

Name: Daniel McCoppin
Grade: 9th
School: Barrington High School

My Inspirational Teacher

I've had a variety of teachers over the years, many of whom I've enjoyed being taught by, and others I didn't appreciate as much. Of the several who stand out, however, the most prominent would definitely have to be my eighth grade science teacher, Mrs. [Laura] Kaphingst. My eighth grade year took place over the course of the 2020-2021 school year—the height of the Covid pandemic. During that first semester, school was taught 100% virtually through zoom (save for a two day long return attempt that quickly failed), so it was incredibly difficult to make authentic connections with classmates and teachers. Even without the augmentation of in-person interaction, Mrs. Kaphingst managed to create an environment within my class far better than most of my pre-pandemic, in-person teachers. Her zoom classes were a safe haven of normalcy—at least, as normal as you can get online—during an era with so much uncertainty; she gave us opportunities to socialize with classmates over zoom, get to know people better, and also presented herself as a friendly, approachable teacher, which made for a far more comfortable learning environment. Additionally, she was a very empathetic person, giving us “mental health days” to encourage positive mental health, in which the only work required was to show photo evidence of yourself doing a relaxing activity.

When we did finally return to in-person school and I was forced back online while quarantining due to Covid exposure, she was the only one of my teachers that checked in on me, made sure I was doing ok, and kept me caught up with class work. When the weather warmed up, she often let us go outside, remove our masks, and connect with people in a way that felt normal, while keeping us safe. Both over zoom and in person, Mrs. Kaphingst proved to be an admirable teacher and role model for me and my classmates, keeping spirits high during a period of immense difficulty. She provided a sense of normality and allowed us to make connections with people in a way that many other teachers struggled to do over the course of my eighth grade school year, and for that she will always have my respect.