

The future of Marion

By: Antonio Cayler @antoniocaylerr

From not even knowing if school was going to happen, to masks and other restrictions, this school year has been full of challenges, surprises, and changes. The 2020-2021 school year started off with a change by starting in early September and using hybrid learning. As more changes started to surface like Homecoming being cancelled and different seating for the cafeteria, the school year started to seem abnormal.

For one student this school year, and all of its curve balls, became pretty difficult. "This year by far was my hardest year, because of all the changes and differences. Not being around my friends at some times, and just having to do online school at some points, made it more of a struggle," said Grace Richards, junior. "My overall

experience of this year was fun for the most part, but also challenging because show choir, cheer, and school in general were different. I'm hoping that next year, these things can go back to normal." said Richards. On the other hand, other students have had a great year.

Wyatt Cannon, senior, has been able to overcome them and still enjoy the year despite the struggles this school year has caused. "I think this year has been the most fun for me because I was online for the first three quarters, and now I'm back and finishing out the year in person with my friends," said Cannon. Cannon was only involved in football this year, but COVID-19 and the school year in general affected him in other ways. "I think the only challenging part about this year was not always being able to be around my friends, and the changes made for sporting events," said Cannon.

Although the plan for next school year has yet to be determined, the struggles of this school year has pre-



There is a lot up in the air as to what school will look like next year, masks being part of that debate.

pared students for what is to come in the future. With all of the changes that were made to this school year, the hope for normalcy next year is at an all time high.

A late start to summer

By: Noelle Regennitter @23norege

Students shuffle closer to the door of their classrooms, eyes glued to the clock. Two minutes left. Teachers persist with their attempts to force more seemingly useless knowledge in their students' heads... A minute fifty. Thirty seconds. Twelve seconds. Three, two, one RING! With that, summer break has now officially



The petition started by Annelise Barkalow, junior, on change.org.

begun. Unfortunately for students and staff in the Marion Independent School District, this much awaited sound won't be heard until the 11th of June this year. However, the reason behind this isn't that simple.

Prior to the start of each school year a committee of administrators and representatives from the school board compose what will later become the district calendar for the upcoming school year. Our district constructs its calendar based on student hours, which the state requires 1080 of per year. This comes out to about 176 days of school. Additionally, an extra 11 days are included in the calendar beyond the state minimum required. Once constructed, the calendar is then sent to the school board to be approved.

However, due to unforeseen events such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the derecho, the school board would later be forced to make some difficult decisions regarding the 2020-2021 school year. "After having one quarter of the 2019-2020 school year disrupted due to COVID... along with many unknowns at that time as to how many days of instruction this year might be disrupted due to COVID, the administrators felt it was important to maintain the 176 student days to maximize instructional time. With that in mind, we adjusted the calendar to a Sep. 8 start date, removed two days from spring break, and extended the calendar to June 11 for students, keeping the 176 days. This adjusted calendar was then sent to the Board in August for approval," said Dr. Brouwer, Marion's superintendent.

Considering that the last day of school was originally scheduled to be the 2nd of June, the Marion School Board applied for

the Disaster Relief Application 2020-21 (in other words a waiver) with hopes to chop off the days that had been added to the school year. The request for a waiver was granted, but in the end not used. "The administrative team has discussed whether adjustments should be considered and proposed to the Board given our late end to the year. However, with the snow days we have had, the number of weeks in hybrid learning, and the impact of quarantine on many students and families, our team believes that the reasons we made the calendar adjustments in August to keep the days are still important," said Dr. Brouwer.

Ms. Duning, a science teacher who has worked in the Marion School District for 24 years said, "I think this is a tough decision that the superintendent and administrative team had to make. They had to try to weigh many different things and come up with the best decision for students. Although I think if we applied for the waiver for the derecho and were granted that waiver, we should have strongly considered using part of the ten day waiver."

The intent of the extended academic hours that were added onto the end of the school year is to enable the district to complete each term without compromising the curriculum due to shortened time. With this, the extended hours also gives students more time to interact with their fellow classmates and friends whom they might not see otherwise. Theoretically this makes sense, but it will more than likely won't end up unfolding this way. "I understand the purpose of the extended

academic hours, but I feel like extending the year that far will not necessarily correlate to a big academic payoff. Most students are used to being done with school by the beginning of June and have a hard time focusing after that. This will be made worse by the fact that they know some of their friends are no longer in school," said Duning.

In fact, students as well as teachers, were so infuriated by the set date of the last day of school that they decided to try and change it. After gaining permission from Mr. Semler, Annelise Barkalow, junior, launched an online petition. Originally, the goal for the petition was to acquire 100 signatures, but within a few hours the number of signatures had already met and surpassed that goal significantly. Shortly after, a petition was hung in the teacher's lounge and shared with the superintendent. On May 10th, the matter was briefly discussed in a board meeting with the petition having 535 signatures at the time. Barkalow was also interviewed by Fox News at 9 about the petition. Unfortunately, to the disappointment of many students and staff members, the school board made an overall decision to keep the current calendar to avoid compromising the curriculum.

While there are reasonable arguments to both sides, many hope that future decisions involving the calendars will take both the academic and emotional needs of the students into account. With any luck, things will return back to normal in the following months, and we can enjoy a full summer break next year.