

# ‘No one’s looking out for those kids’

*High-risk and immunocompromised Bulldogs reflect after a year and a half of COVID-19*

Dylan **Ebs**  
Feature Editor

Caulin Wagner knew something was wrong when he felt extreme pain in his left leg.

Wagner, a senior, went to his doctor and was diagnosed with osteosarcoma, a common type of bone cancer.

“When I realized that I had it I think I was almost about to tear up because I didn’t know that it would actually happen,” Wagner said. “But if it weren’t for the nurses that helped me heal up, I wouldn’t be here by now.”

Wagner no longer has osteosarcoma; he completed chemotherapy and proudly talks about how he beat cancer.

“The chemotherapy was awful,” Wagner said. “I kept on throwing up repeatedly because it was so bad. I needed to have it anyway because it’s very important [for] chemo to be in your system because you have a higher risk for dying. Luckily, the system in my body was very tough and strong and I managed to actually beat [cancer].”

Since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, Wagner has had to adjust his habits. According to the CDC, having cancer makes one more likely to have a severe case of COVID-19.

“I’m kind of scared of getting [COVID-19],” Wagner said. “But as long as I’m careful and stay three to six feet apart, then I’m going to be okay.”

Wagner is not the only student or teacher with a potentially increased chance of having a severe case of COVID-19.

Every Saturday night, English teacher Bree Rolfe logs onto Zoom to hangout and play games with

her friends. The virtual hangouts are a safe way for Rolfe, who has cystic fibrosis, to connect with her friends during the pandemic. Rolfe is one of an estimated 30,000 Americans with cystic fibrosis, a genetic disease that affects the lungs and pancreas.

“One of the positives about the pandemic was that everyone discovered Zoom,” Rolfe said. “My best friend lives in Massachusetts and I have really good friends in the Palm Springs area, and we discovered Zoom. We’re like, why don’t we hang out every Saturday night on Zoom and play Jackbox games? So I did a lot of stuff like that with my friends who lived elsewhere.”

While Rolfe says that she isn’t too concerned about her risk of contracting COVID-19, she worries more about immunocompromised and high-risk students who have to attend in-person school.

“One of the things that’s really makes me angry about Texas, and about this whole situation is that, my concern is for the students who are like me, like when do we start caring about them,” Rolfe said. “There have been people who have gone here that have had cystic fibrosis or other conditions and I feel like they’ve been left out of the conversation, especially in Texas, like that nobody is looking out for those chronically ill kids who are having to come back to school.”

Rolfe was unable to attend the graduation parade for the class of 2020 because she has cystic fibrosis.

“I missed out on lots of things,” Rolfe said. “Some of [my seniors] were like ‘where’s Ms. Rolfe?’ and my colleagues were like ‘she can’t leave the house.’ It was heartbreaking for me to not say goodbye to



**CHECKING IN:** English teacher Bree Rolfe walks around her classroom, monitoring senior Cristian Vockell’s progress. Rolfe received the COVID-19 vaccine in January and recently got a booster shot because she has cystic fibrosis. **PHOTO BY** Sage Epstein

my seniors.”

For many high-risk people, including junior Carey Wooley, who has rheumatoid arthritis, getting a booster dose of the COVID-19 vaccine was the right choice for them because of their condition. The FDA and CDC recently approved booster doses for eligible individuals.

“As a high risk individual I am always so afraid of getting COVID-19 but having the booster shot of the vaccine gives me so much relief as it feels like an extra layer of protection,” Wooley said.

Although CDC data shows that children are dying from COVID-19 at a lower rate than older age groups, the increased transmissibility of the Delta variant has led to an increase in hospitalizations for COVID-19 among children.

“Every time you see it’s like,

‘oh, the only people who are getting sick or have underlying conditions’ and I’m like, you’re saying that in a room with people who have children with underlying conditions and it’s like, oh, only your kid will die is terrible, it’s terrible,” Rolfe said.

The potential removal of mask mandates in Austin ISD due to Governor Abbott’s executive order is a concern to some students, including Wagner.

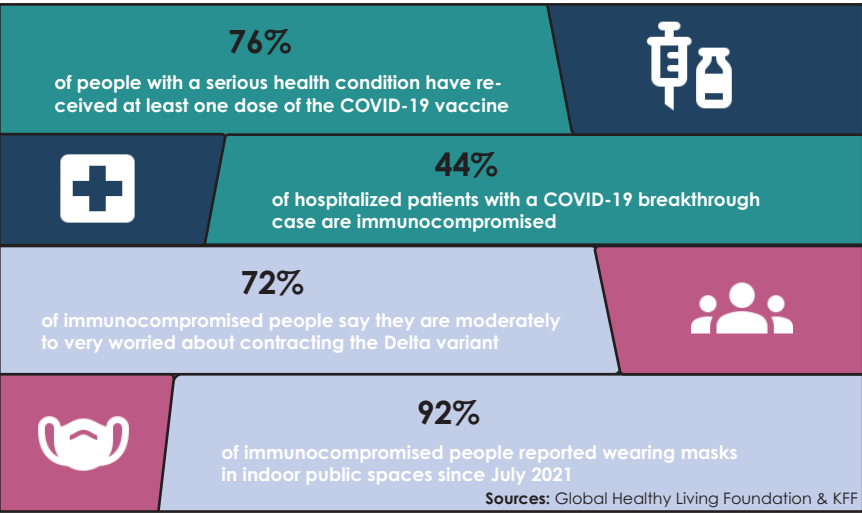
“I would feel really angered,” Wagner said. “COVID is still here, because if it was gone, people would have the mask off. We’re still living in a state where someone brought COVID and there are still people who aren’t smart enough to know that masks are indeed mandatory for stores, schools, everywhere, meaning wear a mask at all times necessary.”

For Rolfe, adjusting to the return of fully in-person instruction isn’t always easy.

“We’re dealing with students who haven’t been to school in two years,” Rolfe said. “[I’m] reminding myself that this is a pandemic, and I have to kind of tailor my expectations. I no longer am like trying to be the best, most amazing teacher on Earth. I’m just trying to make sure my kids learn something and cutting myself and my students some slack.”

Rolfe returned to in-person teaching last February after getting vaccinated.

“I just hope that our students at Bowie who are immunocompromised or high risk are safe and happy,” Rolfe said. “I hope that we find a way to make being able to come back [to in-person school] a thing for them.” ■



**ART BY** Dylan Ebs

# Coach Alex brings renewed energy to cheer program

Grace **Harris**  
Commentary Editor

Earlier this year, the cheer teams bid farewell to Catherine McCallum, their coach of two years. McCallum departed the program after being offered an opportunity to coach at Del Valle High School. The teams welcomed their new head coach, Alyssa Alex, over the summer.

Alex has been a competitive cheerleader and dancer most of her life. She began her journey at age six and continued throughout high school as well as college. After graduating from Baylor University, Alex began her career as a coach.

“I started my head coaching career at Hays High School,” Alex said. “I coached there for three years before being asked to go found the cheer program at the new school in the district, Johnson High School.”

After moving to central Texas, Alex was drawn to Bowie’s cheer program by Courtney David, who’s Alex’s roommate and a former Bowie cheerleader herself.

“After being here for a couple years, I then started to realize that it was not only the cheer squad, but the entire school, staff, and community that I was drawn to,” Alex said.

McCallum, the previous coach, had dance-based experience as opposed to cheer. Although Alex is new to the school, her background in cheerleading has aided her through her transition.

“Coach McCallum seemed a little unsure at times about what she was doing,” JV co-captain junior Brooke Dallmann said. “Coach Alex on the other hand is very comfortable with what she is teaching. It’s very nice to have a new leader who can drive us to success.”

After entering the program late last spring, Alex was excited to jump into summer practices with the teams.

“The transition was honestly a lot of fun because the girls are so talented,” Alex said. “We were able to jump right into a groove of improving and learning new skills.”

Coaches differ in their approaches and coaching styles, often making a transition difficult for the athletes. However, Alex’s presence and leadership in the program has so far proved comfortable and beneficial for the teams.

“I really like coach Alex,” Dallmann said. “She is very confident in everything she does and is very organized. Her transition over the summer felt really seamless and seemed easy on her.”

Currently, cheer is in the midst of football season. Running pep rally routines, game cheers, and painting spirit banners around the school makes a busy start of the year for the squad.



**BONDING WITH BUSTER:** Cheer coach Alyssa Alex gives a warm hug to Buster the Bulldog during the homecoming football game against Del Valle. This was Alex’s first homecoming football game as the cheer coach. **PHOTO BY** Arushi Sharma

“I think the challenge so far has been figuring out the cheer program traditions and expectations of what is normally done, while also making changes to make the program my own,” Alex said.

Though the cheer team has many long appreciated traditions, the cheerleaders welcome Alex’s new ideas and improvements.

“Football season is already looking a lot more fun than it was in previous years with our new coaches,” Dallmann said. “I love how coach Alex likes to create new traditions this year for the team.”

Not all of the cheerleaders got to experience cheer under coach McCallum’s instruction. However, new member Sydney Parsons has also had a positive experience so far with Alex.

“This is my first year cheering at Bowie, but the experience with the new coaches is so great,” Parsons said. “Coach Alex brings so much joy and she really shows a lot of commitment to the team.”

Alex’s presence has had a positive impact on the teams during games and practices.

“Change can be very stressful and very hard, but having a new coach was definitely a very good change, and definitely changed Bowie cheer for the better,” Dallmann said.

Further pursuing her passion for cheerleading, Alex has adjusted smoothly into the school community. Alex is proud of the girls and the success of the program so far this year.

“They have all already had such an impact on my life so I hope I am having a positive impact in theirs as well,” Alex said. ■