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## Lafayette student creates digital space to keep fellow students connected

By Jennifer Wake



Kaveer Gera Photo provided

When the COVID-19 lockdown occurred for 16-year-old Lafayette sophomore Kaveer Gera, he noticed a problem that had arisen at his school after the sudden transition to virtual school: casual connections had been completely and abruptly broken.

"You could no longer ask your classmate about the homework assignment or even make a casual joke as you were walking out of math class. When online class was over, the experience was suddenly and abruptly over," said Gera, who attends Athenian School in Danville. "One moment you were in a classroom with your peers, and the next moment you were in your room alone."

In an effort to repair the problem, Gera configured a digital communication space, which he titled Athenian Community, to replace that casual conversation. "The growth and usage in my school has been incredible, far surpassing my expectations," he said. In the month of May Athenian Community had over 100 members, with

students from all four grades. "We even have a majority of the 10th grade," Gera said. "As the pandemic drew relentlessly on, the platform kept us connected and maintained a degree of normalcy in the most abnormal times we had ever experienced. Instead of being completely isolated, the project helped us stay hopeful and ensured our mental health."

Students, based on their classes, are able to converse with each other in specific places designed for the class. Students have found it immensely useful for getting help for their classes, and the project has served as the best alternative to talking to classmates in person, in addition to helping reduce isolation and boredom during the pandemic. However, Athenian Community has also grown to be significantly more than just communication for classes. "It features a myriad of useful tools for school-related tasks, support for clubs and extracurricular groups, large and reliable administration and moderation teams, and much more," Gera said.

Fundamentally, Athenian Community was created to replace the lost casual connections and communication as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, and it has done that job very well. Even though Athenian Community was invented as a result of the pandemic, Gera believes its usefulness, versatility, and convenience will enable it to continue to be useful to students even after the pandemic subsides.

"Even as we have transitioned to socially distanced in-person school, Athenian Community has remained helpful because the masks, distancing, and limited exposure still inhibit truly natural social interaction," Gera said. "I'm excited to potentially extend the project to local schools in Lamorinda, because I think it could benefit the students just as it benefits the students at my school."

For information, visit [studentcommunity.kaveergera.com](http://studentcommunity.kaveergera.com)

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[back](#)

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