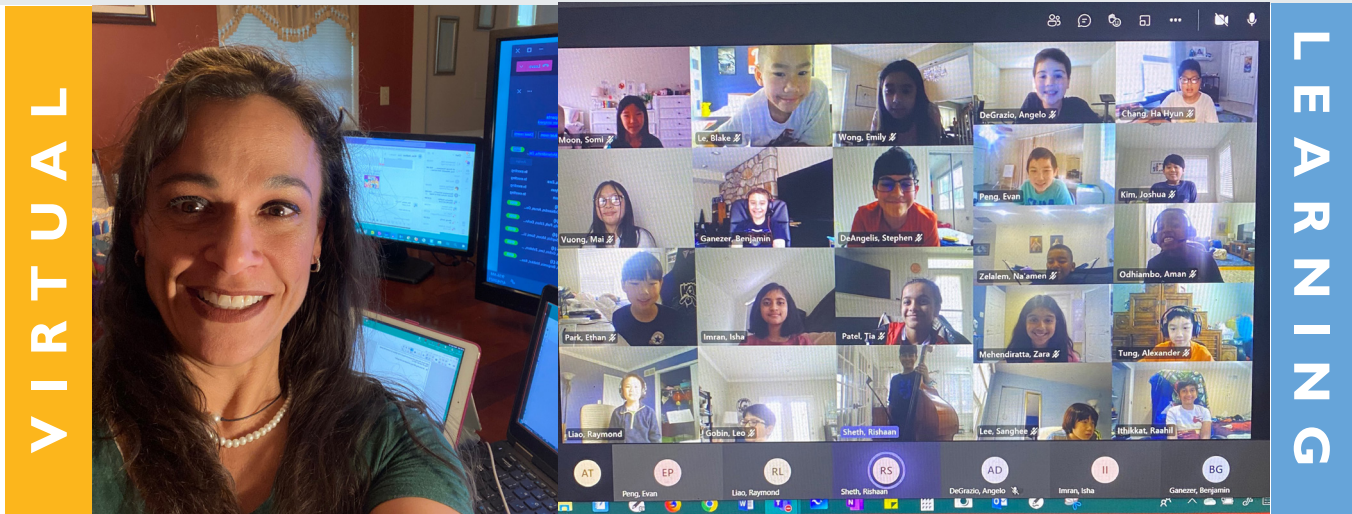
Gabby and Trevor Vidal, Virtual Students Blue Bell Elementary

“ The thing that surprised me the most about virtual learning and is the biggest positive is that my class is really close even though we weren't in a classroom together. My teacher tried hard to make sure we learned about each other before we got deeper into the school year. Because we all struggled together with things like tech issues, we always looked out for each other, helping if someone couldn't get into a meeting or filling them in if they missed something. We really leaned on each other this year - and we are pretty good at technology too!

Gabby, 5th Grade

I'm surprised that I actually got better at managing my time in virtual school because I had to set my own timer and stick to a schedule. Also I got to know my classmates really well, even through the screen. My teacher had a Star of the Week all year and asked us to share at morning meetings. And I got to see my classmates' faces without masks.

Trevor, 3rd Grade



Melissa Sadowski, Virtual 4th Grade Teacher, Stony Creek Elementary

“ In August 2020, I put in my request to be an in-person teacher. I was getting ready to set up my classroom at Stony Creek when I got a message from my principal asking me to give her a call back. I knew what it was going to be, and I was dreading it. The principal asked me to be a virtual teacher. I agreed to do it grudgingly, hoping that someone else would step up and take it away from me. There was no such person.

At first, getting the kids used to the technology was a challenge. I had to say to the kids A LOT in the beginning, "Now...we are going to do something new, and we are probably going to have a lot of glitches. Everyone needs to just STAY CALM." As the school year went on, the kids and I got comfortable with the technology and started seeing different things that really worked for us.

Every day was exciting in the virtual classroom! We learned, laughed, and connected in fourth grade. My motto since the beginning of the year was "We don't HAVE to do this; we GET to do this." I reminded the kids often that **we are making history and that their grandchildren will probably ask them what they did during the pandemic school year and they will be able to tell the story that even though things were uncertain, we made the very most of it.** I would do it again in a heartbeat!



Leon Kanopka, WMS Functional Skills Teacher

The eight students in the Functional Skills class were in school five days a week the whole school year. One of the biggest obstacles for the pre-vocational class was learning school-based social tasks which weren't possible because of the pandemic. The Pride and Re-Ride program provided a solution. Students received bikes in need of repair and refurbished them to donate to children in the community.

“ My students learned how to use tools, but also how to properly clean a bicycle, inflate tires, repair flats, tighten bottom brackets/headsets, and adjust brakes and derailleurs. Despite all of this “fun in the shop”, their favorite day was Friday - “test ride” day. We took our repairs to the tennis courts to simply ride. In our class alone, we had four students who did not know how to ride a bicycle. Today, three of the four can ride independently and we started teaching other students how to ride our bikes.

What started as another challenge because of the pandemic turned into an amazingly wonderful opportunity for learning and community service. We kept close to 75 bicycles out of the landfill, re-purposed over 50 of them and brought many smiles to people of all ages in our community.



WMS Student Council

WMS Student Council officers shared how the pandemic challenged them to use creative thinking to provide activities that would engage students whether they were attending school in person or virtual. The result was high participation in a host of new events including a Halloween costume contest and the Nailed It Baking Contest.

Allison Meng, 8th Grade

“ The student council adapted to whatever school environment that we had. When everyone was virtual, we met on Teams and created virtual events. When we shifted to hybrid, we were able to meet occasionally in person and that changed what we were capable of. **We were forced to adapt more than ever, but we rose to that challenge.** While our engagement didn't look the same as last year, we were able to engage a wider array of students through hosting more smaller events instead of large ones like the pep rally.

Alex Yum, Class of 2021 Valedictorian

“ This past year, all of us have gone through trials and tribulations — a canceled junior year prom, senior banquet, and other exciting senior year events that we've been looking forward to for years — as the coronavirus completely changed our academic and social lives. **We've all suffered through countless classes on Teams and had to take tests online, but with our stellar positivity, perseverance, and academic integrity, we have prevailed.**



What was the most difficult part of the last year and how did you find strength, solutions and unseen benefits?



Kathy Dearborn, WSD Nurse

“ This year was a very different year for the nursing department. We had to take on many other roles during the pandemic. **We contact traced 1,326 people who were officially diagnosed with COVID-19 or were official close contacts. That does not include the MANY students, staff and families that we provided COVID guidance to, working evenings and weekends as needed.** The nurses typically blend in with the school environment, not really being noticed, until needed. This year, we were out in the front. Although the year taught us all resilience and how to work as an incredible team... we are all ready to go back to our “regular” role...of just being the school nurse!

**Sheila Gruska, 5th Grade
Shady Grove Elementary**

“ This year was very different than any other way of learning that I have ever experienced before. There were some positive things like having a better classroom bond and chemistry. I enjoyed this new way of learning, but **I also felt like we were held back by many of the requirements that were created because of COVID. We couldn't do partner work, group work, or collaborative hands-on activities.** I missed being able to work more closely with my friends. But I did still enjoy myself while staying safe!



Sheila attended 100% in-person school this year.



Malakhi started the year in-person, switched to 100% virtual, and then back to in-person.

**Malakhi Abdur-Raqib, 4th Grade
Lower Gwynedd Elementary**

“ When I was virtual, I liked that you could stay at your house, but what I didn't like about it was that you couldn't see your friends in person - only on a computer. I didn't feel in touch.

I learned better and could pay attention in person because there was a ton of things in my house that can be a distraction, but in class, there's only tiny stuff that can be a distraction. And I liked that I could see my friends!



Jason Bialka, Shady Grove Elementary Principal



The challenge of the year was rethinking the way we do almost everything. We had to adjust the logistics of the classroom set up, our approach to instruction, the process of recess and lunch - there really wasn't much we could borrow from the "old" way. In the end, we learned that some of our "new" methods should replace the "old" way of doing things.

As silly as it seems, our morning announcements became a part of our school culture. Instead of having students read morning announcements over the public address system in our building as we had done in the past, we filmed our announcements and sent them out to virtual and in-person teachers to watch each morning. Somehow the announcements became a celebration of our school's favorite day of the week, and classroom discussion began

to erupt about which day was better: Thursday or Friday? Large signs were put up in the hallways; virtual and in-person students filmed their own mock announcements proclaiming the best day of the week; students completed persuasive writing about the best day of the week. It brought us all together. **Even when something seemed trivial, I learned that anything we do as a community is important. I know it will be a year that I will not forget, and not because of masks and social distancing, but because of the way we came together.**

Regina Lloyd, WHS Parent



For me, living through the pandemic felt like something on television. Although frightened and uncertain of what was to come, I also felt a sense of "Pause." Living through the pandemic was challenging and often tragic for many, but I felt it was a message from a higher power forcing us to slow down (and smell the roses). All aspects of my life personally were filled, no time to spare for simple enjoyment or relaxation. When the pandemic hit, I had no choice but to sit back and check out my day-to-day life in the rearview mirror. I was exhausted, overwhelmed, overworked, etc. But due to this unforeseen virus that struck us out of nowhere, my life, my family's life, was put on "Pause."

Well, now "Pause" is my favorite word or phrase. Being on "Pause" enhanced my family's life. **From the start of the pandemic and even now, my family and I have spent so much time together and we have learned so many new things about each other.** We rejoiced together; we cried together; we overcame obstacles together; and because there were obstacles, we grew in our faith together. The pandemic reminded my family about what being family really meant.



J'Simone Lloyd, Senior

J'Simone was enrolled in the hybrid program before switching to 100% in-person at the end of the school year.



Through the pandemic what I found most difficult was the isolation and fear of the COVID numbers rising and the death of George Floyd. It all gave me so much stress and anxiety. What helped me get through it was my family. We were all in the same boat, going through it together, and it helped sharing my voice with the people by leading two peaceful protests, with a ton of help from my family and friends. **So what I learned this year is it is ok to be scared and anxious, but as long as you lean on your family and friends it will be ok. Also, share your voice. It deserves to be heard.**



INSIDE:

Wissahickon School District
601 Knight Road
Ambler, PA 19002

Nonprofit Organization
US POSTAGE
PAID
PERMIT NO. 4
SOUTHEASTERN, PA

We invite you to read how our students, staff and families weathered the school year during a pandemic, what challenged them, what strengthened them, and how they found a "silver lining."



Kyle was enrolled in the WMS hybrid program before returning to in-person schooling five days a week in April. He played for the middle school lacrosse team.

A YEAR IN COVID

Home from school, It was just two weeks they said
Stay home and wash your hands to stop the spread
The beginning was boring with everything closed
No visiting with friends, or getting exposed
Lack of supplies and people were scared
Every day COVID deaths aired
April came, now school was remote
Do I have a fever, cough or sore throat?
May and June was more of the same
With sports canceled, no more big game!
July rolls around; camp canceled, but lacrosse now permitted
Summer closing in August, less COVID being transmitted
School back in session but from my room
All the talk about now learning on Zoom
October brought back lacrosse, and baking for a short cleanse
November brings golf, birthdays, and OUTSIDE visits with friends
Drove to Florida in December, Christmas in 80 degree weather
Back to home, skiing and this pandemic feeling like forever
I don't think I can last much longer with distancing, closures and masks
I'd like to hug my grandfather, is that too much to ask?
Finally an end in sight with a shot in the arm
Moderna helping take the virus's harm
2 weeks turned into a full year
Hallelujah, a return to "normal"
It was just two weeks they said

Kyle Crump 8th Grade

“ The most difficult part of this year was the lack of activities that I could do with other people, since so many things were closed or canceled. **When lacrosse started, I had part of my old routine back, part of my “normal”, and was able to see other people. This helped me find strength** by continuing to enjoy a sport and by seeing my friends so I wasn't alone as much.