

When students returned to Central High School on Aug. 23, 2021, 522 days since COVID-19 closures, the little details mattered.

For junior Arianna Heppe, it was hanging up her mini mirror and photos of her friends in her locker. For senior Angelo Ramirez it was seeing desks in groups and not spread apart.

And as senior Amisha Call says it was nice “actually caring about what [she] looked like for the day.”

Students last year were fully virtual, until a limited hybrid learning program was implemented in March 2021.

Now, out of the 1,878 students enrolled in CHS, 1,864 students resumed in-person learning. Accordingly, protocols such as contact tracing, the application of BIOPROTECT (to prevent COVID-19 growth) and mandatory mask wearing were introduced.

“Everything feels pretty normal again except for the masks, and if we have to wear masks all year just to stay in school like this, it is completely worth it,” Ramirez said.

Prior to the first day, students had two days to enter CHS, pick up their class schedules and acclimate to the school.

After all, along with the entire freshman class, 74 percent sophomores never stepped foot in CHS.

“It was really strange being a sophomore, but being as lost and confused as all the freshmen were on the first day,” sophomore Taryn Imordino said. “Luckily, the teachers were all really nice, and the upperclassmen were helping everyone in the halls with finding rooms.”

A focus was placed on easing students back to the school environment.

“I really just wanted to do a bit of a mental health check on all my kids,” language arts teacher Dawn Pautz said. “We just did a lot of talking, getting re-acquainted and planning how to get back into a normal school routine.”

Similarly, the Student Council organized volunteers to help greet students at the main entrance.

“We handed out donut coupons and had music playing,” senior volunteer Ravi Singh said. “We wanted it to feel like a celebration because it really was. I was so happy to see everyone’s faces.”