

# The Cougar Chronicle

The Student Newspaper of Haddam-Killingworth High School

## Holiday Show Raises \$18,000 for Foundation

By Shane Coleman

The Holiday Show is a great HK tradition, helping a local organization to raise money. This year's show raised more than \$18,000 in donations for the Nathan B. Field Memorial Foundation, an organization that works to prevent suicide and raise awareness.

"This year was different from years past due to the pandemic, so we had to plan a virtual holiday show," said Kasha Topa-Finberg, broadcast teacher and the show's director. "It is usually live at the high school, so we've never had a virtual holiday show before."

Past shows have raised thousands of dollars for groups like the The Nest, a coffeehouse in Deep River run by individuals with disabilities who gain work experience and confidence.



The timing of holiday show always gets everyone in the Christmas spirit.

"I like watching the variety that is involved in the holiday show," said special education teacher Holly Nicoletti. "I enjoy

knowing that the students have put in so much effort."

The student-run show is always a challenging but fun experience, according to those students who helped produce this year's show.

## HK's Teachers Adjust to Changes during COVID

By Tyler Robinson

At the start of the 2020-2021 school year, both the teachers and the students of Haddam-Killingworth High School had to adapt to a new schedule due to the coronavirus that first closed down schools in March of 2020.

This school year has brought an array of new challenges, including finding new and innovative ways to interact with and teach students from a distance. It may be especially challenging for those newer teachers who first must adapt to a new school, and immediately to one that is full of new guidelines and restrictions.

But how are teachers dealing with the new system? While change is hard, so far RSD-17 and its teachers have adapted to the new way of schooling with effective and useful methods to keep students on top of their work and learning.

When asked whether teachers thought adapting to the hybrid model was difficult, Tim Shore, the newest member of the Math Department, stated, "No, I wouldn't say difficult. All school years are different, interesting challenges – we expect things to change. This change has been big, sure, but I

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try to rise to every occasion. It's important to keep a good attitude."

"The big negative is that the high school social scene has been completely upended, but we don't really have a choice on that," Mr. Shore added. "One positive aspect I see in the hybrid model is that we are all learning so much about technology and e-learning – students that were in high school during the pandemic will have an easier time adjusting to college life down the road."



Emily Milcent, one of HK's new science teachers, spoke about the difficulties of the hybrid model. "It was really difficult adapting to the new school schedule and environment at the beginning of the school year mostly because we didn't know what the expectations were of teachers or how to teach using these different models," said Ms. Milcent. "It has gotten much easier as the weeks pass but there are still some challenges such as conducting labs, only seeing students in person once a week, and how to engage and build relationships with fully remote learners."

Despite challenges, there are always the positives that present themselves in a time of uncertainty. RSD-17 has so far had no high school closures, which is something lacking in other districts.

"Compared to many of my friends who teach in other school districts, I think this has been the most successful model. I think we have been able to stay in school longer because we have not gone full-in, which has allowed for more continuity without having to be remote as a whole school," Mrs. Milcent said.

"I think the hybrid model where we are teaching students in and out of school simultaneously is more effective because students feel more engaged in the material," she added. "I think in the spring, many students were just completing work without actually learning the material."

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Both of these teachers have agreed that the hybrid model has been successful in helping students understand the subject matter compared to the spring, where there was less retention of the information given.

"What we did in the spring was a rapid response to an emerging crisis," Shore said. "If we were to go back to a full-remote model like that, I believe we would do it much better, since we have so much practice and have grown and learned so much since September."

## Dealing with Stress and Learning in a Pandemic

### By Caleb Bump

The coronavirus has brought stress to students around the world and is frequently changing the way we go to school and live our lives. Many changes to RSD-17 have been difficult for the students, teachers, and parents, resulting in cancelled midterms.

After March 13, 2020, schools were closed and students were learning full online, while state precautions were being set in motion. Unfortunately, spring sports were cancelled and winter sports were cut off, before being able to finish tournaments.

School buildings themselves are now different, with new rules on being socially

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distanced. This affects how students walk in the halls, eat lunch, and talk to each other. Students now have lunches in rooms sorted by grade and in alphabetical order. Student bathrooms are also separated by grade and hallways have a lane on the left and right, divided by tape, to keep students more separated when walking in the halls.

Emily Baerlein, counselor at HK, said, “Things that we all took for granted at school, like eating with friends or just casually spending time together, have been very hard to do this year. This adds stress for a lot of people.”

Staff members at RSD-17 seem to understand this stress students are feeling, as shown through their action to cancel midterms. Ms. Baerlein also noted that a reason behind this decision was the stressors affecting students. Students were not required to take finals in June of last year, either.

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Teachers have also been doing what they can. Many are offering extra time to help students during lunch or advisory, via the Google Classroom app, which has been a big part of student’s lives since the coronavirus.

Most of these changes have been affecting students, Jayden Zaitoun, HK junior, said. Although the new environment may be stressful, “everyone at the school has been taking it seriously, being very cautious, and I'm glad sports can continue.”



## Student-Run Sessions Highlight Mental Health

**By Antonio Calderoni**

HK held nine separate meetings on Oct. 28 to raise awareness about the importance of mental health and suicide prevention.

During the fall of 2020, many HK students expressed concern when a teen from a nearby town took his own life.

Knowing the school had been concerned with students’ social and emotional health throughout these challenging times, senior George DiNapoli, along with friends, seniors Matt Mohammed and Brien McNamara, met with Principal Donna Hayward to help HK come together as a community to address student concerns and to prevent similar events.

Mrs. Hayward was touched by the thoughtfulness of the boys and wanted to call a meeting for the whole school to raise awareness about mental health.

DiNapoli said, “It’s important to bring mental health into the spotlight because tons of people struggle with it. Students can reach out to any adult they feel comfortable talking to and it will be kept confidential. Talking to an adult is crucial if you feel as if you or a friend will harm yourself.”

During the meetings, students sat together in the auditorium as each grade listened to 15 students and faculty discuss what to do if someone is showing warning signs, as well as addressing the importance of mental health and why it's critically important to talk to an adult if you feel unsafe.

The school has taken many strides to keep our community safe. Assistant Principal Adam Apicella said, “Along with the class level meetings, the school has trained each teacher with the suicide prevention protocol QPR, which stands for Question Persuade Refer.”

A student crisis team that has been

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meeting regularly checks the status on the students around the building. Mr. Apicella also noted that “we are looking into purchasing a social/emotional curriculum for advisory.”

It's always important for students to talk about mental health, even if they aren't affected by it personally.

School Psychologist Cate DeLuca said, “Talking about mental health can break the stigma, making it a lot easier for students in the building to reach out to adults and friends without feeling awkward about it.”

For far too long, mental health was seen as something related to personal weakness. But now, especially during the pandemic, depression and mental illnesses are at an all-time high, demonstrating the need for the community to be more responsive to the people that need our help.

## **Opinion:**

# **It's Time for Citizens and Nation to Move On**

**By Charles Burns**

2020 was a chaotic year for everyone. With Covid-19, online schooling, and just about everything else going on, 2020 got to play host to the election between former President Donald Trump and new President Joe Biden.

Many people have complained about President Trump's administration while he was in office. Joe Biden seems to be a breath of fresh air to many people who disagree with Trump and his policies.

While Biden seemed like a better candidate for president, based on his victory by 7 million votes, Trump was not without his own accomplishments. “He's appointed 53 judges on the 13 US circuit courts. To put this into perspective, former President Barack Obama appointed 55 circuit judges in his two terms in

the White House,” according to Business Insider.

In addition to President Trump's influence in the court system, under his administration, ISIS leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was killed in a US raid in late October, 2020. According to Business Insider, Baghdadi was “the world's most wanted terrorist up to that point and his death represented a major blow to the terrorist group.”

However, President Trump has made poor decisions during his time in office, notably on Twitter where he insulted many people.

“The Fake News media is going CRAZY,” Trump once tweeted in 2018. “They are totally unhinged and, in many ways, after witnessing firsthand the damage they do to so many innocent and decent people, I enjoy watching. In 7 years, when I am no longer in office, their ratings will dry up and they will be gone!”

“Biden deserved to win out of the two candidates and is way better than Trump,” said HK sophomore Alex Engler when asked for his opinion on this issue.



After four years of President Trump's administration, which many critics have called “an affront to America,” President Joe Biden entered the White House on Jan. 20.

Many people are saying that they will “settle for Biden.” The Settle for Biden website, [www.settleforbiden.org](http://www.settleforbiden.org), “is a grassroots group of former Elizabeth Warren and Bernie Sanders supporters who recognize Joe Biden's flaws but know that our nation will not survive four more years of Donald Trump.”

President Joe Biden might not be the best candidate out there, but the majority of Americans voted to forgo four more years with Donald Trump.

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## HK Fall Sports Season Filled with Achievements

By Callen Powers

During the 2020 fall sports season, Haddam-Killingworth High School athletics had outstanding performances. Even with the feeling of uncertainty due to the worldwide pandemic, four HK teams, including boys' soccer, girls' soccer, boys' cross-country, and girls' volleyball, won championships in the Shoreline Conference.

The boys' cross-country team was nothing short of amazing after winning its seventh consecutive Shoreline title. Asked what went into this year's success, sophomore runner Joe Giaccone said "hard work during the summer, workouts, and practices." The remarkable run for the past few years has gained attention across the state and will surely continue for boys' cross-country.

Senior Matthew Jennings had another outstanding campaign, winning the Shoreline individual title. Jennings will run for the Yale University cross country team next year.



2020 HK Boys' Soccer Team

The girls' volleyball team also made their way to the top of the Shoreline. The team had a stellar showing this season while going undefeated and winning the conference championship. After defeating Hale-Ray in the Shoreline finals, the Cougars took home yet another trophy for Haddam-Killingworth athletics.

Both soccer teams, boys and girls, added to the continuing winnings of HK this fall. The girls defended their Shoreline title by defeating Old Lyme in a 3-2 win, while the boys also won after defeating East Hampton by just one goal.

Boys' senior captain Colby Whitehead described the feeling of winning as "one of the best days of his life" and that "nothing can compare to the feeling."

HK sports has created something to be proud of this fall season during the hard times of COVID-19. Despite let-downs and struggle from the pandemic, the school athletics managed to perform at a high level.

## Winter Sports Season Gets a Late Starting Date

By Sammy Ruimerman

Many students, families, and coaches across Connecticut were disappointed to receive the announcement on Nov. 17 that the CIAC had postponed all winter sports until Jan. 19, 2021 due to the rise in COVID-19 cases.

The Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference approved the new winter sports plan that allows practice to begin on Jan. 19 and games to begin no sooner than Feb. 8. Wrestling and indoor track, however, were cancelled.

Unfortunately, at press time, the local health district recommended a later start for Shoreline schools due to spiking COVID numbers in the region. HK's winter sports were then postponed another week, with practices set to begin on Jan. 25.

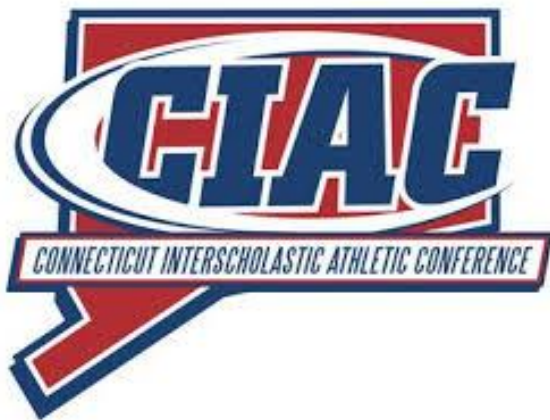
As the fall sports season came to an end, students were eager to know if there would be a winter sports season since "exercise is one of the least expensive ways to stay healthy, with one study finding that exercise can prevent chronic diseases as effectively as

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medication,” according to the British Journal of Medicine.

“I know that this is a disappointment, and there is not much I can say to make that better,” said HK Athletic Director Lynne Flint. For many students sports not only provide physical benefits but social and emotional benefits as well.

Sophie Ramino, a participant on HK’s 2019 indoor track team, said the support from the team acts as strong motivation to stay active, which can be hard especially in the winter. Winter sports make her feel prepared for the upcoming spring sports season. Track also allowed her to become closer to friends and make new ones.



“As much as I want the sports to happen I don’t think they will have them, especially track,” said Ramino. “At the meets there are around 1,000 kids and it’s very much a high risk. When you are sprinting, you can’t really wear a mask either.”

In response to the plan regarding when winter sports resume, Ann Deibert, the HK girls’ basketball coach, said, “There will be many challenges. Players will adjust to wearing masks to practice and play, and as coaches we will need to follow extensive safety protocols in order to keep everyone safe while competing. I think our players will adjust. As our fall athletes showed us, HK will make it work.”

Not all states postponed or adjusted their winter sports seasons. Dr. Karissa Niehoff, the executive director of the National Federation of High Schools said, “29 states have modified their winter sports seasons, including a number of them pushing the start date back,” according to Gametime.CT.



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## ***THE COUGAR CHRONICLE***

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