

The East Rock Record

133 NASH STREET, NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT 06511 APRIL 2022 VOL. 10, NO. 2

HOW TO EXIT A PANDEMIC? Mayor Elicker: “Normal” Will Take Time



Mayor Justin Elicker holds a press conference via Zoom with East Rock Record reporters on March 17.

BY NAYALA CONROE
AND SAHIL LEMAR
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EDITED BY AKO NDEFO-HAVEN

Everyone is itching for “normal.”

And, yes, it IS coming. The East Rock Record Spring 2022 Survey found that 67 percent of students believe life is about to return to normal. But what does “normal” look like now?

After two long years of the pandemic, we are now free to do things that we could not do a year ago. The pandemic has changed us in ways that we don’t probably completely realize. But there are shifts in the way that we live and the things that we like to do.

We have embraced outdoor dining (is it really so bad to wear a coat for dinner?). We have gained a deeper connection to the arts. And we have used technology to overcome challenges in ways that now seem sensible.

This is to say that we are different now. And part of that means that we will move forward always knowing that we could suddenly have to move back.

“I don’t think there’s going to be a moment where we snap our fingers and say the pandemic is over,” New Haven Mayor Justin Elicker told East Rock Record reporters during a Zoom press conference last month. “I suspect it will be

over time, slowly.”

As part of this slow process, Mr. Elicker said the city will loosen restrictions when the rates of Covid cases are low and tighten them when cases surge. Over time, the virus will hopefully become less threatening and make it less of a challenge for those protecting our public health.

Haelly Patel, a fifth grader at East Rock Community & Cultural Magnet School, said that she doesn’t think the end of the pandemic is coming super soon because not everybody is vaccinated. “But I do think it will end,” she said.

The pandemic has changed how we do things in important

Covid Sent Us Outdoors Many want to stay

BY KEYLIN MONTTOYA, CHARLIE PELLEGRINO
AND AARAV LEMAR
EAST ROCK RECORD STAFF
EDITED BY RACHEL CALCOTT

Covid was terrible for a lot of reasons. But it did drive us to spend more time outdoors.

When the pandemic began, indoor spaces suddenly felt dangerous. So, people started meeting outdoors, going for socially distanced walks and talks. If it happened in fresh air, it felt safer.

As a result, many people discovered (or rediscovered) gardening, hiking and even — despite some chilly weather — dining out of doors. Restaurants, businesses and parks found new ways to bring people together, all outdoors. Parking lots became gathering spaces. Roads closed and parks were packed.

Now, Covid is receding. But people don’t want to go back inside.

“Spending time outdoors has now become a part of people’s lifestyle,” said Brent Peterkin, Executive Director of Gather New Haven.



Lake Wintergreen. Photo by Charlie Pellegrino

When the pandemic forced people out of doors he said they fell in love with the nature around them. “It’s just a question of, ‘What can nature do?’ You will find out that nature can do a whole lot,” he said. “Nature can

be calming, and during the pandemic this was especially important.”

People also found that being outdoors was fun — and different. According to the East Rock Record Spring 2022 Survey, almost half of students said they picked up a new outdoor hobby during the pandemic, and 84 percent went to more outdoor dining restaurants.

SEE PAGE 5

SEE PAGE 11

It’s (almost) Summer!!!! Wait, what does that mean now?

BY CHARLOTTE MARTINEZ AND TUSKER
PICKETT EAST ROCK RECORD STAFF
EDITED BY EMILIANO TAHUI GÓMEZ

Summer will come a tad later than usual this year at East Rock Community & Cultural Magnet School. Students will leave their desks for the final time this school year on June 22, days later than in previous years.

Yet, students are excited: This summer looks to be the most “normal” in two years!

According to the East Rock Record Spring 2022 Survey, students have high hope. More than 80 percent of the 197 surveyed agreed that “this summer will be more fun than last summer.”

For many students, this is because

there are more activities they can now participate in.

“I’m looking forward to going to the beach and looking at the parks more,” said Haelly Patel, who is in fifth grade.

Ms. Patel hopes to explore parks that are “farther” away from her home once school gets out. She also wants to spent time outside and enjoy iced treats, especially strawberry ice cream and slushies, which are her favorite.

Now that Covid rules are being pulled back, students have to figure out how best to spend their summer.

SEE PAGE 9

Are Kids OK? Covid Affected Wellbeing

BY ELEANOR MATZ, ELIAS PLACENCIA, HAVEN
PICKETT EAST ROCK RECORD STAFF
EDITED BY JACK MCCORDICK

The pandemic may be ending, but it has left scars.

“My brother and I fought more,” said East Rock Community & Cultural Magnet School fifth grader Tusker Pickett. Pickett said that change was caused by “all of us being cooped up together and having to figure out what to do.”

Students at East Rock School, like students everywhere, said the Covid-19 pandemic was very difficult emotionally. According

to The East Rock Record Spring 2022 Survey, 61 percent said that it had been “hard to stay happy” during the pandemic. And 70 percent agreed that it “was hard to stay motivated in school” because of Covid.

Youth across the city have expressed similar concerns, New Haven Mayor Justin Elicker said during a press conference with East Rock Record reporters.

“Overall we’ve seen a lot more

SEE PAGE 8



INSIDE THE
NEWS

NEED FOR CLASSROOMS
SCRAMBLES SPACES, TURNS
LIBRARY INTO STORAGE
SEE PAGE 3

THE OUTDOORS!
SEE PAGE 1, 11
COVID BEHAVIOR
SEE PAGE 1, 8



RUNNER AND
RESEARCHER
SEE PAGE 13

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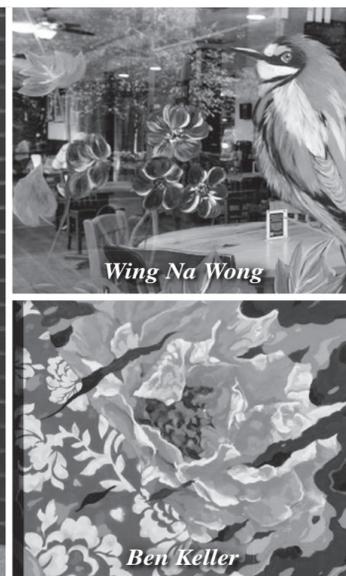
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SCHOOL NEWS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

COMMUNITY NEWS

- THE SLOW COVID EXIT 1, 5
- COVID SENT US OUTDOORS. MANY WANT TO STAY. 1, 11
- HELPING AFGHAN REFUGEES IN NEW HAVEN 7

SCHOOL NEWS

- COVID SCRAMBLED SCHOOL SPACES 3
- THE END OF LUNCH AS WE KNEW IT 4
- COVID MADE FOR LATE (AND LATER) BUSES 5
- WORKING AT CATCH-UP 6

HEALTH & WELLBEING

- ARE KIDS OK? 1, 8
- CAN SUMMER — FINALLY— BE NORMAL? 1, 9
- TIKTOK CHALLENGES CAUSED PROBLEMS 8
- BATHROOMS A BEHAVIOR TROUBLE SPOT 9
- THE OUTDOORS 11

ART & SCIENCE

- CADE BROWN, ATHLETE + COVID RESEARCH STUDENT, VISITS ERR 13

OPINION

- LETTER FROM PRINCIPAL SABRINA BRELAND 14, 15

Pandemic Misplaces School Spaces

BY JADE KINLOCK, HAELLY PATEL, DARIEL CARBONELL PEREZ, MADISON POOLE AND ALANIS MONTOYA
EAST ROCK RECORD STAFF
EDITED BY DEREEN SHIRNEKHI

This year, it seemed like everything was in the wrong place.

Imagine going to a school where the library is being used for storage, the computer room is closed and the music room and art rooms have been turned into classrooms?

This is the reality at East Rock Community & Cultural Magnet School. Sabrina Breland, principal at East Rock School, said the changes happened because the school received federal money to lower class sizes and needed more classrooms.

“We got money for new teachers, so the computer room was used for one of them, the art room for [another]. And the music room houses another grade,” she said.

As a result, students in grades K-4 now stay in their classrooms and art and music teachers come to them. Ms. Breland said the situation is temporary because the federal money will disappear after two years.

Even though it is not forever, it is a long time. Many students do not like the changes.

According to the East Rock Record Spring 2022 survey, 80 percent of students said they do not like having art in regular classrooms. Another change is that the library has been closed and students now get books from smaller collections in their classrooms. According to the survey, 59 percent of students said they missed being able to visit the library and check out books.

Tusker Pickett, a fifth grader at East Rock School, likes classroom libraries because he said that finding a book is more convenient and teachers can recommend books for their students. But he does miss using the school library because it had more options.

“I used to really like being able to see all the books and get out of class for a bit,” he said. “I liked browsing the books and reading them.” He also said that he can concentrate better when he studies in the library.

Because he is in fifth grade, Mr. Pickett has art and music in actual art and music classrooms, which he prefers to staying in a classroom. During the pandemic, those specials came to him.

“I like art in the art room more because when we’re there, we get to do better projects,” he said. “In the classroom, it’s usually just drawing on a piece of paper. Music is better in the music room because [the teacher] doesn’t usually bring instruments to the classroom, but in the music room,



The East Rock Library is being used for storage; the computer room for class. Photos: Sabrina Breland

we can use instruments.”

Switching up spaces does have an impact, said Jessica Hoffmann, a research scientist at the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence who specializes in adolescents. She said that specific rooms like the computer room, music room, art room and library offer important learning.

“These spaces are where there’s more self-expression, where you learn important skills for life,” Hoffmann said. “Those spaces where you can make connections and do self-guided learning have to come back. Small class sizes are a great idea, but not at the expense of art, music and computers.”

The trade-off is one result of the pandemic because the smaller classes are planned to help younger students catch up academically. During a press conference with the East Rock Record, Mayor Justin Elicker said some students need extra attention right now.

“It’s a good thing to have smaller class sizes so there are more teachers to give individual support to kids,” he said. “Everyone is coming to a topic from a different skill level.”

the extra teachers will no longer be at the school.

In the meantime, they are searching for ways to re-open the library. “The library will hopefully be up and running by next year. We’re trying to find an outdoor container for storage,” Ms. Breland said.

Ms. Hoffmann said that being able to move through the building gives students a nice break. But, she said, it is better to stay in regular classroom than not have art and music at all.

80 percent of students do not like having art in a regular classroom

Source: East Rock Record Survey

Given the limitations, “there are little things students can do to get themselves in the right space for the task in front of you,” she said. “Maybe that’s getting up and shaking off your science stress before music starts.”

In the meantime, Mayor Elicker urged students to use their local public library branches. Right now, libraries are closed on Sundays, but Mayor Elicker wants to change that in the proposed city budget for 2022-2023.

“My proposed budget has more money for the libraries so they can be open on Sundays. People can use the space, the books, the computers,” he said.

Students are looking forward to when they can use their art room, music room, computer room, and school library again. Mayor Elicker said that he enjoyed his experience with his own school library as a student.



Photo above and P1 by Nayala Conroe

SCHOOL NEWS

There was fun, social lunch. Then Covid lunch.

BY CHARLOTTE MARTINEZ AND TUSKER PICKETT
EAST ROCK RECORD STAFF
EDITED BY EMILIANO TAHUI GÓMEZ

The cafeteria at East Rock Community & Cultural Magnet School was fun and busy when school was in session. Then, Covid changed lunch.

Students remember lunchtime in the cafeteria as one of loudest times of the day. Friends would have yell to talk across a table. The seats were always filled. When one student left, another sat down to lunch.

School is back in person this year. But East Rock School students say the cafeteria and lunchtime is not “normal.” The East Rock Record Fall 2021 survey found that 35 percent of students said lunchtime is quieter than before the pandemic.

Students must wear masks and sit in groups of four at tables that once held eight. They may remove masks to take a bite of food, but must quickly re-mask. The capacity in the cafeteria has changed. There are 22 tables and now only four are allowed at each table, much lower than in the past. The volume of conversation is softer. When excitement builds, lunchroom monitors rush to keep students quiet.

It has been hard, said Sabrina Breland, principal at East Rock School. “It’s carrying a lot of stress for everyone involved,” she said. “Students want to talk to their friends. They want to get closer.”

The Covid rules for cafeteria limits have many students eating lunch in their classrooms. When the weather is nice, some classes go outside to eat.

Nora Matz, in sixth grade, said they have to wait for every sixth grader to get food before students can go up to their classrooms. Ms. Matz said that is it “annoying-ish” and “it creates a lot of confusion and noise.”

When lots of students wait with trays of food



East Rock students bring lunch to classrooms. Sabrina Breland.

and then have to carry them up stairs, students get into conflicts. “There have been a lot of arguments,” said sixth grader Elias Plascencia. He has seen fights break out when students have spilled food going up the stairs. Other students said they have seen the same thing happen.

In the cafeteria, many students say lunch is quieter than it used to be. Some students also say that lunch monitors are stricter with students. Ms. Breland told East Rock Record reporters that staff often have to remind students to re-mask. “It’s hard for students to remember to pull their masks over their mouths after they lower them to eat,” she said.

This “new normal” lunchtime has been hard to get used to. Students want to see their friends, but are stuck in small groups, said Kristen Hebert, who teaches third grade at East Rock School. “I feel bad for them, because I think you should get to be a kid and I think lunch is one of those times,” she said. “Kids want to talk to each other.”

William Brady, a computational social psychologist at Yale University, told East Rock Record reporters that having fewer opportunities for social interaction could affect students’ mental health and missing out on a social release could make it harder for students to concentrate. “We

have a consistent desire for human connection.”

Lunch is an important social time for students and for teachers. The new rules made it harder on teachers and staff, said Ms. Breland. In-classroom lunches took away time that once gave teachers a break. As students played, she said, teachers had thirty minutes to reset.

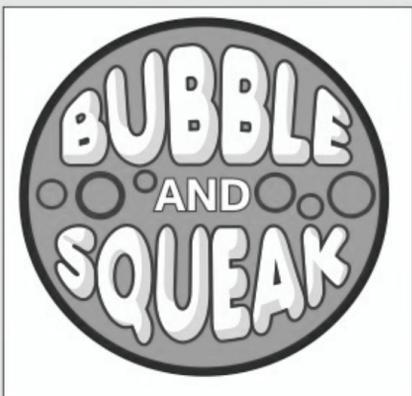
“Teachers want their unencumbered lunchtime back,” she said. “They used this to re-energize themselves.” Eating in classrooms has also created problems for the cafeteria staff. Ms. Breland said that school lunches must be served at a certain temperature. Trying to serve meals hot when students are eating in classrooms, she said, has been “stressful.” Classroom lunch has made more work for custodians. There are more spaces that must be cleaned every day, said Ms. Breland.

Even though lunch is not as lively as it used to be, Covid safety protocols are still in place. Keisha D. Redd-Hannans, assistant superintendent for instructional leadership for the New Haven Public Schools said the district worked with the city health department to create the rules based on CDC guidelines. The guidelines, she said, will change when the CDC changes its recommendations.

There was some flexibility. Ms. Redd-Hannans said the district worked with each school to come up with specific plans for how lunchtime would work. In some schools, the district installed dividers in cafeterias. The district also decided to let students eat outside when weather permits, a policy that Ms. Redd-Hannans said could become permanent.

In some schools, all lunch moved to classrooms. She said the district will rely on guidance from the New Haven Health Department and the CDC to decide when social distancing rules can be loosened.

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SCHOOL NEWS

A SCHOOL YEAR OF LATE (AND LATER) BUSES

BY NAYALA CONROE AND SAHIL LEMAR
EAST ROCK RECORD STAFF
EDITED BY CAITLYN CLARK AND AKO NDEFO-HAVEN

The problems this year with school start before you even get there. Buses are not coming on time. Some can be an hour late. Last fall, some didn't come at all!

According to The East Rock Record Fall 2021 Survey, almost half of students who responded said their bus was late picking them up in the morning and 29 percent said their bus was late taking them home. More than half of students said they were late to school because their bus was late.

(Note: our data may be affected by the fact that some students who answered "No" on the late bus question do not take the bus at all. This could mean that there are even greater percentages of regular bus riders affected by delays.)

"It's kinda like a gamble," said Charlotte Martinez, a 5th grader at East Rock Community & Cultural Studies Magnet School. "You don't know if you're gonna get there super early or super late."

Although she said the bus problem seems to have gotten better last semester, she has still arrived at school as late as 9:15 a.m. this winter. Ms. Martinez said unpredictable arrival times can make students miss class, which can affect

their learning and grades.

Sabrina Breland, principal of East Rock School, said bus delays cause problems for everyone. She said teachers have to make changes to their schedules to watch students when buses arrive late at the end of the day, which means they might not be able to care for their own families or work on lesson plans.

Almost half of students last fall said their bus was late picking them up



Buses at East Rock School. Photo: Sabrina Breland

"It has a domino effect," said Mrs. Breland. "It interferes with our personal lives and our jobs."

When buses are late in the afternoon, she calls parents to let them know. Leslie DePriest, the vice principal, stays to watch students along with teachers.

In the morning, late buses make it hard for parents, teachers and students to plan. When they get up in the morning, it is unclear if they are going to be able to go to school on time. The only way to fix that problem is to find the cause for the buses being unreliable.

Justin Harmon, director of marketing and com-

munications for the New Haven Public Schools, said that the biggest reason for bus delays has been that the district doesn't have enough bus drivers. Another reason is the pandemic. "In a lot of instances, school districts saved money during the pandemic when students were not in school by cutting their bus contracts. Many bus drivers lost their jobs," Mr. Harmon said the district has 301 bus routes each day and that on any given day last fall, five percent were late. "We transport 18,000 students every day." In the Fall, he said, there were regularly "about 900 students who are picked up or dropped off late."

When buses do not arrive on time, many people are impacted, including students, parents, teachers, and other faculty. If the buses do not come, students can't get to school unless another grownup can bring them. If parents cannot take their kids, the student cannot get to school. Elias Plascencia, a student in 6th grade, said that when the bus is late, "Dad is able to drop me off because he's the one waiting there with me."

Dropping students off affects parents and guardians, too, because they have jobs and places they need to be. For many parents, especially those without cars, the only way for their child to get to school is by bus.

Some Covid Practices Here to Stay

PANDEMIC EXIT FROM PAGE 1

and interesting ways. Some of which will likely stay. For example, Mr. Elicker said the city expanded outdoor dining during the pandemic — and wants it to continue.

Because of Covid, the City of New Haven closed street lanes and parking spots so people could dine outside at restaurants and support local businesses. This also happened around the state. Which is why Keyri Ambrocio, Public Policy and Strategic Communications Specialist at the Greater New Haven Chamber of Commerce, said the Chamber supported House Bill 5271, which extended outdoor dining permits across the state for another year. Governor Ned Lamont signed it into law on March 24.

"Outdoor dining has been really popular with restaurants and has helped them bring back some of that lost revenue," she said. Mr. Elicker said the new law makes permitting "a little bit easier" in New Haven. Eating outdoors — something which now feels "normal" — is one thing that changed. Another is public interest in art. During Covid, people have experimented with new types of art.

The East Rock Record Spring 2022 Survey found that 49 percent of students said they have made more art because of Covid. Ms. Patel said she felt more connected to art during the pandemic.

Lucy Gellman, editor of The Arts Paper, said people have shown "incredible resilience" and used the restrictions of the pandemic to find new ways to make art and gather people to experience it.

"There's no such thing as a silver lining from a global pandemic because it's been a really hard time for the world," Ms. Gellman said. "And yet, New Haven has more public art now than it did two years ago."

During the pandemic, artists realized they could still work together outside and make murals. "I love murals, I think they make a city feel warmer and a more welcoming place to be," Ms. Gellman said.

In fact, she said, the pandemic has opened people's eyes to new opportunities, including a project this summer to paint murals on underpasses to make them feel safer. Ms. Gellman likes "how public art can make people feel safer as they are going through the city."

Art has been popular because it helps people connect to their emotions and make sense of what they are experiencing.

"People are really hungry for experiences with art," said James Vanderberg, who is an Educator for Grades 9-12, University and Academic Outreach at the Yale Center for British Art. He said the public has very much engaged with art during the pandemic. It forced the Yale Center for British Art to change how they thought of themselves as a museum.

Although museums shut down early in the pandemic and stayed closed for a long time, some have figured out new ways to show people art and engage with the public. The Yale Center for British Art created digital programs and increased its social media presence, according to Assistant Shop Manager Anissa Pellegrino.

Before the pandemic, the Yale Center for British Art held events in its auditorium, which can hold 200 people. Ms. Pellegrino online programming has allowed them to reach thousands of people. One video released during the pandemic was viewed more than 30,000 times by people from all over the world. "That's something that never would have been possible," said Ms. Pellegrino.

This use of technology shows how Covid "has

taught us new ways to communicate with people," said Shauntasia Hicks, a liaison at Save the Sound Watershed. In addition to using Zoom for meetings, Save the Sound adapted as an organization in other creative ways, Ms. Hicks said. For example, they had meetings outdoors in parks and held brainstorming sessions at a zoo.

People complain about the restriction of the pandemic and about how it forced people to operate in new ways. But as we return to a more "normal" life, many say some things that we did differently, we should keep doing.

Mayor Elicker will continue to use Zoom, which he said "is a good tool." Because he has so many meetings, including some in other communities, he can save time by meeting over Zoom instead of driving.

At first, it was hard for students to adjust to technology and new ways of doing schoolwork. Because of this, a lot of students saw their grades drop at the beginning of the pandemic. But we have learned how to better use technology and have adapted.

Covid has affected so much of our lives, including what it feels like to go to school. It has been harder to socialize with friends. And we have all felt more worried.

Jessica Hoffmann, Director of Adolescent Initiatives at the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, said people began to pay better attention to mental health during the pandemic.

People realized that the social parts of school — like conversations with friends — are just as important as classroom education. We have also learned that it's OK to slow down and take pauses, Ms. Hoffmann said.

"I don't think we can go back 100 percent to the way it was," she said. "We've learned a lot."

SCHOOL NEWS

Students are back, but lots of catch-up now

BY HAELLY PATEL, DARIEL CARBONELL, MADISON POOLE
EAST ROCK RECORD STAFF
EDITED BY DEREEN SHIRNEKHI

Students are back in class again, at their desks with teachers in front of classrooms. But school is not the same as it was before. For one thing, learning has been lost.

“Academically, we have a lot of students behind,” said Sabrina Breland, principal of East Rock Community & Cultural Magnet School. “The achievement gap we’ve been trying to close for years has widened.”

According to the East Rock Record Fall 2021 Survey, nearly two-thirds of students said they feel behind in school, and early all of them are worried about it. Almost 90 percent of students said that teachers were trying to help them catch up.

As students returned in January, they were still aware of the current academic gap. Third grader Haven Pickett said that while a handful of his peers are frustrated and disrupting class, “other students are still trying to learn by reading more and paying attention.”

Teachers and New Haven Public School leaders said students fell behind academically during remote schooling because of technology problems and because for many, learning online is harder than in person. In some cases, students kept their microphones on by accident which interrupted teaching. Some also turned off their cameras and sometimes did not pay attention.

Ms. Breland said that students “because of connectivity issues, because of device issues, struggled.” Some had no way to log on and communicate with teachers and classmates. That made it hard for teachers to explain content to those students.

Ivelise Velazquez, assistant superintendent for curriculum, instruction and assessment for New Haven Public Schools, said that even when technology did work, there were problems.

“Both the students and the teachers weren’t as familiar with Zoom and Google Meets,” she said. “Just navigating was a big challenge.” Ms. Velazquez also said that it was hard for teachers to get students to talk and ask questions, which is an important part of learning.

For some students, it was easier to learn online. Some now are struggling with in-person school. “I’m not used to [in-person school] that much because in 5th grade, half the classes were online, which was a little easier,” said Elias Plascencia, a sixth grader at East Rock School. However, some students say they are catching up. Nora Matz, in 7th grade, is “doing okay,” but noticed that, “in the very beginning of the school year, my grades weren’t that good. But after being back in school for eight weeks now, my grades are getting a lot better.”

Some students said teachers are using strategies that are helping them get back on track. One thing teachers are doing is putting students into smaller groups to give them specific help. “Typically, in lessons you have 20 students in a classroom, everyone’s learning together,” said Ms. Velazquez. She said they are trying to form groups of just five students, based on academic need, to provide more targeted lessons. Each group focuses on a specific subject area, such as reading level. Students then move based on their progress.

It’s an approach that is new to many teachers, said Ms. Velazquez. “A lot



Kristen Hebert, who teaches third grade at East Rock, works with a student. Photo: Sabrina Breland

of teachers had to learn to do that, because they were used to working with that whole group model.”

Teachers are also working with parents to help students at home, she said. “During the pandemic, we invested in a lot of online platforms. We still have those in place, and were fully expecting that parents, as homework/additional practice, will use those online resources.”

Ms. Velazquez said that students can now access any book in the curriculum electronically. “So you can re-read something or spend more time on something,” she said. Teachers are also communicating with parents via messaging platforms, like Class Dojo. Students can get help from tutors and a Homework Hotline.

Keisha D. Redd-Hannans, assistant superintendent for instructional leadership for New Haven Public Schools, said that everyone has to remember that Covid and remote learning have been hard on everyone.

“Students really have shown their resiliency during this pandemic by showing up, doing their work, and being present in a remote learning setting as well as a brick-and-mortar setting,” she said. “We still have a lot of work to do, but we’re proud of our students.”

Ms. Redd-Hannans is also proud of how teachers have adapted teaching methods to help students with learning gaps. But there is still work to do. “We’re focused on helping students get where they need to be,” she said.

At East Rock School, Ms. Kristen Hebert, who teaches third grade, has been doing more teaching in small groups and using morning work and homework to help students catch up. Even though some are struggling, Ms. Hebert said students have not lost everything they knew.

“I don’t think they have forgotten it,” she said. “I just think they forgot where they put it in their brains.” Ms. Hebert also emphasized the importance of repetition in her teaching method, as students often need extra time with a subject before they can continue onto the next. “It’s about a lot of reviewing, a lot of revisiting things,” she said.

To catch up, some students like Mr. Pickett, in 3rd grade, said that they are trying to keep peers from disrupting class so that they can continue to learn. “I am trying to listen and calm everybody down,” he said. “I try to be like their friend and say, ‘Dude, you should stop.’” Mr. Pickett said teachers are “giving us harder work” and trying to help them learn.



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COMMUNITY NEWS

CITY WELCOMES RECORD NUMBERS OF AFGHANS

BY KEYLIN MONTOYA AND CHARLIE PELLEGRINO
EAST ROCK RECORD STAFF
EDITED BY RACHEL CALCOTT

Last August as the whole world watched, thousands of people from Afghanistan tried to leave their country. Children and parents were afraid to walk in the streets when the Taliban took over the capital of Kabul.

Now, many months later, New Haven is welcoming a record number of Afghan refugees who fled. The process of resettling people has just begun.

As a sanctuary city, New Haven has a history of welcoming immigrants and refugees. The Integrated Refugee & Immigrant Services (IRIS), which began as the Interfaith Refugee Ministry in 1982, has been helping immigrants settle in New Haven for 40 years.

But Chris George, the executive director of Iris, said the influx of refugees has been the largest the organization has resettled, “by far.”

He said the U.S. Department of State asked them to welcome 400 Afghans in October, November and December alone. “This is much more than we normally welcome in one year,” he said. As a result, Mr. George said, Iris has increased from 50 to 80 employees.

Iris has also needed more donations, volunteers and local support. Mr. George said the community response has been “amazing.”

Students at East Rock School are eager to have Afghan classmates. According to the East Rock Record Fall 2021 Survey, only about one-quarter of students at East Rock Cultural & Community Magnet School reported knowing someone from Afghanistan. But 71 percent said they look forward to having classmates from there.

“I think it would help with diversity and bring awareness,” said fifth grader Charlotte Martinez. “I would like to hear about their culture and stuff. I have never been out of the country and it would be great to hear about another country.”

Ann O’Brien, director of community engagement at IRIS, said that the refugees left Afghanistan quickly and arrived with little.

“When they come to us, they just have like one bag of clothes because they had to leave their homes really fast, like in a day,” she said. “So when they get here, we provide them with all of the food that they need. We find them a house. We bring them to a place to get clothes.”

IRIS also helps the adults find a job to begin. When they come to us, they just have like one bag of clothes because they had to leave their homes really fast, like in a day,” she said. For children, coming to a new place and in many cases not knowing the language also makes it difficult, said Ms. O’Brien.

Students who arrive also register for school. But language differences can make this a struggle. “We give tests to see if they speak English,” said Daniel Diaz. Students are then often placed in bilingual education classes, depending on their level of English. In many cases, students have to start fresh learning a completely new language.

Ms. O’Brien said that is one of the biggest challenges. “The majority of these children who were evacuated do not have any English,” she said. “They were not learning English.” A few words: “Hello” is “salaam”; “good-bye” is “khoda-afiz”; “please” is “meera bani”; “thank you” is “manana”; “help” is “marasta”; “I am sorry” is “bakhana ghwaram.”

Despite the challenges, Ms. O’Brien said they try to be upbeat. “The more fun we make it for them, and the more friendly we are in a kind of a low-key way, the easier it will be for them,” she said.

Some Afghan students’ fathers do know some English, said Ms. O’Brien. “They might have worked for the U.S. government,” she said. “But the majority of the mothers and the kids won’t know any English. And so, they’ll need everybody in New Haven and all the other towns to just be really patient with them. It’s going to be exhausting for them.”

There are many emotions that also affect how new arrivals feel, she said. Americans may have bombed their homes or hometowns. She said some may want to be friends. Others may be shy; still others will want to play.

One of the biggest challenges is housing. “For each family, we have to go out and find one apartment and all these families are different sizes,”



Ms. O’Brien told East Rock Record reporters during a Zoom interview.

“Sometimes it’s just a mom and a dad and one little kid. Sometimes it’s a mom and five little kids.” She said they estimate needing about 250 apartments. IRIS has also already found houses for some families.

In an email appeal sent in November, Arzoo Rohbar, an IRIS case manager who was once a refugee, recalled that “The first thing I remember is waking up in the morning and how comfy my bed was. The house was set up for us. It was small but really beautiful. It just felt like home.”

Many people are trying to help. Jim Ancil, who started working with IRIS as a mover in 2017, when former President Donald Trump banned travel from several muslim countries. “For years I helped on a volunteer basis. I helped refugee families move from one house to another,” Mr. Ancil said. “But the fall of Kabul created a wave of people and numbers that IRIS has

never had to deal with before. Now they pay me as a subcontractor, and we’ve been able to do quite a bit more than we have in the past.”

“It’s the largest number of people that IRIS has had to deal with in this short a time,” he said. “But IRIS right now has more funding, more volunteers, more donations than they’ve had in many years. It’s a different organization right now than it was a year ago.”

The speed of the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan affected people in New Haven, said Mr. Diaz, the public school liaison. He got calls from upset families who were caught overseas. “They had gone there in the summertime and they got stuck in Afghanistan,” he said. Ms. O’Brien said in October that IRIS was trying to help at least three families return to New Haven. At the time, she said about 200 organizations like IRIS in different cities across the U.S. were facing the same struggle.

“We know there are other Afghan families in all 200 of those cities that also went back to Afghanistan at the beginning of the summer,” Ms. O’Brien said then.

Kirsten Hebert, who teaches third grade at East Rock School, previously taught at Barnard Environmental Studies Interdistrict Magnet School. Barnard has welcomed the largest number of students from Afghanistan of any New Haven Public School, said Justin Harmon, spokesperson for the district. Even before the recent arrivals, Ms. Hebert said Barnard had already had students from Afghanistan, which gave her a chance to learn about the culture.

“I’ve learned about different holidays and different food traditions,” she said. Having more students from Afghanistan in the classroom is good because, said Ms. Hebert, “the amount of learning that goes on benefits both sets of kids, the kids that are arriving and the kids that are in the classroom. A lot of learning goes on there and I think it’s wonderful and I hope we do get together.”

If more students do arrive from Afghanistan, how should people prepare? Ms. Hebert said that she would welcome them, “the same way that I do any new kid who comes into my classroom: have their desks all ready and all set up, read a special story about new kids coming to the class, make sure that my class understands that someone new is coming.”

“When they come to us, they just have like one bag of clothes because they had to leave their homes really fast, like in a day.”

—Ann O’Brien, IRIS

HEALTH & WELLBEING

TikTok “Challenges” Reflected Student Struggles

BY HAVEN PICKETT, NORAH MATZ, ZHYAIRE CRUZ, AND ELIAS PLASCENCIA
EAST ROCK RECORD STAFF
EDITED BY JACK MCCORDICK

When TikTok, a popular social media app that lets users post short videos, began to rapidly spread among students on social media, people thought it was harmless, and even fun.

But this year in schools across the country, and at East Rock Community & Cultural Magnet School, students have acted out and damaged school property all because of “challenges” on TikTok.

“The pressure of social media and peer groups are causing a lot more students than we would like to film things and post them that are actually doing a lot of harm to people in our community,” said Sabrina Breland, principal at East Rock School.

Last fall, she said, students were “really, really taken in by TikTok and they’re doing things they wouldn’t normally do.” That includes using phones to capture things during the school day, which is not allowed.

Concern about TikTok led Ilene Tracey, superintendent of the New Haven Public Schools, to send a letter to parents last fall warning of “a

Tik-Tok challenge to which our students are exposed.” These challenges involved students filming each other doing things including destroying school property or slapping teachers and posting the videos on the TikTok app. Dr. Tracey said it had caused “mayhem” in other school districts. “Students have vandalized bathroom equipment including toilets, bathroom sinks, soap dispensers, etc.,” she wrote.

Social media has a big impact on students. According to The East Rock Record Fall 2021 Survey, 55 percent said that TikTok challenges are a problem. Only 15 percent of students said they had personally done things just so they could share it on social media. But the survey also found that 58 percent believed their peers are too concerned by popularity on social media.

Billy Brady, a computational social psychologist at Yale who studies the impacts of social media, said that “10-18 year-olds use social media on a daily basis much more than people in their 30s, 40s, 50s” and that TikTok is a very popular platform for young people.

According to Dr. Brady, “one of the fundamental principles of social psychology — the study of how

other people and social contexts impact our behavior — is social conformity: we have a tendency in humans to conform to behaviors, thoughts, attitudes that we perceive to be common in our social groups.” He said social media has “a tendency to amplify these conformity effects. We see things that other people are doing, and some age groups are very sensitive to what seems to be a popular, cool, trendy thing to be doing.”

During Covid, Dr. Brady said this increased because people spent more time on social media. For kids, it is hard to avoid. “Kids from ages 10-18 are usually the age group that is mostly on social media,” he said.

Why did these challenges become such an issue this year? School leaders said that as students returned to in-person learning, many struggled with how to act.

“Teachers are finding that there are more behavioral problems and challenges having to do with the students’ state of mind, the students being stressed out about being in school and bringing problems that start on social media into the school setting,” said Justin Harmon, director of marketing and communications for New Haven Public Schools.

Emotional Wellness

WELLNESS FROM PAGE 1

stress with students in our schools and a lot more challenges with mental health and a lot of real struggles,” he said.

According to Mayor Elicker, there are two main reasons why students have been more stressed. “One of the reasons is because for a year we were all out of school and not interacting with people socially as much,” he said.

The second, Mr. Elicker said, was that many students and staff members know at least one person who didn’t just get sick, but also died due to Covid. He also recognized that because of Covid, schools have added new rules to help keep people safe, but they may have also made people more stressed.

As the pandemic ends, he said, “it’s important for us to invest even more in the things that we know help people reduce stress and feel happier and healthier.”

And, in fact, just the fact that the pandemic seems to be easing (even though there will be rises

in cases at some times and in some places) means many people are feeling happier. The East Rock Record survey found that 68 percent of students said their “mood and outlook” has been improving as Covid ends.

Even though students say they are feeling better, both the city and school leaders say we need to focus more on youth mental health. “It’s important for us to invest even more in the things that we know help people reduce stress and feel happier and healthier,” Mayor Elicker said. Those things include investing in summer programs for kids and in the city’s parks and other recreational spaces.

At East Rock School Principal Sabrina Breland has thought a lot about student wellbeing. Often, she said, students are dealing with difficult feelings. Breland said that the school has been trying different ways to support students during this challenging time, but that finding solutions that work has been a challenge.

The positive in all this, said Mr. Elicker, is that

students today are more willing than adults to talk about mental health and feelings. When he was growing up, he said, “people were ashamed and shy to talk about personal challenges about mental health.”

Jessica Hoffman, a research scientist at the Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence, where she currently serves as the Director of Adolescent Initiatives, knows a lot about what approaches work best to support students. In her job, Hoffman says she encourages schools to promote “social emotional learning.”

RULER, which is an “acronym for five skills of emotional intelligence: recognizing emotions accurately, understanding where they come from, labeling your emotions...expressing your emotions and regulating your feelings in helpful ways.”

Covid-19 has helped people realize the need to focus on mental health and wellbeing. But there is still a long way to go.

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HEALTH & WELLBEING

Bathrooms Became a Trouble Spot This Year

BY ALANIS MONTOYA, JADE KINLOCK,
AARAV LEMAR
EAST ROCK RECORD STAFF
EDITED BY MAO SHIOTSU

The bathrooms at East Rock Community & Cultural Magnet School used to be places to go when you had to go, and also for some peace and quiet.

But then they became messy — and sometimes even dangerous!

“We’ve had to deal with a lot of fights this year,” said Sabrina Breland, principal of East Rock School. “Lately, I’m kind of embarrassed to admit, but we have had a lot of students getting their hands on each other in the bathrooms.”

According to The East Rock Record Fall 2021 Survey, 30 percent of students said they have seen a fight in the bathroom. One of our team reporters, Alanis Montoya, third grade, saw students putting hands on each other, and also saw students crying. One student even hit her by accident. That made her feel very scared.

This is not just a problem at East Rock School. Across the country and around the New Haven Public School district, there are many reports of students acting out, often in the bathrooms.

During an interview with East Rock Record reporters in November, Justin Harmon, spokesperson for the New Haven Public Schools, said that “there was a fire in the boy’s bathroom” at one of the New Haven Schools. “I think bathrooms are, unfortunately... a place where [students] can be temporarily out of sight.”

In February, Mr. Harmon shared that fighting in school bathrooms “remains a problem.”

Ms. Breland said that while school leaders have dealt with a lot of fighting, often in the bathrooms, they have tried not to send students to out-of-school suspension. Part of the problem is that the pandemic has been very hard emotionally on students. Some students said it has been hard because many friends are out sick, which can make people feel sad and lonely.

When bathrooms become places for fights, it is harder for students to use

them when they need to, and also when they just want a break from class. Having a space of peace and quiet can give students a way to reset during the school day.

According to the East Rock Record survey, 45 percent of students said they leave class for the bathroom even if they do not have to go.

Mr. Harmon understands that. “I was a student myself once and I remember times when I needed to duck out and get some quiet time,” he said.

Ms. Breland said the bathroom break can be helpful for students. “If you need to step out of the classroom, let the teacher know instead of just leaving the classroom. But, yes, that is a nice strategy.”



An East Rock Bathroom. Photo: Sabrina Breland

Students also go to the bathroom to use their phones, which they are not allowed to use in class. A student said they even saw another student using a computer in the bathroom. Ms. Montoya has also noticed that “some people go to the bathroom to play around with other people.” She doesn’t not like it and said they often make a mess. “They are just making the janitor clean again and again,” she said. Ms. Montoya is also troubled by behavior that includes students standing on the toilet seats, which they are supposed to do during lockdown drills. “Even if there isn’t a lockdown, they go on the toilets for no reason,” she said. It would be best if students would use the bathroom and then come right out, she said.

One other big problem with the bathrooms is that students make big messes and use too much water and paper. This is bad for our climate and our planet. The East Rock Record survey also found that only 54 percent of students tried to use less water and toilet paper in the bathroom. Kristen Hebert, who teaches third grade at East Rock School, suggested reminding students about water and paper use. “Having signs in the bathroom would be helpful,” she said.

Are you ready for summer? For, finally, some fun?

SUMMER FROM PAGE 1

For many, that means going to camp. According to the East Rock Record survey, one in three plan to attend camp.

Local organizations including Gather New Haven, the Eli Whitney Museum and Workshop and Yale University have camp options for students.

The City of New Haven does, too. The Youth and Recreation Department coordinates 19 camps for more than 1000 students ages 5-14 each summer, said William Dixon, Deputy Director of the Youth and Recreation Department. City offerings include day camps, theater camps, and ‘tot’ camps, among others.

“We’re proud of everything we always do every summer,” said Mr. Dixon. He said the city spends over \$2 million each year on summer programs. Federal and state funds help the city pay for them. “We are a big city and we do more than all of the other cities in Connecticut,” he said. “Basically, we’re the largest recreation department in the state.”

Camps are important because give students a change to socialize and they provide childcare for parents, said Mr. Dixon. They also provide jobs for New Haven teens. For the past two years, camps were reduced. But finally, he said, this summer they will be back to normal. Pools will also be open so youth can learn to swim, he said. And on Friday nights, the department will show a movie at a different city park. A mobile arts and crafts truck will visit festivals and city-run camps.

Mr. Dixon said the city is also adding two new “splash pads” this summer to more than a dozen the city operates. Splash Pads are water recreation sites set up at city parks that can be activated by buttons and sensors. The new sites will be located at Criscuolo Park on Chapel Street and Goffe Street Park.

Tusker Pickett, a fifth grader at East Rock School, said that last summer he played at a splash pad near Rice Field. He said it had a bucket that slowly fills and then empties overhead. There are water cannons. “There’s usually a lot of kids hanging around. You can make friends there. Sometimes you can play tag,” he said.

Jessica Hoffmann, a research scientist at the Yale Child Study Center

said students should be trying to enjoy themselves and recuperate after the school year.

“It’s good to relax,” she said. “And that it is better if we do it outside. Best if we don’t think about what we are returning to.”

According to Dr. Hoffmann, research shows that the mental health of students benefits from every minute of time spent outdoors; it is also important to have long days to be creative. Students “recuperate” best when they have a balance of camps or summer school that requires a “mental workout” with unstructured time to be bored and imagine, she said.

Lucy Gellman, editor of the New Haven Arts Paper, agrees that the summer gives students a chance to do activities that take time, like exploring art. She urged students to use this summer to pursue art.

“Find any kind of art that speaks to you,” said Ms. Gellman. “Follow your joy and start there.” She said students have a lot to offer. “Young people are so much more perceptive than adults give [them] credit for,” she said.



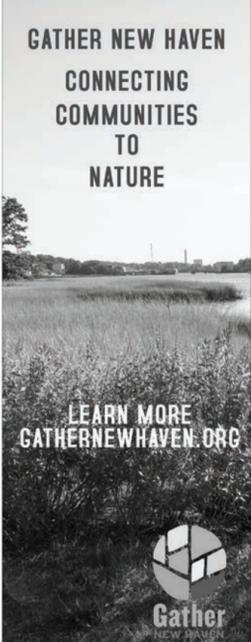
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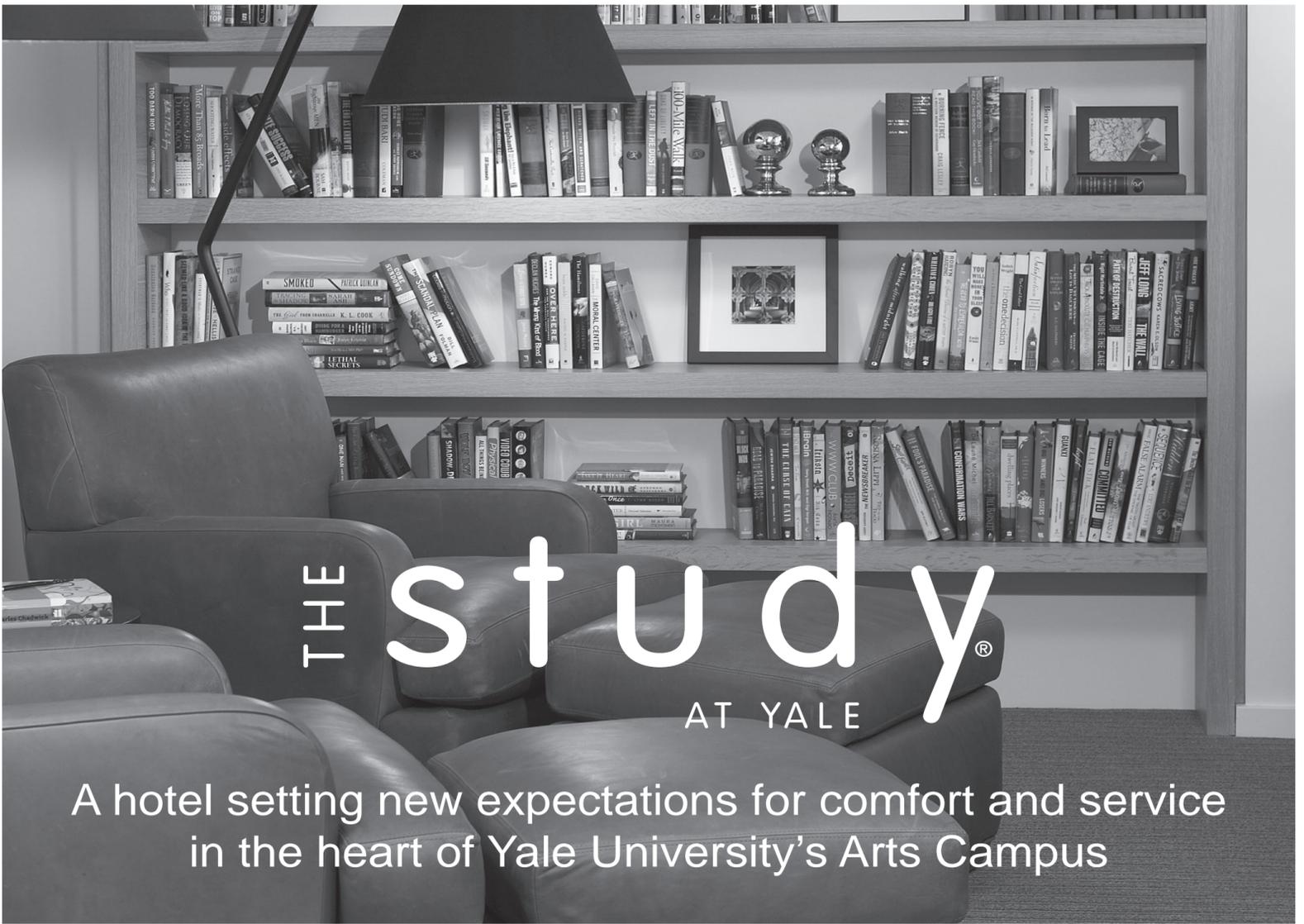
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OPINION: THE OUTDOORS

No to Screens, Yes to Nature!

By Charlie Pellegrino

I don't know why people are so attached to game systems. Now there have been studies showing that people are healthier when they get outside. When people are on game systems or stuck inside, watching TV is not good for their brain. I have experience with this. I know people that are attached to game systems and that don't ever get outside to play, ride their bikes, or whatever they like to do because they're just attached to those screens. You might ask your parents for game systems or tablets that you see on TV, but the real skills of life are not working game controls or whatever you like to do on your systems. It's about knowing how to do stuff. For example, learning how to ride a bike, or hammering a nail, or sitting outside and learning how to relax with the wilderness around you. It's so important to get outside and do the thing you love and never let anything stop you from doing that — especially not game systems. Some people just take this advice and say I'll just throw it away. You might say, this kid doesn't know what he's doing. But during homeschool, I learned that being on a screen isn't what people think it is. I know that it might seem fun in the moment, but in the long term you don't need those things. You do need schooling and modern life skills.



ABOVE: East Rock Park photo by Charlie Pellegrino
BELOW: Flowers, photos by Haelly Patel



You don't need game systems. I know the population of people that truly enjoy nature is getting smaller, but there will always be people who appreciate nature and what it does, and someone can become that person in a split-second. All you gotta do is go outside and walk around in the nearest wood.

Everybody is Outside

By Aarav Lemar

Covid made us go outside more. Now people are going on more hikes and playing outside with friends. More people have been hopping on a bike and going for a spin. Now people usually go outside daily. When you go outside now, you're not the only one. My sister wants to go for a hike every day. Once we went hiking to a waterfall and we saw a lot of people. And when I look out my window, I see a ton of people outside going for a walk, playing catch, taking a jog, and playing games.

Covid Stressed Nature

By Haelly Patel

Covid-19 has affected a lot of things. For example, Nature. I have noticed that plants have been suffering. They seem to be blooming more later in the Spring. It has also affected natural resources. For example, conservation.org states that "people who have lost their jobs and live in cities are returning to their rural homes, increasing pressure on natural resources that are further from the cities." So Covid-19 has affected nature in a lot of ways. From that, we have learned to appreciate everything and what we have because we might not always have them.

It's All Happening Out of Doors

OUTDOORS FROM PAGE 1

Now Covid is lifting, but people still want to be outdoors for learning, fun — and dining. During the lockdown, dining outdoors got popular. Many want to keep eating outside, including restaurants. When businesses were forced to close down indoor service, "outdoor dining was very important for them," said Keyri Ambrocio, the Public Policy & Strategic Communications Specialist for the Greater New Haven Chamber of Commerce.

Ms. Ambrocio is among those advocating at the state level to extend outdoor dining which allows restaurants to take over street areas and parking spaces. "People are kind of just used to outdoor dining as an option now. What we're doing is just kind of trying to make sure that our businesses are being heard," she said.

At East Rock Community & Cultural Magnet School, people are also now wondering if more learning could happen outdoors. Throughout the year, East Rock School Principal Sabrina Breland, has urged teachers to give students many mask breaks out doors during the day. Students are still required to wear masks at school.

Giving students time outdoors, has "so many benefits," said Ms. Breland. "Students are able to get out there and form relationships, socialize with one another, problem solve together, play together, take turns. And vitamin D is something that we all need."

Mr. Peterkin said that just spending time outdoors in nature helps with wellbeing. "Just getting people outdoors to spend time soaking in some sun, breathing some fresh air and just taking their minds off of things can be very, very helpful," he said. "It gives you a sense of peace."

In some ways, Gather New Haven seemed made for the pandemic. It was created on January 1st, 2020, when the New Haven Land Trust merged with New Haven Farms, forming Gather New Haven. As the pandemic set in, Mr. Peterkin saw demand for the group's outdoor spaces increase dramatically.

"It was overwhelming," he told East Rock Record reporters. "Because of the lockdown, people found their way to parks and preserves. So the foot traffic increased."

Likewise, Shauntasia Hicks, a watershed liaison at Save the Sound, an organization that works to protect the New Haven Sounds and other endangered rivers and ecosystems, noticed people "flocking to the outdoors." The pandemic, said Ms. Hicks, "reminded us what it's like to be outside."

The pandemic not only changed the way people go about their lives but what they care about. During COVID, Mr. Peterkin said that more people joined community gardens. "People wanted to start growing their own food. COVID made people more aware of why it's important to eat healthy," he said.

New Haven Farms, now part of Gather New Haven, encourages residents to focus on what they eat and where their food comes from. Mr. Peterkin said it can help people with issues related to diet like heart disease, hypertension, and diabetes.

Mr. Peterkin's passion for the environment started when he was a child. "I'm originally from New York city. I grew up in the Bronx," he said. "Most of the city is concrete, steel and glass." When he was 14, he had an opportunity to work in a forest as a summer job.

"Spending time in nature for me was very helpful," he said. He hopes that same excitement will catch on with students in New Haven. "I want other young people to have opportunities to connect with nature that hopefully will provide them with memories and inspirations that will last a lifetime," he said.

Mr. Peterkin has a vision to expand Gather New Haven, not only to clean up nature preserves and open them to the public, but to better connect organizations in the city. Community gardens, he said, are one way to do that.

New Haven Mayor Justin Elicker, who previously led The New Haven Land Trust, likes seeing residents spend more time outdoors enjoying nature because it makes people healthier, physically and mentally.

"There's a lot of evidence that says, if you spend a lot of time outdoors and in nature, you're going to be happier," he said. Mr. Elicker said that parks are an important resource in the city. Community gardens can be a great tool to better connect schools with neighborhoods and the whole community. He likes how "people really take ownership" of the community gardens.

"One of the things that we want to do is start to work better with our non-profits that offer a lot of programming in our parks," he said. "There's a lot to learn from the outdoors."



LEFT: This month, the student council at East Rock School held an outdoor Easter egg hunt and did face painting for first graders. Photo: Sabrina Breland.

BELOW: Brent Peterkin, executive director of Gather New Haven speaks over Zoom with East Rock Record reporters.

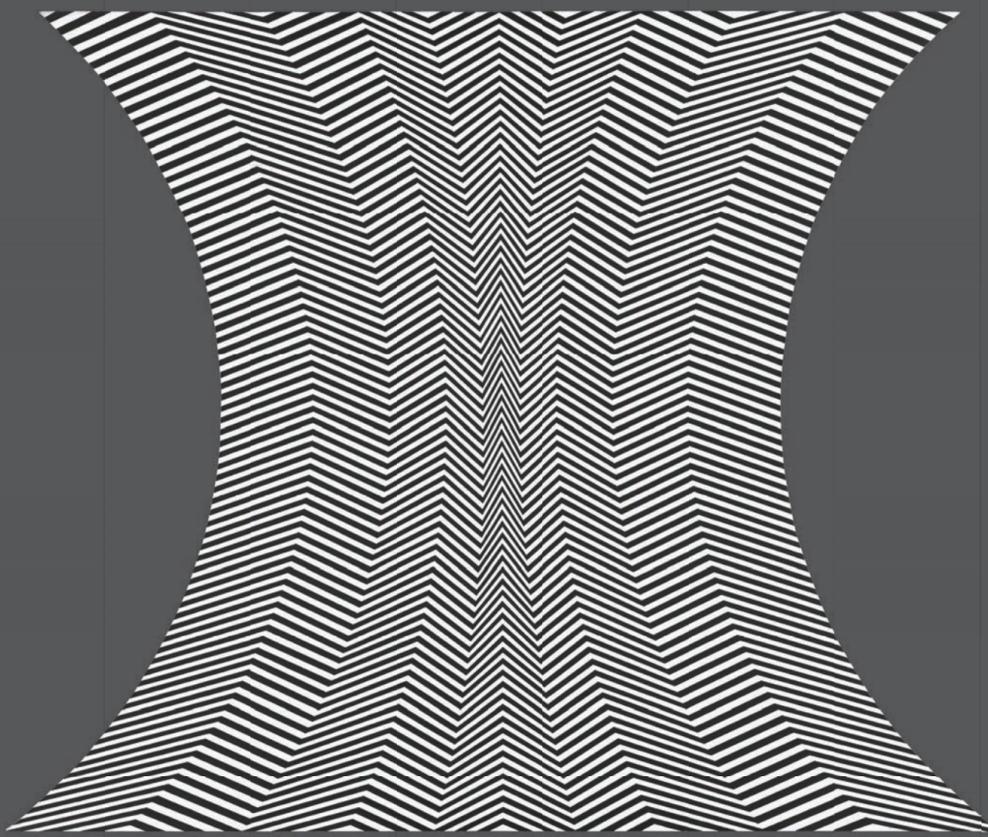


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ART & SCIENCE

CADE BROWN TALKS RUNNING, RESEARCH

Yale junior Cade Brown spoke with East Rock Record reporters about his track career and his Covid research on wastewater. Here's what reporters thought.

By Jade N. Kinlock

EAST ROCK RECORD STAFF

Today, I discovered that you can do something that makes you feel interesting. I liked our lesson. I learned that it is always okay to ask for help when you need it and to at least try. And science is awesome and fun!

By Aarav Lemar

EAST ROCK RECORD STAFF

Today I learned that you could test a lot of people for covid at once you can learn about a lot of different things. That you can discover that people have covid without testing them! And that science can help you with a lot of things!

By Tusker Pickett

EAST ROCK RECORD STAFF

Today I learned that you don't have to be an expert to work in a lab. I always thought that to work in a lab you have to be a genius with a PHD. But you can be a student who went to Yale to be on the track team, working in a lab and testing stuff in vials with cool machines.

By Nora Matz

EAST ROCK RECORD STAFF

My reflection of what Cade was talking about was interesting. His experiment, which was testing wastewater in areas to see calculations of around how many people had COVID-19 in the neighborhood or town, was useful. Cade had said that it was accurate most of

By Charlotte Anabelle Martinez

EAST ROCK RECORD STAFF

Today I discovered that having someone to teach you something can be valuable to how you work in a certain environment, Cade had one of his professors teaching him the basics of working in a lab. Just one person can change the way that you see labs and scientists. And the discovery of using dirty old water as a way to tell if COVID is spreading, is so fascinating, this research was made by a young college student. This is only the beginning of what young people can do if they really put their mind to it. All you need is a good attitude and a great teacher.



By Haelly Patel

EAST ROCK RECORD STAFF

I think that it was cool how Cade put his numbers on his wall and can run really fast, for example 6.2 miles in 30 minutes and 19 seconds. And I thought it was interesting how they are doing lab tests on the sewage water because it can give information on diseases, the virus, drugs and more, like Cade described.

By Zhyaire Cruz

EAST ROCK RECORD STAFF

It was very cool seeing how I get my Covid test back. Not only that, but I was surprised to see how many track races Cade ran and got a lot of numbers from. It is very fascinating. This is why I kinda want to be a scientist when I grow up. If that fails, I'll be a YouTuber.

By Haven Pickett

EAST ROCK RECORD STAFF

I'm interested in Cade being an athlete because I like skateboarding, mountain biking and soccer. I want to do those sports in college when I'm better at them, but right now I need a lot of practice. I'm inspired by Cade.

By Jomar Lamboy

EAST ROCK RECORD STAFF

I think Cade Brown is a very influential person when it comes to school advice and safety.

I feel that the points that he stated about his early love for running and about how fast and strong COVID-19 can travel in our everyday lives. Cade grew up in Washington state and studies at Yale. Since then, he has made amazing

discoveries about COVID-19 in some cities. One of the most interesting experiments was when he and five other partners entered a lab and tested city wastewater and within a couple of days he was able to identify if a lot of people in the city had the virus. Cade stated that he couldn't find out specifically where in the city people had COVID, but that it was enough for a city to prepare. He said that it was amazing how so much work could be done with just samples of dirty city water. Within a few days, Cade could have possibly saved lives with dirty water, and that wasn't his only major accomplishment.

By Nayala Conroe

EAST ROCK RECORD STAFF

Cade Brown is a junior at Yale. He grew up in Washington state but moved to Connecticut to run in cross country at Yale. He did some important research on COVID. He was in a lab with about five people doing the research. It was surprisingly fast; it only took a couple of days. They took some wastewater and did some tests to see how many people in a city had COVID. He said that it's not as specific as individual testing. But we are able to tell on a bigger scale what percentage of a population in a city might be positive. It's impossible to test everyone, but we can save a lot of costs this way and we can be ahead of the curve.

By Sahil Lemar

EAST ROCK RECORD STAFF

Cade Brown is a junior at Yale who is a very fast and athletic person. He has run many races and found his love for cross country and track in middle school. While Cade is a great runner, off the field is where he helps the world. Cade grew up in Washington state and was invited to Yale where he found a lab with a professor that he knew and he was interested in and worked there with a close friend. One of the things that he studied was about COVID being present in wastewater. Although it seems very complex, it actually only took them a couple of days to do some tests and figure out whether many people were infected in a specific city. When one of our reporters asked him where in the city these cases were, Brown said that it was not as specific as individual testing.

Poem

By Tusker Pickett

A bare city done
Empty from giant hallows
It just knelt low
More new openings
Pigeons quails ride super tall
Under veiled wild



Photo by Haelly Patel

NEW HAVEN HEALTH DEPARTMENT
CLINIC HOURS

Monday to Wednesday:
9:00am-5:30pm
Thursday and Friday:
9:00am-7:00pm

**COVID VACCINES, BOOSTERS,
PEDIATRIC DOSES, FLU SHOTS!**
No out of pocket cost, no appointment needed!

Bring insurance & photo ID (if available)
Ages 5-17 need parent/guardian on site to sign consent form. Schedule subject to change.

For information on vaccines & clinics, visit covid19.newhavenct.gov, scan QR CODE or call 203-946-6999

EDITORIAL & OPINION

Letter from Principal Breland



Hello East Rock Record Readers,

The last East Rock Record issue of the school year has me reflecting on a year of successes and challenges. So many things have rattled our community. Mitigation strategies have interrupted the intimacy that we had previously enjoyed. Many annual school events were postponed or canceled. Collaborative activities, gatherings on the carpet and group projects were discouraged and playdates were at an all-time low. But we are a resilient community of fighters and we have persevered!!

I encourage everyone to stay the course and continue to focus on all that is good and strong in the community. We have been in the building the entire year. Our students are learning and using their minds to do incredible things. They are spending time with their classmates. "In-house" after school programming is available for students. A dynamic new math coach has been hired after going more than half the year without one. The staff is working hard and creating meaningful and purposeful experiences for all students. We will not be defeated.

I would like to remind all families to keep the lines of communication open. Contact your students' teachers. Talk to your students about their day and don't miss an opportunity to read with your students. Carve out family time each week because life is so precious. And above all else, guard your heart and love, love, love! Please let love be in everything you do and always expect best intentions. Whatever happens around you, don't ever allow it to harden your heart!

Maya Angelou wrote, "You may not control all the events that happen to you, but you can decide not to be reduced by them." So, stay strong East Rock. We are a community of survivors. Things may never get back to normal, but like Maya Angelou also stated, "If you're always trying to be NORMAL, you will never know how amazing you can be! Onward!!!!"

Respectfully,

Sabrina Breland, *Principal*

The East Rock Record

East Rock Community & Cultural Studies
Magnet School
133 Nash Street, New Haven, CT 06511

TikTok Problems Stopped By Consequences

East Rock Community & Cultural Magnet School, like other schools around the country, had a TikTok problem last Fall. Students were acting out and vandalizing bathrooms. Now, the problem has stopped due to the in-school discipline. If you do a TikTok challenge and the Principal or somebody tells you have in-school discipline, you have to write why you did that TikTok and why you shouldn't do that anymore. Also, if you do a TikTok challenge you could get into a big problem and get called home. While you are on TikTok, if someone says, "Break a pipe at school," don't do it because then that person will not be the person in trouble. You will be the person in trouble. That's why I think that the in-school suspension has stopped the TikTok problem. —Dariel Carbonell Perez

Following School Rules Helps Everyone

I saw someone at school start a fight and they got sent to the principal's office. I personally think that following the rules is important for things to run smoothly at school. It will be less work for teachers because if you get into less trouble or no trouble at all, they won't have to talk to you or send you to the principal's office over and over. Some rules that are common that students don't follow are saying bad words, using the bathroom too many times, not paying attention, going out of the classroom without the teacher's permission and not being respectful. Students will learn more and get a better education if they follow the rules. — By Haelly Patel

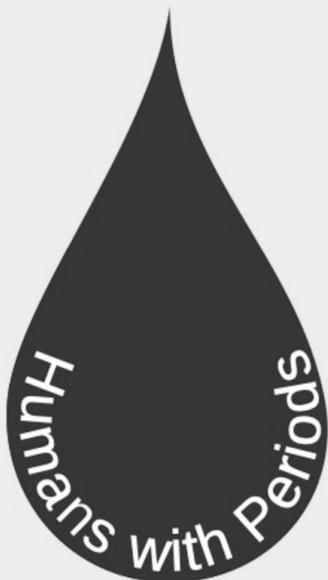
Five Pros of Zoom School

Two years ago everybody was Zoom schooling and now we are all looking back on it. Some of us think virtual school was fun. I do. But some of us don't. Maybe you didn't like it. Here is one reason people didn't like it: You can't see your friends. I think it was fun, here's 5 reasons why: 1. You can sleep in. 2. You don't have to get dressed. 3. You can stay in bed. 4. You can secretly game. 5. You can get a snack whenever. Those are the 5 pros of Zoom School. —By Haven Pickett

BATHROOM FIX: One at a Time

Each bathroom has four or five stalls. When a person goes to the bathroom, all they see are fights in the bathroom. If the teacher sees the fights, they are going to tell the principal. They should allow only one person in the bathroom. —By Alanis Montoya

The Diaper Bank Of Connecticut
Invites you to share your story



Let's Talk About It. Period.

**Take Action.
Donate. Advocate.**

TheDiaperBank.org/Period

Thank you!

The *East Rock Record* would like to thank the following for their help and support:

EAST ROCK SCHOOL
Sabrina Breland

**YALE UNIVERSITY OFFICE
OF NEW HAVEN AFFAIRS**
Maria Parente
Claudia Merson

COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER
Laura Pappano

YALE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS 2021–2022

Emiliano Tahui Gomez
Ako Ndefo-Haven
Dereen Shirnekhi
Mao Shiotsu
Jack McCordick
Rachel Calcott
Caityln Clark
Jacob Israel
Nimran Shergill

SPECIAL THANKS

Angie Hurlbut, AH Design

Thanks to all those who made themselves available for interviews and press conferences. We also thank our major funding sponsor, the Yale Office of New Haven Affairs and our partners and supporters including The Yale Center for British Art, Bubble and Squeak, The Shops At Yale, The Study, Yale-New Haven Health, The Diaper Bank.

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OPINION

More Mask Breaks Needed

Due to the fact that we wear masks all day, non-stop, I believe that we deserve more mask breaks as well as more time to socialize and breathe in fresh air. We need a time of calm and relaxation and a time to recharge. It would be nice if we could spend some time outside seeing friends and taking in the fresh air — Keylin Montoya

Covid is Still With Us

When Covid has first started, a lot of people and places had shut down. Many people thought Covid would be gone by now, but it isn't gone. There are a lot of things that could keep you safe from Covid. The Covid vaccine is sometimes trustable. Sometimes, when you first get it you will feel fine, but then the side effects kick in. When you get the shot on your arm, it might be redness or swelling. The rest of your body might be tired or having headaches, muscle pain and more. But in the end, the Covid vaccine makes sense to get for your own safety. I think masks should be taken away. There are kids like me that have cochlear implants. The masks make it more difficult to hear because it is mumbling. — By Jade Kinlock

Covid is Scary

Covid has affected people and my family. It is scary when your mom or dad gets Covid. I had Covid before and it was scary. When my dad had Covid, he needed to go to the hospital. A lot of fairs were shut down because of Covid. Just don't be scared by Covid. Stay at home and you can go get the vaccine. When you're done, you will feel better. I got my second vaccine shot. — Alanis Montoya

Teach CPR in Schools

Cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and automated external defibrillator (AED) practices are very important to good health and safety. Yet, many kids don't know how to do these. This is why I think CPR/AED education should be brought into schools. There aren't many places where you can learn these skills, other than online classes or, if you are in college, taking a health class. Not only is it an important life skill, but you can also save somebody's life with the skill of knowing CPR. In addition, there are many job benefits from knowing how to perform CPR. If somebody were to apply for a job as a babysitter in high school, they could bring up that they have skills with CPR. Knowing how to save somebody's life in case of cardiac emergencies can have great benefits, even if you don't ever have to use those skills in a real-life situation. As somebody who was learning CPR briefly, it really isn't as hard as it sounds — even though I did online classes. If you do practice CPR, you are required to re-take lessons every two years to make sure that you remember how to perform CPR safely. This would be useful to learn in schools because if lessons start in fourth grade, you would have two weeks to finish the course and then you would wait until sixth to retake it. In all, it would be a great idea for schools to start having kids work on CPR, in class and outside of it. — By Eleanor Matz

Take Time to Experiment with Art

More people should experiment with art and have fun with it. Art has been a very good thing during Covid — especially when everybody was stuck at home. My own style of art changed during the pandemic. At the beginning of and before COVID I was drawing cute animals mostly.

Then, I started making more realistic animals. I still draw different animals, but now I also make more art based on nature. Mostly trees. For my birthday, I got to go to an artist's studio, and made art with her. It was so cool! We used feathers, sticks, leaves, rocks, and more to paint. It started as abstract art but then it started looking like different things in nature. This creative style of painting is super fun. I have made more sketches and paintings of nature at home after going to the studio.

Whether it's painting or playing a musical instrument or dancing, experimenting with art can be really fun. Even if you don't have any experience with art, you should try it too! — by Nayala Conroe

Ride your Bike!

Think about how many times you have gotten in a car when you could have been riding a bike with the wind on your face. Riding a bike gets you to exercise and have a fun time. You could help stop climate change just by riding your bike because most cars emit carbon dioxide, a global warming gas. Every year, my brother and I ride our bikes in Rock to Rock, a community bike ride that is in honor of Earth Day. It is so much fun. My bike is turquoise and black and it has really cool shocks — By Haven Pickett

Detention Centers Are Cruel

There is a serious issue going on and I do not think that it is getting enough attention. Many immigrants have come to the U.S. for a "better place," but what awaits them is nothing of that sort.

I would first like to mention that this topic was taught in class from my Spanish teacher, Mrs. Colón. When she taught this, it seemed as if no one had heard of it. We read a book based on real lives, and also did research.

Many people will walk hundreds of miles from some Latin American countries to get to the U.S. But after walking all that distance, they come to a wall. Some people come as families, some come as siblings, and some come by themselves. Once you get to this 15-foot wall, the kids are thrown over. It does not matter if they are three years old or if they are 13.

Once they're in the U.S., they are sent to a detention center, which have cages filled with kids. There are eight-year-olds alone with their baby siblings, teenagers with their own kids. There is nothing to do. Toilets are out in the open. You have the same three meals that leave you hungry every day. You are forced to sleep with the lights on and are woken in the middle of the night every night. Some of these kids do not even have beds. Now imagine all this — but during COVID with no masks or vaccines. People get sick all the time but are not tended to. What I am trying to say is that this place is torture. The detention centers were built only to hold kids for a few hours until they found their homes. But some kids have been there since 2020! — By Sahil Lemar

Give Food To People In Need

Getting good food is very important. Some people can't get good food, and I think that is terrible. There are places like Walmart or Amazon that might deliver you food and say it's cheap, but when you go to other places, it's much cheaper—maybe even \$1. Organizations all over the world are helping people who need food. Some people take advantage of those, but other people don't like to rely on organizations.

Before I was homeschooled, we used to drive to Whitney Donut on Whitney Avenue and we would listen to Harry Potter while getting donuts. We passed this place where people gave out food in a stand. People would line up along the block to get a couple of apples and a box of mac and cheese. I think it's great that healthy food is getting passed out to those in need.

If you go to church, there are usually food boxes that you can put food in and the church gives it to homeless shelters. Some people are not able to go to homeless shelters because there are requirements. But passing out food to people is a great way to enjoy yourself and the people around you.

I know you're thinking, "Am I going to go to Walmart and buy 10 rows of crispy treats and hand them out to people?" But you would be making your city a better place. Some people would say, "I want the food." Well, if you really want this food, you can have it, but if you have extra then give that. I'm not telling you to give all your food to people on the side of the road, but if you see someone and you have something extra in your car, then give it.

My mom used to keep sandwiches and bars in the glove compartment of her car, and my dad did too, so that when they walk by homeless people, they always have food to give them. I thought that was great.

—By Charlie Pellegrino

Cats Better Than Dogs!



Cats are better because first they do not shed as much as dogs. You also don't have to take them out on walks all the time or take them outside to poop or pee because they can just go in their litter box. So, overall, it's just easier to have a cat. You can even have more than one cat and you still won't have to do that much. But for a dog it will be even harder, you will be even more tired and you will be hassled every day with the same thing.

You might think cats are mean because of all the funny videos of them biting and scratching things but trust me: cats will only bite and scratch things because they think you're either playing with them or you won't let them sleep and leave them alone. Cats are kind of alone creatures. But sometimes they want all the attention that you can give them. And you should because they are too cute for you not to give them attention.

— By Elias Placencia



Bolaji
COVID Patient

**“To everyone who saved my life
and my baby’s life too...
thank you – from both of us.”**

“I was 34 weeks pregnant when I found out I had COVID. While I was on the ventilator and sedated, I delivered Joseph by C-section, and I couldn’t see him for a month. But the doctors and nurses at Yale New Haven Health, they took care of us.”

At Yale New Haven Health, we’re grateful to all the healthcare workers out there who care for others. So that others can live.

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