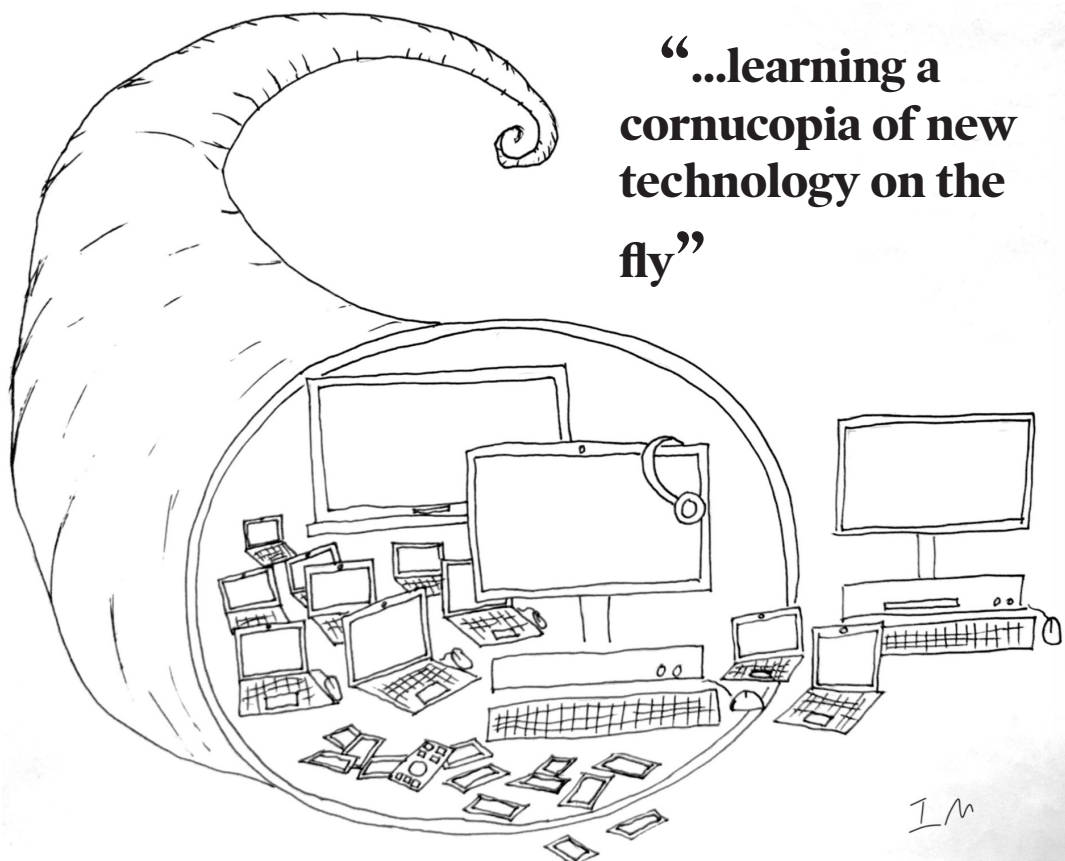


the in the room

Milton High School's Student Newspaper • May 11, 2020 • Milton, MA • Volume IX, Issue IV

“...learning a cornucopia of new technology on the fly”



Isabel Murley

Corona Snacktime

By Ian Lundeen

With lots of time at home, students are more inclined to eat more. That is okay; however, diet is the most important part of health. Yet, for a healthy diet, we would like to provide you with some tips and better alternatives.

Tip #1 -- If it's not good for you, work for it.

For example, if cookies are on the menu, do not simply reach for the nearest box of Oreos or girl scout cookies; make your own. Forcing yourself to make your own sweets not only gives you the chance to step back and ask, “do I really want to eat this right now?” but also provides a sense of self-worth and accomplishment.

Cont. on page 11

An Unexpected End to a Memorable Year

By Molly Strout

Ever since Milton High School's indefinite closure, which began on March 13, students, teachers, and staff have been trying to navigate the transition to online learning. Having to adapt to a new platform of learning, exclusively online, while also missing out on annual high school traditions has been a substantial challenge for the MHS community.

When principal James Jette announced Friday afternoon on March 13 that the school would be closed until at least the end of March, students were excited about the extended closure. This date then became May 4, but as of April 21, Governor Baker announced that all Massachusetts schools would be closed for the remainder of the school year.

At this time, students are finding themselves in a difficult time after an unexpected end to the year, especially the senior class. It is now a reality that the virus is more serious than some of us ever would have thought. With cancellations of sports seasons, proms, and graduations, and a change in important testing such as the AP tests, and SAT/ACT's, students are

worried.

“Remote learning” is something that sounds quite ideal. Getting to sleep-in for months on end, and a considerable decrease in workload from a six-hour school day is something every student might have wished for at some point. In this case, however, some students have found themselves missing an early rise during the week, and want to be back at MHS alongside their friends.

Massachusetts Commis-

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sioner of Education, Jeffery Riley, said in a recent letter, "While we do not expect remote learning to replicate the traditional school day, schools will use remote learning tools and instructional materials to develop and provide students with appropriately structured and supported ways to keep learning."

Most students have found it difficult to concentrate on rigorous work with no face-to-face instruction from teachers. Finding the motivation to learn in the comfort of your home is much more challenging than it may seem. Junior Jocelyn Ridge says, "Online learning is a lot more difficult than regular school.

It's hard to keep track of all my work due and stay organized at the same time."

For the first three weeks of the school closure, work was not counted as grades, but instead to encourage students to keep active in their classes. Principal James Jette sent out an email stating that starting Monday, April 6, students will be given an average of three to three and a half hours of work per day, and work will be considered mandatory. Teachers were prompted to only give students pass or fail grades rather than a percentage or letter grade.

While it is nearly seven weeks into the remote learning transition, students are

still adapting to this new platform daily. Still, the support from teachers, counselors, and administration has been immensely helpful. Mr. Jette said, "My vision right now is to make sure every student stays actively engaged in their schoolwork, and to be patient, flexible in your thinking, and have the ability to adapt." While this situation is different for everyone, staff members of MHS have been reaching out to students to ensure they are still actively learning, and staying safe during these unpredictable times.

Teachers have also found difficulty in this situation, from technology issues to trying to keep all their

students engaged and aware of the required work. English teacher, Mr. Collyer said, "Like most hurdles in life, remote learning has been a challenge, but also a fascinating opportunity. Aside from the obvious challenge of learning a cornucopia of new technology on the fly and in the context of sudden uncertainty, the greatest challenge has been in communicating."

Although we are going through a very unpredictable, stressful, difficult time, administration and teachers have been doing their very best to keep MHS students committed to their learning no matter the circumstances.

A Call for a New Normal

By Claire Walko

The coronavirus epidemic has become the focal point of today's media coverage. Sifting through all the stories, predictions, and data can become overwhelming; however, there is a bright side amid the confusion. With more people working from home and practicing social distancing, the effects on the environment are encouraging for the future of our planet.

Los Angeles is notorious for the constant smog that covers its city skyline. According to CNN, with stay-at-home orders put in place due to the Covid-19 outbreak, the "Los Angeles area experienced the longest stretch of 'good' air quality since at least 1995." Dr. Yifang Zhu, a professor at UCLA's Fielding School of Public Health, reported a 20 percent improvement in Southern California's air quality, linking the cleaner air with the sharp decrease in LA traffic.

What is happening in

LA marks a global trend of decreased air pollution. In China, satellite images show a considerable reduction of nitrogen dioxide and carbon dioxide emissions in major cities between January and February.

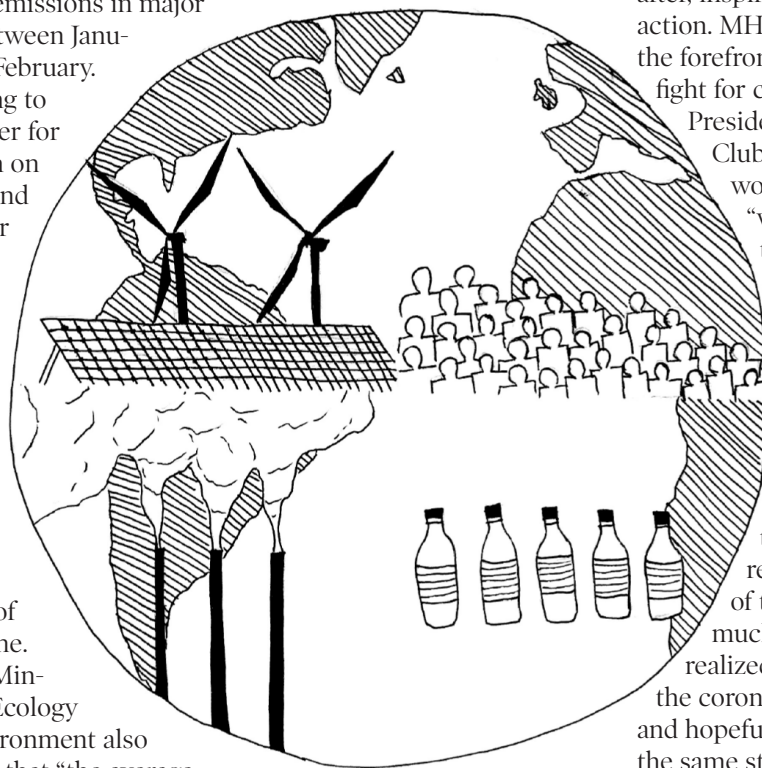
According to the Center for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA), CO₂ emissions decreased by at least 25 percent since the beginning of quarantine. China's Ministry of Ecology and Environment also reported that "the average number of 'good quality air

days' increased 21.5 [percent] in February, compared to the same period last year."

Quarantine has shown the positive impacts we can

have on the environment. Although this data gives many climate organizations hope, the shutdown is only temporary. Real change comes after, inspired by community action. MHS Earth Club is at the forefront of Milton High's fight for climate justice.

President of the Earth Club, Elana Naide, wonders if the virus "will draw more attention to and put a greater focus on environmental issues that haven't been taken as seriously as they should be." She continues, saying, "With this, we might also realize the severity of the climate crisis, much like we quickly realized the severity of the coronavirus pandemic, and hopefully we can see the same strides towards change."



Isabel Murley

Some changes are already happening in Milton. Since the shutdown, students' behaviors have shifted. Instead of staying inside for a regular school day, MHS students are beginning to appreciate the outdoors. Junior Eliza Calla-

han says, "During quarantine it's especially important to go for walks outside and just appreciate the fresh air, the sun, and the soothing sounds of nature." Hopefully, as more students begin to value and respect the environment,

more become frustrated with our mistreatment of the earth and join the fight for climate action.

During this time, it is important to reflect on the future of society and our planet. If the people are

willing to step up to fight this pandemic, why can't we unite and take action against the climate crisis together? Hopefully, with the end to the outbreak comes a call for a new, more sustainable, normal.

National Changes to Lunch Program May Affect Milton Students

By Joe Krueger

Announced in January, the Trump administration's plan to change the school lunch system around the country puts more control into the hands of local governments.

The proposition would allow schools to cut the required fruits and vegetables at breakfast and lunch and give them a license to sell

foods like pizza, fries, and burgers. The administration feels they need to do this because students are wasting food.

Local Cafeteria Worker Elaine Moore says, "Yes, I do think that students waste food." Students like sophomore Dimitri Sophinos say, "From what I've seen in the trash can, yes, we do waste

food."

The department of agriculture states that they want to put locals in charge of what food they give to their students because they know them best. They think a school should decide itself what it wants kids to have access to in the cafeteria because not every community in the country has the same interests as the other.

Moore says, "it's a tough question," in regards to whether the national system should be more controlling or relaxed.

In a January 2020 interview with the *Washington Post*, the head of the National Potato Council, Kam Quarles, was asked about the possibility of potato-based foods like french fries becoming more central to student's diets. Quarles says, "Potatoes are a nutrient-dense vegetable, which contain more potassium than a banana and 30 percent of the daily value of vitamin C along with three grams of protein, fiber, and carbohydrates that school-children need to perform their best at school."

"I would encourage kids to eat more fruit," Ms. Moore says. "I feel 50/50 on whether it should be more controlling, though it would be nice to see our opinion. The government should ask what we think but still, have some control."

Sophomore Taliah Gabriel

says that lunch regulations could be more relaxed. "I think we should focus on making the food more appetizing," says Gabriel.

The current system is largely influenced by Let's Move!: a 2010 public health campaign by then-first lady Michelle Obama to decrease the rate of childhood obesity to 5 percent by 2030. "The Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act," which was passed by Congress in August of 2010, put \$4.5 billion of funding into federal nutrition programs.

Though according to ABC News in an article released around the time of the bill's passing, to pay for the legislation the Senate bill takes \$2.2 billion away from funding for food stamp programs. This move has cost the government the support of some hunger advocacy groups such as Feeding America and the Coalition Against Hunger.

Under this system, cafeterias were required to increase the inventory of fruits and vegetables, cut trans fat and most sodium in food out of the menu, and serve exclusively low-fat milk.

The new system dials back on grains and puts a stronger emphasis on meat and meat alternatives (i.e. vegan options). Though it is encouraged to make changes allowing different menu options, it is entirely in the control of the local governments on this new system whether to change or not.



Nate Wayne

The snack bar stocked for lunchtime in the cafeteria

The College Board Compacts and Digitizes Spring AP Exams. What does this mean for students?

By Charlotte Lawrence

The College Board narrowed down details for online AP Exams earlier this month, in response to confusion regarding test changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In a letter to students, parents, and teachers, the College Board outlined the exam schedule and format, exam security and college credit, and additional at-home resources to help students prepare for this year's unprecedented exam. As of Friday, two dates will no longer be available to students taking the exams—as originally planned—but rather, just one date: sooner, rather than later.

The novel coronavirus has upended education and testing plans worldwide, striking particularly hard in low-income neighborhoods where students may have limited access to the technology required to complete the exam. To combat this, the College Board has partnered with other non-profit organizations to provide thousands of Chromebooks to students across the country, including broadband internet access.

Unlike the usual in-person, two or three-hour marathon AP exams College Board

usually administers, this year's at-home tests will be more of a sprint. Tests will all take 45 minutes, excluding any multiple-choice, and will generally consist of one or two open response questions. According to Teresa Watanabe of the *Los Angeles Times*, the questions will "require synthesis of material, application of concepts and critical thinking"—basically, ones that cannot be readily looked up online.

The College Board is taking extensive measures to prevent cheating during May's exams. Already, they have made the test open-note and required students to download a lockdown browser that will inhibit online plagiarism. Additionally, the College Board's desire to prevent information leaks and legitimize the test in the

eyes of prospective colleges also led to its decision. All AP tests will now take place between May 11 and May 22. Subject tests will occur simultaneously, and makeup tests will be available between June 1 and June 5.

Will colleges accept this year's unorthodox exam format? The College Board asserts yes, especially considering colleges have accepted altered tests due to regional disasters before. In their April 3 statement, the College Board confirmed: "We're confident that the vast majority of higher ed institutions will award college credit as they have in the past."

Students, meanwhile, are willing to take the risk: 91 percent of the 18,000 students College Board interviewed are still interested in taking their AP exams this year, although full refunds are available for those who wish to cancel.

Milton High's guidance department stands with the College Board's assertion that AP Tests will be beneficial to all students this year—even

seniors. In an April 29 letter to AP students and parents, Head of Guidance Karen Cahill stresses this point, writing, "we urge our seniors to take all of their AP exams, even if they have already made a college decision, in order to put them in the best possible position to adapt to changes regarding college credits, courses and finances as the landscape of college for the fall of 2020 continues to evolve."

In the meantime, the College Board is providing online AP review sessions, accessible by a link on the website to a youtube channel of AP course overviews. Here, students can practice the limited information the new test will cover—only $\frac{3}{4}$ of planned material. Today, AP students study and wait to see how they manage with this unexpected turn of events once test day arises.

(c) The function g is given by $g(x) = \int_{-2}^x f(t) dt$. Find the absolute maximum value of g on the interval $-2 \leq x \leq 5$. Justify your answer.

Graph of f

Critical Points: $g' = 0, f(x) = 0$ $x = -1$ and $x = 1/2$ Endpoints: $x = -2$ and $x = 5$

x	$g(x)$
-2	0
-1	$1/2$
$1/2$	negative
5	$11 - 9\pi/4$

Maximum Value is $11 - 9\pi/4$

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Milton High AP teacher Richard McCready goes over relative and absolute extrema to prepare his students for the AP AB Calculus exam

Will Scannell

What is the Tenacity Challenge?

By Taliah Gabriel

The word tenacity means determination and persistence. People who have this trait are most likely to achieve in life and don't give up. What if there was a challenge that showed what the word tenacity means?

The Tenacity Challenge provides students the opportunity to achieve a scholarship while working together as a team in four categories of math, science, history, or literature. There is also a challenge that involves making a mural that showcases tenacity. Jonathan Sills, the co-creator of the challenge, had a primary goal with the Tenacity Challenge: to increase the engagement in competition in schools for students of color.

The Tenacity Challenge happens in all urban and

suburban schools across Massachusetts, involving mostly African-American and Latino students. Students have a long period of time to prepare for what category they are going to compete in. The highest-scoring teams will win trophies and certificates for the Literature Response, History Argument, Science, Math Quiz Bowl, and the Tenacity Mural Challenge individually. The members of the team that place third will win a \$300 scholarship each, second-place team members will win a \$500 scholarship, and the first-place team will win a \$1000 scholarship.

The competition was going to take place on March 28, 2020. However, since the closure of Massachusetts schools, the results of who won the competition remains

unknown.

The meeting for the tenacity challenge took place after school on Thursday, February 6. The meeting discussed the plans for the tenacity challenge. During the meeting, I met some of the members, including tenth-grader Dianna Duran and eleventh graders Ilisa Risal and Dominique Thomas. I also met the leader of the team Mr. Stoodt, who referred to himself as the "leader of the pack."

At the beginning of the meeting, Mr. Stoodt discussed the creative piece for the literature event. Members of the team responsible for the literature portion were asked to make a video response to the book they're currently reading. This year the book selected was *The*

Underground Railroad by Colson Whitehead. The book is about a girl named Cora who escapes slavery through the Underground Railroad and gives detailed accounts regarding the events during that time.

The team discussed how they were going to respond in the video and how the video was going to be set up. Mr. Stoodt suggested that the video should have lamps like the ones used during camping to set the mood of the story.

They also discussed the mural for the Tenacity Mural Challenge. Sophomore Dianna Duran is in charge of the mural for the challenge. Her plan is to construct a mural of role models who have demonstrated tenacity throughout the decade.

Milton High Staff Continues to Show That Their Work is Essential

By Will Scannell

Principal Jette says that teachers, administration, guidance counselors, and adjustment counselors have all had to step up to continue to do their jobs.

Additionally, Jette highlights the work of the MPS custodial and food staff, saying, "We have one custodian on duty (they rotate) as the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendents still work in the building (Essential Personnel). Additionally, the custodian on duty is there as well for deliveries, respond to vendors and to maintain the security and maintenance of the building."

Jette goes on, saying "As for food service staff, they only come in during the days that they prepare food and

serve meals three days/week (twice per day) for those who may be in need during these tough times where folks may have lost jobs or simply be experiencing some sort of financial hardship. Most, if not all school districts in the Commonwealth have a similar set up."



Will Scannell

Despite closing for the remainder of the 2020 school year, Milton High School remains open for its essential workers

Duc's Dissection: What if Spring Sports Happened?

By Duc Tong & Will Scannell

The spring is an exciting time for Milton High athletics. Spectators watch as Milton's teams compete for a chance to make it far into their tournaments. For this reason, the lack of high school sports during this spring has been a letdown for everyone involved.

However, what if high school spring sports in 2020 carried on as usual? Milton High sports enthusiast, Junior Duc Tong, offers some insight into this question with his predictions.

Baseball Team:

"I think the baseball team will make the tournament again because they're a great team. They'll cruise through the first round, but they may

not head further than the quarterfinals because ... [the] teams are very good."

Softball Team:

"The softball team is heading [into] to kinda a rebuilding because most people from the softball team [have] left. In the past couple of seasons, they have [had] ups and downs and they also have a new head coach this year as well. So I think they'll probably not make the tournament"

Boys Lacrosse:

"The boys and girls lacrosse teams haven't had much success in the past few seasons, especially for the boys. This is only their second season under the new head coach and it isn't gonna

go well for them. They'll miss the tournament."

Girls Lax:

"Same for the girls, the depth isn't that great and it has been an issue for the team over the past few years. They'll also miss it."

Boys and Girls Crew:

"For the boys and girls crew, they're also very good so they'll have at least 5 athletes who can make all states."

Girls and Boys Track:

"The track teams have a lot of people and I think they can somehow send multiple athletes to the all state tournament."

Unified Track:

"Before the spring season

was supposed to start, I looked on the MIAA website and I saw ... that there will be a tournament for unified track in MIAA. But now since the season is not happening, they took it off. But since it was on there, [I'm] pretty sure next season there will be a tournament. And the unified track team is just for fun. They won't head that far."

Rugby:

"And finally for rugby, they'll definitely get the three-peat, meaning winning [the] state tournament again. They're so talented and well coached. Definitely Mr. Dolan will be the best rugby coach in the bay state conference."

How are MHS Students Staying Active?

By Charlotte Lawrence, Ian Lundeen, & Katie Wrightington*

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all MHS sports teams have been canceled for the rest of the school year. Now more than ever, it is important to stay on top of one's fitness and release stress in a healthy way. Just because we can't meet within the guidelines of traditional organized sports doesn't mean we can't work out together! Read below to find out how some Milton High students are

staying active and connected.

Milton High's crew team, the Neponset Rowing Club, is staying connected through Facebook! In a private group, rowers participated in a "virtual season": an online alternative where students can post their results and compare their progress. "I love how through all this struggle, we will stay united and work for a common goal," Sophomore Sophia Manning ex-

claimed on a zoom call this Thursday, "That's what a team is all about!"

Despite the National Tournament canceling due to COVID-19, the Rugby team is still finding ways to stay active during this time in isolation.

Michael Swanton, a member of the Eagle Impact Rugby Academy, says his team is required to perform a series of exercises once a week. This workout constitutes an array of different activities, and although they don't need to send in pictures of their performance to coaches, players are required to submit their scores.

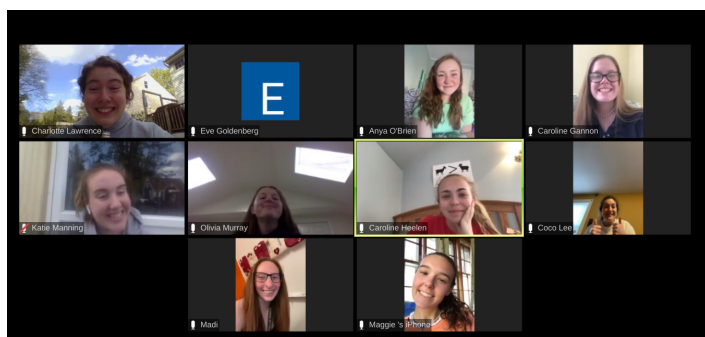
To incentivize physical exercise, the MHS wrestling team competed in a workout challenge against Boston Latin. The idea was that the rivalry would encourage wrestlers to get off their couches

and slay the weights or go for a run. Each individual could score points by running, doing intense cardio, push-ups, pull-ups, lifting weights, and even helping those in need. Even the coaches got involved. Coach Carroll woke up early to go on a five mile run in an attempt to motivate the team. The Wildcats did score fewer points; however, they are ready for next time.



Maggie Haley

Senior Maggie Haley poses with her sister post-workout. Maggie's message to her fellow teammates and other Milton High students: "If I can do it you can do it! Get out there, post some pictures."



Charlotte Lawrence

Milton Crew members connect during a zoom call Thursday

The Buzz Breakdown

By: Elliot Cargill

There's nothing like your first sip of coffee from Dunkin' in the morning that gets you prepared for the day, or even a Red Bull to help you last through the night while finishing an essay. Sometimes students find it challenging to go through school, clubs, social interactions, and any other commitments without additional energy. Many people drink caffeine for the taste alone while others, for energy, but is it really worth it?

Caffeine is found in a number of different products, including coffee, energy drinks, soda, tea, and other sources. Not to mention the numerous companies like Starbucks or Rockstar showing these products in our faces with advertisements directed at teens and young adults.

Many students consume caffeinated drinks regularly. "I like iced coffee," Senior Shekinah Destin said. "I need it in the morning because I'm tired and I like the taste." Senior Olivia DiManno said, "I have one every morning."

Caffeinated beverages have become commonplace, with companies raising the contents in their products to meet the fast-paced movement of society. A small iced coffee from Dunkin' Donuts alone has 198 milligrams of caffeine. In addition, modern coffee-based companies include added ingredients such as sweeteners that contain processed sugar or, depending on the added cream, high fructose corn syrup, artificial flavors, and preservatives.

In 2014, a study conducted by the AAP found that almost 73 percent of those aged 12 to 18 consume caffeine each day. But while a small iced coffee can contain up to 198 mg of caffeine, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends only half of this amount for teenagers (100 mg).

Nonetheless, caffeine intake depends on the beverage students drink. For example, most energy drinks have anywhere from 80 to 400 milligrams per serving, while a Lipton Green Tea tea bag will average about 55 milli-

grams per serving.

As most beverages contain caffeine, it's easy for students to go unaware of the amount. Yet, imagine drinking a latte, diet soda, and energy drink in the course of a few hours. Well, it's not so hard to imagine, right? It might even sound harmless. But in the case of a 16-year old boy's death in 2017, this proves otherwise. Davis Allen Cripe, a high school student from South Carolina, collapsed from a 'caffeine-induced cardiac event' only hours after having three caffeinated beverages: a large McDonald's Latte, Diet Mountain Dew, and an unknown energy drink. Just from the latte and Mountain Dew alone he ingested 233 milligrams of caffeine. The third beverage likely created an amount that far exceeded the body's limit.

Mortality rates related to caffeine alone are incredibly low (unless with added substances such as alcohol). Yet, for teens, it proves a major health risk. While this stimulant isn't particularly healthy,

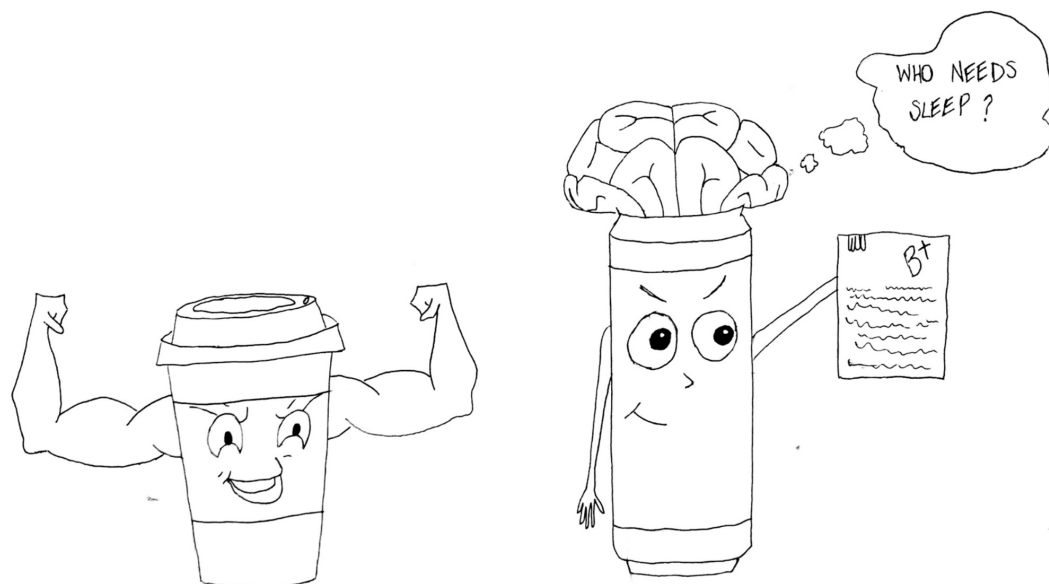
aside from the benefit of staying awake, many find that a little does go a long way.

However, when it comes to overdosing on caffeine, unwanted effects of nervousness, insomnia, muscle tremors, or even an irregular heartbeat may occur. These side effects correlate with anxiety, which has the potential to boost these symptoms. Additionally, consumption can increase short-term blood pressure spikes, making caffeine a concern for those with high blood pressure.

More importantly, a lack of intake after a period of regular usage may lead to the following withdrawals: headaches, extreme drowsiness, muscle pains, lack of concentration, nausea, and even anxiety.

Having teens hyped up and jittery on caffeine may also widen the gap between the average hours of sleep teens get and the average hours of sleep needed to function healthily. One study conducted by the National Sleep Foundation (NSF), indicated that only 15 percent of teens reported getting at least eight and a half hours of sleep on a school night. For regular consumers of caffeinated beverages, this may prove difficult to detox with an already busy schedule.

This does not mean that there aren't ways to function without Venti, though. There are several methods to stay energized without risking caffeine dependency and can still help you get on the honor roll. The key is simply eating proper meals, staying hydrated, and getting a full 8 to 10 hours of sleep.



Hooked: How Live Grades Has Transformed Students'

Anxiety

By Ralph Destin

When students get a push notification, whether it's a text, snap, or DM, we're inclined to check it as soon as we find time to spare. It's tempting not to do so as we usually spend the bits of time that we have on social media and our phones. Likewise, the same has grown to be true for PlusPortals, an online platform that students use to check their grades.

In an online survey of 176 MHS students, the *Elephant in the Room* found that 52.3 percent of respondents reported checking PlusPortals "about every day" of the week.

Milton High witnessed the introduction of live-grades January 2018 through the Rediker student information software, PlusPortals. This came after years of calls from parents and students requesting that grades be hosted online, according to vice-principal Benjamin Kelly.

Since then, both students and teachers alike have found the tool useful and convenient. For one, students no longer have to directly meet with their teachers in order to learn where they stand in a class, particularly how they are performing in different areas.

"Before PlusPortals the only way to check what scores...made up your grade was to ask teachers directly," said Junior Alix Benoit. "While it helped build a rapport between some students and teachers, it was very intimidating and time consuming."

David Mills, who teaches history and psychology, finds that live-grades help to



Isabel Murley

mitigate some of the stress that mounts near the end of a term surrounding grades. "You can be more aware of where you are," Mills said. "It might alleviate some stress for a student because they're not scrambling at the end of a term."

Yet, despite its benefits, Mills finds that having constant access to one's grades can result in some students being more focused on their class grade rather than what they're learning in class.

"There's a tendency to look at the grade as the most important part of a class," Mills said. "[students] may embrace the challenge but not appreciate it as much as the academic number."

Between January ninth through the 24th, the *Elephant in the Room* conducted a survey regarding students' grade checking habits and attitudes surrounding grades and stress.

50 percent of students reported checking PlusPortals between two to four times each day, more than twice

the percentage of those who check it once a day (21.6 percent of students). 15 percent said that they don't check every day, while 9.1 percent do so between five to ten times each day. Less than five percent of students report checking PlusPortals more than 10 times a day.

In regards to frequent grade checking, many teachers find that it can be concerning. "I feel like it almost becomes addictive and then I think that you're not gaining any information because not much is going to change within a couple hours," said math teacher Greg Pullia.

Pullia finds that "students are more aware of where they're at" with the addition of live-grades. Yet, he does not see any added benefit of students checking their grades every day. "I think it's better if kids checked it once every other day or once every three days," he said.

In addition, Pullia notes that while students anticipate teachers to upload tests or quizzes shortly after adminis-

tering them, the reality is that the process of grading and uploading takes much longer.

"Some teachers, if the test lines up for them correctly... then that might work for them and they might be able to turn around pretty quickly," Pullia said. "But for a lot of teachers who have kids and their kids have commitments, it's kind of unrealistic."

Yet, while significant changes don't occur that often during the school day or even within the span of a day or two, many students still decide to check PlusPortals to be sure of this.

Mills, who teaches AP Psychology, likens PlusPortals to social media, "because it has the same reward mechanism," he says.

Indeed, PlusPortals shares many similarities with how popular apps such as Instagram and Tik Tok tend to operate that it's worth comparing them to understand what makes them so tempting to check often.

Instagram and Tik Tok are some of the most effective apps at grabbing and retaining the attention of users. What makes these apps successful is not just that their design is appealing to users, but because businesses engineer them to leverage various psychological tools.

Companies often follow a mechanism economist Nir Eyal calls the Hook Model in which apps are designed to create habit-forming behaviors that reinforce themselves.

At the core of the Hook Model, is a variable reward(s) which is given at irregular

intervals and quantities. However, in order to access the variable reward, a user engages in certain actions and behaviors. Psychologist BF Skinner was the first to discuss that humans crave unpredictable rewards especially when the reward is valuable enough to the user.

When a user performs the action enough times, it becomes a habit that reinforces itself. However, a strong variable reward is key for a habit to develop. Companies often use enticing notifications to stimulate this.

Most importantly, social media companies leverage the fear of missing out (FOMO) in regards to what others post on social media. FOMO is a social anxiety that others may be having exciting experiences elsewhere that leads to a desire to always be connected to the online lives of those on social media. As a result, users of these apps continue to remain invested.

Live-grades fit many of these characteristics. It provides constant access to a strong variable reward, a good grade. Since live-grades are unpredictable in both the grade students receive and when teachers upload them, they follow an unpredictable reward schedule ratio. Therefore, when a student checks their grades, they're inclined to check it even more in anticipation of when a new grade will be uploaded.

When an already strong variable reward such as a good grade is readily accessible, students are tempted to feed into this desire of the feeling that comes with getting a good grade. Yet, due

to the fact that live grades follow an unpredictable reward schedule, it adds another layer of anxiety for students.

Students often become anxious that a grade could be uploaded at any moment, which leads them to check PlusPortals often to be certain. 83 percent of students either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "I check PlusPortals more when I'm anxious about a quiz/test grade," with 43 percent of students strongly agreeing with the statement. This is a self-reinforcing cycle,

“50 percent of students reported checking PlusPortals between two to four times each day”

however, as students begin to anticipate each change to their grades.

While seeing a "good" grade can be a rewarding feeling, a "bad" grade can also be discouraging for students, although it might have less weight in the long term.

52 percent of MHS students view a class grade dropping as their greatest source of anxiety/stress when checking PlusPortals.

"The immediacy of information has a powerful effect on how people see themselves," said English teacher Stephen Collyer. "People judge themselves in an instant and... [it] eliminates reflection and understanding oneself."

Collyer finds that a tendency to look at numbers as a measure of one's ability can negatively impact a student's outlook leading "to an inaccurate picture of one intellectu-

ally," he says.

"I think when a student sees their [grade], their subconscious tends to freak out and [they] imagine unrealistic consequences," junior Alix Benoit said. However, he adds "Even if the grade is far from being final, it still feels very unpleasant."

Grades tend to be a source of self-esteem for most students. A 2002 study conducted at the University of Michigan found that 80 percent of students surveyed based their self-esteem on academic performance more

than any other factor.

However, rather than be motivated by a bad grade, many get discouraged which holds negative ramifications. 68 percent of MHS students agreed that bad grades impact their self-esteem and 23 percent expressed strong agreement. Furthermore, 62 percent of MHS students reported that they are less motivated in a class if they are not as confident in it.

Though distressing grades often result in immediate panic, it does not always translate into taking the steps to improve, according to history teacher Nancy Warn.

Warn finds that the opposite occurs when students become complacent with seeing a bad grade. By the time students receive a grade back in person, "[they] have already processed their scores, in private—and questions lessen," said Warn.

Indeed, while 41 percent of MHS students "sometimes" go over test/quiz mistakes with teachers, 32 percent "rarely" do so. 13 percent, however, reported "usually" doing so.

For vice-principal Benjamin Kelly, the attention students give to their grades varies for each student regardless of live grades. "It depends on the person. People have always been interested in their grades or not interested in their grades," Kelly said. "PlusPortals just allows them to log in and see what

they are. It's their choice."

He finds that the real challenge is shifting the traditional mindset of students, which can't occur in one instant. "It's gonna take a long time to change the minds of a thousand plus kids and a hundred plus teachers," he said.

In the classroom, teachers like Nancy Warn encourage their students to adopt a growth mindset instead of having a negative outlook towards a bad grade.

She wants her students to know that "It's not just about that grade, and hopefully they start focusing on getting better," she said.

"You want them to have faith in themselves, that they figure it out. That's what life is about, figuring it out," said Warn.

Remote Learning's Challenges and How Students Can Overcome Them

By Will Scannell

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Milton High School students have joined the millions of high schoolers across the nation that must now make an effort to replicate their school days at home. Video chats with teachers, completing worksheets on google classroom, and checking Plus Portals have characterized a Milton High student's learning experience since the middle of March. It's called "remote learning," and both students and teachers have had to adapt to it.

There are inherent challenges that make it difficult for students to bring the classroom into their homes. While there are methods for students to overcome some of these challenges, there are no methods that students can employ for others.

Learning under Milton High's new grading policy presents inherent challenges for students. With regard to academic expectations for students, Milton High has been adhering to the guidelines of the Commissioner of education for the state of Massachusetts, Jeff Riley. For students, this means that choosing whether or not to complete schoolwork between March 16 and April 3 did not affect grades. Though, as of April 6, all schoolwork is graded as pass/fail; this means that students can receive a 100 percent for term four if they complete 60 percent or more of their schoolwork.

Before remote learning, students were externally driven to complete *all* of their schoolwork to achieve the

highest average they could. Now, with a less nuanced grading system, students can achieve the same result even while not doing 40 percent of their work. With a lack of external rewards, students must become internally driven to complete beyond the bare minimum of their assignments.

Such a shift in motivation can be challenging for students. Yet, there are ways to smooth the transition. Becoming internally motivated will require students to change the way they think about schoolwork. For instance, students should now view schoolwork as an activity for the betterment of themselves—like playing sports to stay in shape, for example. Milton High Principal, James Jette, says, "Reading to the mind is like exercise to the body."

"Reading to the mind is like exercise to the body"

In addition to adjusting to the new grading policy, students now must also adapt to learning exclusively in their home environments. At school, students have many environmental cues to signal what they should be doing at any given time. For instance, the bell dictates when it is time to move from one class to the next. Additionally, a teacher is always standing at the front of the classroom to tell students what they should be focusing on. There is a specific structure and rhythm to the school day that cannot be fully replicated in

students' homes.

During this period of remote learning, the environment in which students have spent years learning in for six hours a day is no longer available. On top of this, in a house full of family members that must also work from home, the remote learning environment can be full of distractions.

However, while students struggle to recreate the structure of a school day at home, there are solutions that they can implement. One such solution is performing their daily routine that they would typically perform on any given school day. This can include timers to signal when students should move on to their next subject or activity. Milton High students can even join the Morning Announcements google classroom page if they want to further adhere to their previous schedule (the class code is rxeilz5). Furthermore, if students take the initiative to maintain their daily routine, they could be preparing themselves for the less-structured atmosphere of college.

While students can work through some of the challenges to learning from home, other barriers to remote learning are insurmountable. Principal Jette says that one of the difficulties that some households are facing is a lack of internet access. During a typical school day, students receive a mixture of physical and internet-based assignments. With a school-issued Chromebook and a satisfactory internet connection at the school, there are rarely external hurdles to bog down students'

completion of schoolwork.

But the switch to exclusively internet-reliant learning in the home, however, can pose learning challenges for students who have unreliable internet access. The ways in which students stay connected to their schoolwork—through video chat meetings, google classroom, and the College Board's website—all rely on a stable internet connection. Even if a student can normally rely on their home's WiFi, a large household of people all working online can cripple internet speeds.

Unfortunately, a lack of internet access during the COVID-19 pandemic is a problem that a student can do nothing about. Sure, cable companies like Xfinity are now offering free access to public WiFi hotspots for anyone, and students' families can always invest in a better WiFi router that supports more devices. But with some students and their families being socially and financially cautious during the COVID-19 pandemic, these solutions are not viable for all.

Amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, Milton High students have had to face the challenges of learning how to learn from home. The solutions—if any—to remote learning's problems are not easy for students to implement.

But although 25 Gile Road—a building in which students used to rely on attending daily—is now closed, students are still members of the Milton High family. Thus, students have an obligation to themselves and the staff that continue to work on their behalf to be as creative as possible in the face of remote learning's challenges.

“Corona Snacktime”

(Cont. from page 1)

Tip #2 -- Eat meals not snacks.

It is quite easy to raid the pantry every time you feel a little peckish. Most likely, those snacks are just empty carbohydrates providing a quick fix. Eventually, those snacks add up to a lot of unnecessary calories that don't quite give you the boost that a full meal provides.

Tip #3 -- Drink lots of water.

Everyone knows it, but it is easy to get carried away with a task and not drink enough water. Got a headache? Drink water. Thirsty? Drink Water. Ate a meal?

Drink water. Keeping a bottle near the bed and wherever school work is done keeps water convenient. One trick is to rinse an olive oil bottle with hot soapy water. Then with cold water until all of the soap is gone. Olive oil bottles make great at-home water bottles for two reasons. First, they hold a lot of water, usually a quart or quarter of a gallon. Second, these bottles are made of thick glass, meaning they don't break easily like plastic but also give the superior feel of a glass bottle. They are also free, unlike a hydro flask.

My favorite quarantine snack—The Breakfast Burrito:

The breakfast burrito is quick, easy to make, tasty, and healthy.

Core ingredients.

1 tortilla
2 eggs
2 tbsp of butter

1. Melt the butter into a pan
2. Fry the 2 eggs in your favorite style.
3. Wrap the eggs and any other “topping” in the tortilla and put it back on the pan until you feel that it is done.
4. Let cool and enjoy

The beauty of the breakfast burrito is that you can make it your own. I like to put mozzarella, salami, and some hot sauce on mine. Just eggs and a tortilla is the bare minimum for it to qualify as a breakfast burrito, but it can be anything you want it to be. So dream on.

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Requirements:

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Must include name and grade

Must e-mail to elephantintheroom2017@gmail.com

Note: The Elephant in the Room reserves the right to edit published letters to fit into paper.