



THE ECHO

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IN THIS
EDITION:

PEOPLE OF
NEUQUA
VALLEY

FASHION AT
NEUQUA

GIRLS GOLF

GROW
YOUR OWN
TEACHER



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Students,

It's crazy to think about it, but this is now the third school year that has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. We've gone from the longest spring break ever, to a year of learning through Zoom, to now being back in person. As much as we want to strive to be back to normal, we know that it is still a ways away. Nonetheless, we've made it to the end of the first quarter of the 2021-2022 academic year.

This is a time in school that is typically met with fatigue, and this year is no different. The excitement of being back in school after a year off has diminished, the intrigue of new classes is waning, and assignments, tests, and everything else that occurs outside of school is piling up. You might be thinking, "How is it only the end of the first quarter?" or "I can't believe it's already the end of the first quarter!" Regardless of your perspective, my hope is that you are ok and are mentally checking in with yourself.

I may not be speaking for all teachers, but many of us feel fatigued, too. The excitement of being back at school has been met with the reality of our situation: we're still in a pandemic, we are now tasked to ask students to pull up their masks, put away their phones, end their Snap streaks, take out the AirPods they're sneaking behind long hair, and we aren't back to how we remember school operating for the better part of our educational experience. On top of all of this, many of us also have children that are going through the same experience that you are going through with school.

Honestly, I'm not sure if we'll ever get back to how things were, and that isn't necessarily a bad thing. The pandemic taught us about some things that weren't working in education, and it educated us on different ways to approach school as we know it. Know that we're trying. We are also tired, and we are also trying to figure things out alongside all of you.

I hope you enjoy this quarter's edition of The Echo. I know the authors and photographers that are featured in this magazine have been anxious to get their thoughts out there. And thank you for supporting The Echo! Even just by reading this, you are supporting us by reading your peers' perspectives and allowing them to share their voice.

Mr. Verdin,
The Echo Adviser



“I know what I want to be when I grow up!”

By Aarti Gupta, Editor-in-Chief

Picture this:

It's 12:04a.m., and your parents are asleep. You hear your dad snoring lightly as you walk through the hallway to grab your AirPods, and you want to groan at the sound of his blissful sleeping during your miserable suffering.

You begrudgingly venture back to your room and slouch down into your desk, pushing away your math homework and opening a new tab on your computer to get some more work done. It's only a Tuesday night, and you've got three more days left before you can finally pretend to unwind—simply pretend because you know you're going to be back at your desk working hard once again over the weekend.

Your back aches at the thought, and you can't tell whether it's from the heavy backpack you carry around, your poor posture at your desk or the weight of the stress of getting into college. I mean, you literally haven't done anything.

Your teacher has been asking for your letter of recommendation form since the beginning of September, and you still can't figure out what to put. You're only seventeen; you don't know anything about yourself. You don't know three traits that best describe you, much less what you would say if you were writing your own letter. You're even lying in your aspirations question: "What major do you intend to pursue in college? Why are you considering this major?"

You're "intending" to pursue a degree in accounting, but you weren't even "considering" that major until two weeks ago when you heard about the average annual salary. Obviously you can't put that, so you freak out even more and slam your laptop shut. How are you supposed to know about your future when you're only seventeen?

The month of October is scary for students everywhere, and it's not because of Halloween. Maybe you're a freshman concerned with the clubs you're joining; maybe you're a sophomore with slipping grades. If you're a junior, you're probably thinking about studying for your SAT and ACT, and if you're a senior, the early application deadline for most schools, Nov. 1, is likely haunting you.

All of your concerns boil down to one common stressor: your future. And everyone you know is asking you the same question: what do you want to be when you grow up?

Indian Prairie School District 204 (IPSD 204) might just have the answer for you.

In an initiative to encourage students to consider a future career in education, District 204 has created a program, known as Grow Your Own Teachers (GYOT), that allows current high school students to have observational and hands-on teaching experiences at the high school, middle school and elementary school level.

One classroom observation will take place each quarter, and participating students will be provided with a working district ID that allows them to work like a representative of the building. Students who are not necessarily interested in teaching can also observe other staff members such as school psychologists, social workers, guidance counselors and speech pathologists on observation days. The district is looking to hire future graduates to work at the district after they finish college by showing students what working for them would be like.

At the end of the current school year, students will also have the option to set up classrooms with teachers and intern at schools. Moreover, to ensure success of students involved in the program in their future pursuits, participants have been provided college application assistance. Students are additionally encouraged to take the Introduction to Education and Education II courses offered at Neuqua Valley, alongside the Early Childhood class. Educators Rising is also a club that has partnered with Aurora University to provide members with additional internships, observations, volunteering opportunities and lessons about teaching and classroom management.

Students are not required to be part of education-related classes or clubs to participate in the program. However, in order to pursue a career in teaching, students are required to attain a bachelor's degree in education, after which they are guaranteed an interview with IPSD 204.

Because Grow Your Own Teachers is fairly new to the district, administration is looking to offer more opportunities to students in the future. Students interested in the program have been encouraged to reach out to Todd Mertz (todd_mertz@ipsd.org), Neuqua Valley's building coordinator for the GYOT program. The district hopes that being part of the program will either introduce you to a new interest or help you narrow down your future prospects.

Life with COVID-19: being back at school

By Lily Ha, Staff Writer

When Neuqua Valley High School released its decision in the summer of 2021 to go fully in-person for the 2021-2022 school year, the feeling of excitement to bond with teachers and peers was met with nervousness on the bumpy road to adjusting to school with COVID-19.

Having to consider socially connecting with friends and teachers and academically adjusting to a different set-up than last year, while not ignoring the caution of being safe during this time, has been challenging for many.

However, it seems that the first quarter has gone on without significant bumps. Regardless of COVID-19, sports and extracurricular activities have started; students and teachers have been doing great in wearing their masks during nearly all of the entire school period. The pep rally was received positively, and many of the students enjoyed their year back by celebrating with friends at Homecoming.

But what do students at Neuqua Valley High School think of the first quarter so far?

“I think I’m getting to know a lot more people, which is pretty good. I’m a lot more focused in school now than I was in remote learning; it was pretty easy to get distracted online, but now I’m on task and I know what I need to do. Last year, there weren’t that many opportunities to do extracurriculars, like there were

extracurriculars, but it was very restricted on what we could do. But now because we’re in person, there’s like a lot more you can do, and I’m pretty excited to see what the school has to offer,” Aditi Cherukuri, a sophomore, said.

Cherukuri added, “I think the biggest struggle is [that] last year, because like when we were online I was a freshman... I’m a sophomore now. So I’m moving to a new school, you might not see some of your old friends from middle school, and it’s kind of hard to make new friends when you’re online on Zoom.”

Most students at Neuqua Valley are adjusted to the in-person classes; although some peers struggle with school in a COVID-19 learning environment. By now, a majority are comfortable in their classrooms and moving from classroom to classroom.

Among them is junior Ethan Lopez. He admits, “Academically, I feel like subjects are more difficult in person because teachers were a bit more lenient last year. We had more time to do things because there just wasn’t much going on, so now it’s trying to balance everything and manage your time wisely.”

Many students agree that the adjustment back to in-person learning is challenging. But this is not the only difficulty at Neuqua Valley. Another is wearing masks during all classes. Fortunately, most believe that Neuqua is working very well towards making sure masks are on for the safety of its members.

“I’d say, for the most part, the school is doing a good job. I’d say in some places like in the hallways, there are people who are being strict about that,” Cherukuri said. “It’s hard to kind of enforce that because you can’t eat while having a mask on. For example, I do sophomore swim and nobody wears masks in the pool area. This makes sense because you can’t swim with a mask on, but I guess it makes me a little bit



While maintaining COVID-19 guidelines, students adapt to new learning settings, including the reduced-capacity LMC.
Photo by Ingrid Reginato

concerned because COVID can spread easily during those times when nobody's wearing masks."

Lopez agreed, "yeah, I think they are. I think they've done a fantastic job with the resources that they've been given and the cards that they've been dealt. We're still technically in a pandemic, and I think they've done a very good job of reintroducing people into an in-person learning system."

A vast majority of Neuqua's members seemed to be taking wearing masks seriously by covering their nose and mouth. "I think they're generally doing a good job. I think the enforcement is going well and I would say 98 percent of kids are doing well to keep it over their mouth and nose."

The opening of in-person extracurriculars is an addition that students are excited for. Events like the Children's Show and music concerts opened, alongside many clubs. Students were

also able to play and attend sporting events, like the popular football games.

Many students new to Neuqua are also excited to experience high school events somewhat normally for the first time. "I think it's like actually being, not just homecoming, but getting to experience all the events and everything because we completely missed out on that last year," said Madison Cereno, a sophomore at Neuqua.

Like most of Neuqua, she is "very excited to be included in all those activities."

The transition fully back will not be an easy road. Like now, there will be struggles for teachers, parents, and especially students. But one thing is for certain: Neuqua Valley High School is finally back in session, and the kids here are looking forward to a variety of opportunities and experiences that an in-person education has to offer, regardless of the looming threat of COVID-19.

The problem with fast-fashion

By Ryder Stejskal, Staff Writer

You're scrolling through your Instagram feed when you stumble upon some of the coolest sweatshirts you've ever seen. It's an ad. Most likely, what you're seeing is fast fashion, fashionable clothing that sports trendy designs that you might not see at your favorite stores. Unless, of course, your favorite stores include Forever 21, H&M, Zara and more. You may have even heard before that fast fashion clothing is typically created under conditions not so favorable in the world of ethical labor practices, but what about the devastating environmental impact?

The reason these kinds of clothes are so new, cool and trendy is because they are created very quickly, and companies have the labor force to make new designs and lots of them for very cheap and very fast. This is fast fashion. Whether or not the labor is done by humans is irrelevant when discussing the environmental impact of fast fashion. When ten shirts only set you back \$30, or even less, it seems like a "steal," or an insanely good deal. In reality, you don't need those ten shirts; even if you have more than enough money and space to hold them, you don't need those ten shirts.

Overconsumption is a common habit in America these days, and has been growing in the past few years. In the past two years alone, overconsumption and online shopping skyrocketed due to the pandemic. Among this escape from physical stores, fast fashion became more popular among consumers as it was easily accessible via online stores like AliExpress, Shein and most of all, Amazon. You may have heard you can search for Amazon products on AliExpress to get the best price, alongside other brands such as Hydro-Flask, via a similar method. But these all have the same, taxing cost on the environment.



Moreover, while the United States and Europe make up for only 12% of the global population, 60% of private spending is done by their combined populations. This is highly attributed to the growth of e-commerce, something you may hear when people talk about how malls and stores are closing nationwide. Considering that 85% of clothing Americans consume (3.8 billion pounds) ends up in landfills every year, this creates an enormous problem; there's too much clothing and it's not being disposed of properly.

If you want to truly experience unique clothing, try upcycling or supporting upcycling artisans through Depop and Etsy, two apps that host a marketplace for anyone to sell clothes, used, upcycled or even new. Upcycling is taking used clothes and turning them into new clothes, generating a one of a kind piece that will stand out over any article of fast fashion, name-brand, or other unnecessary products. Cutting down on consumption is one of the ways that we, as humans, will help save this one planet that can't speak for itself and suffers in silence.



Meiling Sun is a freshman with an incredible knack for music. Not only does Sun play the oboe as her primary instrument in Neuqua Valley's curricular band (Wind Ensemble), but she is also a part of Neuqua's marching band, where she plays the cymbals and vibraphone in the drumline. When the drumline was approached by Gold Rush to play an arrangement of "Industry Baby" by Lil Nas X and Jack Harlow at a football game, she took it upon herself to arrange a full marching band score of the song's main theme due to her interest in composition and arrangement. With help from her section leaders, Kavin Karthi and Emilie Jerger, Sun was able to pitch the arrangement to her directors. The drumline worked on the piece during their rehearsals and played it on the sidelines during the home game on Oct. 15. Sun sees playing "Industry Baby" as "a great way [for the marching band] to connect with [their] audiences in a positive way, so [she] felt obligated to utilize [her] musical skill sets to make such a possibility tangible." She thinks of the marching band's primary goal as making the audience happy and sees the pieces they play as a medium for this to occur. After working so diligently and overcoming the many roadblocks along the way, Sun is extremely thankful to have received the opportunity to further augment the stature of Neuqua's Marching Wildcats with the "Industry Baby" arrangement.

People

With the cross-country season back in full swing, Zachary Close is a notable sophomore runner for Neuqua Valley High School. Since middle school, Close has been training and developing his running speed preparing for meet after meet. Close has improved greatly over his time competing as a Neuqua Valley Boys Cross Country runner. Freshman year alone, he finished three miles with an astonishing time of 17:30. In this past season, Close crushed that personal record, running 15:39. Many upperclassmen aspire to reach this mark, and Close was able to progress towards it after only two years of high school training. As he continues to train, there isn't a day that goes by in which Close doesn't improve. He has rightfully proven his spot on the team, sharing how he runs with the Varsity boys and has "the third fastest time on the team." Running is often not only his everyday sport but also an escape from everyday life. "Cross country is one of the sports where you just run, and it's simple and it's fun." While continuing his outstanding sophomore season, Close looks ahead to his improving in his junior and senior and potentially competing for an All-State spot at the Illinois state meet. In the coming weeks, Close will toe the line and compete as a Varsity runner in the Regional, Sectional and State meets of the 2021 season.

Of



Sohum Suthar is a junior working with Argonne National Laboratory to develop a surveillance robot in high radiation facilities. Using machine learning and AI, the robot will monitor high radiation facilities where humans would not be able to enter otherwise. Suthar is working with his father and brother on the project, but he himself works on everything from CAD modeling to programming on the robot. Their project will also be published in a national research paper. While opportunities like these don't come around often, Suthar credits some of his Neuqua classes on this impressive feat: "some of the experience I've got from actually doing this has come from statistics where I've learned a lot about analyzing data." Suthar has also been involved with the Neuqua Robotics team and other various STEM and robotics clubs outside of school. When Neuqua Robotics was cancelled during COVID-19, he joined VEX AI and placed 8th place at the World Championships in Texas. Despite being immersed in many facets of the STEM field, Suthar hopes to pursue a career in data science or machine learning, saying "these [professions] are going to be very big in the future, and this is a great start." Suthar is grateful for the opportunities he's received and hopes to continue his work on the national research paper and his various involvements in STEM in and out of the school.



Neuqua Valley



Reesa Espera may be majoring in chemical engineering, but she's always in her element. Ever since middle school, Espera has taken advantage of any opportunity sent her way, starting off as a member of NIU-EEP, a program for girls interested in engineering and later founding a chapter of SWENext and Girls Who Code club at Crone Middle School. During her junior year at Neuqua, Espera was accepted to Neuqua alumna Congresswoman Underwood's STEM Scholars Program and the MIT's Beaver Works Summer Institute where she completed the Build a CubeSAT course and learned to code with the Python language using a MicroBit (pocket-sized computer) to build a Cubesat (mini-satellite). She continued her stellar work with Python at MIT's Medlytics Course, where she studied machine learning in relation to the analysis of medical data. At Neuqua, Espera is a captain on the Science Olympiad team, specializing in Build Events and is part of the Girls in STEM executive board. Espera hasn't limited herself to just science, though. As a part of Neuqua Media, she films events at Neuqua, and she participates in the TV/film club where she can showcase her creative side as opposed to focusing on STEM which is very methodical. Espera also enjoys expressing her creativity through singing, having consistently been involved in the Variety show and posting occasional covers on her personal Instagram (@reesaspra).

Student perspectives of Neuqua fashion

By Viraj Desai, Staff Writer

Fashion is always one of the most popular trends, especially in high school. At Neuqua Valley, this is especially true since everybody has a different sense of style. No matter what gender or age, all students have a great fashion sense, and it's the diversity that makes the fashion at Neuqua so amazing.

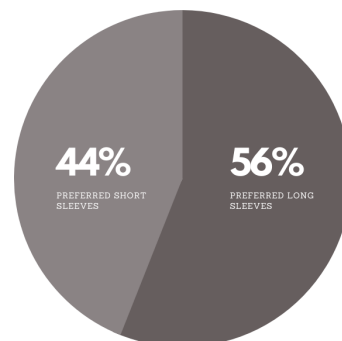
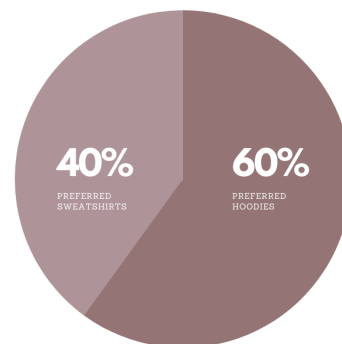
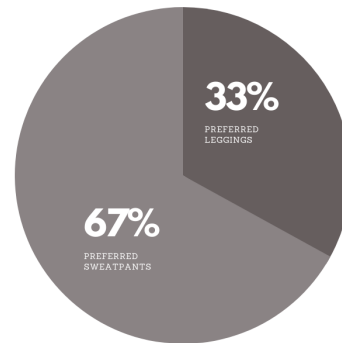
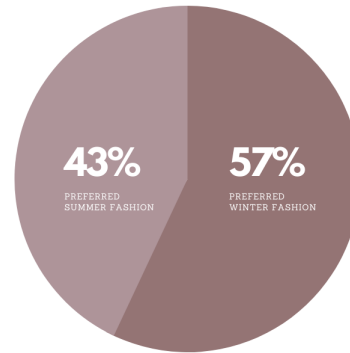
I asked some questions to people about what stores they shop at. Pacsun and H&M were the most popular options, especially among the girls. Hollister, Brandy Melville and Urban Outfitters were also very popular. Everybody has a different criteria for the store they shop at.

Both junior Jason Benguche and sophomore Samantha Weyandt enjoy thrifting, mainly because of its high quality and low price. Students have found a way to shop for recycled old clothes, believing that "it's the most sustainable way to shop."

I also asked people what color they like to wear the most. Most people said they like to wear more neutral colors, such as black, white and grey, while others favored pink and light blue.

Benguche says, "I used to really only wear what other people wore or what was considered trendy. I started watching a lot of early 2000s and 90s skate videos or movies, so I kind of started looking for that clothing."

Along with fun styles and shops, there is also some controversy when it comes to cloth-



ing. One of the major conflicts is the difference between the clothing of different genders. I personally feel as if there is a big difference between the clothing of boys and girls, and many times they feel like they don't want to mix clothing styles with each other. Others also expressed their opinion on this matter.

Weyandt notes: "I see a pretty large gap between the boys and girls' fashion at Neuqua. I think this is because a lot of girls have the benefit of being able to express androgynous fashion traits, whereas men are pinned to a certain societal standard and it can be difficult to break that standard." She believes that girls have more of an advantage as they are not pinned by social norms.

The dress code also seems to be a huge controversy because some girls think that dress codes, in general, are sexist. Sophomore Aditi Cherukuri says that the current Neuqua dress code is outdated because "what has been appropriate for girls to wear has changed over time. Before, showing your knees was an issue, and now it's not, so the same thing should be done with shoulders or any other body part."



Sydney Furth, senior



Helena Haralambopoulos, senior

However, she also believes that students should be able to wear whatever they want, and they shouldn't be restricted by a code.

The free dress in our school is another topic that creates controversy. While some think it is nice to be free with clothing, others think that uniforms would get rid of the social controversy of style. This includes the gender dispute and concerns with the dress code, alongside some other issues such as clothes based on popularity and freedom of expression with style.

Others do believe that the school lets people express themselves by wearing anything they want, and they think it increases confidence. Weyandt also says she "feels free" in school to wear whatever she wants and that the free dress does not affect everyone in a negative way.

Overall, the style at Neuqua is very diverse, and everyone's standards of good clothing is very different. Some want to be trendy, while others want to be comfortable. Some prefer certain articles of clothing. No matter what their style is, everyone at Neuqua has a place to feel comfortable wearing whatever they want.

Girls Golf season is a hole in one

By Logan Brown, Staff Writer

After finishing 4th in the 2020 Sectional Tournament at Silver Lakes Country Club last year, the Neuqua Girls Golf team is back and better than ever, with a 10-0 record for both the varsity and JV teams: a new school record.

According to head coach John Keller, “it’s on them to do summer tournaments. They do a lot of lessons on their own, things like that. They really have to, kind of, come into the season prepped and ready,” and their current performance is a huge testament to the hard-work they’ve put in when nobody is watching.

Senior golfer, Sarah Zheng, however, took this to the next level.

“I stayed in Florida for about 6 months and trained during my off season... I had the opportunity to play in a few tournaments during that time as well, which has prepared me well for this season.”

Zheng, who has verbally committed to play collegiate golf Carleton College in Minnesota has had an extraordinary season, leading the team to victory on many occasions and placing first at the DVC Conference.

Keller notes that the team has been adhering to all of the COVID-19 restrictions put in place by the administration in order to ensure the safety of players.

“One of the great things about golf is: you leave the school, you go out onto the golf course and you kind of forget about it. Last year, that was pretty much the case, but we didn’t have our weekend tournaments. Our bigger tournaments, we had to wear the masks [while] warming up, but once we started playing, we could take them off.”



Senior Sarah Zheng prepares to take a shot during a recent tournament.

Photo provided by the Girls Golf team.

COVID restrictions have made it difficult for the team to be close physically, yet they have continued to grow closer over the past year.

“We’re all a lot closer as a team. A lot of us are seniors, so we’ve all spent a lot of years together on the team. We’ve gotten closer with a lot of underclassmen as well. Just having that bond with everyone creates a more fun and collaborative environment,” said returning senior golfer, Chelea Santos.

Now, while other sports are kicking off this fall, the Girls Golf team has closed out their regular season with an impressive victory over Naperville North at the DVC Conference. After winning the DVC conference and placing first at regionals, the girls walked away with an impressive 10th place finish at an incredibly competitive state championship.

