



# The Tower

96th Year: Issue 8

Princeton High School  
151 Moore Street, Princeton, New Jersey 08540

November 25, 2024

## Princeton Town Council to purchase Westminster campus



Founded in Dayton, Ohio, in 1926, Westminster Choir College was moved to Ithaca, New York, in 1929, and later Princeton in 1932, merging with Rider University in 1992.

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The campus of Westminster Choir College, which sits adjacent to PHS, is set to be acquired by the Princeton Town Council following the passage of a \$50 million bond ordinance. The status of the property, which is currently owned by Rider University, had been uncertain ever since the university decided to move its well-known music program from Princeton to their Lawrenceville campus. The only active organization that remains on the Princeton campus is the Westminster Conservatory of Music, which offers music lessons and other programs to local residents; the remaining 28 acres are largely unused.

In 2018, a Chinese company attempted to purchase the property, but the deal fell through. According to Princeton mayor Mark Freda, the town is acquiring the property in part to prevent the property from being purchased by similar large developers.

“I don’t think there’s very many people that live in town that would like to suddenly see 1000 housing units on that property. I think people hope that there’s some way to maintain some of what’s there — it’s a beautiful property,” said Freda.

Because of the campus’s proximity to PHS and Princeton Middle School, Freda and other town officials also hope that the property could be used by the Board of Education in future expansion efforts. However, all plans are tentative, and the town has not yet had an official meeting with the full BOE.

“The schools need to determine how they use it,” said Freda. “Do you put another school there? Do you close part of Franklin Avenue and put an addition on the middle school? Do you need more fields?”

The current \$50 million ordinance only covers the acquisition of the property and minor repairs to the buildings. Any significant capital improvements would require additional funding from the BOE’s budget. Even still, the current bond puts an estimated \$329 annual tax burden, over 30 years, on the average Princeton household. To help lower this cost, the town is planning on potentially renting out the space to local organizations.

While Freda said that he has not personally heard any resistance to the plans, he understands that the purchase could jeopardize the only existing program on site — Westminster Conservatory. Dr. Ruth Ochs, the current director of the Westminster Conservatory’s community orchestra, believes that special care must be taken to

ensure the institution can continue in Princeton.

“The Westminster conservatory is the strongest and largest musical asset that the Princeton community owns,” said Ochs. “It is a unique and special opportunity for accomplished individuals from different backgrounds [and] generations to come together and unite and learn from each other.”

The curriculum development and programming has become challenging due to lack of clarity of the conservatory’s future, even in the near term, according to Ochs. She also described the uncertainty that conservatory faculty have felt because of unclear messaging from the various parties involved in the acquisition process.

“We have no idea what comes on January 1,” said Ochs. “We’re hoping that things will just continue through the end of the year. Beyond that, it’s quite hard to imagine.”

In the long term, Ochs hopes that the conservatory could potentially partner with existing arts organizations

“I would hope, if there comes a point when — and this is 100 percent hypothetical — that if the Westminster Conservatory somehow needed to find independent partnership that there are arts organizations in the area that we might find fruitful partnership with,” said Ochs.

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## BOE passes resolution to hold \$85 million referendum

Emil Kapur, Avantika Palayekar, and Reed Sacks,  
STAFF WRITERS

On September 1, the Princeton Board of Education passed a resolution to vote on a bond referendum worth over \$85 million intended to renovate school facilities. The proposed renovations, if passed in full, would impact Princeton Middle School, PHS, and each of the four PPS elementary schools by modernizing aging district buildings and expanding PPS’s capacity to accommodate an increasing student population.

The projected spike in student population is a result of the municipality of Princeton complying with New Jersey’s affordable housing requirements via the construction of multiple residential developments across the township, the largest being those adjacent to the Princeton Shopping Center. Moreover, on October 18, the state mandated municipalities across New Jersey to meet specific housing obligations: Princeton is calculated to currently need 60 affordable housing units, with an additional 276 in total over the next decade. As such, the district expects an even greater influx of students, which the BOE purports will be beyond the current capacity of PPS.

“We, as a community, know that there’s been some affordable housing mandates and that the ... housing that Princeton was required to build resulted in about seven new developments that were approved by the council and are now underway and being built around town,” said Beth Behrend, an executive BOE member.

If approved, the BOE’s proposal for a bond referendum — where the local government asks for a vote from the public to approve or reject a project — would allow the government to borrow (via bonds) funding to complete the project. Princeton Township residents will vote on this referendum on January 28, 2025. To ensure that the public has a greater degree of flexibility surrounding the parts of the proposal they support, the BOE has divided it into three parts, each of which will be voted on independently.

“There’ll be three questions on the bond referendum, and question one has to pass for question two to pass, and questions one and two have to pass for question three to pass as well,” said BOE member Susan Kanter. “Since I’ve been in Princeton, that [hasn’t been] how referendums have gone out, so it’ll be new to the public to have that choice.”

The first proposal section, or “question,” would renew Community Park Elementary facilities and install small-scale ventilators at PHS, along with a broader HVAC system. Although the improvements would cost approximately \$37 million, savings from the new HVAC may total \$150,000 to \$200,000 annually.

“The renovation will encompass the building’s HVAC system, including the chillers, the boilers, and the air handling units,” according to the PPS website. “This work will bring these outdated systems up to par with those at the elementary and middle schools.”

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Recent developments, including at the Princeton Shopping Center, will impact the number of students attending public schools in the district.

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## ... coordinating transportation

Daniel Gu and Fangwu Yu  
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS



Donna Bradin goes over the district’s transportation arrangements while in her office.

Getting the 3,800 students in the Princeton district to and from school would cause a considerable amount of traffic in Princeton if not for the district’s transportation system. As the Transportation Supervisor of PPS, Donna Bradin ensures that all students are able to attend school and events safely and on time.

In order to coordinate transportation for over 30 other schools in addition to PPS’s

six public schools, Bradin starts months ahead of the first day of school to prepare for the upcoming school year. She begins with private schools, drafting routes in April and May, before planning routes for public schools in July, and sending them to contractors by August.

“We have 26 contracted routes, which consist of mostly our public schools and some of our [private] schools. The challenging part is everybody [has]

basically the same dismissal time, so I have to be really creative with how I do these routes,” said Bradin.

Bradin also helps to coordinate athletics and events. A contract with Irvin Raphael, a school bus company, allows flexibility in coordination with Princeton drivers. This allows Irvin Raphael to do nighttime or weekend trips when Princeton drivers are unavailable. She also helps to coordinate transportation for Princeton events such as the Princeton High School Marathon, Community Diversity Day, and even Teen Travel Camp.

“I’m very busy, always busy. I have a list of things each month that need to be done, whether it be reports or not, and I enjoy doing it all. It’s like a big puzzle, I have to put it all together,” said Bradin. “I always say that anybody can come to my office and visit just to see how we work.”

With nearly 30 years of experience, Donna Bradin has worked her way through the transportation ladder, from driving buses to becoming a trainer for CDL and a third party tester, before finally landing in the transportation office of PPS.

“I started doing this almost 30 years ago as a school bus driver, and I came from Pennsylvania. And when I started, my two children were young, and I was like,

‘I gotta get a job.’ Never thought of making it a career, to be honest with you, but here I am,” said Bradin.

As a former bus driver, Bradin says that being a driver is easy for the most part, but may encounter many challenges, including traffic road closures, or bad weather. Nevertheless, Bradin believes the positives of her job outweigh the negatives.

“I know from my own experience, you get to watch kids grow. I try and keep the same drivers on the same run ... I’m a firm believer [in that] because you build a relationship with families and you get to watch students grow up,” said Bradin. “I’m a people person ... I’ll run into somebody that I drove many years ago, and they’ll have families, and they’ll be like, ‘Hey, you were my bus driver,’ so that is rewarding in itself.”

Bradin stresses the importance of being able to connect with new students and their families who may not be used to taking a school bus every morning.

“I know we have a lot of families that come from other countries and their children may never have been on a school bus,” said Bradin. “I’ll say [to them] ‘Why don’t you come here with your child? We’ll take them for a bus ride and show them.’ I love doing that.”

## ... stocking vending machines

Leila Guitton, STAFF WRITER  
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Vending machines have long been a staple in high school, providing students with easy access to snacks and drinks during busy school days. At PHS, however, recent changes to the snack and drink options in vending machines have caused varying opinions and discussions among students and faculty. This shift in snack choices comes in part as a result of working with PPS’s new food provider, Pomptonian Food Services, and a stricter adherence to state nutrition guidelines.

As administrators strive to balance state regulations with student preferences, PHS vending machines have become a testing ground to find the right mix of health guidelines, pricing, and taste.

The decisions regarding what goes in the vending machines are complex, involving both the school district and third-party providers who stock the machines. Pomptonian manages the food in the cafeteria, but is not directly responsible for stocking the vending machines.

“It’s just the transition between one school food service and the next. This piece of the vending machine has kind of fallen into a vague area that we are still

trying to figure out,” said Dean of Students Diana Lygas, one of the main coordinators between PHS and Pomptonian.

For now, a third party vending machine company continues to replenish snacks based on sales trends and overall availability.

In addition to a change in providers, state regulations limiting the grams of sugar in the vending machine products have resulted in alternative snacks and drinks such as baked Cheetos, zero-sugar Gatorade, and reduced-fat Doritos being stocked in the machines. However, as long as the food adheres to the regulations, the school is working to provide what the students want.

“We are trying to get enough data [for what] our students’ preferences are,” said PHS Principal Cecilia Birge. “We can still bring some of the favorites back while meeting the guidelines; [those are] improvements that we’re hoping to make together with Pomptonian.”

In an effort to gain student input on the vending machines, Lygas recently conducted a Canvas survey. In the survey, many students have expressed that they



Pomptonian workers stock vending machines outside of the old gym.

would like to see non-diet gatorade, chips, and fruit snacks back in the machines. PHS will be working with Pomptonian Food Services and a third-party vendor to provide food in the vending machines that meets everyone’s needs.

“What is popular, what’s not, it takes a little time for the company to get used to,” said PPS Business Administrator Matthew Bouldin. “So we’re definitely listening to the feedback. We want to hear what [people] like and what [they] don’t like.”

## PHS Profiles: Suzanne Stevens

Simon Santamaria and Rohan Srivastava,  
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS



Stevens explains the concept of probability to her AP Statistics class.

“I don’t like math,” said geometry and AP Statistics teacher Suzanne Stevens.

For Stevens, the motivation to teach math instead comes from her enjoyment of helping others. Stevens found her spark for teaching while helping her peers in college understand a subject that she already knew well. This love of helping others grasp concepts and do well in subjects they may not enjoy is what led her to become a teacher.

“I never liked math. I hated math in high school. I went to college and said, ‘I’m going to take the easiest math I could possibly take in my whole life so I can get it over with,’” said Stevens.

Pursuing her passion for teaching, Stevens taught at many places before coming to PHS. Beginning her career in New York, Stevens went on to teach at

Robbinsville High School, South Brunswick High School, and the Princeton University Preparatory Program. Ultimately, PHS drew Stevens’ attention because of the freedom that both teachers and students have in teaching and learning.

“The administration lets you run your classroom the way you want to run your classroom. Students are held to a high standard, but also given some freedom, which is really nice, and it seems to be a good blend that works,” said Stevens.

Stevens recognizes that many students struggle with learning math from equations written on a board.

“I try to do all hands-on stuff ... My philosophy of teaching is that I give you an activity or you try something and figure it out, and then you get to the main idea ... there’s exploration and discovery which

translates better into recall and processing, but ... the actual experience helps in recall later,” said Stevens.

Learning through exploration allows students to remember concepts through hands-on application, rather than terminology they may have a hard time remembering.

Stevens believes that though students may not believe in their own ability to understand something, they can still learn it. All they need is someone to put in the effort to make the content accessible to them.

“I like helping people recognize they could do something. If someone took the time to explain something in a way that was understandable ... they were able to get it, and it was amazing to help people do that,” said Stevens.



# Princeton Town Council to purchase Westminster campus

Continued from Page One

Rider University has said that the Conservatory will continue to operate through the end of this academic year. Beyond that, however, plans are still uncertain, according to Kristine Brown, Rider University's Vice President of External Affairs.

"The municipality has recognized the value of the Westminster Conservatory for the community, and at this time, we expect the Conservatory will continue to operate in Princeton through June 2025," said Brown. "As the municipality's process to acquire the property continues, and any future decisions regarding operations on that property are made, we will certainly keep the community informed as we go forward."

Even if the Conservatory stays under the administration of Rider University, Ochs has expressed concerns regarding the business-focused approach the university has to the music education the Conservatory offers. The Conservatory is ostensibly a non-profit, according to Ochs, which doesn't align with the way Rider University views the program.

"There's a very fundamental conflict at play ... it's business versus the cultivation and the teaching of music, which is in itself, not a sustainable endeavor," said Ochs. "I would love Rider University to find a way to continue the relationship with the Conservatory because I really like continuing to have a relationship with Westminster Choir College."

Robert Loughran, the director of the PHS orchestra program, believes that if the deal goes through and Rider University sells the conservatory, the conservatory could potentially return to its old level of activity.

"It would be great to see it return to its vibrancy," said Loughran. "[The orchestra performs] there every spring, so I'm all for [the purchase]."

One of the major barriers to the acquisition of the land remains the outstanding legal challenges between Rider and the Princeton Theological Seminary. Because the trust that initially founded Westminster Choir College in the 1930s stipulates that the property must be used "for the purpose of training ministers of music for Evangelical churches," a group of Westminster Choir College affiliates



Rider attempted to sell the campus to the Beijing-based Kaiwen Education Technology Company in 2018, but failed due to opposition from the Princeton Theological Seminary and donors, as well as legal issues.

are contending that the town cannot use the land for recreation or building public schools.

However, the town is planning on fighting this lawsuit through the concept known as eminent domain — the power the government has to seize private land and convert it for public use. This power, historically used to facilitate transportation and create public buildings, is being considered in this case to facilitate the potential expansion of the public schools.

"We assume that the legal hurdles will be resolved which will allow us to move forward. But you know, while we're pretty confident of that, nothing's for certain until it happens," said Freda.

# BOE passes resolution to hold \$85 million referendum

Continued from Page One



The Numina Art Gallery is among the locations at PHS that would be remodelled via the referendum.

If the first question were to be approved, Princeton residents would then vote on the second question, which costs \$38.3 million and largely consists of changes to PMS infrastructure. However, this question would also remodel the Numina Art Gallery and transform current district tech office to be used for student instruction. The third question of the proposal, worth nearly \$13 million, is focused entirely on constructing more classrooms and enlarging existing facilities at Littlebrook Elementary.

"The school district does not operate in a vacuum, and we are aware of other recent impacts to the taxpayer. After much discussion, the Board and administration believe that a three-question format is the best approach to let voters decide their additional level of investment in the public schools," said BOE president Dafna Kendal.

Behrend and Kanter emphasized that the state, rather than the municipality, would pay for significant parts of the proposal; approximately 15 percent of the question one and two funds would come from New Jersey. If all three questions were to pass, owners of Princeton homes with an average assessed value of \$853,000 would see an estimated increase of \$532 yearly for 27 years of financing.

BOE members disavowed any form of advocacy from other members, emphasizing the importance of voter input in the January decision.

"Our job is just to put together the solutions, and we've worked really hard on it for many years, and had some really good professionals advising us," said Behrend. "We've had a lot of forums with the public ... it's been a really collaborative process. We all learned a lot, and I think we all feel pretty good about the solutions we've come to, and now putting it out there for the voters to consider."

# Behind the scenes: college visits at PHS

Angela Chen, Madeline Levine, and Benjamin Li, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

November marks the final month of college representative visits to PHS in 2024, concluding three months of visits from over 200 colleges and universities from around the country and the world. Students were able to explore a wide range of institutions during school hours, learning about the unique features each college offers.

Nipurna Shah, PHS's college counselor begins the planning process by opening a calendar on Scoir in mid-August for schools to begin registering

their representatives for visits. This calendar streamlines the scheduling process, allowing institutions to coordinate with other high schools and arrange visits more efficiently. Currently registered colleges return year after year, and many others show interest in visiting PHS.

R

"For the most part, we have a robust assortment of different colleges, and many of them come back every year," said Shah. "They like our students. They want our students."

Adjusting to the bell schedule each year to squeeze in college visits requires a close look at holidays, professional development days, and other school activities. To minimize potential scheduling conflicts, Shah communicates with both college representatives and the school's administration. However, coordinating many people's schedules is never an easy task.

"Our schedule gets really full very quickly, and then some colleges, at the last minute ... decide they want to come. So I have to work around existing colleges to see if I can fit other ones in," said Shah.

Shah also considers the students' bell schedule, as seen in her decision to avoid hosting college visits on Tiger Day Thursdays since it is a shortened day with limited availability. Unexpected evacuation and fire drills can also create complications, often requiring last-minute adjustments.

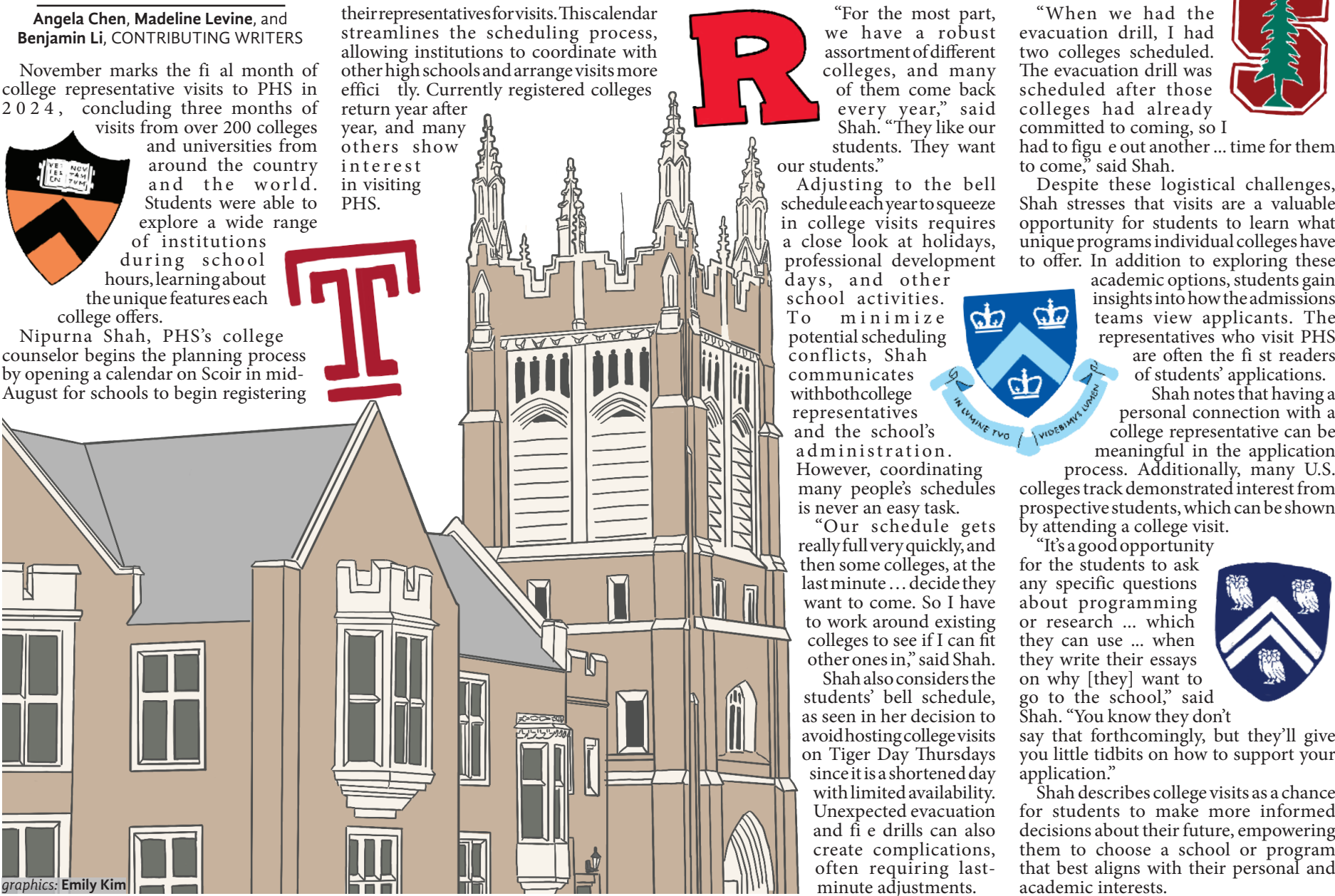
"When we had the evacuation drill, I had two colleges scheduled. The evacuation drill was scheduled after those colleges had already committed to coming, so I had to figure out another ... time for them to come," said Shah.

Despite these logistical challenges, Shah stresses that visits are a valuable opportunity for students to learn what unique programs individual colleges have to offer. In addition to exploring these academic options, students gain insights into how the admissions teams view applicants. The representatives who visit PHS are often the first readers of students' applications.

Shah notes that having a personal connection with a college representative can be meaningful in the application process. Additionally, many U.S. colleges track demonstrated interest from prospective students, which can be shown by attending a college visit.

"It's a good opportunity for the students to ask any specific questions about programming or research ... which they can use ... when they write their essays on why [they] want to go to the school," said Shah. "You know they don't say that forthcomingly, but they'll give you little tidbits on how to support your application."

Shah describes college visits as a chance for students to make more informed decisions about their future, empowering them to choose a school or program that best aligns with their personal and academic interests.



graphics: Emily Kim



# OPINIONS

## The healthy way to stop being lonely

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Iniya Karimanal, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

On February 28 of this year, Florida teenager Sewell Setzer committed suicide after months of conversing sexually with an AI chatbot resembling Danaerys Targaryan, a character from the HBO show “Game of Thrones,” on the platform Character.AI. Eventually, the chatbot encouraged the young man to take his own life. Sewell’s case is all around us; he found himself in the common position of social isolation, causing a spiral of emotional vulnerability that was left unchecked and ultimately resulted in a severe mental health crisis.

Reliable and steadfast friends are difficult to come by in a world dominated by shallow interactions. Social anxiety is becoming increasingly common as young people feel pressured by high standards of “perfection,” driving a fear of inadequacy. As teenagers feel more detached from their support system of friends and mentors, the loneliness epidemic continues to grow. The popularity of conversational AI-driven characters is skyrocketing, and the trend is likely to continue after Google recently acquired Character.AI for \$2.5 billion. As AI chatbots continue to proliferate and target socially isolated young people, the loneliness epidemic continues to grow.

A 2021 Harvard Graduate School of Education survey of 950 Americans found that 61 percent of young people ages 18–25 reported experiencing profound loneliness compared to only 36 percent among other age groups. The study’s researchers attribute this trend to factors such as young people lacking close connections and noting that, compared to older adults, they have not yet developed “mature, reciprocal” relationships with others yet.

Unfortunately, the internet has moved to romanticize the correlation between teenage years and lonely behavior, portraying isolation as admirable. Online trends idolize people who are “mysterious,” as though they are more complex or interesting than others. For instance, “nonchalant dreadheads” — perpetually aloof individuals who seem entirely detached from all social interactions — have become people to venerate. Terms like “I Don’t Give A F— (IDGAF) war” reflect a growing culture of apathy and passivity in young people. “Ghosting” — suddenly cutting off communication without warning — has become

a glorified solution to control and dispose of others, making pulling away from connections without explanation a normalized and facile act.

The rise in people disconnecting from the rest of society continues to undermine the value of forming long-lasting relationships. In an attempt to curb the painful impacts of loneliness, individuals also increasingly prefer the instantaneous rush of dopamine from often (though not limited to) short-term, low-commitment romantic relationships over the perennial stability of platonic ones. After its surge in popularity over the past few years, the word “situationship” even became a contender for Oxford Word of the Year — further demonstrating how common these no-strings-attached relationships have become.

Romance in general has become another form of escape for lonely people. However, prioritizing romantic relationships is often coupled with deep dissatisfaction and insufficiency in one’s stable platonic bonds. One who craves romance often seeks two things through it: emotional vulnerability and reliability. Because their friendships lack these qualities, and teenagers are often culturally conditioned to believe that they are guaranteed in romantic relationships, many assume romantic relationships are the instant

and all-encompassing solution to their loneliness. In reality, both vulnerability and reliability should be present in healthy, functional friendships. True friends are those you can count on to support you in difficult situations, and want to help you. A romantic partner will never be fully capable of replacing the importance of

If you or someone you know is undergoing a mental health crisis, call the suicide hotline: 988



graphic: Charley Hu

is more important than ever as we undergo various changes in our lives, whether it be personally, academically, or socially. By nurturing our friendships, we improve our wellbeing and push ourselves to become the best versions of ourselves. Thus, we urge you to show effort within your relationships instead of opting for other forms of escape; send your friends a kind message, wave to them when you see them, initiate a conversation. Give out your love, and you’ll see it return.

## Empowering minds: a new era of learning at PHS

Angela Chen and Aryan Singla,  
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

In a world where AI can be used as an automated thesaurus, grammar checker, editor, and worksheet filler all in one, it is understandable that schools may be hesitant about its ethics; but the benefits of integrating it into education are still hard to ignore. So why are we holding back on a tool that could transform how we learn? Instead of worrying that AI might “spoil” students, maybe it’s time to recognize it as a potential solution for the United States’ deteriorating education system — a tool that empowers students to learn more efficiently.

At PHS, students constantly juggle rigorous coursework, intense extracurriculars, and ever-looming college prep. So what if AI could step in? Imagine a world where AI tools can keep track of deadlines, create personalized study guides for your hardest classes, or even streamline teacher feedback, leaving you and your teachers more time for critical one-on-one moments.

Instead of sifting through hour-long videos or scouring lengthy research papers for that one idea you need, AI-powered tools such as Otter or NoteGPT are able to categorize information

and provide concise summaries. This allows students to allocate more time to absorbing or understanding key ideas instead of spending time searching for them. AI can be an on-demand and cost-effective tutor, with programs like Khan Academy’s Khanmigo that are always available to assist students with difficult concepts by walking them through step-by-step.

But the benefits of AI go beyond supporting students at PHS; it can also provide valuable assistance to teachers. As the country faces a teacher shortage driven by feelings of being underpaid and overworked, AI can be a valuable tool to ease educators’ stress and retain more teachers in the profession. By using AI to handle some time-consuming and repetitive tasks, such as grading work based on completion, teachers can instead

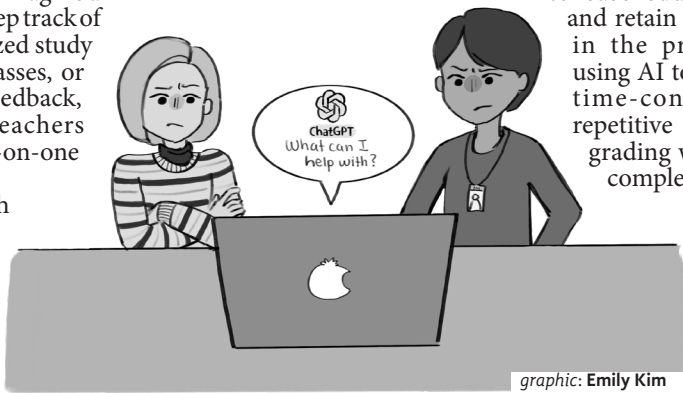
invest that time into providing personalized support or planning engaging lessons that are memorable and valuable. Tasks that previously took hours can now be knocked

off of to-do lists in minutes, allowing teachers to destress and prioritize impactful teaching over busy work, creating a stronger and more supportive environment for students.

In a 2023 article titled “New York City Public Schools Ban Access to AI Tool That Could Help Students Cheat,” Jennifer Korn and Samantha Kelly of CNN express concerns about AI’s ability to generate “convincing responses and even essays in response to user prompts, could make it

easier for students to cheat.” They also note the worry that tools like ChatGPT could spread inaccurate information. However, misinformation is not unique to AI; it’s a challenge we face daily, whether through the internet, social media, or even word of mouth. Just as students are taught to verify information from these traditional sources, they can also apply this valuable skill to using AI responsibly. Rather than blocking access, teachers at PHS could incorporate lessons on how to use AI

effectively into their classes, helping students understand its potential and warn of its ethical concerns. Additionally, PHS teachers have access to School AI, a program that can identify generated AI content, holding students who misuse this privilege accountable while teaching integrity. Restricting access to AI is an ineffective solution; it is more beneficial to equip students with values and critical thinking skills that help them realize AI is a resource for growth and learning — not just for easy answers.



graphic: Emily Kim



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# The pitfalls of “die-hard” fandom

Stephanie Liao, STAFF WRITER  
Aarna Dharmavarapu, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

“If you can recognize these songs, you’re a real fan of Sabrina Carpenter,” reads an Instagram reel. At the 10 percent mark, a radio hit like “Espresso” plays, but the songs get progressively harder to recognize. By the 100 percent mark, an original fan is expected to know the “Girl Meets World” theme song from early on in Carpenter’s career. Other videos on social media made by these self-proclaimed “original fans” claim that “only true fans deserve tour tickets,” advocating for Ticketmaster’s Verified Fan system to include a test of fandom membership in order to prove “concert eligibility.” In today’s fandoms, simply enjoying an artist’s music isn’t enough to be considered a real fan — you now have to pass a series of loyalty tests to earn your place. The pressure to be considered a “true” fan has turned artists’ fanbases into exclusive clubs where entirely random criteria are more important than genuine appreciation.

In order to be considered a “true” fan, not only do you have to know the lyrics, but you have to know the meaning behind each verse, every milestone in the artist’s life, and even the outfits they wore at a specific concert. This leads to a contrived hierarchy,

where long-time fans view themselves as superior to newer ones who may not yet be as familiar with the artist. This mentality is given the perfect opportunity to thrive on social media, which teenagers are heavily exposed to and influenced by. Though videos posted by die-hard fans that promote standards for belonging to the fandom, such as being able to understand a niche interview reference or an obscure childhood fact, students who only recently started

liking an artist’s music feel as if they must know every possible detail in order to be considered a real fan.

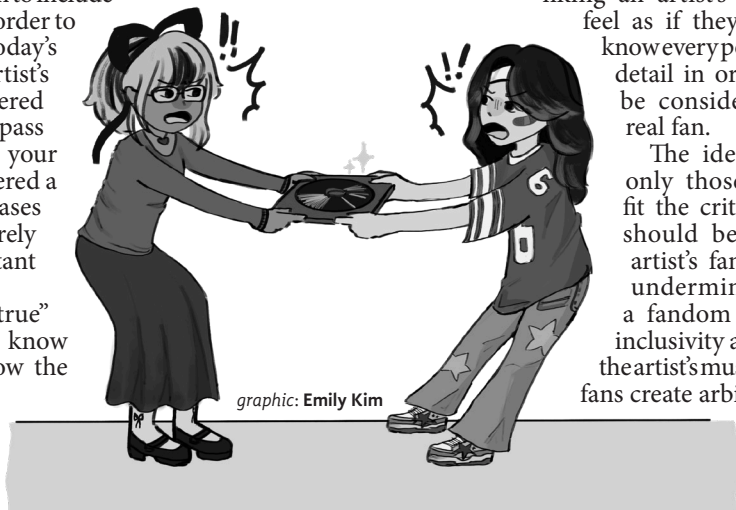
The idea that only those who fit the criteria of a true fan should be able to join an artist’s fanbase significantly undermines the idea that a fandom should be about inclusivity and shared love for the artist’s music. When longtime fans create arbitrary standards of

worthiness for newer fans to gain “entry” into the fandom, they

cultivate an atmosphere that’s less based on celebrating and enjoying the artist’s work, and more about separating the true fans from the fake ones. In a space originally meant to bring people with a shared passion together, the concept of being a die-hard fan has become a weapon that pits fans against one another, creating a toxic space where only a select few get to claim ownership over the music they love.

The current concept of a “true” fan has significantly undermined the point of fandoms. By plaguing fanbases with arbitrary “tests” and pecking orders to prove worthiness of being part of the fandom, older fans are shutting out newer ones, stopping keeping fanbases from being inclusive spaces. This shift harbors a toxic environment where ownership over an artist’s work becomes a source of division that can tear these fan communities apart.

While many teenagers may feel pressured to conform to this culture, they, as the largest consumers of music, have the power to realign fandoms with their original value of unity. Superfans, in particular, have a responsibility to take a step back and recognize that just because they have been a fan of an artist longer than their classmates, it doesn’t mean they are automatically superior. By discouraging demeaning behavior toward newer fans and offering guidance instead of judgment, long-time fans can help cultivate a welcoming and supportive space. In doing so, fandoms can thrive as the communities of warmth and excitement we all want them to be.



# We should embrace quitting

Harry Dweck, STAFF WRITER  
Franciszka Czerniak, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

In the United States, endurance is a virtue valued above all else. It’s a foundation of the American dream, the belief that through determination anyone can achieve anything. And while not a bad ideal by itself, somehow society has also accepted that the opposite is true — that quitting guarantees failure.

As high school students, we are often the most susceptible to this way of thinking. We’ve all stuck with things we hated for years simply because of the faults associated with being a quitter.

However, quitting — especially in high school — is sometimes the best course of action, contrary to the sign of laziness or emotional weakness that it’s stereotypically believed to be.

In order to improve in anything, one first has to accept that the current state of things is not perfect — that it can be improved upon. This principle seems so obvious in school or sports. We go to school and learn because we know that our current understanding of the world isn’t perfect. We exercise because the current state of our body isn’t perfect.

Somehow, when it comes to deciding what we spend time on, we don’t acknowledge imperfection or have any desire to improve. This isn’t about trivial things like watching movies or scrolling online — this is about the activities we put effort and focus into, day after day. All too often, we endure activities that we don’t enjoy or don’t improve in simply out of habit.

In being more open to quitting things, we are acknowledging that the way we spend our time can be improved. In an article for The New York Times, MIT professor Sendhil Mullainathan wrote that “experimentation is an act of humility, an acknowledgment that there is simply no way of knowing without trying something different.”

Though the act of quitting is a risk, and therefore admittedly scary, it’s usually the only way to experiment with figuring out how to spend our time. And as high school students, it’s ridiculous to think that we have it all figured out.

In addition to this fear comes the psychological phenomenon known as the sunk-cost fallacy. The fallacy

(so called because it’s completely illogical) describes an all too common action that people take: continuing with something pointless or unpleasant simply because of past investment in the activity. Although you shouldn’t give up after every little hiccup, if something is consistently unrewarding, perhaps it’s best to move on and experiment with a different activity.

Quitting shouldn’t immediately be thought of negatively, or as a sign of defeat. It’s not permanent. Though it is a change, it can also provide some distance and a space for reflection. It allows us to compare how we feel both with and without a given activity in our life. It’s never too late to try new things, but it’s also never too late to quit.



photos: Tessa Silver and Chloe Zhao  
graphic: Katherine Chen

PHS SPEAKS OUT

“USUALLY I JUST TALK WITH THEM AND THEY ... KNOW HOW TO COMFORT ME OR THEY’LL GIVE ME SOME ADVICE ON THE SITUATION.”  
- ASHVI GADAGOTTU ’28

“I’M HERE WHENEVER YOU NEED TO TALK,’ OR IF IT’S SOMETHING SCHOOL-RELATED, THEY’LL BE LIKE, ‘OH, IT’S OKAY, YOU CAN DO BETTER NEXT TIME.’”  
- MILANIA KAPOOR ’27

“PEOPLE I KNOW ... REACH OUT AND OFFER TO HELP WITH STUFF. IF I’M TALKING TO PEOPLE WHO HAVE GONE THROUGH THE SAME THING, IT’S VERY HELPFUL.”  
- SKYE PINNEO ’26

“I PREFER ... TALKING THROUGH AN ISSUE AND IT’S VERY NICE WHEN [MY FRIENDS AND I] CAN JUST SIT THROUGH A LUNCH PERIOD AND WE GET TO TALK ABOUT IT AND ... JUST LET OFF SOME STEAM.”  
- ANYA HAEBERLI ’25





# In support of local news sources

Editorial

Last month, The Jersey Journal, a 157-year-old newspaper that has covered Hudson County since before the Civil War, printed its final edition. It joins the growing list of local papers that have closed in recent years because of financial hardship, leaving communities without dedicated news sources. While national outlets such as The New York Times and The Washington Post continue to thrive, the loss of local newspapers is creating a void in journalism.

Local newspapers also serve as watchdogs for more specific issues that directly impact our daily lives. National newspapers must cast a wide net, covering stories that resonate with readers across the country. They can't dedicate reporters to cover every town hall meeting or investigate why the construction of the new community center is behind schedule. But these are exactly the kinds of stories that impact people's lives the most, and local newspapers meet their community's need for them. When our Board of Education debates changes to the school curriculum or considers budget cuts, local reporters are there in the room, taking notes and asking tough questions. They translate complex policy decisions into clear, demystified information for the public to process.

Additionally, small-town culture is preserved through local news sources. Consider our own local community events such as the upcoming annual Christmas tree lighting in Palmer Square. While this event probably wouldn't interest readers in California or Texas, it's a cherished tradition in Princeton that brings community members together each

year. You won't find coverage of it in The New York Times, but that doesn't make it any less meaningful to the families who attend, the local musicians and artists who participate, or the small businesses that benefit from the increased foot traffic. It's worthy of recognition, and that recognition is only likely to come from a local newspaper.

The closure of local newspapers creates what journalists call "news deserts" — communities without access to local reporting. Without reporters attending city council meetings or investigating local concerns, who will hold our local officials accountable? Who will tell the stories that matter most to our community?

As student journalists, we have an inside perspective on this issue. Because we focus primarily on school news, we're learning firsthand the importance of local reporting. Every story we write about our school's achievements, challenges, or changes reminds us that local journalism matters — not because it generates profit monetarily, but because it serves a community.

The loss of The Jersey Journal should serve as a wake-up call. Local newspapers might not always be financially profitable, but their value to community life is immeasurable. Supporting local journalism isn't just about preserving jobs or tradition — it's about ensuring that our community's voice continues to be heard, its stories told, and its citizens informed about the issues that affect them most directly. That's something worth protecting, even if it doesn't show up on a balance sheet.

# Librarians need to be protected

Ben Li and Alexander Gu, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

If there are laws to protect individuals in marginalized communities from discrimination in areas like employment, healthcare, and education, why shouldn't there be laws to protect books that reflect their stories and experiences? Students at PHS and across the country deserve access to the voices of minority groups and a chance to learn about their lives and beliefs through literature. According to the American Library Association (ALA), censorship of books has increased by 65 percent from 2022 to 2023, with over 4,000 books containing themes of racial justice or gender identity being banned from public and school libraries. Recently, however, the New Jersey Senate has started to focus on preventing censorship to promote diversity.

On October 28, 2024, the Freedom to Read Act was passed by the New Jersey Senate, but is currently awaiting the approval of Governor Phil Murphy. This law will prevent books from being banned solely because of their origin, background, or views in public and school libraries. It aims to enforce the ALA's Library Bill of Rights, which seeks to make libraries inclusive and diverse environments. This is especially important for students as access to more diverse literature allows them to build cultural awareness, empathy, and critical thinking.



Trey Carnevale, Educational Media Assistant for the Learning Commons, shelves books.

In addition, if the Freedom to Read Act is approved, it will protect librarians. Currently, librarians face pressure to remove certain books, especially those dealing with sensitive topics such as race and gender. In 2023, a survey conducted by the School Library Journal found that 18 percent of elementary school librarians reported experiencing harassment, and the rate rose to 30 percent among librarians in high schools. Harassment often comes from parents who want to protect their children from content they consider harmful. It also often comes from political groups who oppose the representation of certain ideas, such as LGBTQ+ themes, in libraries. As a result, these people claim that librarians are spreading inappropriate content and pressure them to remove those books, despite a lack of evidence. With the Freedom to Read Act in place, librarians will be granted liability protection, encouraging them to do their jobs without fear of legal repercussions and harassment from the public, leading to a less stressful work environment.

The harmful effects of censorship on society are displayed in Ray Bradbury's dystopian novel "Fahrenheit 451." Bradbury's novel is a direct reference to historical

# The Tower

Princeton High School  
151 Moore Street, Princeton, New Jersey

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## Mission Statement

The Tower serves as a medium of information for the community through reporting and/or analyzing the inner workings of Princeton High School, the school district, and cultural and athletic events that affect the student body, providing a source of general news for parents, teachers, and peers; voicing various opinions from an informed group of writers; and maintaining quality in accurate content and appealing aesthetics, as well as upholding professionalism and journalistic integrity.

## Editorial Board

The Editorial Board of the Tower consists of a select group of 14 Tower 2024 staff members. The views of board members are accurately reflected in the editorial, which is co-written each month by the Board with primary authorship changing monthly.

## Letter and Submission Policy

All letters and articles are welcome for consideration. Please e-mail all submissions to [phstowersenioreditors@gmail.com](mailto:phstowersenioreditors@gmail.com). The editors reserve the rights to alter letters for length and to edit articles. The Editor-in-Chief takes full responsibility for the content of this paper.

## The Tower Online

The Tower is available to read online at [www.towerphs.com](http://www.towerphs.com)

The newspaper accepts advice from the administration and the advisors in regard to the newspaper's content; however, the final decision to print the content lies with the Editor-in-Chief. The Tower's articles do not necessarily represent the views of the administration, faculty, or staff.

ensorship events like the Nazi book burnings, where thousands of books, primarily written by Jewish authors or others considered "un-German," were destroyed to control public thought. In the book, everything that goes against the government's ideals are censored, leaving people desensitized and overly reliant on technology, making them unable to think for themselves. Individuals also refrain from sharing their opinions due to the fear of retribution. Today, the novel serves as a reminder of the importance of protecting individuality and preventing censorship from enforcing conformity and suppressing critical thought within individuals.

In a world where the voices of marginalized groups are suppressed, it is incredibly important to solve the issue of censorship and be able to connect with all communities. The Freedom to Read Act is one step towards this, but censorship still remains a concern: Pen America found that in the United States, there are over 40 educational gag orders that have become law in over 22 states, restricting topics such as race and gender to be taught in schools. Such policies prevent individuals from developing beliefs and critical thinking. With the Freedom to Read Act, New Jersey will set an example for other states to establish laws that restrain censorship. Now it is time for us to advocate and promote similar ideas that advocate for freedom of expression and access to diverse perspectives so that we can explore our own interests and beliefs without our rights being infringed by censorship.

CHEERS

STUFF WE LIKE

STUFF WE DON'T

JEERS

CHRISTMAS MUSIC

TYLER THE CREATOR'S new album

National Merit CUTOFF

Cafeteria BAGELS

PLUSH KEYCHAINS

THANKSGIVING BREAK

Temperature TURBULENCE

Doordash THIEVES

New seasonal JELLY CATS

"HOMEWORK FREE WEEKENDS" that have homework anyway





## The demise of Nike

Maxime DeVico and Anna Petrova, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

As Nike stocks plummet, the long-time global leader in athletic footwear seems to not be taking its own advice when it comes to “just doing it.” Since its founding in 1962, Nike’s popularity has been propelled by marketing campaigns and sponsorships of athletes who would later attain worldwide fame. The brand’s shoes are not only a staple on tracks, courts, and fields, but also an emblem of style and popular culture. While they will remain in every sneakerhead’s collection for years, the brand’s popularity, particularly its appeal to athletes, has noticeably decreased with an upsurge in more sport-specific shoes.

Many brands market their products for a specific sport, while Nike’s shoes are solely advertised as everyday sneakers or basketball shoes. For example, many runners have switched to On Clouds or HOKAs, volleyball players have switched to Avoli, and non-athletes have switched to more comfortable or “better-looking” shoes, such as Vans, Uggs, Converse, or Adidas.

“For volleyball, you need a lot of ankle support and [Avoli has] good insoles for jumping, and they look cool as well,” said girls volleyball Captain Pearl Agel ’25, who is one of many players who transferred to Avoli.

A budding new company created only last year, specifically catered to the needs of female volleyball players, Avoli shoes are made to support and cushion a player’s feet after powerful and repetitive jumps. Nike shoes, on the other hand, aren’t made with that in mind. In fact, basketball athletes jump four times less than volleyball players do, making basketball shoes — Nike’s forte — less viable in a competitive field.

Another competitor taking sales away from Nike is HOKA. HOKA One One, known simply as HOKA, is an athletic company geared towards runners. Their shoes have a lot of cushioning, making propulsion easier and bracing the foot’s impact when it hits the ground. Their high breathability is another reason so many athletes have made the switch to HOKA.

“I wear [HOKA shoes] because they work better for me as training shoes,” said cross country runner Mila Trkov ’27.

A problem that Nike seems to fall into is that their new models seem too similar to older models, or are just plain recolors. Seeing that aesthetics is a primary reason why people wear the shoes they do, Nike has become less desirable in the long run.

“I personally think [Converse shoes] are comfortable and look cooler,” said Eve Kavookjian ’27.

Although many people have switched from Nike to other brands that are more preferable to them, it is nowhere near gone or unpopular. Their shoes are still flooding the hallways of many schools, and customers of all ages are sure to be sporting the distinctive swoosh for years to come.

photos: Syra Bhatt



# Vanguard interviews: Fleet Feet

## Which pop culture shoe are you?

Asma Frough and Finn Wedmid,  
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Syra Bhatt, VANGUARD CO-EDITOR  
Aarna Dharmavarapu, STAFF WRITER



## What's the hype with Crocs?

Aritra Ray, MULTIMEDIA EDITOR  
Aryan Singla, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

In the crowded hallways of PHS, Crocs stand out. Neon orange, pastel blue, or covered in unique Jibbitz charms, these shoes have become as much a fashion statement as they are a choice for comfort. From athletes to artists, it seems everyone has embraced the hype of Crocs. But what's driving this trend?

The rise of Crocs from quirky clogs to an iconic fashion statement owes much to celebrity influence and creative collaborations. Over the years, big names like Post Malone, Justin Bieber, and even high-end brands like Balenciaga have partnered with Crocs, creating exclusive, limited-edition Crocs that instantly sell out. When celebrities started wearing Crocs — not just casually, but on red carpets and in music videos — the brand gained a new level of prestige. These partnerships made Crocs “cool,” transforming them from practical shoes to symbols of self-exploration and comfort.

The enduring popularity of Crocs captures the spirit of our ever-changing culture. As society continues to embrace self-expression, individuality, and comfort, Crocs are a prime example of how our views on style have evolved. No longer bound to hold onto the traditional ideas of style, what may have once been seen as “ugly” is now reshaping the pop culture landscape. So whether you rock Crocs with a single standout Jibbitz charm, prefer them in sports mode, or just straight-up hate them, there's no question: Crocs will be here to stay.

Beyond the “coolness” factor, Crocs also owe their popularity to their unique Croslite material, a closed cell resin foam, which makes them both versatile and easy on the feet. With the busy lives of PHS students, it's no wonder that Crocs have become a top choice for the student body. Whether hurrying between classes, heading to sports practice, or relaxing with friends, these shoes offer unparalleled comfort and versatility to match any pace.

The COVID-19 pandemic was another major turning point for Crocs and the “ugly fashion” trend as a whole. With everyone stuck at home, fashion priorities shifted almost overnight; comfort and ease took center stage, and suddenly the unconventional appeal of Crocs made perfect sense. As people traded formalwear for loungewear and comfy shoes, Crocs became an obvious choice — they are practical, easy to slip on, and surprisingly fun to customize. With the added influence of social media and celebrities who embraced their quirky appeal, Crocs became a symbol of pandemic fashion, reflecting both the need for comfort and a playful approach that helped people cope with challenging times. Emily Brayshaw describes this in her 2023 article “Gen Z grew up in a world filled with ugly fashion – no wonder they love their Crocs,” noting that “Crocs are wearable memes for Gen Z,” capturing the humor and authenticity that online culture celebrates.

Beyond their association with pandemic fashion, Crocs have evolved into a powerful way for people to express their style and personality. With Jibbitz charms, each pair tells a story — whether it's bright colors, symbols of favorite bands, or quirky charms that hint at inside jokes. At PHS, Crocs aren't just footwear; they're a small, fun way to show what you're into without saying a word. In a world of similar styles, Crocs lets students stand out, and that's what makes them so popular.



Photo credits: Harper & Row, Pixar Animation Studios, Sony Animation Pictures, Universal Pictures, SYCO Games, Warner Bros. Pictures, Walt Disney Studios, Wikipedia



With its walls lined with compression socks, athleticwear, and sneakers of every color, Fleet Feet Princeton has served the local community as both a running store and fitness group. Located on Nassau Street, they offer personalized shoe fittings for customers that range from experienced marathon runners to nurses who are constantly on their feet. Although Fleet Feet has almost 40 brands in store, they encourage personal well-being over anything else.

“I think [a] common mistake is when people kind of get themselves boxed into ... having that brand per se, when in reality, it's about comfort more than anything else,” said Connor McCraney, Fleet Feet's Retail Experience Manager.

Using a 3D foot scanner combined with a pressure plate, Fleet Feet helps customers find their best running shoe fit.

“[The scanner] gives us that 3D image of a person's foot so we can see exactly what someone's true foot size is all the way down [to the] decimal points,” said McCraney. “We also have what's called a pressure plate, which lets us ... see how people distribute pressure.”

Taking precautions to accurately measure people's feet and choosing the right fit can help prevent injury. Much of the job, however, is the runner's responsibility, as they evaluate the condition of their footwear. A shoe's durability is one of the most important factors in both ensuring a runner's comfort and minimizing injuries.

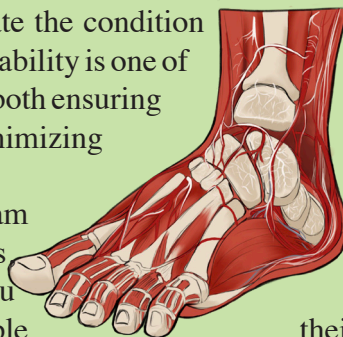
“All shoes are made with foam that's made to ... compress absorb impact, and ... spring you back up. We always tell people

... [if you take] care of your shoes, they'll last for 300 to 500 miles,” said McCraney. [If] you're taking your running shoes and wearing them [to school] or [just] out and about, that shoe is going to wear down a lot quicker.”

Beyond protection and support, shoes can serve as a way to express yourself. Maintaining shoes is maintaining the comfort to get through each day.

Finding the right fit can be a hassle, but ultimately, the feeling of accomplishment that comes with the perfect shoe is unmatched.

“Something as simple as [footwear can] really help people feel comfortable for all their lifestyle goals and needs,” said McCraney. “We always try to tell people [that] even though it may seem like a running story, we're more concerned about helping people [in achieving their] goals.”



## Cultural shoes

Aarna Dharmavarapu, STAFF WRITER  
Vanessa He and Nomsa Ngang, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

### Indigenous moccasins

The term “moccasin” comes from the Algonquian language Powhatan, and was first used to describe any kind of Native-sewn footwear. Now, the term encompasses just about any shoe that has an Indigenous design or was worn by Indigenous people. Most Native Americans wore moccasins made from deer-hide, with a U-shaped toe. However, Native Americans who inhabited areas with extreme climates, like deserts and plains, often wore moccasins with hard soles that were made from pieces of rawhide or soft leather, with a turned-up toe. For tribes who lived in colder climates, moccasins referred to heavy-duty boots that were lined with fur. In the 19th century, moccasins became a popular footwear choice in Europe, due to their ability to protect the feet from plants and landscapes.



### Dutch wooden clogs

Dutch wooden clogs are a well-known symbol of the Netherlands. It is believed that the oldest pair of these shoes were made around 1230. They were first crafted by hand, taking a day to create two pairs. Now, factories produce more than 2,000 of these shoes a day. These clogs were made out of necessity rather than for fashion. They are naturally water resistant to protect feet from the Dutch climate, and provide the needed support to move on land comfortably and easily. They symbolize practicality, craftsmanship, and resilience. Farmers, garden enthusiasts, and tourists in rural areas of the Netherlands still wear them.



### Manchu platform shoes

Manchu platform shoes became a fashion staple for the Manchu people during the late Qing dynasty (1644–1911). Platform shoes, found in various cultures globally, are typically characterized by thick soles resulting in an elevated style. The Manchu platforms, nicknamed horse hoof shoes, emphasized maintaining “natural feet.” This



was largely in contrast to another group under the Qing dynasty, the Han Chinese, who practiced foot binding to create smaller feet to fit far smaller shoes. The platforms included detailed fabric upper sections and had a slightly curved, stilt-like wooden heel, hence the nickname “horse shoe.” Not many people are aware of the Manchu people and their culture due to the rapid modernization of the areas they inhabited, along with their decreased cultural presence. However, the Manchu people's platform shoes were an important component of dress among Manchu women for centuries.



# ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

## “Rumors” brings laughter and joy beyond the stage

Angela Chen and Rebecca Zhang,  
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS



Konrad Hedges '26, Alexandra Sandt '25, Serafina Joseph '26, Maxime DeVico '27, and Anna Kaufman '26 gather together at an anniversary party.



As the rest of the party moves upstairs, Peter Niforatos '25 and Luke Gitterman '25 banter in private about the rumors surrounding a marriage.

Shh, did you hear? PHS Spectacle Theatre and Tech Crew presented “Rumors,” a 1988 comedy, as their fall play. This award-winning play written by Neil Simon showcases a chaotic and seemingly joyous dinner party. Beneath the smiles, however, darker conflicts of mistaken identities and rumors lurk in the atmosphere.

Because of the characters’ deceptive identities, the actors had to familiarize themselves with multiple personalities within a singular role.

“[My character] is a bit of a people pleaser, so there [were] some scenes where she’s with a lot of people ... and she’s doing her best to appeal to them and appear cheerful,” said Alexandra Sandt ’25, who played Chris Gorman in the blue cast. “The real struggle with my character ... was trying to find who she was behind that veil ... how [she would] act when she’s not placed in that high-stress situation.”

Konrad Hedges ’26, who played Lenny Ganz in the red cast, shared his experience of exploring his character.

“I think Lenny is a bit of a suppressed drama queen ... [his career] doesn’t allow for much creative freedom, and I think in this play, Lenny gets to explore a side of him that’s more creatively free and expressive,” said Hedges.

Aside from the traditional challenges of getting into character, the comedic aspect of this play added a layer of complexity that offered new opportunities for the cast as they learned to adapt to this style.

“[In comedy], it’s so easy to fall flat and you really have to be very detailed in the rhythm and the pace ... or the jokes won’t land,” said Technical Director Jeffrey Van Velsor.

“[Performing ‘Rumors’ was] a really great exercise in delivering the lines quickly and clearly so that the audience gets the joke.”

Performers and the Tech Crew had been preparing for this play since the beginning of the school year. During Tech Week, the cast and crew collaborated on stage for the first time to resolve difficulties for the final performance.

“We [didn’t] want you to notice that there were any mishaps ... and that’s part of the beauty of it,” said Stage Manager Grace Waldman ’25. “[Tech Crew worked] as many hours as all the actors [did] to build the set, paint the set, be in rehearsal, and communicate all the things that [needed to] happen.”

Throughout the play’s production, PHS performers were given the opportunity to further their own narratives through their specific roles in the play.

“With every role I play, I figured out a new thing about myself as a person, [like] something that is a quirk of mine ... Sometimes I’ll take a line from a show and I’ll just start saying it in my everyday vocabulary,” said Noa Zacks ’25, who played Chris Gorman in the red cast. “Playing different roles that come from different perspectives and walks of life helps you grow as a person and kind of realize where you’ve come from, because acting is putting yourself in another person’s shoes.”

## Cynthia Zhou ’25 finds strength through art

Yunsheng Xu, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

From colored pencils to acrylics, Cynthia Zhou ’25 creates art using various mediums. Since seventh grade, she has learned to translate her personality into her art style. Besides drawing as a hobby and gifting paintings, Zhou is a member of the art studio Keke Studio, and co-president of the Numina Gallery. Over the course of her artistic journey, Zhou’s former art teacher and younger sister have become her inspirations.

### What made you interested in creating art?

I was always self-taught when I was younger. I really liked to doodle in class [and] I think that’s really my biggest thing. I liked comics a lot, so I read a lot of Webtoons and stuff like that growing up. I think the main reason why I started learning was because originally I wanted to draw web comics ... Later on, I realized that, honestly, [art is] just really calming, and a [way for me to] express myself.

### What is your artistic process?

I think it depends for the most part. I have a bank of ideas [that I think] about. Usually, I [use] the best idea and then pick a color scheme [for the piece]. I’m into really random colors mixed together to create really vibrant pieces ... My idea, and then the colors that I want to incorporate ... are the [two] things that I always decide before drawing and then I usually sketch it out. Right now, I’m doing a lot of acrylic. I start with the base colors [and] the face first. I get very excited to do certain parts, so I skip around, and focus on one specific part, really in detail, [then I] skip over to the next part. I don’t do the full thing all at once.



Cynthia Zhou ’25 touches up her piece “I Like Green Grapes.”

### Have you ever felt like quitting art because of challenges that you faced?

Yeah, I think in eighth grade, I went through a really hard time with my life during COVID. I would rip up my drawings and stuff like that because I just would take my anger out on art. I really wanted to just stop [doing] art, because I didn’t feel like myself. Because art was such a big part of myself, I thought that was the issue, and I just wanted to quit.

### What made you continue art?

My sister was especially [helpful]. She taped all my drawings back up together, which was really thoughtful. And I think I eventually just got over it. I came to the realization that I really love drawing and I can’t stop.

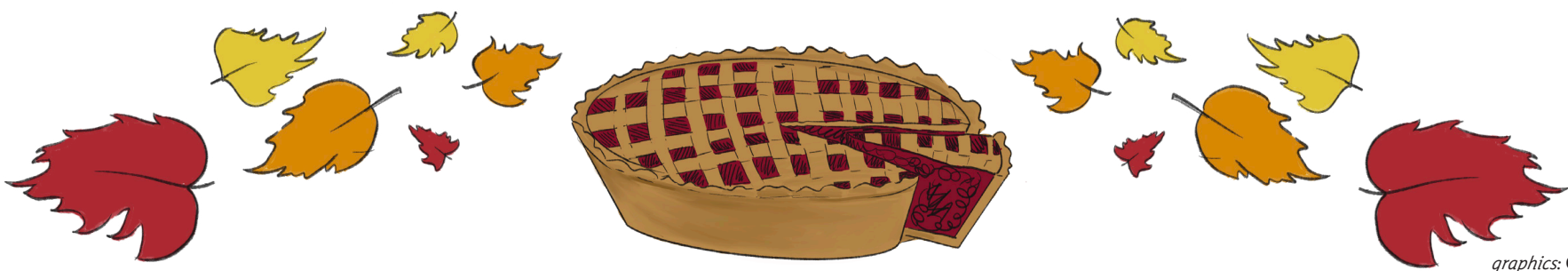
### What were some goals that you had when you started and how have they changed over the course of your journey?

I think my original goal was ... to do something big, like draw a Webtoon or enter a competition and win something massive. But I think because I wanted that, I had to follow this very structured art type. But honestly, I think throughout the years, I realized that I don’t want to draw this very standard type of art. I’ve been exploring with a ton of different crazy ideas that I get from my head. I really love writing with art too. I think originally I did not want to write at all with my art, but now I just like to tie those two together. But I don’t really have a huge goal. [I] just like to do [art] for fun.

**PREX**  
**PRINCETON RECORD EXCHANGE**



# Our memories of gathering and appreciation



graphics: Charley Hu

## Connecting through cultures

Asma Frough, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Thanksgiving, the heart and joy of November, is celebrated in the United States and Canada every fall, when people gather with their families to appreciate the blessings of the past year. The holiday holds a special place in many people's hearts, as it is a time for family reunions, celebration, gratitude, and delicious food. It's a joyful time of year that symbolizes the transition from fall to winter, marking the cold weather. For me, however, the joy of celebrating Thanksgiving always felt empty.

I was born in Kabul, Afghanistan. I grew up there as a Muslim girl, getting to experience other joyful celebrations such as Eid and Nawroz (the Muslim New Year). Those occasions, especially Eid, have a special place in my heart. Every morning of Eid, I would excitedly wake up and put on the new clothes that I chose for myself. The scent of my mom's cooking and freshly baked pastries would fill the entire house as I waited for guests and family to arrive so we could enjoy the delicious food together. Getting to see my cousins and receive gifts from the adults made the celebration all the more special.

When I moved to the United States in August of 2022, I was introduced to a whole new culture and society that I was previously unfamiliar with; I had never celebrated Halloween, Thanksgiving, or Christmas. Although I knew a little about how people celebrated Halloween and Christmas, Thanksgiving was completely new to me. What was this celebration that took up two whole days of school? That year, my family and I were invited to our first Thanksgiving in a church by some friends. When I went there, I saw so many people and so many different types of food.

I soon realized the holiday's true meaning, which led me to discover that it is actually very similar to what we do during Eid. Even though Eid is celebrated to end the fasting month of Ramadan for Muslims, it brings people together, just like Thanksgiving. Since my first Thanksgiving experience, my family and I have looked forward to this holiday every year.

On Thanksgiving day, my mom prepares different dishes that mix our own cultural food with classic Thanksgiving dishes; for instance, she often serves the Afghan rice dish Qabuli with a turkey. On this day, we all gather around to enjoy the meal and spend quality time with each other, appreciating everyone and everything in our lives. My Thanksgiving celebration connects me back to my country and to the joyful celebrations of Eid, while helping me create new cherished memories.

## Finding magic in the mess

Samantha Henderson, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

A long time ago, my dad and his siblings decided, to keep things fair, that they would split hosting holidays. My aunt took Easter and my uncle claimed Christmas Eve, which left arguably the most elaborate holiday, Thanksgiving, to my family. Every year it sneaks up on us. Only when the leaves have all fallen to the ground and November has begun are we suddenly reminded of Thanksgiving.

A week or so into November, my family gathers with a spreadsheet from the year before, going over all of the things we won't do again. For example, we always make way too many sides; every year we say, "This year we won't have leftovers for weeks," and every year we're still eating stuffing two weeks after Thanksgiving.

Besides this initial spreadsheet making, for the first few weeks of November, nobody is really worried about Thanksgiving preparations. As the day creeps closer, however, this laissez-faire attitude slowly shifts to full-blown panic. I know the Thanksgiving anxiety has fully set in when my parents struggle to fit 20 chairs into our dining room. On Thanksgiving morning, the kitchen quickly becomes a frenzy of activity. My dad and grandma will peer nervously in the oven at the turkey as my mom stirs the cranberry sauce on the stove and my brother and I hurriedly set the table.

When people start to arrive, this frenzy soon turns to chaos, as the house begins to resemble the scene in "Home Alone" when the McCallisters are leaving for the airport. In my house, football always blares from the den, where everybody huddles around the TV, yelling at the Giants. I set out the placecards in the dining room. My uncle uses every spoon in the house to stir canned cranberry sauce into the pot of homemade sauce that my mom labored over for hours. My brother and cousin playfully shoot each other with Nerf guns while my aunt ducks, creamed spinach in hand.

When dinner is finally ready, I breathe a sigh of relief. Everybody drops what they're doing and rushes to make themselves plates. Once we're all gathered around the table, my grandpa, Big Mac, begins a toast. "Let's all go around the table and say what we're grateful for," he'll say. Every year as I listen to everyone share what they are thankful for, it hits me all over again what Thanksgiving is really about: giving thanks. It doesn't matter if some spinach got spilled on the floor or if the Giants lost or if there is way too much cauliflower. Getting to sit around the table with my family is the most important thing to be thankful for and, ultimately, that's the reason why Big Mac has made this same toast every year for as long as I can remember.

# What goes around comes around: a fashion commentary

Gabby Kaputa and Jane Hu, STAFF WRITERS

Fashion trends today are constantly evolving and never stick around for long. And yet, it seems that the latest styles often cycle back to old favorites — jorts, chunky sneakers and bold animal prints, for example— which keeps history's styles at the forefront of our minds. While this endless loop of reinvention makes fashion thrillingly unpredictable, it also leaves thousands of clothes discarded, primarily due to fast fashion, as closets adapt to these changing trends.

Popular clothing styles from past decades are slowly making their comeback into the lives of the new generation. Jorts became a trend during the 1960s counterculture movement as younger generations embraced the scandalous nature of cutting their jeans to above the knees. The lengths and styles of jorts have changed over the years: people in the 1970s and 1980s opted for shorter and tighter-fitting styles, while hip hop artists in the 1990s pushed for lower waistlines with longer and baggier pant legs.



Another item of clothing that grew in popularity in the 1990s were chunky sneakers, but they fell out of fashion later on shoes that were more sleek and minimalist replaced them. However, by the mid to late 2010s, chunky sneakers were brought back into the fashion realm after the "dad shoes" trend arose.

While these aesthetic comebacks are being widely accepted by the newer generations, rapidly changing fashion styles pose many issues. For one, what makes fast fashion "fast" is the poor quality of the clothing, which often results in garments becoming unwearable after only a few uses. This creates a cycle for the wearer: buy cheap clothes, wear them a few times, throw them out, buy more cheap clothes, wear them a few times, throw them out, etc. As trends shift shorter, consumers feel compelled to constantly replace items, perpetuating the loop and increasing environmental harm.

Moreover, the concept of "fast fashion" has become more widespread due to these fashion changes.



Teenagers are often the target audience of fast fashion companies like Shein and Temu, as they're drawn to buying large heaps of clothing at once due to the cheap prices. While there is a wave of excitement when one receives their Shein package, most are unaware or overlook the underlying issue of inadequately treated workers. According to Humanium, an organization focused on children's rights, in Asian countries such as India and Bangladesh, many child laborers are overworked and underpaid to create clothing for fast-fashion brands following such trends. Unfortunately, the production of fast-fashion clothes also creates environmental problems due to the excessive use of water and the amount of plastic used within the garments.

The concept of fashion trends being cyclical isn't inherently bad; the old is brought back as "new." However, issues emerge when society is always looking for the next new thing to popularize, discarding clothes with the blink of an eye, as many of fast-fashion's workers and the environment are left to shoulder the consequences of our temporary desires.

graphics: Charley Hu



## TOWER MULTIMEDIA

HOW HAVE WE ADAPTED TO THE NEW SCHEDULE?

With thoughts and reactions from PHS students and teachers





# Debunking college admissions in TV

Chloe Lam, STAFF WRITER  
Joy Chen, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

From perfect GPAs to Ivy League acceptance letters and abundant extracurriculars, characters on screen seem to glide through the college application process, all while balancing several romantic relationships and some serious personal drama. The media’s glossy depiction of the college application process disregards the late-night cramming, weekend shifts, and lunch meetings with teachers that make up real students’ lives. Protagonists in “Gilmore Girls” and “Never Have I Ever” are all living an idealistic illusion of a stressless senior year and college application season. As viewers, we can’t help but feel drawn to these characters who seem effortlessly intelligent, accomplished, and goal-oriented.

Many high schoolers dream of attending a top university, yet the reality of getting accepted is far more challenging than popular TV shows portray. In “Gilmore Girls,” the journey to

a prestigious college appears deceptively easy, creating an illusion of guaranteed success for any hardworking or successful student. The protagonist Rory Gilmore is an overachiever who excels in academics and is involved in many extracurricular activities. Throughout her high school journey, she doesn’t encounter many struggles and ends up only applying to and getting accepted into her dream colleges: Harvard, Princeton, and Yale. However, “Gilmore Girls” fails to acknowledge the difficulties and complex feelings high schoolers often face during the admissions process. Real-life college admissions are often full of uncertainty and rejection. The reality is that even high achieving students may not be accepted to their top choices.

The media’s narrative of the college application process glorifies prestige. Time and again, TV shows and movies

only mention the names of Ivy League or top 20 universities, as if attending one of these institutions is the only acceptable route to success. In “Never Have I Ever,” Devi, a smart and driven student, only applies to Ivy League schools. When college acceptances come out, she is left with only one waitlist and considers waiting another year to reapply to the Ivy Leagues if she is denied from that school. Devi’s story is a prime example of the media’s romanticization of prestigious schools. This unhealthy portrayal creates misguided beliefs among students, where one’s hard work in school becomes automatically pointless if denied admission to top universities.

However, the media is overlooking the thousands of other colleges all around the world that also provide quality education for students to pursue what they love. College admissions should be about finding a place where one can thrive, not

simply aiming for the name that looks best on a bumper sticker.

Not only are there a wide range of excellent colleges, but some students may not realize that college is not the only suitable path after high school. While attending college can provide opportunities and a degree, high school graduates can also find joy and achievement through working, training, or pursuing other experiences. Additionally, some students choose to take a gap year and travel, volunteer, or work to help shape their goals and find their interests. It’s important to remember to embrace your own journey as there is more than one path to success.

For PHS students, the college admissions process can be much tougher and more stressful than what we see on screen. However, success isn’t defined by one decision, and the college journey should be a time for us to explore who we are and find where we belong.



graphics: Angela Wu

# Let’s dish this out: two Thanksgiving sides to add to your feast

## Pakoras

Suroor Menai, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Growing up, Thanksgiving had always been the holiday when my aunts and uncles gathered at my grandmother’s house here in New Jersey. My cousins and I would look forward to the many delicious Pakistani dishes we would get to eat over the long weekend. Last year, however, we hosted Thanksgiving at my house. Because of this, my mom, aunts, and uncles made all the food instead, and put their own spin on the meal. For example, instead of the traditional pakoras made with potatoes, my mom decided to use spinach and onions and fry them in a lighter batter instead. The pakoras with this new twist were a big hit, so at my house, we’ve been making pakoras that way ever since.

### Ingredients:

Any neutral vegetable oil to fill up to about ¾ of a deep frying container  
2 cups gram (besan) flour  
1 cup of warm water (add more as needed for batter consistency)  
½ tsp baking powder  
2 tsp salt  
1 ½ tsp turmeric  
½ tsp red chili pepper (or add to taste)  
1 tsp cumin powder  
1 tsp coriander powder  
3 cups of spinach, chopped into thin strips  
3 onions, thinly sliced

Total time: 30 minutes  
Prep time: 10 minutes  
Cook time: 20 minutes



photo: Suroor Menai

### Instructions:

1. Put the oil in a frying pan and heat it on low heat while preparing the batter.
2. Add the gram flour to a large mixing bowl. Slowly add the warm water, mixing as you add, until it has the consistency of pancake batter. Try to remove bubbles or clumps from the batter as you mix.
3. Add the baking powder, salt, turmeric, red chili pepper, cumin powder, and coriander powder into the batter. Add the spinach and onions to the batter and mix well so that they are evenly coated by the batter. It is best to mix with your hands, but you can also use a spatula or big spoon.
4. Using a large tablespoon or serving spoon, scoop dollops of batter into the hot pan (make sure the oil is sizzling before you place the batter in).
5. Wait for the fritters to get golden brown and crispy, then flip and continue to fry for another minute or two.
6. Remove the fritters from the oil using tongs or a slotted spoon, and store in a container lined with paper towels to drain any excess oil.
7. Repeat steps five and six until you use up all the batter.
8. Serve hot with your favorite chutney or dipping sauce.

## Sweet potato black bean pasta salad

Aarna Dharmavarpu, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

As the Thanksgiving holiday approaches, there’s nothing better than a hearty, comforting side dish to add to your seasonal feast. This sweet potato and black bean pasta salad is the perfect recipe to embrace this holiday’s flavors. With its vibrant combination of roasted sweet potatoes, black beans, and the satisfying crunch of corn, this pasta salad offers a warm, earthy base that is balanced by the tangy dressing. For me, it’s a go-to side dish that’s become a holiday favorite — a comforting reminder of this season’s warmth and the joy of sharing meals with loved ones.

Recipe adapted from: “Allrecipes”  
Total time: 1 hour 5 minutes  
Prep time: 25 minutes  
Cook time: 40 minutes



graphics: Charley Hu

### Ingredients:

PASTA SALAD  
½ pound of pasta  
1 medium sized sweet potato, peeled and cut into 1 inch cubes  
½ cup black beans, drained and rinsed  
½ cup fresh corn  
½ cup minced red onion  
¼ cup finely chopped cilantro  
½ cup shredded cheese (can be any cheese)  
2 tbsp olive oil  
1 tsp kosher salt  
1 tsp black pepper

### SALAD DRESSING

2 ½ chipotle peppers in adobo  
1 ½ tsp adobo sauce  
1 clove of garlic  
½ tsp dried oregano  
Ground cumin to taste  
1 tbsp honey  
3 tbsp rice vinegar  
¼ cup olive oil

### Instructions:

1. Preheat your oven to 425 degrees Fahrenheit. Toss the sweet potato with olive oil, black pepper, and kosher salt, then lay the sweet potato cubes evenly on a baking tray. Roast the sweet potato in the oven for 20 minutes, or until they are brown and tender.
2. Cook the pasta in salted boiling water for about ten minutes, or until al dente. Drain the pasta and set it aside to cool.
3. In a small bowl, prepare the salad dressing by mixing together the chipotle peppers, adobo sauce, garlic, oregano, cumin, honey, rice vinegar, and olive oil, until a smooth consistency is achieved. Season with kosher salt and black pepper to taste.
4. In a large bowl, combine the cooked pasta, black beans, corn, sweet potato, red onion, cilantro, and olive oil. Season with additional kosher salt and black pepper if desired. Then, stir in the cheese, plate, and enjoy!



photo: Aarna Dharmavarpu





photo courtesy: Eddie Chen



photo courtesy: Eddie Chen

Top: The team huddles before their home opener against rivals Southern Regional High School on September 11. Bottom: Charlotte Woods '26 goes up for a swing in the same match, aiding the team to their 3-1 win.

The PHS girls volleyball team repeated as New Jersey Group 3 champions after winning their first title during last year's 30-1 run. The Little Tigers ended the year with a 28-1 record, with five players being named on the Burlington County Scholastic League All-Star First Team. Setter Lois Matsukawa '25, hitter Naomi Lygas '26, and libero Pearl Agel '25 also broke their respective school records.



photo: Emily Kim

Top: Chase Hamerschlag '26 heads in a goal off a corner to win the Central Jersey Group 4 title against Monroe Township High School. Bottom: Azariah Breitman '25 shields the ball from the opposing defenders en route to the team's 1-0 win.

The PHS boys soccer team ended the season with a 18-3-4 record, repeating as Central Jersey Group 4 champions. Though they lost in the final of the Mercer County Tournament last year, the team won the tournament in this year's final against Notre Dame High School. Their season came to an end in the Group 4 State semifinals in a tight match against Southern Regional High School.



photo: Emily Kim

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# SPORTS

## Sports drinks: healthy or harmful?

Claire Yang, STAFF WRITER

Brightly colored bottles and bold advertisements promise a multitude of benefits for athletes, from enhancing energy to boosting overall performance. These advertisements are highly attractive — according to a 2018 study led by pediatrician Kyla Cordrey, there is a positive correlation between the aggressiveness of energy drink advertisements and the proportion of U.S. high school students who consume them. This trend is evident at PHS: students in the Fitness Center are rarely seen without a bright blue beverage, bottles of Powerade sit on desk corners, and vending machines sell Gatorade G-Zero, vitaminwater, BODYARMOR, and Gatorade Propel. What are the real health benefits of energy drinks, though? What ingredients do they contain? Are they worth peddling to the PHS crowd?

Beyond advertisements, sports drinks are increasingly popular in the United States due to a rising athlete population and greater interest in fitness-related activities, with the sports drink industry projected to reach a value of \$36.35 billion in 2028, according to Fortune Business. Furthermore, accessibility through online stores, effective branding, and collaborations with sports teams or celebrities have bolstered the industry through the years. In order to keep up with the current trends, companies have started to change their advertising and packaging to emphasize the use of natural and organic ingredients to reflect the growing support towards sustainability and clean-label sources. However, even with these changes, the main ingredients of the drinks remain largely the same, including large amounts of sugar, carbohydrates, sodium, and caffeine.

A popular sports drink brand and go-to choice for athletes, Gatorade claims their product hydrates better than water due to two additional ingredients: electrolytes and carbohydrates. Electrolytes are minerals essential for maintaining the body's ionic balance — the balance between the fluids in and outside the cells — which is necessary for muscle, brain, and nerve function. As one of the three main nutrients, carbohydrates are sugar molecules that are eventually broken down into glucose, and are the main source of energy for organs and cells. However, sports drinks like Gatorade contain excessive amounts of sugar, with some even including caffeine, which can spike blood glucose levels significantly, according to the American Diabetes Association. Regularly having high blood glucose levels can lead to severe or permanent damage in the kidneys, nerves,

eyes, and blood vessels. Many companies advertise their products as “zero sugar” to appear healthier but only minorly disclose that the alternative sweeteners they use, such as aspartame and sucralose, may alter healthy gut bacteria, according to Anglia Ruskin University researchers Aparna Shil and Havovi Chichger. The long-term effects of low-calorie sweeteners are unknown, but studies from Harvard University have found them to be correlated with diabetes. Additionally, the vibrant colors of sports drinks are achieved by using artificial dyes such as Red #40, a common additive that has been linked to concerning carcinogenic effects such as tumor growth.

However, despite containing high amounts of sugar and mysterious additives, sports drinks can be beneficial when consumed during intense exercise, where extra calories and sugar are offset by the energy burned during the workout. According to the Academy of Pediatrics, sports drinks may be more useful than water for athletes who engage in vigorous physical activity for longer than an hour, especially in hot conditions. But while athletes are still the primary consumers of sports drinks, the industry's shift in focus towards non-athletes and other consumers, particularly through aggressive advertising, often results in unintended and excessive consumption. Gatorade, for example, can be found in children's lunchboxes and is even used as a hangover remedy. A study conducted by researchers at UC Berkeley found that people who aren't athletes and drink sports drinks once a day are usually not as physically active as they should be in order to balance the intake of the sugar and calories. For less active people, the extra calories and sugars aren't necessary and cause more problems, such as increased risk of high blood pressure and obesity. Water remains the ideal source of hydration by effectively replenishing fluids lost through sweat without added sugars or calories for light exercise.

Though water is widely considered the best source of hydration, it does not contain electrolytes and carbohydrates needed for longer, more intense workouts. But instead of turning to neon-colored drinks with an abundance of added sugar, there are healthier alternatives that contain the same essential ingredients as sports drinks. Coconut water and orange juice contain electrolytes, natural sugars, and water, offering all the benefits of a sports drink without harmful additives. For an easy homemade alternative, try mixing

a glass of coconut water with honey for added sugar, a pinch of sea salt to replace sodium lost through sweat, and a splash of lime for flavor.

Sports drinks have their place for intense exercise, but they are often incorrectly used in everyday situations where they may not be necessary. Despite marketing claims that emphasize performance benefits, high amounts of sugar, sodium, and artificial dyes can pose health risks when consumed regularly by less active individuals. With their popularity at PHS, sports drinks will certainly not leave the vending machines soon. Thus, it falls on students to weigh the risks and benefits of what they consume.

“High amounts of sugar, sodium, and artificial dyes can pose health risks.

“There are healthier alternatives that contain the same essential ingredients as sports drinks.



photo: Asya Morozov

Kyle Grzymala '25 contemplates his drink options at a vending machine.

## How to fight the pressure (and come out on top)

Katie Qin, SPORTS CO-EDITOR

Pressure is normal in sports and affects almost every athlete. It often manifests itself as frustration, where a player ends up fighting themselves rather than their actual opponent; a mix of anger and disappointment clouds their judgment and prevents them from seeing the game from an objective, strategic view. Frustration's effect is rapidly evident: mistakes, especially those easily avoidable during practice, show up again and again; injuries increase in frequency; matches are lost. Fortunately, this is both avoidable and, although difficult, reversible.

The first step is to understand where the pressure comes from. It could be from a combination of stressors: game-clinching moments, strict time constraints, onlookers, expectations, or important games. All of these can get into an athlete's head and disrupt their rhythm. But what are some methods to deal with these stress factors?

An athlete's attitude and preparation can set the tone for a match. Physical activities like a warm up or breathing exercises are particularly significant. Researchers at the College of Physical Education and Sports in China found in 2023 that dynamic stretching for seven to ten minutes produces the best explosive

performance. This includes high knees, squats, and lunges — anything that relaxes the body while moving. According to another study conducted in 2022 by the German Sport University Cologne, long-term practice of slow-paced breathing and breath-holding is associated with improved performance in sports. In conclusion, feeling prepared for a match often boosts self-confidence, a key factor for a competitive player.

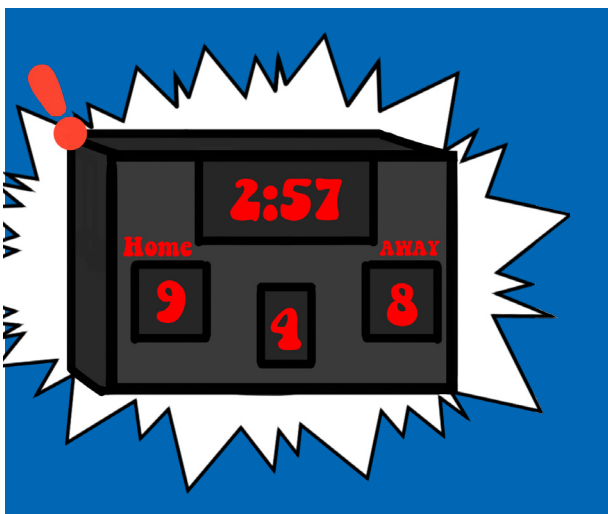
“Feeling prepared for a match often boosts self-confidence, a key factor for a competitive player.

Another way to escape the jitters is staying healthy. Physical health affects one's mentality; people with better sleep are generally more resilient, as reported by research conducted at Baylor University earlier this year. In addition, maintaining a healthy body can prevent or reduce the risk of injury. Besides proper warm-up and correct form, proper hydration and electrolyte balance, an important part of physical health, are also crucial for injury prevention. Sweating results in the loss of ions such as sodium, potassium, and calcium, and their imbalance in the body may cause involuntary muscle cramps or spasms. This is why athletes may pause in the middle of a game to eat a banana or drink coconut water. Keeping one's body in tip-top shape is a significant way to reduce anxiety for a match, as it boosts one's mood in general, making it easier to cope with stress.

Of course, even with all of these preparations, a match can still offer up unexpected challenges. This is where one's mental fortitude is extremely important. Kelli Moran-Miller, a certified mental performance consultant at Stanford Sports Medicine, teaches athletes about focus cues and instructional self-talk to get back on track. Focus cues are words or actions meant to refocus an athlete. For example, an athlete may say to themselves, “compete,” to remind themselves to stay active. A visual cue could be a stationary object or frequent observations, like the netpost on a tennis court or a toss of the ball during a volleyball serve. Grounding oneself in habits is an easy gateway out of mental spirals, but it also takes practice and matchplay to notice calming patterns to fall back into during games. Moran-Miller also discusses the

importance of self-talk and divides it into two categories: helpful and unhelpful. Helpful self-talk is positive, such as “you got this,” “it's okay,” or “focus on the next one.” It is often action-orientated as well: “breathe, calm down” or “focus.” Negative self-talk, such as “I'm so bad,” or “that was supposed to be easy,” is unhelpful and will only make mistakes seem worse than they really are.

As a tennis player myself, I struggle with pressure during competitions. Positive self-talk used to seem like pseudoscience to me; I refused to believe that words could have an impact on my performance. I ignored recommendations to pause and take a breath, especially during physically or mentally tiring situations. It wasn't until my coach forced me to walk in a small circle to catch my breath and regain composure that I realized how much clearer my mind became. My mental approach to competitions also changed when I remembered that what I was playing was, in the end, just a game. Sports are meant to be fun and to bring people together. It is important for athletes to remember that, although pressure may help them push themselves to their mental and physical limits, they should make sure to take care of themselves and to remember to enjoy what they do — pressure may be a tough monster to beat, but it can be done.



graphics: Madison Charles





“Last year, we were the underdogs in most of our games, and the roles have definitely reversed this year. We go into every game with a target on our backs. That’s when we found that having a lot of energy helps us win over the teams that bring large crowds or are super inspired to beat us.”  
- Naomi Lygas ’26



Players like Naomi Lygas ’26, Kaelin Bobetich ’26, and Charlotte Woods ’26 (pictured right) have racked up an immense number of kills, contributing significantly to the team’s 818 number kill season total.



photo courtesies: Eddie Chen



This season, the PHS girls volleyball team had a 24-1 winning streak. They won most of their games two sets to none.



“[Playing at the Williamstown tournament] was the best memory because we had worked so hard the past couple of years to finally come out on top. Also, this year being my last season playing high school volleyball, it felt so good to bring the first place trophy home.”  
- Lois Matsukawa ’25

**VOLLEYBALL  
SEASON  
HIGHLIGHTS**

Asya Morozov and Katie Qin,  
SPORTS CO-EDITORS

# The impact of sports video games

Dester Selby-Salazar, SPORTS CO-EDITOR  
Kaelan Patel, STAFF WRITER

Sports video games, whether you love them or hate them, have undeniably been entrenched in youth culture for decades. Announcements of new FIFA games are met with months of anticipation, even if the new release is a near replica of the previous version. Professional athletes play as themselves in their sports games and livestream to millions of fans. The rise of the sports video game industry has been rapid and astronomically lucrative ever since the first late 1950’s. But why?

Part of the answer stems from the wide variety that sports video games have to offer. Some involve physical interaction and allow for exercise, while others are more laid back and oriented around relaxing through sports. Active games include popular classics such as Just Dance and Wii Sports, where you have to physically move to earn points and win. These games also allow you to play with friends in-person and compete, promoting exercise and overall health while also creating friendly competition between peers.

Tarquin Wood ’25 loves this aspect of sports video games and calls himself a devoted fan. He also knows the value of video games that promote physical health, especially during a time where many youth increasingly spend more time inside or at a chair.

“What makes Wii really successful is that it combines the good things about video games with the good things about sports,” said Wood. “It can help you exercise, burn calories, and stay fit, and that’s really good for kids who play the games. They’ll be taught that early and instill it into their lifestyles as they grow up.”

Wood also loves the social aspect of these types of video games, sharing personal stories about how the game impacted his connections with others.

“I remember I went to my friend’s house a lot, and he introduced me to Wii Tennis,” said Wood. “I grew closer to my friend because he taught me

something that became really important to me later, so it really solidified my friendship with him.”

The other, more sedentary, type of sports video games include popular modern games such as MADDEN, FIFA, NBA2K, and MLB The Show. These games are licensed by professional sports leagues and teams, allowing players to have a realistic and fun experience by involving their favorite teams and players in real life. This is a more relaxing experience as there is no real physical activity involved.

For many, watching professional athletes play as themselves in the video games is a primary source for the genre’s boost in popularity. Many athletes grew up playing these video games, and when they

become professional athletes, it only increases the game’s popularity. Certain game modes put the players in critical situations where they feel that they are in more control such as, as a career as a player or coach.

Similarly to active games, these types of video games also allow players to have fun with peers and compete in person, but also online against other users of similar skill levels, testing the user’s skills against people from around the world. Overall, although this type of sports video game lacks exercise, it is still an enjoyable experience in its own unique ways.

Max Mazo ’25 has been playing FIFA for the past four years, and has found that it is a great way for him to wind down after a long day.

“I started playing FIFA in freshman year because my friends had it, and because I enjoyed playing soccer so it seemed like a fun thing to do,” said Mazo. “Additionally, if I have a friend that lives in another state, I can still play with them.”

For Mazo, the best part about playing games like FIFA is that the player can replicate the feeling of being in control of a team and compete with friends to see who can make the best teams.

“I play [FIFA] Pro Clubs with my friends. I used to play by myself but now I play with [my] friends on the soccer team. It’s fun because we all yell at each other, which relieves stress when you play together,” said Mazo. “You can play against the computer, such as in FIFA ultimate team, but you can also play single player.”

Both types of games have a strong impact on not only PHS students, but on the rest of the world. Although both have unrelenting fanbases who claim that their game style is better, they appeal to different audiences under different circumstances. As players browse the game shelves, it’s almost guaranteed they will find the perfect video game to immerse themselves in both the sport and the game itself.



graphic: Charley Hu



# Athletes of the Month

## Anya Haeberli '25: volleyball

Asya Morozov, SPORTS CO-EDITOR



Haeberli celebrates with teammates Naomi Lygas '26 and Lois Matsukawa '25 after scoring a point. She was essential in PHS repeating as Group III State Champions.

As the opponent hitter leaps up for a swing, Anya Haeberli '25 is in place, loading a jump before blocking the hit back over for a point. As she lands back on the ground, her teammates crowd around her as the bleachers erupt in a roar.

Although Haeberli started playing volleyball in sixth grade, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic temporarily cut her playing short. She cycled between rowing and field hockey but missed volleyball more than she wished to play either sport.

"I really didn't like any other sport I was doing at the time," said Haeberli. "So I was like, 'let me try [volleyball],' and it turned out to be a lot more fun than anything else."



Haeberli passes the ball, redirecting it to her teammate during warmups.

Although she is a successful player now, Haeberli's reacquaintance with volleyball started on a sour note, as she failed to make the team in ninth grade. This was a challenging period for her, and though she never planned on quitting, there were moments where she felt like her skills did not measure up.

"In my freshman year ... I thought I knew what I was doing more than I really did," said Haeberli. "But putting myself out there during

tryouts was really hard for me, and I didn't play club like a bunch of the other girls did."

When Haeberli made the junior varsity team the following year, she started to find her stride as a player. She recalls making her first good hit, which, even though the ball went out, still inspires her today.

"[With] the feeling that was left on my hand afterwards, I knew that I'd done things right. It went out, but I was like, 'that's what I have to strive for every single time now, this feeling,'" said Haeberli.

Now that she is a returning varsity player and a senior, Haeberli finds that she has a new role to play on the team. Beyond being an example for others with her skills, she takes an active role in improving the underclassmen's game.

"I definitely try to take on a mentorship role ... when I see [underclassmen] struggling to do something during practice, [I point] out things that don't seem right. [I] also cheer for them," said Haeberli.

According to Girls Volleyball Assistant Coach Katie Dineen, the energy and her commitment to helping her teammates both on and off the court is the strongest traits Haeberli brings to the team.

"There's never a time when she doesn't put a smile on every other player's face," said Dineen. "When she scores a point, when she gets a kill, everybody cheers louder. They're just so happy to be happy for somebody who makes them feel important."

One of Haeberli's teammates, Sedona Arminio '27, also finds that Haeberli has a major positive influence on the team. As a fellow middle blocker, Arminio has seen Haeberli grow over the time they have played together.

"She's gotten much more confident on the court. Towards the end of the year she got the confidence to [serve], and she actually got to serve in a game. We were all screaming for her," said Arminio.

Beyond her energy and positivity, Haeberli is known by her teammates as a talented volleyball player who significantly increased her skills over a short period through personal dedication. As her coach, Dineen has seen her grow from her first tryouts as a freshman into her key role as a middle blocker on the varsity team.

"She ... was the starting middle [blocker] on JV, and ... she became really consistent at blocking. In fact, she has the highest vertical of anyone in the program. And then she's a state champion her junior and her senior year on the starting roster, playing middle, and just being a really instrumental part of our defense," said Dineen.

As a middle blocker, Dineen says she reliably supports her teammates every game.

"Blockers really are the unsung heroes of the defense," said Dineen. "She is just so consistent in closing that block every time. Her timing has gotten much better, her hand positioning has gotten much better, and it's really her specialization."

After high school, she plans to explore her interests in literature, neuroscience, and psychology. She will not leave volleyball behind, though, and plans to join her school's volleyball club or intramural team.

"[Volleyball has] given me insight into having people to go to and how I want to find that in the future again," said Haeberli.

As Haeberli's final year on the PHS girls volleyball team comes to a close, she leaves some final words of advice for younger players both on and off the court.

"I think being okay with failure and having other people around you be okay with that failure as well is really important," said Haeberli. "Having experienced a lot of failure myself, it's something you just need to accept and move on from and learn from."



Haeberli looks back to her teammates with an encouraging smile before a serve.

## Connor Hewitt '25: soccer

Dester Selby-Salazar, SPORTS CO-EDITOR



Hewitt's persistent drive led him to become a starter in last year's state title run and this year's central jersey title defense.

Calling for a pass on the right side of the pitch, Connor Hewitt '25 receives the ball and charges up the field, cutting inside and launching a perfect cross into the box for one of his teammates. Following the attack, Hewitt drops back and commands the defense back into shape, stopping any chance for the opponent to score. In control of both the offense and defense, Hewitt has been a key player in the team's success this season.

Growing up, Hewitt did Taekwondo as well, but eventually settled on the soccer. His decision ultimately came down to a love for the game and the people who played on his team.

"I think it really was just my friends that made me continue to play soccer," said Hewitt. "My team was really good, and I really just love the game of soccer. It's super fun."

Since then, Hewitt says he has continuously been motivated to improve through watching the the world of professional soccer. He looks up to athletes who are the best at what they do in order to continue improving in his position at right back.

"My favorite soccer player is probably Sergio Ramos. I really like his attitude in the game and how he plays with a lot of heart," said Hewitt. "Before games, I always watch soccer games. I like to watch center backs play because I feel that I'm good at attacking, but defense is what I'm wary about."

Ryan Walsh, the head coach for the boys varsity soccer team, was quick to notice Hewitt's progression over the years, attributing his exciting character and dogged personality as quality traits.

"When Connor first tried out with the soccer team, he was a young freshman and he was super energetic and you can tell that he loves soccer," said Walsh. "He played varsity for us sophomore year, but he didn't play. We had a meeting before the offseason just about his progress in training and stuff, and he came back his junior year great from the very beginning. He was so much stronger. He was much better in the air. He's probably become the best right back in the county."

Hewitt's strong impression doesn't just stop with his coaches, but is felt through the team as well. Having spent many years as his teammate, both on the high school and club teams, Brian Donis '25 knows what Hewitt brings to the table.

"Connor is someone who's a good friend and teammate since I was in first grade," said Donis. "He may not wear the captain's armband, but he gives everyone that reassurance that we need. He always makes his presence felt, he is very loud and clear."

According to his coaches, what sets Hewitt's leadership apart is that he doesn't just order people around. He gives out directions and is respected based on the connections he has with his teammates.

"I think my leadership really comes from the practices and team bonding. It's important to be a role model for them as well, to help them through practice," said Hewitt. "My leadership comes from getting everybody to talk and encourage them, such as if they score a good goal or make a good save."

However, Hewitt faced setbacks this season, most notably the injuries he picked up. "Injuries happen a lot, especially with high school soccer because we play so many games in a short amount of days," said Walsh. "Guys that play maximum minutes like Connor, you have to manage their workloads in practice. So there was a period of time when he wasn't really training because we had to deal with his groin and knee issues, and we had to make sure he was ready for games."

Even with the loss in the semifinal of the NJSIAA Group 4 tournament, the Little Tigers had success, winning both the Colonial Valley Conference and the Central Jersey



Hewitt prepares to pass the ball to teammate Jaiden Jain-Edwards '25.

not a group of individuals."

In the future, Hewitt is considering playing club soccer when he goes to college, but is also thinking of playing lacrosse and hockey for fun. In the end, Hewitt is making the most of his time at PHS, and is loving every minute of it.

"I would love to continue playing my athletic career, but nothing super serious," said Hewitt. "I'll keep going to the field for soccer and to just kick the ball around with friends, so that I can keep my skills together."



Hewitt prepares for a throw-in against Monroe Township High School during PHS's sectional finals.

Group 4 titles. After losing many important senior players from last year, Hewitt is immensely proud of the season that his team had.

"I think that everyone really stepped up to fill the shoes of the kids who left, and all the new kids that were a part of our team this year stepped up too," said Hewitt. "As the season started, we didn't have much of a connection, but we developed as the season went onwards. In the end, that's how you win championships: by having a team,