

September 1, 1939: At 5:30 am, Hitler's army invaded Poland starting WWII.

September 15, 1776: British forces under General William Howe captured New York during the Revolutionary War.



September 24, 1936: Puppeteer and creator of the Muppets, Jim Henson was born.

September 30, 1955: Actor James Dean was killed in a car crash at the age of 24.



## D-Chat

By Dakota Calcaterra

Before I begin this interview, I want to first say that I've sourced a lot of these questions from kids in different grades, and in different classes, to get an idea of what you, the readers, would like to know. These articles are not merely page-fillers, but, at their best, work to keep the administration connected to the student body in a really personal way. Please enjoy.

**DC:** Most people, when I check to see what questions they want to have answered, ask me about masks in school. I try my best to redirect them to Board of Ed meetings, the state government, and the executive order issued about this. That being said, everything aside, how do you feel about the mask mandate?

**KD:** As I've said, if that's all we have to do, wear a mask and socially distance to get back into school, it's worth it. In fact, after thirty years in education, I know that there's nothing more important than getting students back, live, in-class with teachers. We learned first-hand last year that synchronous learning, which was used by over eight hundred of our sixteen hundred students, doesn't work perfectly. Kid's grades suffered, it didn't work out the way we hoped, but now that we're seeing kids come back, we see that they're doing pretty much normal activities.

**DC:** No doubt, and on that subject, a lot of people are now asking what dances, and activities like that, look like.

**KD:** Alright, so as you know, Homecoming is right around the corner, October 15th. Mr. Pienkowski was trying to draw up some plans, and the reality is that having a dance, in a gym, with hundreds of kids in a gymnasium or a tight space, might not be something that we would promote.

One of the big ideas that we're looking at, and working with the Fire Marshal on, is an old-school-style bonfire. These were probably not around in your time, probably more like your parents' times, and the last one I know of was in 1999 when I was the Student Council Advisor. We ran it near the tennis courts in the grassy area near the football field's entrance. You guys have probably never been a part of one of these before, only seen it in movies, but

we're working to try to get this going in lieu of the dance.

We're still trying to talk with the Student Council about this, see what the students' attitude would be, who knows, maybe we have an outdoor dance, maybe we do something entirely different. But, you're a senior, and you've seen all this fun stuff, the spot painting event that Brooke [McKown] organized and did a great job on, sixty kids participated in that, and then the outdoor mobile pep rally, we're trying to move to normal. Within the health and safety guidelines, we hope to bring the school back to a normal place.

**DC:** That makes sense, yeah. Now, another good way to segue, I received a lot of questions about the state of the tennis courts and the track, many feel that they've fallen into a state of disrepair. I run track, and I know that many on the team feel that the track is not on the level of some others when it comes to conditions. Is there a plan to revitalize or restore these playing surfaces?

**KD:** So, we've already cranked out many capital projects. One of the biggest, as you may have seen, is the Memorial gym. The Memorial gym cost \$400,000 to pull up the wood floor that had been there since the 1960s, it was clearly aging, and we decided to prioritize that project. The gym floor sees a lot of usages, be it wrestling or gym classes, basketball games, everything. That floor is used tremendously.

The tennis courts, I hate to say it, but they aren't on that level. Tennis is a low-impact, c-level sport. We can play it at Liberty if we have to, but it would cost \$300,000 to try to redo that tennis area, from the estimates we've had done. The top priority we had was spending that money on improvements to the gym.

Now, the track, as you'll see, has been spot repaired. It's not pretty, but it works. There were groundhog holes, other spots, and we had them filled. We had Corby, which is an inspection service, take a look at these areas. They deemed the tennis courts not playable, but the track was deemed runnable. So, do we intend on fixing the tennis courts? Yes, we do, but we're not ready to comment on a time frame for that, as we just don't have one right now.

**DC:** Going further into what our financial priorities are, I'm interested in where exactly our overall financial priorities lie. You hear rumors that all the money is going to chrome books, it's a well-known fact that we're losing money, as a district. Where are we prioritizing money?

**KD:** Well, as you know, S2, the financial cuts, are really hitting Ocean County hard, Jackson school district is on the hook for several million dollars. That'll continue for about three years, and that's why our class sizes are a little bit on the larger side right now. Mrs. Dauenhauer retired last year, and we weren't able to replace her, so now the students who would ordinarily be given to her have to be spread to the other twelve or thirteen English teachers.

So, we are still in the midst of budget cuts. However, we received some federal money during the pandemic, as a part of the Restart and Recover program, which has blunted some of those losses. That money is for use to help students, like with the after-school programs for kids who are quarantined, and from what I know, I'm not in the board office, that money couldn't be used to fix the tennis court. It could be used to help a kid with gaps in their instruction, like with APEX and supplemental teachers, some online resources, things along that line.

That Restart and Recover program is long-term, it's until 2024, but so is S2, so if the state is taking away two million dollars, and the government gives you a million, you're only down one million dollars, you see?

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School Principal Kevin DiEugenio... not bald

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The same thing goes with bussing, bussing is a huge priority in our district. We need to bus both public and private school students. As you know, we have a lot of private students in the district, particularly on the other side of town, and they required a lot more bussing. We needed more bus drivers, and we couldn't find any, so then we needed to raise the pay for bus drivers, and we couldn't get substitute teachers, so we needed to raise pay for them as well. There are a lot of moving parts when it comes to finances, and I don't want to speak out of turn, but my finances are based around Jackson Memorial High School. I do small-scale budgeting, the district has about one hundred fifty million bucks, I budget for only about two hundred thousand bucks.

That being said, we did just put in a new team room, we were smart, and we used very little out-of-pocket cash to create a new team room for the boy's soccer team. We have a small auxiliary gym that we rubberized the floor of, painted, put a whiteboard in there, and about fifty lockers, and now we have a pretty great team room in there. So that is going to be used for that team, used in the winter for basketball, and then boy's lacrosse in the gym. The girls' team room is beautiful, and we wanted to make it equal on both sides. So, the boy's team room is nice, not as nice as the girls', but still good.

**DC:** Another frequently received question was regarding field trips, are we going to have field trips, what does that look like even as far in the future as the springtime?

**KD:** We are having field trips. Adventure Bound is very important to us, especially to the seniors. We're not going to go all-in during the fall, but certainly, a trip down to Cedar Creek for Adventure Bound is very doable for us. That's definitely something we plan to do.

Overnights, however, not happening. Too involved, too far away if anything goes wrong, we're not doing that. We just signed something that makes it so that the AP Environmental classes can head down to the science center at the end of Bowman road for a trip, so they'll do a project there.

**DC:** Personally, I'd like to know what that means for, like, the Gov trip down to D.C. Could that still happen, or is that too far in the future? That, and the DECA trip to states, do we think that, later in the year, these events can happen?

**KD:** We're looking at this semester by semester, but AP Gov, which has model congress and all that, you'll get a trip to Trenton, and Kean. DECA will get

its state's competition. But a lot of overnights, I don't know about those.

I know that the band is going on a lot of day trips, seven day trips, as far up as Metlife Stadium and Hamilton High School. Small-scale stuff, they're not going to Nashville or Pasadena like they used to.

**DC:** Speaking again about the next semester, this is by far one of the most requested questions, common lunch. Do we think that it could come back, and what does it look like?

**KD:** One of my biggest disappointments was not being able to do a common lunch in September. I've been planning that, with Mrs. Pormelli (the Superintendent) since 2018. I visited three different high schools, bought all this furniture, we had teacher supervision and a plan. Most importantly, kids had an hour to be with each other. To me, that's a huge thing.

Still, I wouldn't be within my health and safety guidelines if I allowed this to happen. You know, I felt this coming, the quarantines and all that, and we had a lot of kids who hadn't been in school in eighteen months. I've given more directions to freshmen this year than I think I've ever had to. It wouldn't have been the right time to do it. The optics wouldn't have worked. You couldn't contact trace it either, which made it even more difficult.

We're planning right now that February 1st, the first day of semester two, we'll do it. If the cases are where they are right now at that time, however, I don't see us running a common lunch. I can't see us contact tracing it. Last year, as spring and summer came, we saw cases drop and we were able to let go of masks. If we are in a place like that, then I will advocate to Mrs. Pormelli that we do have a common lunch.

**DC:** Perhaps the most serious question, for you, when I was going around trying to get questions to ask, I found that not many of the kids actually knew you. Some asked what you looked like, where you are, and they know your voice, but not much more. One kid asked if you were bald (for the record, he isn't), and three kids described you with the characteristics of Mr. Tarver. So, is there a plan to increase your visibility?

**KD:** Absolutely, that's a great question. Remember, many of these kids haven't been here in eighteen months either.

**DC:** Quite a few of these people, actually, were seniors, many of them people you'd expect to recognize you.

**KD:** Really? That's interesting. I have no problem with making myself known. Particularly if we had a common lunch, I will keep my door open. I'm glad you brought this to my attention, and now that you've mentioned that, I'll make it a priority to be out and about in classrooms.

It's been a tough time in the past year and a half. I've heard kids being pulled off of soccer fields to quarantine, chromebook issues have been a problem, so the complexity of this job has changed immensely. But, I know you knew me when you were a freshman, you were in student government, and a lot of other kids who participated in those activities knew me.

I think that all students should get a chance to know their principal, and being in the business thirty years, I think that anyone who knows me knows that this door is always open, I'm always elbow deep in student issues.

**DC:** As you've said, I've known you for a while, and I know that you're a straight shooter, you tell the truth when asked, and you do care. I'm confused when I'm asked who you are. I know that many kids asking about the mask mandates and these other issues, if they asked you, would get a good answer and they wouldn't ask a second time. I'm interested in getting that message to these kids.

**KD:** Thank you, and I agree. You know my philosophy, I've always wanted to govern with the student government as a conduit to the student body, I would have lunch with student leadership every month before COVID. This is a big school, huge, sixteen hundred kids. The student leaders are a conduit, they spread the word and the message that we formulate together.

I think that there's no reason why a student should have to feel uncomfortable coming to me, my door is always open, if it's closed there's something really heavy going on, so kids can come into fine arts and knock on my door whenever. I've had kids come in and say things like "Hey, Mr. Di, I don't like the way this teacher talked to me." And they've sat down and we've talked about it.

I welcome students to come in, I take questions, and students email me time-to-time, and I always email them back by the end of school day. I think it's best to make sure that students feel like they can approach me.

Hopefully these students read D-Chat, usually there's a picture of me next to the interview on the front page, and they can see my shiny forehead and see who this guy is.

# Welcoming Back the Old Normal

By Vedika Kumar and Megan Anderson

After a long 2020-2021 school year, we'd love to give a big welcome back to our JAGS family. In recent times, it's been difficult to discuss the normality of our school, being that a majority of our students here haven't witnessed what a full and regular school year is like. But as things begin to settle down, we journey back into what is the actual normal. Last year was definitely a strange one for all of us. Many different people witnessed school in many different ways, just like us.

The two of us had two completely different perspectives during the past school year. Vedika went virtual during the school year while Megan went back to in-person learning. Both faced different challenges, trying to make it past their sophomore year.

From the very start, Megan was hesitant about entering back into the school. Some people didn't take it as seriously as others, and she knew that some of her family members could be in danger if she had brought home the virus. Vedika had some high risk family members that she didn't want to get sick, which is why she decided to stay virtual the whole year. The two had a conversation about their personal experiences, and this is how it went:

**MA:** What was it like learning from home?

**VK:** Honestly, it wasn't bad but it was really hard not being able to have students or a friend that you talk to and it was hard to socialize for teachers and students. I relied on myself a lot to be able to teach myself the school work we were assigned. How was coming back to school for you, Megan?

**MA:** It was strange at first because it wasn't the general schedule I was used to. You know, all the half days and going back and forth everyday from virtual and home. There weren't that many people in the hallways. It was definitely not something I was used to. Over time I got more used to it but also the fear of getting sick and quarantined was the most frightening. I got quarantined four times, and I never got Covid, thank goodness, but it was still something I'd constantly keep in the back of my mind. I was worried, I had the fear of spreading it and I'd end up having a guilty conscience over it.

**VK:** And how did it affect you? Did you struggle with anything?

**MA:** I personally struggled a lot with keeping up my motivation. Consistently keeping up with things was very ex-

hausting for me. Pre-Covid I was always on top of stuff, and I was always so into school and making sure I did everything I had to do. When we were on lockdown, I had more time to myself and it wasn't as strict as it was in person. Teachers struggled with teaching virtually and figuring out what to do. I feel bad, they had to change pretty much all of their lesson plans. But anyways, like I said before, I kinda just lost all sense of motivation. How about you?

**VK:** I really lost a lot of motivation because I thought that I'm at home. I can always just lie to a teacher. Realistically speaking I think everyone lied to a teacher while they were at home. "I can't join a call, my wifi's down, I can't get this on in time" something like that was probably emailed to a teacher everyday. I was always on top of stuff pre-Covid; I'm very good at keeping up with my time management. I really lost track of that because when I was at home I would just end up falling asleep or just not caring about my work or putting my best effort into it. I always loved putting my best work into stuff. My social battery was really low because during online class it would just be that they assigned work. You would go on a call for five minutes for attendance and then just leave the call while you did the work so I really had no interaction with people from school.

**MA:** It was definitely hard. Both students and teachers struggled to get everyone involved as well as just trying to stay involved. It was just really easy to just lose yourself at home.

**VK:** What was it like being at school?

**MA:** It really depends on who you were with. Some teachers cared more than others and some students cared more than others. And it was really shown with how certain rules were enforced, like spacing out desks and cleaning stuff. It just depends on who you were around. In a sense they could've done more but it was also difficult because of how many people were constantly moving around. I know everyone tried their best to keep it all as safe as possible. How were the classes at home for you, Vedika?

**VK:** Like you mentioned a lot of the teachers were putting in the effort and trying to make it a good year for students. Some teachers really were there to help students while some didn't really care. Teachers were always there to answer emails which I was really appreciative of. Megan, what was something you would change about your sophomore year?

**MA:** I would've liked to figure out how to get more involved in things. Like we were talking about earlier, the lack of motivation and wanting to do stuff. There's some things around the school I could have participated in more and I could have put a lot more effort into certain things. And I know if I tried more, I could've done a lot better academically and socially. In the long run, it wasn't too bad for the circumstances we were in. How was your sophomore year buddy?

**VK:** Something I wish I could change was putting more of my best effort into stuff and having more of a schedule because that was something I really didn't have at the time. I just woke up at any time I really wanted, just to go on a call with a teacher and then the call just ended so I didn't really have any schedule. I really do regret not going back, but it was just a fear in me especially not being vaccinated. I have a big family and it can be high risk. I really didn't feel comfortable until I knew I was in a safe position to go back.

**MA:** Reflecting on this time, what was something you were happy that you did?

**VK:** Well I joined a lot of clubs because I was in the comfort of my own house. That was something I was really proud of and reflecting on the time again I just wish I put more effort into stuff and created a schedule for myself. What about you?

**MA:** I ended up joining basketball which was a new sport for me. It was something fun and I met a whole bunch of new people, and had a lot of different experiences. The whole year was nice, but really looking back on that, that year, it just didn't feel real to me. I didn't realize how crazy and not normal it was until now.

**VK:** It felt unrealistic to be a sophomore that year. It feels weird to be here again. A good weird, of course!

With all of that being said, spending time away from the normal could be incredibly challenging. Having to come back into this hectic environment and quickly having to adapt to something you're not used to could take a huge mental toll on both students and teachers. A great thing about this school is that you're always going to have someone who cares. Whether it's your English teacher or a student counselor, there's plenty of people you can go to and get help. Your mental health matters, and we want to make sure that is enforced this year. We hope that this can be an amazing year for everyone, and we're glad to be back!



# Walking Pep Rally



Pep Rally Photos by Olivia Skvarenina

## Views From C Wing: Welcome Back JMHS

It feels great to be back in school! I am happy to see my friends and teachers. I still can't open my locker, but Mrs. Flanagan promises to help me with that. I can't shake hands or hug. I can only elbow bump. I hope we can have glee club after school. I miss riding my bus because my mom drives me in. I will continue to try my best until Covid ends!

-Erin D'Amato

Some of the things that make me feel happy to be back in school are to see my friends. This year will be different from years before because I have to wear my mask. The goal for this year is to work hard!

- Brian Murphy

It feels boring to be back in school. Being back in school makes me feel tired, but I am happy to see my friends. This year will be different from years before because of too much work. Overall, as Jags do, we will make the best of 2021-22!!

-Cesar Hernandez

It feels great to be back in school. Some of the things that make me feel great are seeing my friends at school, meeting new people, and having my own personality. This year will be different from years before because I have to wear my mask in school and on the bus when I go to votech. We all have to practice social distancing. This year I plan to get good grades in school!

- Thomas Young

It feels odd to be back in school. Some of the things that makes me feel odd is wearing a mask, and no longer having shortened days. I'm happy to be back because I like to see my friends. I'm happy to be back because glee club is back. I'm so happy to be back because Mr. Conti says we can go shopping.

- Christian Janicki

I met my new teachers. I want to join Jaguar Buddies, and I also want to join drama club. I want to be in a play this year because I want to be in a musical like a Disney movie. I want my senior year to be awesome!

- Amanda Martin

## Senior Parking Spots

By Gabby Fortunato

As many of you know, based on the colorful boxes you see as you roll into the parking lot in the morning, seniors were allowed to paint their parking spots this year. This marks the first year ever that seniors are allowed to participate in this new tradition, starting the year with the 'I'm Gonna Be a Senior' event in late August. The senior class came together to paint their own individual spots, showing off their creativity. This event was a terrific way to kick off the year. Not only will there be no problems finding a parking spot in the mornings, especially if you're running late to school with all the traffic in the morning, but I personally find the parking spots to be just the personal touch that the school needed.

The event was full of social interactions, music, and fun, with a scoop of Rita's Italian ice given to students at the very end for all of their hard work. The excitement was clearly there floating amongst all the students. For the kids who unfortunately didn't get to paint their spots (or didn't want to), it really was a missed opportunity. On a bit of a personal note, I painted my own spot and I think it came out great. It really was an incredible edition to my senior year. Everyone who painted made fantastic works of art and each made a spot that easily stands out. This was probably one of the best events this school has ever had. I had a ton of fun.

A huge thank you to the 2022 student body for making this possible and fundraising for it, and another huge shout out to the National Art Honors Society for helping out with painting the spots for students who needed or wanted the help. There were some problems with the spots, if any of you recall those kids on quads going into the school parking lot to drive donuts all over the freshly painted spots, but all in all it was a nice way to wrap up the summer and bring on the new year of school, and it will certainly be something that the seniors will be remembering about their high school experience, and a tradition that hopefully will continue for years to come.

