



Jack Kercinik talks about rites of passage for Barrington fifth-graders and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.



Jack Kercinik and Coach Eddie Fay.

Lean on Me

I LOVED FIFTH GRADE AT HOUGH. I had a lot of fun and had gotten closer with so many kids in my class. We did “High School Musical” in the beginning of the year which was great. I was also president of my class which I really loved.

We shut down in March and it was terrible. It was the worst time in my life. Our class missed Camp Timber-lee, which was really disappointing. We had been looking forward to our two-day trip for the entire year. Actually, I had been looking forward to that the whole time I was at Hough.

Normally, there are a bunch of end-of-year celebrations when you graduate from Hough. Because of COVID, we didn’t get to really do anything. Zoom calls weren’t fun. I got to play “Fortnite” with friends, but that was about it.

It made ending fifth grade a total bummer. I miss my friends and teachers from Hough because we never really got to say goodbye.

During the summer, we didn’t really know if we’d be going to back to school. I felt nervous about that because I was looking forward to

meeting new people in middle school and I was definitely ready to interact with other kids. I was also nervous to start middle school and it felt weird that we still didn’t really know if we’d be able to go in-person. I kept thinking about how hard it would be to start a new school while being on Zoom classes.

My parents suggested that I go to Saint Anne for middle school. I was excited to try middle school at Saint Anne and happy that my parents were giving me the choice. When we made the official decision, I was really relieved to go there. I was added to group chats with the kids from my new class and that was cool. I didn’t feel like the new kid which was nice.

We started sixth grade and it was kind of weird. We did e-learning in the classroom because our teacher was pregnant, so she had to teach us remotely from home. Soon after school started, she went on maternity leave and the athletic director from Saint Anne, Coach Fay, took over our class to substitute. He has been teaching us all year and we’ve learned so much from him. We are so lucky

that he stepped in to be a substitute for such a long time.

Coach Fay makes sure that every single person understands what we are learning. He will stop the class to make sure that everyone gets it. I think this is so amazing because everyone gets better grades. Plus, he gives us all our own nickname. Coach Fay motivates us to work hard and if we are having a bad day he’ll be understanding. He tries as hard as he can to help us get the best grades we can get.

He’s tough and hard on us in a really good way. Just because a kid acts up doesn’t mean that he won’t stop liking us. He doesn’t see us as bad or good—he just sees us as humans and that we are all equal. That we are all just kids trying to learn, and he makes the learning experience better. He helps us be kinder students.

I’m so grateful to have had Coach Fay as a teacher. U

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Eleven-year-old Jack Kercinik is a sixth-grade student at Saint Anne Parish School in Barrington.