

# ESSENTIAL EXTRACURRICULARS



**Above:** FINALLY IN PERSON: Members of the Clarke Central High School Hispanic Organization Promoting Education (HoPe) Club wave posters advertising their plant sale at Hendershot's on May 1. The club has conducted few in-person activities this year due to COVID-19 restrictions. "HoPe is something that really helps me as a Hispanic because the whole goal of HoPe is to increase the graduation rate of Hispanics and other minority communities through their education," HoPe President Roxy Peña-Pineda said. Photo by Audrey Enghauser

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed challenges for clubs at CCHS, such as difficulties with community service engagement and attracting new members.

BY ELIZA INGLE  
News Staffer

Virtual and limited in-person learning due to the pandemic has made it challenging for Clarke Central High School clubs to bring in new members, volunteer, coordinate meetings and maintain a sense of unity. However, many clubs are still finding ways to make an impact on their community.

Despite CCHS returning to in-person instruction five days a week, After School Programs will not continue for the remainder of the school year. Some clubs have decided not to conduct club meetings at all, such as the CCHS Young Democrats.

"All of (the officers) figured that we don't really want to go to another Zoom meeting during the week and it kind of makes it feel more like an obligation than something that's enjoyable," Young Democrats President Penelope Merva, a junior, said.

Instead, Young Democrats have focused on social media outreach.

"We've been doing all of our activities and like outreach through social media or Instagram. So once a week we post a news update, which includes all of the biggest news stories from the past week," Merva said. "And then we try to do an activity post about once a month."

Unlike the Young Democrats, the CCHS Hispanic Organization Promoting Education (HoPe) President Roxy Peña-Pineda, a senior, hosts club meetings once a month via Zoom, which populates with three to five regular attendees. Although it is different from club meetings in person, it provides consistency for the club.

"(At) our monthly meeting, we go over a presentation. It's pretty much a theme for the month," Peña-Pineda said. "(In February, the theme was) Valentine's Day, so we had a Kahoot about Valentine's Day trivia, and then the (four leaders) give a motivational seminar."

HoPe club, which specializes in leadership and community service opportunities, has faced problems attracting new members and maintaining consistent involvement.

"Now that we're online, it's not really that we can't make an impact, it's more like it's harder to (make an impact) because we can't do what we used to do," Peña-Pineda said. "Last year, we had give or take 80 members and now we have 12. I guess it's based on how we have everything online. Our service events are online, our meeting is online, we have an online school, so this whole technology thing is exhausting."

Despite these limitations, club advisers and members have found ways to maintain spirit and community.

"We use the engaging curriculum that (the HoPe organization) sends us each month to promote a sense of community while we're in a virtual setting," HoPe adviser and social studies department teacher Courtney Jones said. "During meetings, we play games, have discussions and more. Students also regularly engage with our HoPe chapter's social media."

The CCHS Garden Club, a club that works to maintain plants around campus and engages in service opportunities, has met both virtually and occasionally in person. According to Garden Club sponsor and science department teacher Dr. Debbie Mitchell, online learning has made gardening activities more difficult.

"The first time (Garden Club) met in person (after going virtual), we sowed seeds in flats of all kinds of perennial plants that typically aren't difficult to grow, and they survived, but the students haven't been able to come back and care for them," Mitchell said.

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**-- DEBBIE MITCHELL,**

Garden Club sponsor and science department teacher

The CCHS FFA chapter, which engages students in opportunities in science, agriculture and business, has received resources from the University of Georgia to assist with their work and in-person meetings.

"We have tons of participation within our classes, me and Dr. Mitchell both. We're both very excited for what's to come," FFA adviser and Career Technical and Agricultural Education department teacher Levi Carr said. "I just went and picked up some flowers from the (UGA Garden Student Community Farm). We picked out some plants there that were donated to us for our greenhouse and for our students to use in class and to plant into our gardens."

According to FFA secretary Ma Aye, a junior, virtual learning has strained the social aspect of the club.

"It's a lot different because I'm not interacting with my peers and my team. Just making it fun and interesting for others is hard," Aye said. "It's still fun online, but it's really important to be in person to do (activities)."

FFA continues to grow in members and has offered opportunities to students despite their setbacks.

"With the use of social media and other contacts to spread the word of our events such as our monthly meetings, fundraisers, (Career Development and Leadership Development Events) competitions, our numbers have definitely increased over time," Carr said. "I wanted to give each of my students the same opportunities as if we were face-to-face regardless of it looking a bit different. Success was soon to follow."

Looking forward to next year, club advisers are optimistic that opportunities for in-person meetings will strengthen morale and engagement.

"We still plan to have virtual meetings which best accommodates our crazy schedules, but (also) host in-person events where our students can mingle and interact with one another socially distant, of course," Carr said. "I am preparing (for there) to be tons of fun and learning experiences to be had by each (student) that passes through these doors of the CCHS Agriculture Classrooms."



**Above:** ZOOM CLUB: Members of the Clarke Central High School Hispanic Organization Promoting Education (HoPe) club meet via Zoom at one of their spring monthly meetings. The group has conducted mostly virtual activities in order to keep the club functioning throughout the pandemic. "COVID-19 has made gaining new members challenging, and I believe it's made the sense of community within the club a bit strained, like the virtual setting has done for all aspects of school," HoPe adviser and social studies department teacher Courtney Jones said. Screenshots courtesy of HoPe club