



# The Tower

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## PHS is a State Winner in Samsung Solve for Tomorrow competition

Meiya Xiong, STAFF WRITER

PHS's team has been selected as the New Jersey State Winner in the 2023-2024 Samsung Solve for Tomorrow competition, which grants more than \$100,000 in Samsung equipment and classroom resources to schools across the country for developing solutions to major global issues.

The research team was first selected as one of 300 State Finalists back in January, winning a total of \$2,500 in funding for their solution to diminish the number of speakers of endangered languages around the world, specifically Haitian Creole and Mam, an indigenous language of Guatemala. Now State Winners, the team has received \$12,000 worth of Samsung technology and resources and is preparing for the National Finals in which ten of the fifty schools will be selected to win a total of \$50,000 in funding.

"I think we can start a movement to actually preserve indigenous languages and really call attention to it," said PHS science teacher Mark Eastburn, the team's mentor. "We're actually going to bring a spotlight to a topic that really is one of the major biodiversity crises in the world. We're living organisms, and we're losing so much culture when we lose language."

In developing a robot programmed with databases for various languages that were constructed in-house, the team's goal is to teach endangered languages to people who don't have access to an actual speaker of the language, and for young native speakers to continue practicing in their language. A stuffed armadillo, the national animal of Guatemala, was chosen for the first appearance of the robot.



photo: Matias da Costa

Researchers (from left to right): Shrey Khetan '24, Jairo Jiguan '26, William Yao '24, Daniela Gonzalez '24, Ayush Shrivastava '25, Cassiopeia Mitova '24, Matias da Costa '25, Mayda Jiguan '25, Nicholas Akey '24, Hayah Mian '25, Heather Li '24, Sofia Son '25, Debdeep Sen '26, Amy Lin '25, and Alecxi Jiguan '24 take a team photo for a National Public Radio interview on February 16.

Targeted in large part towards children, the stuffed animal robot can communicate in the specified language and can interact through the pressing of buttons, which are specifically colored so that colorblind users can still use the robot. So far, the PHS students have created a prototype that can hold conversations in Haitian Creole and are working on one for Mam, as well.

"We aim for these to be implemented in schools so that kids can [learn the language] from a young age and spread it generationally," said Hayah Mian '25, a member of the psychology team. "We want to bring these languages back to life by preserving them from a young age and teaching the language to others who want to learn it."

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## Weeks of protests continue discussion regarding HiTOPS curriculum

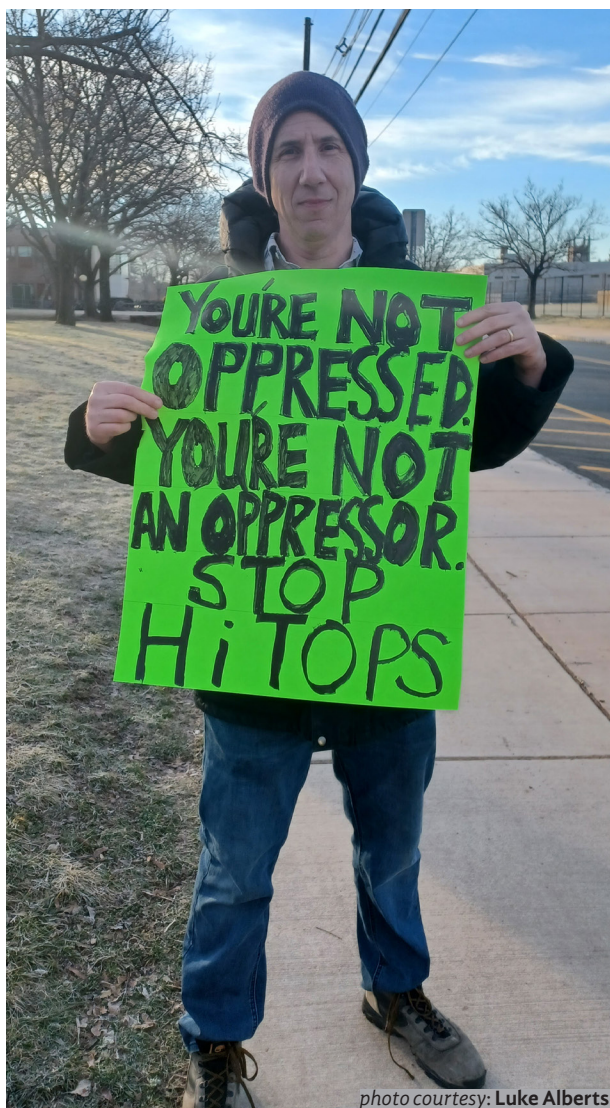


photo courtesy: Luke Alberts

Luke Alberts, one of the parent protestors, holds a sign outside Princeton Middle School.

Matias da Costa and Claire Tang,  
NEWS & FEATURES CO-EDITORS  
Bengu Bulbul and Reed Sacks,  
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

"You're not oppressed. You're not an oppressor. Stop HiTOPS," reads the neon sign of Princeton Public Schools parent Luke Alberts, protesting the organization in front of Princeton Middle School. The demonstrations began January 11 and took place for 30 minutes each morning for the following two weeks, where Alberts and several other parent protestors demanded revisions to the HiTOPS's curriculum taught in PMS classrooms.

PPS's partnership with HiTOPS began through the state-mandated program Pathways to Racial Literacy. Under New Jersey's diversity, equity, and inclusion mandate for schools, the "Identity Pathway," a section of the curriculum making up three of the 25 total courses, focuses on helping students develop their identities and contains discussions about gender, gender expression, and other LGBTQ+ topics. Former PMS counselor, Thomas Foley, now HiTOPS's Senior Education Manager, teaches the courses together with fellow PMS educators.

"What the lessons are trying to do is to try to help students understand...how others see the world maybe a bit differently," said Kimberly Tew, PPS's Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction. "It's about just understanding that we all come from different walks of life. All these different components; our religion, our ethnicity, our socioeconomic status ... [and] our gender identity [all] shape how we walk in the world."

However, several concerned community members see this differently. Junglien Chen, Luke Alberts, and two unidentified protestors participating in demonstrations outside of the school are a part of a larger group of 15 PPS parents organized under the name Parents for Responsible Education Policy. They have claimed that HiTOPS's educational rhetoric goes beyond the state-mandated "Pathways" program and introduces ideas not suited for middle school students. Among these ideas is the "oppressor-oppressed" dynamic, which PREP alleges leads to unfairness and polarization in the classroom, in part through classing students into binary groups of privileged and oppressed.

"The concern is that such a divisive approach may not only oversimplify complex social dynamics but also sow discord among students. [The "oppressor-oppressed" dynamic] fosters a mindset where individuals labeled as 'oppressed' might feel justified in their wrongful actions, attributing them to external forces rather than internal choices," stated the PREP website. "This approach ... encourages an externalization of fault [and] detracts from a student's development of character and accountability."

The Princeton Board of Education discussed the wider community's views on both HiTOPS's curriculum and PREP protests during a meeting on January 30. The meeting provided a platform for PPS parent and member of the LGBTQ+ community Thomas Perc to raise concerns about HiTOPS protestors' alleged intimidation of children.

"What I said [at the board meeting] was my response to seeing two middle-aged men protesting during drop off and addressing children," said Perc. "I heard from my daughter and other students that they were engaging with some of the students, and I just thought it was highly inappropriate, very misguided, and downright wrong."

HiTOPS declined to speak to the Tower concerning these issues.

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photo courtesy: Princeton Public Schools

Thomas Perc expresses his views at the January 30 Board Meeting.

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# PHS Profile: Lauren Freedman joins the administration as a permanent Assistant Principal



Lauren Freedman, PHS graduate from class of 2004, now gets ready in the morning as an Assistant Principal, answering calls and organizing files.

**Leila Guitton, STAFF WRITER**  
**Emil Kapur, CONTRIBUTING WRITER**

Now working in an administrative position, Lauren Freedman is one of two Assistant Principals at PHS with Rashone Johnson. A former math teacher at PHS since 2008, Freedman joined the PHS administrative team in September, replacing now-principal Cecilia Birge as one of the Assistant Principals.

This past summer, before taking the new position, Freedman had just completed her Master's degree in educational leadership online through the University of Texas Permian Basin when the position of

assistant principal opened up. Realizing that she could work with even more students than as a math teacher, Freedman was eager to take the position.

"Over the years, I have served on many, many different committees. I've taken on various leadership roles, both in the school and in the surrounding community. For a long time, I was working with about 120 students across my classes, but I realized that in a role like this, I could work with close to 1600 students. So I knew that this would be an opportunity for me to sort of work with the larger community," Freedman said.

Freedman believes that her style of teaching was never "traditional" for a high school setting. A self-described quirky and

creative person, Freedman often sought to include fun elements in the classes that she taught.

"I like to think of myself as someone who thinks outside of the box. ... I [liked] to teach using songs and games and doing things that aren't so traditional and I think it's really fun to teach math," said Freedman. "It's fun to help students to be creative and help students see math in a different way."

Grace Waldman '25, a former student of Freedman's when she taught Geometry I and Pre-Calculus recalls strategies Freedman would create to help maximize the engagement in her students.

"She was a very chill, fun teacher to be around. She would have these things called Freedman Franks or something, it was like her form of currency, and if you did well on an assignment or you were paying attention and raised your hand in class she would give you one, and at the end of each quarter right before break you would have a little party where you got to trade in stuff, so it was pretty fun," Waldman said.

Growing up in Princeton, Freedman is grateful for being able to meet so many people of different backgrounds. Later attending PMS and PHS, she was inspired by many of the teachers she grew up with, including Mr. Johnson whom she now works with as Assistant Principal.

"Being part of this community is really special. It's a special place because there is such a diverse group of people from all around the world and you can learn so much from so many people," said Freedman. "I had a great education. In middle school, I have memories of being in my math class and having a really strict teacher at the time

and that's actually when I decided I wanted to be a math teacher, because it was a hard class and I felt like it was the one class that I was really successful in."

After graduating from PHS in 2004, while majoring in math education her senior year at Villanova University, Freedman was hired as a math teacher at PHS, enabling her to move back to her hometown.

"What brought me back to PHS was my love for the town and my love for the community. My roots are here. I'm really close with my family and they all live [in Princeton]. I met my husband in high school [and] both of us have parents who live here, my sister lives here, his sisters live here. We're family people," said Freedman.

With Freedman stepping into the new role, Supervisor of Math and Business Education Tiffany Brennan, who worked with Freedman on organizing Saturday Academies over the summer, praised her colleague's attentiveness and curiosity.

"She's a really good listener, and so she likes to consider more than one person's point of view. ... She's [also] willing to ask questions, and that's important for a leader to admit when they don't know some things because she is new in her role," Brennan said.

While Freedman's former students will not see her on a daily basis for classes anymore, many of them, including Waldman, see her continuing her dedication to PHS students in carrying out her new role as assistant principal.

"I'm very happy for her and I think she'll do a great job. I don't really see her very often anymore ... but she's doing a great job as [assistant] principal, so she deserves it," said Waldman.

## Flash Features

**Mattias Blix and Aritra Ray,**  
**CONTRIBUTING WRITERS**

### Princeton's 101: Fund presents at PHS for its 54th year

On Wednesday, January 31, presenters from the nonprofit 101: Fund came to the PHS Ideas Center to discuss need-based scholarship opportunities for low-income students. Launched in 1970, initially under the name of Princeton Regional Scholarship Foundation, the 101: Fund is a unique opportunity open exclusively to PHS seniors looking for financial aid to help them begin their higher education journey.

The 101: Fund, which has provided \$1 million in aid over the past five decades, currently offers scholarships and financial assistance for students pursuing both two-year programs and four-year higher education, with funding primarily sourced from community initiatives, fundraising events, and donations from institutions, including Princeton University.

"Decades of fundraising, with stewardship, [we] would get grants from local philanthropic organizations, fundraisers. ... Princeton University just made a huge announcement [on January 30] and they're giving 50 million dollars to the municipality, [50,000] of which are promised to the 101: Fund," said awards committee co-chair Jennifer Jang.

Community donations are also vital for the 101: Fund to provide financial support for students. The 101: Fund's College Throwback Night fundraiser, taking place on Saturday, March 9 at 7:00 pm at the Princeton University Charter Club, will offer attendees the chance to eat and play games together as they bid on items provided by the event. All proceeds from the fundraiser will go towards supporting PHS seniors through the 101: Fund.

"Elizabeth Hamblet, who was president of the fund for several years, said donating to the 101: Fund is an act of caring ... We are such a college-focused community ... but some of us do a bit more perhaps to make sure that more students can go to and finish college and do so without debt," Jang said.

In the academic year of 2020-2021, the 101: Fund dedicated a total of \$122,762 to assist 67 college students ranging from first-year students to those entering their fourth year. A substantial portion of the recipients are breaking new ground in their families by pursuing higher education for the first time.

"We've raised on average, in the last decade, somewhere between 90 and 125 thousand dollars a year, and we give it all away. We want to keep being helpful, hopefully supporting students and enabling them to not take on debt whenever possible," said 101: Fund president Anthony Klockenbrink.

The deadline for 101: Fund scholarship applications is April 15, 2024. Jang encourages seniors to apply even if they are unsure whether they qualify or not.

"We serve students who not only may have very limited resources, but for a great many families for whom despite ... careful saving, it's just incredibly difficult today [to pay] for college, even with financial aid from various institutions. So we like to think that we are being helpful to a significant range of students," Jang said.



Jennifer Jang and Anthony Klockenbrink present to Rodolfo Mejia '24, Hangyeol Cheong '24, Luis Del Cid '24, and other students in the Ideas Center.

### PHS celebrates Black History Month

Throughout the month of February, the PHS community celebrated Black History Month through a series of events showcasing Black culture, heritage, and contributions to the nation. These celebrations ranged from the new addition of a gospel festival to the annual school-wide assembly on February 22.

The annual assembly opened with a performance of "Lift Every Voice and Sing" by the PHS Choir, which set the stage for the later events that included songs, self-choreographed dances, a flag wave, and poems that included members of a group called Black History and Heritage 365. This year, the students involved in planning aimed to make the assembly more interactive, encouraging the audience to engage with the performers through singing and clapping along.

"This is an inclusive opportunity for us all to just highlight the beauty of African Americans and also folks that represent the African diaspora. We have a lot of students that are from the Caribbean [or] that are from other countries around the world that consider themselves Black Americans," said Bethany Andrade Siddiqui, Student and Family Services Coordinator at PHS, and one of the faculty members who helped organize the event.

Being completely student-driven, the PHS Black History Month assembly's main organizer was the Multicultural Student Achievement Network. As an initiative to help PHS students become more culturally literate, the organizers taught audience members the history behind performances and the countries and cultures they originated from.

"The other [goal] is for our students at PHS, who may not know as much about Black culture, to learn as well," said Siddiqui. "So I think the biggest takeaways [are] to make sure that the students' voices and timelines are lifted and that it's also an educational opportunity for the entire school."

However, the activities don't end on March 1 — in May, MSAN is planning a Malcolm X Day of Excellence in which young men will attend a one-day mentoring program at Princeton University. Other events throughout the year include a cultural attire day, a Historically-Black-College-and-University themed door decorating contest, and a trip to see a Black play at the McCarter Theater Center.

"All of the [activities] we have throughout the calendar year are just opportunities to make sure that we are bringing kind of light to the contributions of Black Americans in this country as a whole," Siddiqui said.



Students from MSAN participate in a flag wave performance.

# Weeks of protests continue discussion regarding HiTOPS curriculum



Junglien Chen, one of the parent protesters, holds signs outside Princeton Middle School.

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Several months earlier in September 2023, HiTOPS had also faced widespread criticism after Project Veritas, a national right-wing advocacy group, released a video alleging HiTOPS's stance against parental consent and "opt-outs" for several of their lessons. HiTOPS responded by stating that the allegations were false and the result of a misrepresentation of an interview. Led by former superintendent Carol Kelley, PPS concurrently denounced Project Veritas's accusations.

"Our goal is that all students have access to developmentally appropriate, positive, and medically-accurate sex education. We respect a parent's right to opt their child out of a class or

activity. We hope they won't, but we respect their right to do so," HiTOPS's website emphasized in an official statement.

At the January 30 board meeting, Perc emphasized that the middle school was not the right setting to advocate for change.

"This is a state mandatory curriculum. It's not decided by Principal Burr. It's not decided by sixth graders. It's not decided by the Board of Education. It is decided by the governor and [the curriculum] comes down from the state," Perc said.

At the recent board meeting, Dafna Kendal, the BOE chair, shared an anecdote of a concerned mother whose seventh-grade daughter expressed fear of the protesters' presence and reportedly asked whether it was necessary to hide from them. Kendal went on to suggest that the protesters continue their protests in front of the municipal Valley Road building instead of the middle school.

"[PREP has] every right to protest on the sidewalk, that's public property, [but] you know this is all about kids ... if someone's actions are detrimental to children, they should think about their actions," said Kendal. "And that's not to say they shouldn't protest [but] maybe they need to examine how they are protesting and ... why it is being reported that some kids are intimidated."

However, anti-HiTOPS protesters object to accusations of intimidation and deny approaching or speaking to children. Protestor Luke Alberts claimed that the only intimidation suffered by students was a product of immaturity and adverse sensitivity.

"As for children claiming to be 'intimidated' or 'scared,' grow up. What's so threatening about a pair of middle-aged doofuses with signs telling anyone who reads them that they're neither privileged or oppressed? Life isn't always

going to cater to your worldview, which, in the end, can be a wonderful thing," Alberts said.

Alberts argued for the necessity of protesting in front of the school as a measure of publicity and legitimization.

"If I held up a sign in front of the admin building on Valley Road, do you really think we'd be having this conversation?" said Alberts. "I would just be dismissed as some crank. Ditto in front of the state house."

At PHS, HiTOPS works with several clubs, including the Gender and Sexuality Alliance club, and offers both a racial literacy elective and the online Princeton Introduction to Racial Literacy course. Additionally, the state-mandated racial and sexual literacy requirements are met through the health, Peer Group, and Teen Pep programs.

"The high school doesn't [work with HiTOPS] from a curriculum perspective, but some of our clubs, because of their involvement with HiTOPS and the middle school and the community, bring it into the building," said Birge. "[HiTOPS is] an important organization that provides support for some of our students at PHS."

In discussing sensitive topics, Birge advocated for engaging in open-minded conversations rather than silencing opposing views. She highlighted the importance of discussion to break away from binary perspectives.

"I think my interpretation of this whole event is to ask what's the best way to educate our kids to make sure that they grow up to be critical thinkers and be brave enough to meet the world's challenges," said Birge. "It's not that one person is always gonna be progressive and the other always conservative, it's really a spectrum. ... [We want them to] understand ... and figure out what's the best way, most inclusive way, to bring everyone in the audience so that [we] can have a diversified society and promote peace."

## PHS wins States in Samsung Solve for Tomorrow competition

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Additionally, the team intends for the stuffed animal robot to help decrease anxiety around practicing an endangered language.

"If you're talking to a stuffed animal, it's not going to judge you, so you could practice or learn a language without the stress of being judged by another person," said Eastburn. "We think this is going to be, at least psychologically, helpful in overcoming the barrier of hesitancy to speak."

Due to the multidisciplinary nature of the project, creating the robot has required coordination across teams of students working on programming, robotics, psychology, as well as language speakers.

"We have a large team of really talented people working together ... There is so much overlap, and effective communication has been key to combining all these areas of knowledge ... We've learned so much from each other, and we've expanded what we originally thought we were going to do. This was something we never thought possible last year," said Mian.

However, the team's progress has not been without challenges, especially with finding speakers of endangered languages to collaborate with.



The stuffed armadillo, the national animal of Guatemala, with its platform and robotics components.

"Many people who speak Mam or Creole have been discouraged from speaking these languages because they are seen as lower class or lower social status languages.

Because there is a stigma around speaking an endangered language, many people are afraid to speak it, so we have had trouble collecting data," said Sofia Son '25, a member of the programming team.

The subsequent round of selection in the Samsung competition is at the national level, so the team is working to complete the prototypes of the robots, as well as to further expand their outreach, so that they can present them at the competition and to various news sources, including Town Topics and NPR. They plan to test the effectiveness of the robots on aiding language learning by testing them in ESL classrooms at PHS, before eventually sending the robots around the world. This will mean making the technology affordable to anyone.

"We want to make this something that is accessible to socioeconomic levels across the spectrum, for people who may not have had a formal education," said Eastburn. "We've brought the price down [to] ... probably less than \$30 a robot. ... The real challenge is we're going to have to figure out how to make those technical skills, some of which are very daunting and intimidating, accessible to everyone so that everyone can feel empowered to take charge of building these robots and hopefully create a movement that will grow to become much bigger than us."

## Changes to the program of studies place restrictions on class selections

Harry Dweck and Daniel Haiduc,  
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

The Business & Technology Education and Science departments have made significant changes to their respective programs of studies for the upcoming school year.

In the Science department, the Physics I Accelerated and regular Physics I class will now be available to sophomores and will fully replace AP Physics 1. Additionally, AP Physics C, previously a one year course covering two AP tests: Mechanics and Electricity and Magnetism (E&M), will become two separate full year courses. Lastly, the Business & Technology Education department has restricted the joint-semester AP Macroeconomics and Microeconomics classes to upperclassmen.

Physics I Accelerated first debuted last year in conjunction with AP Physics 1, allowing rising juniors to choose between both classes. Next year, however, rising sophomores will only have the ability to take Physics I or Physics I Accelerated as introductory physics courses.

Oren Levi, a physics teacher at PHS since 2015, believes that the change will increase the accessibility of the program.

"It used to be that physics was kind of capped for junior year. [This year], we've finally managed to convince guidance to let sophomores take physics as long as they meet some of the required math — Algebra II mostly," said Levi.

The removal of the AP Physics 1 class, according to Levi, will help students better navigate the science curriculum.

"AP Physics 1 was not intended to be a first-year physics course, but Physics I was never a prerequisite so you could take [AP Physics 1] without having even taken physics before," said Levi. "So students decided to take [AP Physics 1] simply because it was an AP science with no science prerequisites; it would give [them] a boost to their GPA, which I personally don't agree with."

Levi said that this structure resulted in many failing scores on the AP Physics 1 exam.

"In the two AP classes that I taught, only half of each class even took the test. [A trend that] we've been seeing for years now is that the AP Physics 1 scores are never as

good," said Levi. "With the scores, usually you want an even distribution of all scores across the board, but in physics the distribution is much heavier [towards] one side."

After Physics 1, students can continue their studies with AP Physics C, which has been split into two separate, full year courses — one year of AP Physics C: Mechanics and one year of AP Physics C: Electricity and Magnetism.

This change will provide students with more time to understand the material and study for the AP exams.

"With the extra time, we're going to be able to do a lot more labs and practice that we wouldn't have been able to do before because of how quickly we had to rush through the curriculum," said Levi. "People will have a better chance at succeeding on their tests."

Although completion of Physics 1 has become a prerequisite to taking AP Physics C, students with a strong background in math have the option of skipping the requirement, provided they take a math-based placement test and complete a physics summer assignment.

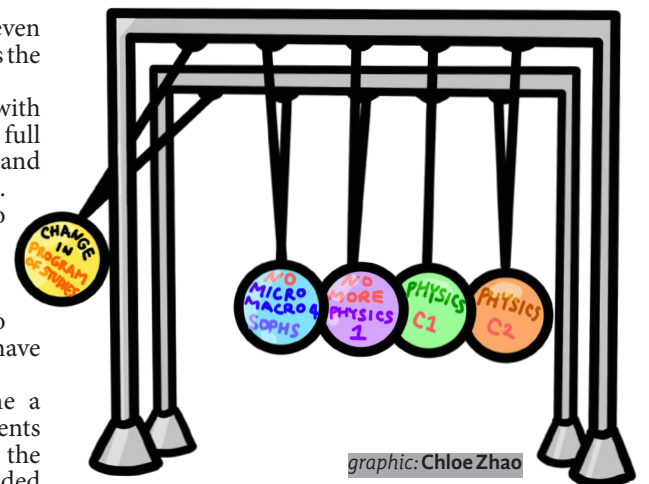
Andrew Rivera '25, a student of physics teacher Peter Martens, noted that while the change may result in greater depth in the physics curriculum, it could also reduce advancement in other disciplines.

"If you were to take both years of AP Physics C, you wouldn't be able to take two years of chemistry," Rivera said.

With regards to the Business & Technology Education department. Instead of Algebra II and English, the joint-semester AP Macroeconomics and Microeconomics courses now require Pre-Calculus and U.S. History II as prerequisites.

AP Macro/Microeconomics teacher Katelyn Wagner advocated for the change after talking with many high school economics teachers from across the country.

"We did see a pretty big correlation between how well students do in math courses versus how well they do in economics, because there is a lot of math involved [in AP Macro/Micro]. [We] swapped out the English [prerequisite] for the history [prerequisite] because there's a big crossover between U.S. History II and what we learn in Macro/Micro," Wagner said.



As a result of the new requirements, the course will no longer be available to sophomores, reserving it exclusively for juniors and seniors.

"For the last few years, we've had an insane waitlist for the course, and a lot of times what happened is that juniors and seniors who really wanted to take it weren't able to, because sophomores were filling the spots. I thought that it would be more fair to juniors and seniors," Wagner said.

Wagner mentioned that there are still other opportunities for sophomores to learn economic concepts.

"We offer an introduction to economics course that you can take as a freshman or sophomore, which goes through the first two or three units of AP Macro[economics]."

Audrey Huang '27 feels that delaying the course will make joining many clubs requiring knowledge of economics, such as PHS Young Investors or Euro Challenge, more difficult for underclassmen. Further, she argues that restricting one of the few AP courses available to sophomores will only make their upperclassman year course loads more stressful if they still want to take AP Macro/Micro.

"I think economics principles are better taught earlier in high school and a lot of juniors and seniors already have a lot of course work so taking on [AP Macro/Micro] would just be even harder to manage," Huang said.

# OPINIONS

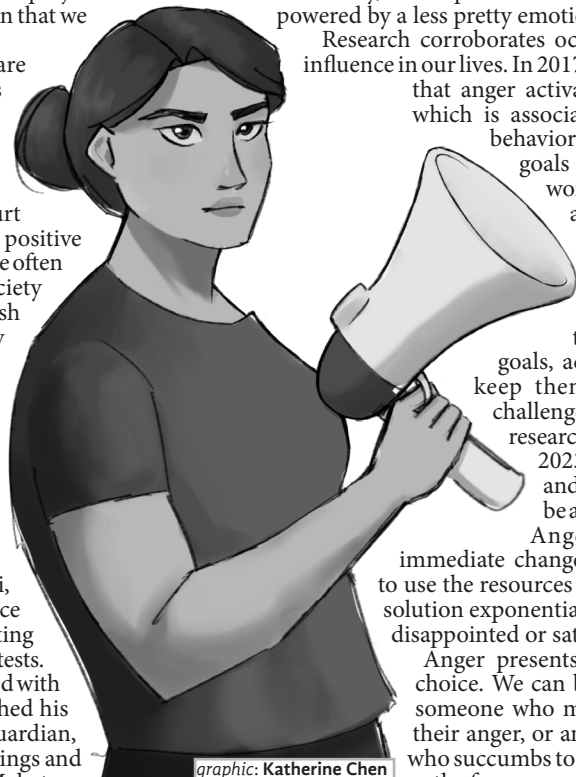
## Anger architecture 101: a guide to positive anger

Iniya Karimanal, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

As high school students, our daily lives can be emotional rollercoasters due to constant academic and social pressures. Whether it's because of frustrating school projects or friend group drama, anger is an emotion that we can't seem to escape.

Because of the way many of us are exposed to anger, we almost always see anger as a negative, destructive emotion. After all, it does seem like the worst aspects of human behavior come from anger — we say things we don't mean, make rash decisions, and hurt those around us. However, there is a positive side to anger. For example, protestors are often driven by anger towards injustice in society and take to the streets. Inventors push towards finding a solution when they are frustrated at a recurring problem. Feeling anger is proof of empathy and ambition, and should not be cast away or dismissed. When harnessed appropriately, anger can be mobilized as a vehicle for change; it is only when the emotion is uncontrolled that it becomes negative.

Some of the most recognizable activists used these strategies. Mahatma Gandhi, a pioneer in the Indian independence movement, is globally renowned for setting landmark precedents for nonviolent protests. However, his advocacy of peace coexisted with his anger, the latter of which even pushed his cause forward. In an article from *The Guardian*, Gandhi's grandson discussed the teachings and lessons of his grandfather, stating that Mahatma



graphic: Katherine Chen

Gandhi “saw anger as a good thing, as the fuel for change.” While we often perceive Gandhi as a symbol of tranquility and stability, it is important to recognize that his journey was powered by a less pretty emotion — anger.

Research corroborates occasional anger as a positive influence in our lives. In 2017, *Psychology Today* reported that anger activates the left anterior cortex, which is associated with positive approach behaviors that push us to pursue our goals and think logically. In other words, anger is fundamentally

an expression of intense passion for a larger cause. It inspires individuals to achieve their goals, acting as a fuel to keep them going despite challenges. According to research from November 2023 in the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, anger can be a powerful tool for motivation. Anger makes us want to see immediate change. Our brains are motivated to use the resources at our disposal to engineer a solution exponentially faster than if we were just disappointed or satisfied.

Anger presents us with a very important choice. We can become an “anger architect,” someone who mobilizes the positive side to their anger, or an “anger apologist,” someone who succumbs to negative anger. Choosing the path of an anger architect doesn't require hours

of therapy or anger management classes. To avoid the dam of uncontrollable anger breaking in our brains, we simply need to take control of our emotions and evaluate our anger holistically. And there is a simple tool to do so — the anger audit. When we are angry, we often hear people tell us to take ten seconds to get rid of our anger, to suppress and ignore the strong emotions we feel. The anger audit takes a different approach, aiming to understand the root cause behind the anger and work towards a solution with three easy steps.

The first step is to inspect. Just like a building architect, we need to assess the situation. Ask yourself: “Why am I angry?”

The second step is to create a blueprint. We need to draft a plan, without which our final product might come crashing to the ground. Ask yourself: “What do I want to get out of my anger?”

The final step is to build. Here's the moment where our anger turns into action, either by destroying or creating. We have the choice. Ask yourself: “What am I going to do with my anger?”

The Princeton community has seen its share of angry students. From PHS students' passionate showings at board meetings to rallies and protests on current issues such as the liberation of Palestine and Black Lives Matter, it is clear that the diversity of opinions found in Princeton is great. However, hosting open discourse on relevant, heated, modern-day issues comes with the responsibility of managing and understanding the intense emotions behind disagreement. To promote constructive dialogue, it is crucial to be aware of and leverage anger to forge progress collectively in our community.

When you become an anger architect, you can make your anger a superpower instead of a liability. Although we'll never rid the world of anger, we can use the power and momentum of it and turn it into a powerful force that can spur positive change. If we collectively strive to become anger architects, perhaps the world would become a more empathetic and resilient place.

“You can make your anger a superpower instead of a liability.”

## Political bribery is hidden in plain sight

Andrew Kuo, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Imagine you're in a crowd of people shouting demands at a politician. You've got a loud voice, so you're confident that you can be heard. Unfortunately, there are five thousand other screaming people in the same crowd as you. And everyone is getting drowned out by a guy who bought a top-tier surround-sound speaker system and rented that balcony above the politician two weeks ago. This is representative of current American politics, and how it currently drowns out the voices of the people.

There's one often overlooked requirement to hold office in the United States: money. According to *OpenSecrets.org*, the amount of money each House Representative spent to win office in 2022 was around \$2.79 million, and the amount of money every Senator spent to win office in 2022 was around \$26.53 million. It is clear that elected officials are reliant on money, and it is far more efficient for them to turn towards a small number of wealthy individuals than to seek donations from thousands of average voters. The process of doing so is often covered under the term lobbying.

Lobbying is defined by *Britannica* as “any attempt by individuals or private interest groups to influence the decisions of government.” In the United States, this comes in the form of “public” campaigns undertaken to pressure politicians into specific policy decisions. The term is broad. It covers the practice of directly speaking to politicians, signing petitions, and funding research. However, the most common and influential method used in lobbying is donating large sums of money to political campaigns. There's a reason that terms differentiating different forms of lobbying do not exist. It makes it far easier to confuse the public about what lobbying actually is.

The only problem is, lobbying isn't supposed to work like that. There are set limits on how much individuals or corporations can donate each year to campaigns. Those limits can be conveniently circumvented by exploiting several loopholes in the law, especially those inherent to PACs.

The PAC, or Political Action Committee, is the main vehicle politicians use to accept campaign contributions. A PAC, according to *OpenSecrets.org*, is “a political committee

that raises and spends money to elect or defeat candidates.” Federal law allows for two kinds of PACs: Connected and Non-Connected. Judicial decisions have allowed for a third kind of PAC known as “independent expenditure-only committees,” otherwise known as “Super PACs.”

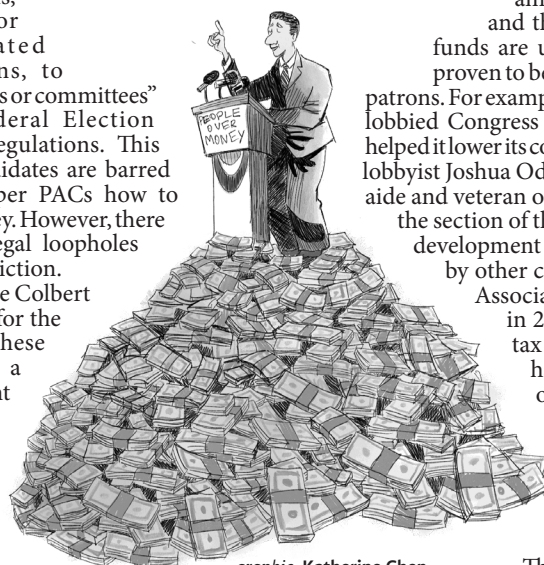
A Super PAC can accept unlimited amounts of money, provided they don't use those funds to “make contributions, whether direct, in-kind or via coordinated communications, to federal candidates or committees” as per the Federal Election Commission's regulations. This means that candidates are barred from telling Super PACs how to spend their money. However, there are numerous legal loopholes around this restriction.

Stephen Colbert, host of *The Colbert Report*, created a Super PAC for the sole purpose of exposing these inherent loopholes. During a conversation with the president of his PAC, Colbert pointed out that while he “[couldn't] tell him [what to do]” directly, he could easily convey his preferences to the PAC through indirect means, such as publicly expressing his views on television. The other major requirement, according to the Campaign Legal Center, is that Super PACs must “[report] their fundraising [and spending] to the Federal Election Commission.” However, the Campaign Legal Center also notes that Super PACs can hide their donors by simply “[reporting] contributions from secretly-funded ‘dark money’

nonprofits, which themselves keep their donors hidden from the public.” Additionally, politicians can easily transfer money from Super PACs back to themselves. According to Politico's coverage of Colbert's Super PAC, Colbert's lawyer explained that Colbert “could secretly steal the remaining \$800,000 in his super PAC by creating an anonymous 501(c)4 and using an IRS loophole.”

Colbert's experiment proves that politicians are able to accept unlimited amounts of money, not disclose its origins, and then hide it from the IRS. Many of these funds are used in lobbying processes, which have proven to be effective in creating change in favor of its patrons. For example, Politico reported in 2021 that Amazon lobbied Congress to preserve a prized tax break that has helped it lower its corporate tax bill. The company hired the tax lobbyist Joshua Odintz, a former Democratic congressional aide and veteran of the Obama administration, to lobby on the section of the tax code dealing with the research and development tax deduction. Although they were joined by other companies such as Intel and the National Association of Manufacturers for their attempt in 2021, Amazon's own efforts to curb these tax bills have been happening for years, and have successfully pushed back the repeal of the tax break. According to Statista, corporations spent a total of \$4.09 billion on lobbying in 2022 alone. Of course, that's only the reported figure. Nothing stops a corporation from donating to a shell nonprofit organization, which can then transfer money over to a PAC.

The dozens of student-created clubs at PHS are a clear sign that students want to create change that lasts. The government is meant to be the tool for people to create that change. Attempting to create change with a corrupt government is like trying to fix a car with a broken wrench. As we become the new generation of civically active citizens, it is crucial to understand the intricacies of our current political space and where it is currently failing us.



graphic: Katherine Chen

“The PAC ... is the main vehicle politicians use to accept campaign contributions.”

## CHEERS

Stuff we like

Stuff we don't

## JEERS

SNAPPLE zero sugar teas

COQUETTE styles

School WATER FOUNTAINS

APPLE product shows

PARQUET COURTS

CALCULUS midterms

BEING SINGLE on Valentine's Day

NEW FOOD JOINTS in Princeton

Studying for the SAT

WALKER SCOBELL and CHARLIE BUSHNELL

VENDING MACHINE inflation

Magnolia Bakery BANANA PUDDING

COLD WEATHER

# Don't be so keen on caffeine

Elif Cam, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

In the past few years, students may have observed that cans of Celsius, Monster, and similar energy drinks have become as prevalent as water bottles in classrooms and hallways. According to the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH), there has been a recent surge in the consumption of these drinks, particularly among teenagers and young adults, to whom energy drink companies gear their advertising. These colorfully adorned cans and intriguing flavorings are marketed to this age group with the assertion that they provide a temporary energy boost, improving physical and cognitive performance. This claim is not entirely void, considering a classic 12-ounce can of Celsius packs a shocking 200 milligrams of caffeine, roughly double the amount in a cup of coffee.

Although students tend to reach for caffeinated products during the school day for the increased energy and concentration they may provide, the Harvard T. Chan School of Public Health finds that excessive consumption of caffeine can have side effects like insomnia, heart complications, anxiety, and even seizures. Due to these possible complications, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends consuming no more than 100 mg of caffeine per day for adolescents ages 12-18 — a standard that is difficult to maintain when almost one-third of teens in this age group consume energy drinks regularly, according to the NCCIH. To make sure kids don't over-consume caffeine, there needs to be more federal and school level regulations to cap the caffeine content in these beverages and label them with accurate warnings.

Even though some of these drinks contain twice the recommended amount of daily caffeine content for teens, there are no current FDA regulations regarding the amount of caffeine in the drinks, as they are sold as "nutritional supplements" and are not regulated as strictly as conventional consumables. As

the labels of these beverages often don't reveal the exact amount of caffeine in each drink, teens are likely to pile on too much caffeine over the course of the day, negatively impacting their health. In 2011, the CDC found that 1,499 teens aged 12 to 17 years went to the emergency room for energy-drink-related emergencies. If this sector goes unregulated, those numbers could skyrocket as these drinks grow in popularity.

Unfortunately, the rampant issue of unregulated caffeine contents goes beyond canned energy drinks and extends to common beverages such as restaurant lemonade. In fact, a large-size Panera Charged Lemonade contains about 390 milligrams of caffeine, and the company has already been charged with two lawsuits from heavily-caffeinated lemonade-induced deaths. Many consumers were not aware of the amount of caffeine that was contained in the drink and the severity of consuming that much. As a result, many can unconsciously reach for refills and have extremely excessive amounts of caffeine without realizing. To limit cases of caffeine overdose — which, for healthy adults, would be consuming more than 400 mg per day — beverage industries should be forced to place labels on their products specifying how much caffeine is in their product and how many servings can be safely consumed in a day.

PHS should take action to prevent students from overconsuming caffeine, but right now, the USDA nutrition standards do not restrict the sale of caffeinated beverages in high schools. The CDC states that about 12 percent of secondary schools in the country sell energy drinks in vending machines and school stores, making it easier for students to access these highly caffeinated drinks. To help ensure that students aren't exceeding their caffeine limits, PHS should adopt caffeine caps on the products sold in school, limiting caffeine content in drinks to half the recommended daily intake for teens. Additionally, caffeinated drinks should only be available in the school cafeteria and Tiger Cafe. By doing so, PHS staff can

easily monitor the number of drinks students have purchased in a day and control a student's intake. It also prevents students from purchasing these drinks during times when the cafeterias are closed, preventing them from consuming caffeine in the afternoon and possibly disrupting their sleep schedule. High schools around the country implementing these policies might influence major energy drink companies to add less caffeine into their products in order to meet the cap. In a world where caffeine is abundant in many common beverages, it is important that teens are aware of the amounts they are consuming and can make informed decisions.



graphic: Charley Hu

# Nature is the natural learning environment

Joy Chen and Harry Dweck, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS



graphic: Charley Hu

At PHS, our cramped hallways and stuffy classrooms exacerbate an already stressful four years. It's all too easy for students to go all day sitting in a room with only a window to remind them of life beyond school. Around the world, outdoor classrooms offer a credible solution to these problems, helping

students to stay engaged and connected with the environment around them. In the outdoors, teens perform field studies observing ecosystems and biological interactions, use nature as inspiration in outdoor creative writing classes, and even organize outdoor-themed conversations in their foreign language classes.

The "waldschule," or forest school, was introduced in Germany in the early 1900s as a way to mitigate the spread of a tuberculosis epidemic. These classrooms provided fresh air and freedom from often cramped school-houses. During the COVID-19 pandemic, PHS brought some of their classes outdoors as well. These outdoor classes allowed students to engage in a more immersive environment while social distancing, which proved to be very successful in science and language classes. However, outdoor education has more value for the modern student than just preventing disease.

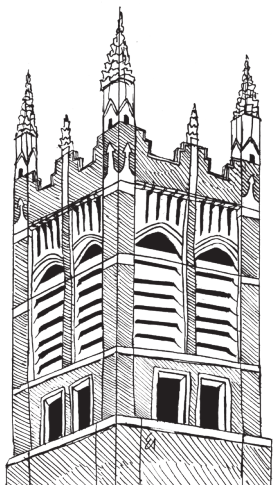
More diverse learning environments help people break free from a negative cycle of self-doubt and increase mental clarity. According to neuroscientist Dr. Elizabeth Crofton, the crowded areas we encounter at school lead to an overload of environmental and social stimuli that increase the concentration of stress hormones. Worse still, these stimuli largely come in only two senses: sight and hearing. A study conducted by Dr. Loren Johnson and Robin Randall in 2017 found that outside learning diversifies the way we process information by cultivating other senses, such as smell and touch. This is extremely crucial for non-traditional learners, whose sensory needs are often not taken into consideration in indoor learning environments.

As the world turns increasingly indoors, outdoor education is even more important. Longer school days and a precipitous rise in screen time causes students to spend less and less time in nature, leading to a disconnection between younger generations and the environment. Unsurprisingly, we are more likely to appreciate our environment when we are spending time in it. In a representative model of American students, Dr. Kyle Knight of South Dakota Mines found in 2022 that those who frequently engage with and enjoy outdoor activities are more likely to take action against climate change. At a time when students rarely voluntarily spend time in nature, outdoor education in schools can act as a force to reintroduce a curiosity and love for the outdoors.

There are legitimate reasons why outdoor education isn't the norm. One response, from students, parents, teachers and administrators alike, is that it's simply impractical. While this may be true in places such as New York City, suburban areas, such as Princeton, have the resources and space to make an outdoor curriculum not only feasible but also practical. At PHS, we are lucky to have many courtyards, fields, and nearby wooded areas that offer a quiet environment to teach and learn. Outdoor education is also not an all-or-nothing endeavor, and even weekly interactions with nature can bring positive change.

Though it may be unconventional, PHS should not be afraid to experiment with outdoor education. What traditional learning settings lack, natural learning environments can make up for, with potential for the implementations of creative class workshops that benefit students and teachers alike.

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## Student council can be more than just another extracurricular

Editorial

Every year, dozens of Freshmen, Sophomores, and Juniors all around PHS show interest in becoming members of student council. In some ways, student council is just another riveting feature of school life; the slightly ripped, faded posters that hang around in unexplainably hard to reach places, the faces and names of candidates at every corner, and complicated strings of endorsements pushing their preferred candidates forward, are just pieces of the running-for-office process that every student is all too familiar with. But of the students running for positions in every grade, the question of genuine intention arises. Does every candidate run with the intention of improving their school? Do candidates really strive to “be a voice for everyone” in the student body? Amidst the ever-growing competitive college environment and race to grasp noticeable achievements, student council has lost its traditional meaning and has become yet another supplement on students’ application.

At PHS, the student council has four positions per grade: President, Vice President, Treasurer, and Secretary—a common practice across the nation. And yet, each of these titles in relation to student government have become superficial, something symbolizing only a seemingly impressive leadership position.

While many people approach these roles with good intentions, their spirits are quashed with patterns of inactivity and insignificant action. At PHS, students solely see the presence of their student council members in event planning, such as prom, dances, and pep rallies. While they also hold fundraisers for school dances and organize events, other student councils across the country are making grand efforts to improve their schools and communities. In November of 2023, Portland Press

Herald reported that Maine’s Biddeford High School held a student council-led food basket drive, in which the school collected 100 baskets composed of Thanksgiving foods. The council promptly distributed the food donations among community members experiencing food insecurity. So why is our student council limiting itself to mundane tasks when it has the potential to reach so much further, to impact so many more people?

It’s key to recognize that a student council also exists to give everyone a voice. Thus, it is also essential to strive to communicate with as broad a group of student voices as possible. Through class meetings? Through a Google form? A monthly stand?

The lack of significant influence and reach that student government currently suffers from doesn’t seem to correlate with the value that is placed upon student council positions; this is especially relevant in college applications, as students often load their resumes with achievements they’ve obtained just for the sake of receiving an Ivy League acceptance come winter or spring. Has holding a student council title become just a checkbox? Has this responsibility — that historically has been linked with student advocacy and community uplifting — been reduced to nothing more than a means to an end? In Harvard’s Class of 2024, 40.2 percent of students self-reported involvement in their high school’s student government. Yet, it is doubtful that they made the same impact as those who tackled community service projects or experienced the personal growth that comes with managing athletics or committing to challenging courses. So what is the value of artificially inflating the perceived societal worth of this title? Unless a change in the ambitions and expectations comes, not much.

*Note: Managing Editor Matthew Chen is PHS ’25 Student Council President and recuses himself from any involvement in this editorial.*

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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 [phtowersenioreditors@gmail.com](mailto:phtowersenioreditors@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 Editors-in-Chief. The Tower’s articles do not necessarily represent the views of the administration, faculty, or staff.

PHS  
SPEAKS OUT

WHAT ISSUE ARE YOU MOST  
CONCERNED ABOUT IN THE UPCOMING  
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION?



“NOT KNOWING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TRUE AND FALSE IS A VERY CONCERNING ISSUE FOR THE UPCOMING ELECTIONS ... PEOPLE ARE ... WILLING TO BELIEVE WHAT THEY SEE AT FACE VALUE, WHICH IS WHY STAYING WELL-INFORMED IS KEY TO A FUNCTIONING DEMOCRACY.”

- THIBAUT DEVICO '24



“I THINK THE AGES OF THE CANDIDATES IS A HUGE ISSUE. I DON’T REALLY TRUST TRUMP OR BIDEN ANYMORE, THEY’RE BOTH REALLY OLD.”

- HAYAH MIAN '25



“[THE BIGGEST ISSUE IS THAT] THERE’S THE SAME PEOPLE [IN THIS ELECTION], SO THERE’S NOT GOING TO BE ANY NEW IDEAS. I KNOW THEY HAVE EXPERIENCE, BUT MAYBE SOMEONE FRESH [WOULD BE BETTER].”

- AARNA VACHHRAJANI '27



“I THINK OUR IMMIGRATION POLICIES ARE VERY CONCERNING. WE SHOULD BE MORE ACCEPTING OF PEOPLE COMING INTO OUR COUNTRY, IT’S WHAT MAKES AMERICA SPECIAL.”

- AIMY SOLARES-ZACARIAS '26

graphic: Charley Hu  
photo: Tessa Silver and Chloe Zhao



## A multiverse of narratives: diversity in superheroes

Jieruei Chang, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

I'll be honest: I'm not much of a superhero fan. The recipes for most superhero movies today all seem pretty similar: take some guy with magical powers (and an ego to boot), throw him into some conundrum with the villain of the week, and have him fight his way through. Mix in some witty jokes, manufacture some sort of emotional moment to give an impression of sophistication, and wrap the whole thing with a special effects budget that could rival the GDP of a small nation. And then watch the box office money rain down from the sky.

Alright, that was far too harsh. Truth is, superhero movies are a form of escapism. They appeal to people for the same reason that I've found myself eating Chipotle in a foreign country instead of trying the local cuisine: familiarity. I can pull up "Iron Man" on a ten-hour flight and be reasonably sure that I'll be mindlessly entertained for an hour; however, that doesn't mean these movies all have to fit the same formulaic mold. When people ask how films like these could be made better, a common answer is to "make it more diverse." But why is a more diverse cast better? How should it be done? And what, exactly, do we mean by "diverse?"

Characters coming from different backgrounds means that their motivations, struggles, and triumphs become multifaceted and relatable to a wider audience. Shockingly, I am nothing like Superman. For starters, I can't fly. Secondly, I'm Asian. A few years ago (which I must say is far too recent) Marvel made its first Asian superhero, based on a virtually unknown comic book hero named Shang-Chi. To see myself reflected in such a film I surprisingly empowering and affirming, even for someone who doesn't usually watch superhero movies. Characters like Black Panther and Ms. Marvel can do the same — they give representation to groups often overlooked in media. For me, a superhero who looks like me can make the experience seem more intimate, and the escape from reality more real. For an impressionable child, it can show that rather than being a privilege reserved for one narrowly defined group, being a hero is a quality that lies within.

But diversity shouldn't just be a box on a businessman's checklist. Its incorporation should be intentional and thoughtfully planned — simply changing the character's demographic misses out on the creative potential of showing how their background influences their actions, while pigeonholing a character into a set of ethnic traits reinforces the very stereotypes that a diverse cast tries to break.

"Everything Everywhere All At Once" probably isn't the first thing that comes to mind when thinking of a superhero movie, but it shows how diversity can be seamlessly integrated into the fabric of a story. Michelle Yeoh and Ke Huy Quan are absolute martial arts masters in the film — seriously, the one-take fight choreography is insane — but they're not stereotypical kung fu artists wearing straw hats. Instead, Yeoh portrays Evelyn Wang, a laundromat owner, navigates the generational gulf dividing her from her father, and has a husband and teenage daughter (who aren't just around for comedic value). Even though she does plenty of extraordinary things, she is, at heart, an ordinary woman; that is what makes the story seem so relatable. And with its 139 minute runtime and a tenth of a standard blockbuster budget, it manages to weave a complex narrative that traverses universes, exploring themes of familial love, absurdism, and what it means to be a Chinese-American immigrant in a world where both nothing and everything seems to matter at the same time.

By incorporating different voices, backgrounds, and perspectives, we can make superhero films more relatable, inclusive, and powerful — not just in terms of CGI explosions, but also in emotional impact. "Diversity" isn't just sticking different faces on the same static characters; it is a nuanced process that makes for empowering storytelling. Done well, it makes superheroes seem more human — as individuals shaped by their experiences, but not defined by them.

Graphics  
by Emily Kim

# The everyday superhero

Aritra Ray, MULTIMEDIA EDITOR

Graphics: Emily Kim

# WOW!

In a world full of homework assignments, extracurricular activities, family commitments, and social events, being a superhero may seem like a far-fetched obligation to tag on. But being a hero is much simpler than the capes and costumes that come to mind; in its essence, a hero is someone who uses their unique quality to achieve a task that would not ordinarily be possible.

Superheroes come in all forms and can be found in our everyday lives. In fact, some of the most powerful superheroes are the people we encounter regularly: nurses, doctors, teachers, and volunteers are some examples. Nurses and doctors help heal and save lives, teachers inspire and educate others, and volunteers selflessly help those in need. Their compassion and dedication make them superheroes in the eyes of many. With their superpowers, they leave a lasting impact on the lives of others.

So, what can you do to be a superhero in someone's life? Think about your unique superpower. It could be as simple as offering a listening ear to a friend in need, lending a helping hand to a stranger, or using your talents to uplift others. Small acts of kindness and empathy can have a profound impact on someone's life. It doesn't take x-ray vision or superhuman strength; all it takes is a compassionate heart and willingness to make a difference.

Embrace your unique superpower, no matter how small it may seem, and use it to create a ripple effect of goodness in the world. Recognizing your superpower and using it to bring meaningful change that benefits those around you is a step in the right direction — you may not be as quick as the Flash, but the change you bring can certainly travel across the world.

Remember, superheroes are not defined by their costumes or superhuman abilities, but by their actions and impact. Excelsior!

## PHS answers: If you were a superhero, what power would you have?

Chloe Zhao, OPINIONS CO-EDITOR



Jiatong Zhao '26

"My super power would be to make things magically come out of thin air. I would make ... lots of money and food. I wouldn't make too much [money to cause inflation]."

"My super power would be invisibility, because it's really cool to be able to go places without being seen."

"I would pause time, because then I can wake up really late ... pause time and then ... go to school ... a minute before school starts."

Ishaan Banerjee '24

Aishwarya Vedula '25

Yangwenbo Yao '24

"I want my mind to be able to read SD cards. So, everytime I want to learn, I just plug myself to the SD card and read all the knowledge."



Photos: Chloe Zhao

Jane Hu, Avantika Palayekar, and Yitian Xiong, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

## Superhero Trivia

Asya Morozov, SPORTS CO-EDITOR

1. Who is the "Man of Steel?"  
a. Superman  
b. Batman  
c. Iron Man  
d. Captain America

2. What color was the Hulk originally going to be?  
a. Red  
b. Gray  
c. Blue  
d. Purple

3. What was a proposed name for one of the Ninja Turtles?  
a. Lippi  
b. Titian  
c. Bernini  
d. Botticelli

4. What gives Black Panther his powers?  
a. A magical knife  
b. A mysterious precious metal  
c. A heart-shaped herb  
d. Nothing, he earns them through his own effort

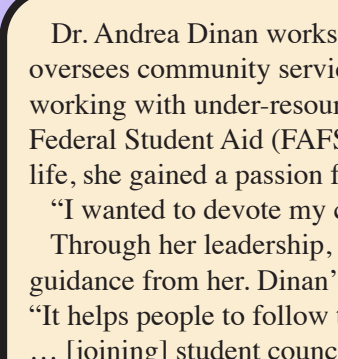
5. What is Captain America's shield made of?  
a. Strontium  
b. Bronze  
c. Steel  
d. Vibranium

6. What is the name of the villainous coalition that opposes SHIELD?  
a. ABYSS  
b. CROWN  
c. SWORD  
d. HYDRA

## The heroes of PHS



Amid the rush of students in the hallways and corridors, Bill Urian stands firm as a security guard at Princeton High School. Urian works everyday from 7:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. asking students for their IDs before entering school. As for parents and other visitors, Urian asks them for a driver's license, runs it through the "Raptor" system, and gives them an orange hang tag that identifies them as visitors. Urian's goal is to make sure that no strangers enter the building to maintain school safety, and he encourages students to take initiative for their own safety, too.  
"A lot of students are on social media ... so they can monitor that and let us know if things [seem] not right," said Urian. "Just be aware of your surroundings."  
Prior to working as a security guard, Urian used to work for the town of Princeton as a firefighter, where he worked with the police department and directed traffic. He worked there for 31 years and received a service award from the fire department — he's now retired and has been working part-time at PHS for four and a half years.  
"A couple years ago ... one of the workers [at PHS] asked me if I would want to come in and apply [as a security guard] ... [and] give it a shot," said Urian. "I like it here a lot ... especially the students. The students are the best."



Dr. Andrea Dinan works tirelessly to support the PHS community through her leadership. As the Ideas Center director, Dinan oversees community service and tutoring programs in which over 400 students participate. A normal day for Dinan consists of working with under-resourced students who are attempting to complete their college applications using the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Having been involved with AmeriCorps and helping homeless students get an opportunity for a better life, she gained a passion for service work.  
"I wanted to devote my career to service, and when this ... program came up, I applied right away," Dinan said.  
Through her leadership, Dinan believed she could allow students to run community service projects on their own, with little guidance from her. Dinan's system allows for students to overcome their obstacles and learn to improve their mistakes. "It helps people to follow their passions, lead projects, [and for] some of the quieter students [who] may not be ... interested in ... [joining] student council or even running another academic club, this is a perfect opportunity to try leadership skills and have [leadership] experience."



Despite the hustle and bustle of the school day, Margarida Cruz, one of Princeton High School's three nurses, manages to remain calm and collected wherever her work takes her. From administering treatments and first aid to physicals and even monitoring and tracking disease outbreaks, Cruz has worked as a nurse for PHS for over 19 years, and every day holds its own surprises.  
"Every day is always different; there is never a dull moment," said Cruz. "It is always busy and we have a vast responsibility." The central goal for the PHS nurses is to help students safely continue their education and to offer assistance in times of need. "Keeping the students in school is the priority," Cruz said.  
Initially, Cruz was a hospital nurse, but made the switch to become a school nurse for the convenience of the hours and to spend more time with her children. Now at PHS, Cruz believes that it is more than just a job.  
"I love it!" said Cruz. "I love talking to the students, and everyone here gets along."



Photos: Emily Kim

Answers: 1(a) 2(b) 3(c) 4(c) 5(d) 6(d)





Guest conductor Shannon Jacob Dorman leads PHS Choir and Studio Band's bass section into an uplifting rendition of gospel music.

## Lifting spirits in PHS Choir gospel celebration

Jane Hu and Aleena Zhang,  
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

On February 23, 2024, the three choirs at PHS came together for their annual Gospel Fest, performing gospel songs in the PAC. With guest conductor and clinician Shannon Jacob Dorman, who also teaches gospel music in Boston College, students were led the choirs into a unified performance. Originating in 2010, choir teachers Vincent Metallo and Sarah Pelletier wanted to expose their students to more repertoire from black culture, making the gospel celebration a tradition from then on.

"This was partially in the curriculum, but we really wanted to allocate one event to highlight this style [of music]," Metallo said.

The students performed familiar folk tunes and spirituals that have been rearranged in a more current style. Essentially, spiritual music evolved into gospel music. These pieces used symbolism and important references to black

history, such as in "Ride of King Jesus," "Glorious," "I Feel Your Spirit," and "Wade in the Water."

"[Gospel music] talks a lot about spirituality and religion ... most of the songs are very emotional," said Theo Balavoine '24, a baritone and choir representative. "Forming [the music] allows us to share important parts of history ... culture ... and spread positive messages."

Some singers faced the challenge of hitting a wide range of notes in the songs. The music was in a higher range, which was vocally straining, making it difficult to learn and execute. Additionally, the style of singing used for gospel music was different compared to other pieces of music that the choirs typically sing, which are traditional choral arrangements.

"Some of the harmonies [were] really challenging, but our Choir Directors [worked] section by section so that we

[could] feel confident about our parts," said Vivian Clayton '24, an alto singer. "It [was] super satisfying once we [got] our parts right because the chords [were] really beautiful."

Even though some singers didn't have any experience in gospel, they learned to pull the concert together seamlessly.

"I [had] never sung gospel before, [but] hoped [to] grow as a singer from the experience," said Konrad Hedges '26.

During the performance, the Princeton High School Studio Band accompanied the choirs in majority of the pieces. Despite a busy schedule, the three choirs managed to prepare these songs for around two months. With this event, choir students could explore a different genre of music.

"My favorite aspect about this event [was] being able to perform and learn music that I haven't really been exposed to before," said Aishwarya Vedula '25. "I also like how we [got to learn] about its significance."

## Student artist of the month: behind the screen with Todor Pophrastic '24

Marina Yazbek Dias Peres, ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT CO-EDITOR

Lights, camera, action — the three famous components of a movie. As an aspiring movie director, Todor Pophrastic '24 prioritizes the latter. Whether it's by riding around town until he finds the perfect set, or filming on his mom's iPhone, Pophrastic has always chased after his dreams, rather than waiting around for them to be realized. Taking this initiative has allowed Pophrastic to expand his filmmaking skills and create a repertoire of his own films that began in the fifth grade. He's also explored his love of visual arts through other mediums, evident in his role as Editor-in-Chief of The Ivy and his previous position as a staff writer for the Tower's Arts and Entertainment section, frequently writing movie reviews. In college, he hopes to display the knowledge he's gathered throughout his experience directing and collaborating by getting into big film festivals, and eventually turning this passion into a fulfilling career.

### What inspired you to start filmmaking?

I started mainly out of boredom. In fifth grade, I was at my cousin's house and we had this app where you could create movies on my mom's phone. And after that, there was the Walnut Lane Film Festival in sixth grade, which made me think, "Oh, I should keep doing this." [The film festival] died after COVID-19, [but] just last year, me and my friend Finn Neuneier ['24] restarted that for the middle schoolers.

### How would you describe your creative process? Do you start off with the story or how you want it to look?

It depends. It can always just start with a specific image I have in mind for a scene, it can start with a line of dialogue, a character ... I don't know how much brainstorming I have to do, it's really over the course of ... weeks, I have a few ideas in mind, and as I'm walking, thinking, just going about my day, they'll usually expand to the point where I can sit down and start writing a script and expanding upon them that way.

### Is there any movie director's style who you take inspiration from? Would you say it's more their aesthetic that you appreciate or their storylines?

I'd say generally the filmmakers I'm inspired by, [the] Safdie brothers, are a big inspiration, so [are] Refn, Guy Ritchie, and a few others. I like really anxiety-inducing movies ... something that keeps me on the edge of my seat, very suspenseful, and generally these movies are also about the underbelly of society.

### Do you cater your movies to that same specific audience? What genre do you think your films fit into the most?

I could say crime is a framework, but generally [in] the majority of my movies, most of the time isn't spent on the actual crime, the actual violence, but what comes before and after, which is kind of a more psychological thriller-drama ... I guess what I'm trying to do, and what a lot of these filmmakers are trying to do, is give the audience a character or scenario that is vile, that is disturbing, and that the audience can immediately react and say "that's bad, that's evil." Then slowly as you get to know the characters and immerse yourself in the narrative, you kind of see yourself in those characters, you see what you do on the day-to-day, the immoral actions that you go through with. It's like a self-reflection, through awful extremes.

### Your latest film, "21st Century Spunk," is made up of multiple short stories. How were you able to keep a cohesive feel throughout, while the stories were changing?

I think by virtue of the mindset I was in junior year, as with anybody that's been making movies, music, or any kind of visual art, your art is gonna be a reflection of where you are at mentally, your perspective at the time ... Although all [my films] differ a lot, in terms of genre and sometimes even visual style, they all have elements that connect them in terms of theme, narrative, and just kind of the personality of the film. I feel like a lot of the time, people think about the purpose of the film and they don't think about personality. All those movies have a very similar personality, and that's my personality, where I was at during junior year.

### Any advice for aspiring directors?

Don't try to perfect everything, don't wait for the opportunity to arise for you to make a movie. You have everything you need. Even if you think you don't, you do. You can make a movie on your iPhone even; you can't wait for everything to be perfect for you to start making your movie. Things are going to fall apart; all of these movies that I've made, even "21st Century Spunk," there have been a myriad of issues that have come about in the process of production. And I've built up a lot of resources and connections, and even then, I run into a lot of problems ... Don't wait for opportunities to arise for you, just create them.



Todor Pophrastic '24 works on editing and layering the soundtrack for his new film.

# Strong voices: a collection of overlooked Black musicians in history

Gabby Kaputa and Avery McDowell CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

## Mamie Smith

**Gabby Kaputa, CONTRIBUTING WRITER**

Mamie Smith was the first Black American to publish a blues recording and become a prominent figure in the film industry. Born in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1891, Smith's childhood remains largely unknown. However, her career began at age ten, when she joined a white tour group, the Four Dancing Mitchells, and demonstrated her talent in dance. After seven years, Smith shifted away from dance and pursued a career in music. She collaborated with the record label Okeh Records, with which she recorded songs that made her the first Black singer to ever record a blues song.

Although Smith and her record label had faced threats of boycotts from the public, her songs were released, gaining widespread success and paving the way for many other Black musicians to record. Her biggest hit was "Crazy Blues," a collection of songs written by Perry Bradford, a well-known blues composer and songwriter. The album sold a million copies in less than a year, prompting many other recording companies to seek out female blues singers. She was eventually dubbed the "Queen of Blues" after recording songs with other major Black singers at that time, such as Joe Smith, Herb Flemming, and Cecil Carpenter. Smith continued to make music through the 1920s, though no songs reached the same level of popularity as her first album. She eventually returned to the film industry and starred in notable films, such as "Jailhouse Blues," "Because I Love You," and "Sunday Sinners" before retiring. Smith laid the foundations for Black Americans in both the music and film industries through her groundbreaking progress, setting the stage for the rising popularity of blues and black records. Although she was an influential person during her time, she remains almost unknown to newer generations. Nevertheless, we

## Sister Rosetta Tharpe

**Avery McDowell, CONTRIBUTING WRITER**

see her lasting impact in music and film history. Considered by many to be the Godmother of rock 'n' roll, Sister Rosetta Tharpe was one of the first musicians to popularize the genre, as well as one of the very few female



guitarists of the 1930s and 1940s. Surrounded by religious music since her birth in 1915 in Cotton Plant, Arkansas, Tharpe's style combined gospel melodies with New Orleans jazz and Delta blues. At 23 years old, she released her first single, "Rock Me." Her high vocal range, impressive guitar playing skills, lyrics that expressed the freeness of sexuality, and fusion of blues with a spiritual sound, impressed the nation. Later releases included a collaboration with Duke Ellington and the Dixie Hummingbirds on "I Want a Tall Skinny Papa," and her most popular record titled "Strange Things Happening Everyday."

Although she is currently not as well-known, and her accomplishments in the rock 'n' roll industry have been largely overlooked by the fame of artists like Elvis and Johnny Cash, she was truly a groundbreaking musician. Besides being one of the very few female guitarists of

color, Tharpe shook gospel audiences by blending the genre with nonspiritual styles. Notably, she was one of the first openly queer artists, performing on tour with her partner Marie Knight, a move that shook her audiences and encouraged acceptance of identity in the music industry. Despite her success, Tharpe faced numerous hardships, including racism, sexism, and homophobia throughout her nearly four-decade long music career, which ended with her passing in 1973.

From her passion in creating innovative sounds to her dismantling of social barriers, Sister Rosetta Tharpe remains a musical wonder

## Gladys Bentley

**Gabby Kaputa, CONTRIBUTING WRITER**

deserving to be celebrated by all.

Gladys Bentley was a blues pianist and well-known singer during the Harlem Renaissance. Growing up in Pennsylvania, Bentley had a difficult home life as she was shunned by her mother for not being born a boy and was raised by her grandmother instead. Due to her unconventional way of dressing (opting for suits instead of dresses and blouses) and infatuation with her female teachers, Bentley was ostracized by her family and community. Her family sent her to multiple doctors in an attempt to "fix" her unladylike behavior.

At age 16, Bentley decided to leave her home, and she moved to New York. There, she found an



graphics: Charley Hu

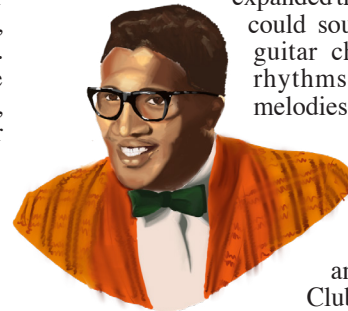
ad seeking a male piano player at a nightclub and secured the job. It was later, at a prominent gay speakeasy known as Harry Hansberry's Clam House, where she launched her career as a pianist. Bentley was known for dressing in white tuxedos and often singing about sexual relationships while flirting with women in the audience. Her songs had an expansive vocal style ranging from deep and booming to high and feminine, featuring a clash of cultures and music, as she went from "Black" blues to "white" ballads. After signing her first record deal with Okeh Records in 1928, she produced eight records in the following year and later went on tour around the United States. Her work and success in the music industry not only paved the way for queer black artists in the music and performing industries, but also sparked many debates and changes in attitudes over gender and sexuality in the United States.

## Bo Diddley

**Avery McDowell, CONTRIBUTING WRITER**

Evident from his nickname "the Originator," Bo Diddley was one of the first influencers of American rock 'n' roll through his unmatched singing, songwriting, and guitar technique. Born in 1928 in McComb, Mississippi, he solidified his status as a legendary musician by combining blues music with rock 'n' roll. Through this style, he expanded the possibilities of how music could sound by using more intense guitar chords alongside pulsating rhythms, which empowered his melodies. He was inspired to play guitar after listening to John Lee Hooker perform the blues, which led him to play the music of Louis Jordan, John Lee Hooker, and Muddy Waters at the 708 Club in Chicago.

Diddley soon rose to prominence, and he invented his own rhythm, called the "Bo Diddley Beat." This syncopated, rumba-like rhythm left an undeniable mark on pop and rock 'n' roll music during the 1950s and 1960s. With this distinctive style, Diddley produced hits such as "I'm a Man" and "Pretty Thing." Notably, Diddley was one of the first Black artists of his time to perform for mixed-race audiences, breaking social norms in a highly-segregated society. Recognizing his influence on the music industry, Diddley was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 1987. While he remains recognized by many, it is essential to continue honoring Diddley's contributions to the sound and rhythm of music today.



Scan this QR code for a playlist containing music from these 4 artists.



graphics: Charley Hu



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# From the heart: warm delights for a chilly winter



## Chocolate mug cake

Amelie Kraft, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

My sisters and I have a fun tradition of making mug cakes, especially when it's cold and snowy outside. We love gathering in our cozy sunroom, which has heated floors, and enjoying them together. Our favorite flavor is chocolate chip, but we also like trying out different variations, such as, birthday cake. Mug cakes are exactly what they are named, a small cake in a mug, and we've found that slightly undercooking them makes them extra soft and delicious. It's these simple moments of togetherness and warmth that we cherish the most. This recipe is perfect for staying in on a cold night because it's something personal that you can make and give to people you love and care about.

**Recipe adapted from:**  
The Bittman Project  
**Preparation time:** 40 minutes  
**Baking time:** 20 minutes  
**Serving size:** 6

**Ingredients:**  
5 ounces dark chocolate (70%)  
4 ½ ounces unsalted butter  
3 tablespoons good espresso  
2 large eggs  
¾ cup superfine sugar

**Recipe:**

1. Preheat the oven to 250°F.
2. Snap the chocolate into a heatproof bowl, add the butter, espresso and a good pinch of sea salt.
3. Place the mixture over a pan of gently simmering water to melt until smooth, stirring regularly.
4. Meanwhile, in another bowl, whip the eggs and sugar together until doubled in size, then carefully fold in the melted chocolate mixture. Boil a kettle of water.
3. Divide the mixture between six coffee cups and put them into a roasting pan. Place the pan in the oven, then carefully pour in enough boiling kettle water to come halfway up the side of the cups. Bake for exactly 20 minutes, then carefully remove from the oven.
4. To serve, shave over some extra chocolate, or add fresh fruit like cherries, blood oranges or wild strawberries, with a dollop of yogurt or crème fraiche.



photo: Amelie Kraft

## Strawberry waffles

Sophie Zhang, ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT CO-EDITOR

One of my favorite recipes to make is waffles. They are light, creamy, and maintain a softness within, yet a hint of crispness on the outside. Not only are they incredibly delicious, but they are also simple and easily customizable (and are great with strawberries!). I love preparing this treat for my family and I in the morning, and what better way to wake up than with a homemade breakfast? After all, few things are as special as a plate of freshly made waffles topped with strawberries and honey. There's nothing quite like starting the day with such a sweet aroma.

**Recipe adapted from:** Dash  
**Preparation time:** 10-15 minutes  
**Baking time:** 3-4 minutes each  
**Yields:** 12

**Ingredients:**  
1 cup flour  
1 tablespoon sugar  
¼ teaspoon salt  
2 teaspoons baking powder  
1 cup milk  
1 egg  
2 tablespoons butter  
Strawberries, sliced  
Honey

**Recipe:**

1. In a large mixing bowl, whisk together flour, sugar, baking powder, and salt.
2. In another bowl, beat the egg, milk, melted butter, and vanilla extract until well combined.
3. Pour the wet ingredients into the dry ingredients and stir until just combined. Be careful to not overmix, as the batter should still be slightly lumpy. Add some of the sliced strawberries into batter and lightly mix.
4. Lightly grease the waffle maker with a cooking spray or some melted butter. Pour the batter into a waffle iron (preferably a heart-shaped one!) and cook until golden brown.
5. Carefully remove the waffles from the iron and serve them on a plate. Top the waffles with more sliced strawberries and drizzle honey on top.



photo: Sophie Zhang

graphics: Ellora Tayler, Charley Hu



# Stitching together hearts in “Lilo & Stitch”

Vita Moss-Wang, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

When you think of Valentine’s Day movies, the first that probably come to mind are the classic rom-coms and dramas: “The Notebook,” “Sleepless in Seattle,” and the movie “Valentine’s Day” itself. All focus on romantic love. Instead, I would like to direct you to a lesser celebrated — however, completely indispensable — relationship: Ohana. For those of you who don’t know, Ohana means family, which is an iconic line from “Lilo and Stitch,” a beloved animated film to many. Lilo, an adventurous young girl in Hawaii, has lived with her older sister since her parents died in a tragic accident. Lilo’s sister, Nani, struggles with adult responsibilities and maintaining custody of Lilo. The two sisters adopt a “dog,” Stitch, who is actually an alien weapon, avoiding capture from his creator, Jumba, and Peakley, an agent of the United Galactic Federation.

Of course, there’s a perfect fairytale ending, since this is a Disney film — Nani keeps custody of Lilo, and Stitch, Jumba, and Peakley stay on earth — but it is important to note the many messages

this film portrays about love and Ohana. Family, it seems, is both by blood and by choice. Lilo and Nani are a family, but their alien pets and friends become a part of that family too. Lilo loves Stitch, Stitch loves Lilo. These two have no trouble showing each other affection. However, family can be more complicated than that. Nani loves Lilo, but has trouble showing it with all the pressure of her newfound adult responsibilities. Lilo loves Nani, but sometimes doesn’t understand that Nani acts harshly towards Lilo and Stitch because they often interfere with her work.

This Valentine’s Day, it’s important to highlight a variety of love stories, and “Lilo and Stitch” stands out. Nowadays, many holidays are materialistic to an extreme, especially Valentine’s Day. Candy hearts, teddy bears, too much chocolate, and Galentine gift exchanges — it’s a holiday based on consumerism. Pivoting to sisterly and familial love in the form of watching “Lilo and Stitch” is the perfect place to start. Although not your traditional love story, this story is reminiscent of childhood, growing pains, and believing in happily-ever-afters. This Valentine’s Day, I thought of sisterly love and found family.



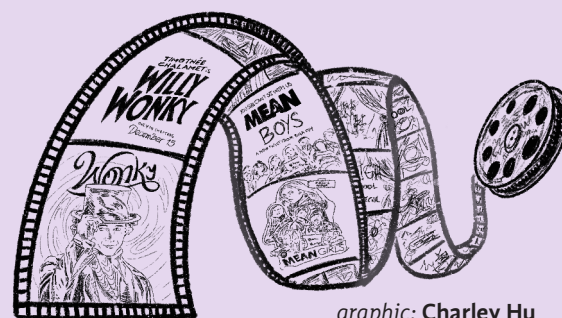
graphic: Katherine Chen

# PHS Takes: Should movie musicals be marketed as musicals?

Tessa Silver, OPINIONS CO-EDITOR

Wondering what everyone thinks of various topics? Now available online, student interviews offer insights and perspectives on a wide range of subjects. For this month, the Arts & Entertainment section discusses the controversy over the marketing of movie musicals. Many people around the country have gone to see these new releases, such as “Wonka” and “Mean Girls,” without knowing they were being promoted as musicals.

Scan this QR code to watch!



graphic: Charley Hu

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LEFT: Christina Fernandez, *Untitled Multiple Exposure #4 (Bravo)*, from the series *Untitled Multiple Exposures*, 1999. Courtesy of AltaMed Art Collection, AltaMed Health Services.  
© Christina Fernandez, courtesy of Gallery Luisotti, Los Angeles. RIGHT: Khalilah Sabree, *When Things Fall Apart*, 2016–17. Collection of the artist. © Khalilah Sabree

# SPORTS

## College sports — popularity built off a dark past

Asya Morozov, SPORTS CO-EDITOR  
Claire Yang, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

From the University of Connecticut's renowned women's basketball team to Michigan's football team, every college has a sports team that they're known for. Duke University dominates men's basketball with 19 Atlantic Coast Conference tournament titles. College football has seen an all-time high viewership, with 27.2 million viewers watching a gripping semifinal game between Michigan and Alabama.

With certain sports having such a huge presence around the world, there is bound to be some favoritism towards certain "elite" sports based on how much income they generate, which, when paired with frequent bias against players based on race, gender, or economic status, brings about a set of issues that have plagued college sports for centuries, tainting their history. So how did these issues wind up affecting colleges' favorite sports?

Before the birth of college sports, sports were mostly viewed as hobbies or a form of physical exercise without any real competition behind them. In 1843, rowing clubs were the first to be made into competitive sports teams at Yale, and at Harvard a year later. In 1852, the first ever Yale-Harvard Regatta, a rowing race, was held, marking the beginning of college sports and long-term rivalries between prestigious colleges.

In the early twentieth century, it became apparent that colleges began to dominate certain sports. Harvard and Yale won national championships in football and continued their rivalry that persists to this day. Many others take great care to uphold the tradition mainly because of the attention these sports still receive today.

As time went on, getting attention from the public became important for revenue, so colleges' focus began

to shift to revenue-generating sports. More athletic scholarships became available for traditionally popular sports like football and basketball. Similarly, in the 1970s, athletic grants-in-aid were mainly for sports such as swimming, track, soccer, lacrosse, hockey, and baseball. The sports with large fanbases, such as football, received the most funding; improving the quality of other sports would stress the budget of the athletic department. This problem persists today — supporting non-revenue generating sports is not a gamble athletic directors want to take, leading to insufficient funds, equipment, and training space for them. College students today

resent revenue-generating sports that siphon support and resources away from their school activities. However, despite pouring millions of dollars into their preferred sports, many colleges still face financial issues if their sports don't make a profit that year. This leads to schools increasing their athletic fees and even college tuition. Favoritism of collegiate sports not only impacts non-revenue-generating sports, but favors athletes and students with higher incomes that bring more to the team than just athletic prowess.

In addition to financial issues, colleges have a long-standing problem with representation in sports. Historically, college varsity teams were made up of exclusively white wealthy men. Racial bias and prejudice motivated colleges to favor white male athletes who were able to contribute to the team financially. This changed in the 1960s, during the

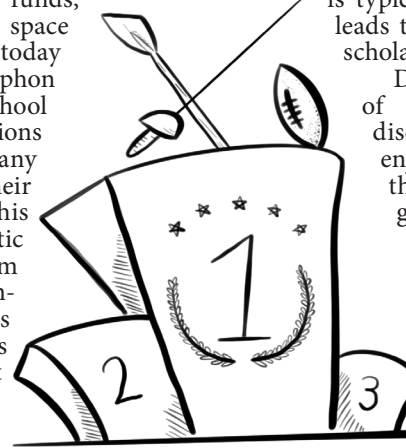
civil rights movement, when Texas Western's all-Black team won the national basketball championship in 1966 against the University of Kentucky's all-white team. This event was a turning point that signified an important shift in acceptance of Black athletes into collegiate sports, opening new opportunities for people of color across the board.

Similar progress was made, not just regarding race, but also gender, beginning with the Title IX legislation. This landmark legislation forbade discrimination based on gender, leveling the playing field in collegiate varsity teams. However, there is still a huge gap in financial support for women's sports, which is typically due to lower viewership. This leads to underfunding and fewer athletic scholarships for female athletes.

Despite their complicated history of economic, racial, and gender discrimination, millions of people enjoy college sports today, whether they're watching the latest football game with friends or chatting about a new basketball matchup. While modern college sports are miles more accepting than they used to be, they are still lacking in many areas. Race- and gender-based discrimination are still prevalent, and opportunities for the less economically fortunate are very limited.

Although watching college sports is fun and a staple of American culture, it's important to understand the history of these sports and fight against their elitist status to truly bring equality to one of America's most beloved forms of entertainment.

“While modern college sports are miles more accepting than they used to be, they are still lacking in many areas.”



graphic: Johanna Chen

## Breaking barriers, making moves: changing gender dynamics in chess

Asya Morozov and Katie Qin, SPORTS CO-EDITORS  
Joanna Hou, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Chess players like Magnus Carlsen, Garry Kasparov, and Bobby Fischer are legends to anyone who knows anything about chess. If someone were to think of a few more players, they would probably think of Hikaru Nakamura or Anish Giri — but what about players who are not men? Women are just as capable of excelling in chess as men, but they receive much less publicity and play much less in general. Transgender players are also frequently excluded or forced into strict, binary norms.

“The Queen's Gambit” is a Netflix show about a young woman, Beth Harmon, who is a chess genius and completely dominates her opponents. Many people might attribute the cause of the recent spike in popularity of chess to this series because of its inspiring success story about overcoming all the odds. However, the series also highlights the obvious gender imbalance in chess in the 1950s–1960s; at every tournament, Beth is usually the only woman present who is actually playing and is often underestimated by both the audience and her competitors.

This gender inequality still exists to this day. An article on chess.com shows that chess is still largely a male-dominated game, with only 15 percent of United States Chess Federation (USCF) rated players and 11 percent of International Chess Federation (FIDE) rated players being female. And in 2020, out of the 1,722 grandmasters, or players who have a rating of 2,500 or higher and achieve favorable results in at least three tournaments against other grandmasters, 37 were women. So why does this happen?

Some may still argue that there are less female players simply because they're not as clever as male chess players, but these are groundless statements, as there is no concrete proof that men are innately more intelligent than women. The disparity comes from societal and cultural issues, as chess has always been a sport that only male elites were invited to. According to a study co-authored by Woman Grandmaster (WGM) Jennifer Shahade (2023), gender bias plays a huge role in why there are so few female chess players compared to male chess players. The study revealed that many coaches and parents of chess players, people who are closest to them, believe that girls are less likely to succeed. Of course, playing a game where nobody truly believes in one's potential to succeed can definitely bring down one's self-esteem and motivation. This constant, often overwhelming, discouragement is a big reason why there are fewer professional female chess players in general. It also does not help that, because there are so few prominent female chess players, many girls who aspire to play chess as a career lack role models. This gender bias has recently become extreme. In August of 2023, more than 100 women signed an open letter denouncing sexist and sexual violence in the chess community. The fear of such actions is understandably another factor that discourages many women from participating in chess.

Additionally, male and female chess players are often separated into separate leagues and tournaments due to the commonly held belief that women are not be able to win when playing chess against men. The separation between men's and women's chess emphasizes that the chess world

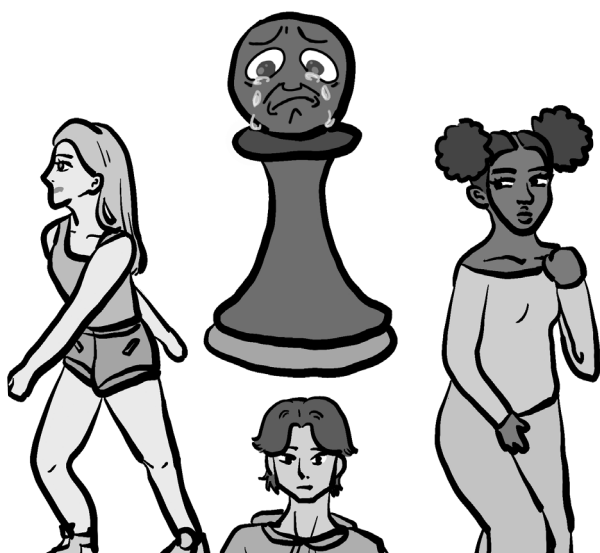
is an environment in which women's skills are not fairly assessed and in which women as a whole are undervalued from the moment they enter a tournament.

This separation, which is strictly enforced by FIDE, also prevents players who do not fit the gender binary from playing. Transgender women, for instance, cannot participate in women's chess tournaments without undergoing a legal gender change. Even after providing proof of a legal gender change, transgender women must still be subjected to “further analysis” by FIDE. Essentially, the vast majority of transgender women are unable to play in the correct gender category or stuck in a long legal process. However, when they successfully switch from male to female leagues, transgender women are allowed to keep all of their previous men's titles, while transgender men are not allowed to keep their women's titles and have to start from zero. Meanwhile, nonbinary people have no place in chess tournaments at all. Transgender people are excluded in all situations, forced into a gender binary that oppresses people of all genders and prevents the emergence of high-level players by placing restrictions on their play.

Yosha Iglesias, one of the only professional transgender chess players, expresses concern for her future as a chess player. Unsure of whether she can continue to play in women's tournaments or if she will be able to continue her career, Iglesias, along with many transgender chess players, wonders if these coming years will be her last in the game.

Although there have been efforts to balance the game, there are still many challenges women have to face in the chess world, stemming from stereotypes that are rooted deeply in historical prejudices. In a game dominated by elite cisgender men from the start, women and transgender people struggle to find a place where they can learn, grow, and play at an appropriate level. If chess becomes more accepting, it would create a much healthier environment where all players are able to challenge themselves, no matter their gender.

“Because there are so few prominent female chess players, many girls who aspire to play chess as a career lack a role model.”



graphic: Chloe Zhao

## TOWER MULTIMEDIA



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# Soccer and its impact on the PHS community

Katie Qin, SPORTS CO-EDITOR  
Gabriel Andrade and Thomsen Lord, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

As the clock counts down and anticipation rises, thousands of soccer fans from all over the world cheer for their favorite team, eyes glued to the ball on the field. Whether they're watching in person or online, it doesn't matter who scores; each goal is met with roars of excitement. At the end of the game, every fan feels even more connected with the team they were rooting for, whether they are celebrating with them after a well-deserved win or supporting them through a tough loss.

Soccer, also known as football, is one of the most popular sports in the world. There is a reason for this—soccer is more than just a sport; it is a force that promotes solidarity through competition and inclusion. As a versatile sport that requires little costly special equipment, soccer can be played by people from all walks of life. So it is no surprise that soccer, and its close variant futsal, have a huge presence in the PHS community.

Ryan Walsh, math teacher and head coach of the PHS soccer team, spoke passionately about soccer's role in encouraging inclusivity and community spirit. "[Soccer] is a sport that brings together individuals from diverse backgrounds, cultures and experiences," he said.

At PHS, apart from the girls and boys soccer team, there are clubs like the Futsal Club that students can join to play the sport outside of the soccer season. While soccer is normally played outdoors, futsal can be played inside and uses a smaller court, making it even more accessible for students. These communities within PHS bring students from all different backgrounds together through intense and fast-paced but fun competition.

Nicholas Matese '24, the current captain of the boys soccer team and leader of Futsal Club has made several important changes. He made the club even more welcoming by expanding futsal throughout the PHS community.

"We expanded the team limit to allow for more people to have a chance to play," said

Matese. "Not only does it get more players involved, it also creates a larger fan environment."

Matese is also proud of the positive influences that the Futsal Club has had, particularly the convergence of diverse people who would not have met under normal circumstances. He pays particular attention to the needs of different players in order to make futsal enjoyable for everyone and promotes understanding and communication.

"We also make efforts to ensure those with special needs have an

opportunity to play, and it is great how inclusive the rest of the players are to everyone," Matese said.

By actively seeking out new members interested in the sport, the Futsal Club has become a place that transcends traditional barriers that may otherwise usually prevent people from communicating with each other. By providing students with the opportunity to bond and improve, clubs like the Futsal Club truly reflect the PHS's core ideals: pride in diversity and striving for excellence, and how these ideas fuse together into a unique and inclusive environment.

The community that is built from the PHS Futsal Club and other areas of PHS has translated over to the high school's soccer team, which showed their prowess by winning the Group IV State Championship in 2023. Success stories like these only continue to enhance Princeton High School's community in essentially a positive reinforcement pattern.

Reflecting on the recent triumphs of the PHS soccer team, including the Group IV state championship victory in 2023, Walsh stressed the great impact of soccer on the broader community.

"Seeing alumni, who played at PHS five to 15 years ago, and community members passionately enjoying this once in a lifetime moment with the current team was special to see," said Walsh. "This celebration represents the power of soccer to transcend generations and create lasting connections in the community."

Indeed, soccer at PHS extends beyond the playing field; it is a promoter of personal growth and development. Through prioritizing the importance of sportsmanship, respect, and positive engagement, Walsh and his coaching staff try to teach valuable life lessons that extend far beyond athletics.

"Winning [soccer] games is just one aspect of being a head coach. More importantly, I want to turn teenagers into good standing young adults," Walsh said.

“Football is a sport that brings together individuals from diverse backgrounds, cultures and experiences.”



graphic: Madison Charles

## PHS TAKES: If you could change one rule to a sport, what would you change and why?



photo: Katie Qin

"Tennis net touches during the point should not result in the loss of the point, especially when it is a slight accidental touch that doesn't affect the outcome of where the ball lands."

- Dia Beri '25



photo: Dester Selby-Salazar

"[I would] change college shot clock from 30 seconds to 24 [like] in the NBA [because it would be] faster paced."

- Alejandro Ecuier '26



photo: Asya Morozov

"It's not necessarily a rule, but it just so happens that all the girls' uniforms are always sexualized, so it would be great if they weren't."

- Jessie Wang '24

# Athletes of the Month

## Zach Guan '24: swimming

Asya Morozov, Katie Qin and Dester Selby-Salazar, SPORTS CO-EDITORS

Stroke after stroke, breath after breath, Zach Guan '24 glides through the pool. His legs kick up and down consistently, propelling the rest of his body further into the water. For Guan, this is just another day.

Guan started to swim at the early age of seven. Although his parents supported his swimming, they wanted him to focus more on classical music. Guan liked swimming more, however, and chose to stick with the sport.

"I grew up in a very musical family ... my dad always played classical music on the radio. So [my family] wanted me to go into music ... but I really fell in love with swimming," Guan said.

Guan frequently placed in the top three swim times in his individual meets in elementary and middle school, but gained a deeper appreciation for swimming after joining the high school team and becoming a part of its dynamic. "When we won our first county meet ... It's the first team experience [I had] where we won. I felt [awesome]," Guan said.

Guan's talent, built up from years of individual practice, isn't just limited to one kind of swim style. According to head boys swimming coach Carly Misiewicz, this makes him an invaluable asset to the team.

"[Zach is] very versatile, whether it's freestyle, backstroke, butterfly, any distance," said Misiewicz. "He can swim a variety of events, and he can be successful in any event that he does."

Guan may be an excellent swimmer and leader in the pool, but he also plays a key role in leading his teammates and building team chemistry, something that his teammate of three years, David Brophy '25, has noticed.

"I love being on the team with him. He's a really good team player and he always tries his best," Brophy said.

Guan loves his team's dynamic and enthusiastically participates in team rituals, like the team chant and going to hang out at each others' houses. He particularly admires how every member of his team supports the others, and how everyone does their best because they don't want to let the team down.

"I've known these people for years," said Guan. "When you're swimming with people every day, around six days a week in a pool for two hours each time, it's hard not to have an unbreakable bond."

The boys swim team has had a remarkable winning season, with every player improving their individual skills and the team growing as a whole. Guan himself has consistently placed in the top three during meets and is proud of how far his team has come, seeing their victories as proof of their dedication and hard work.

"[We're] representing [our] whole school," said Guan. "[We have] the banner at the pool, and recently we've gotten a record. So our names [being] immortalized on the walls of the pool is pretty amazing."

These victories are even more impressive considering the difficulty of swimming itself, a demanding sport based on precision, coordination, and technique. Although the PHS boys swim team has been undefeated for years, Guan makes sure to remind his teammates that they can push themselves further and should never rest on their laurels.

"You've got to always be on your toes. Always be ready, because there [will be] somebody who's gonna drop five seconds somehow. You can't just go in [thinking], 'Oh, this

is gonna be easy.' You've got to be ready to swim your hide out every race no matter what," Guan said.

Another aspect of Guan's character that stands out is his attitude. He never seems to run out of steam or stop practicing, no matter how well his team is doing, making him a great role model for his teammates.

"He's always trying his hardest on the relays. And, especially when we have meets early in the morning, he still has a lot of energy and he always brings a good energy [with him]," Brophy said.

Although Guan has certainly had a positive influence on his team, he has learned just as many lessons from his teammates, whom he will certainly keep in touch with after he graduates from PHS. For Misiewicz, Guan is someone who puts his trust in the team, and has gained the same trust from them.

"He's very involved and outspoken in a very positive way," said Misiewicz. "He's someone who I can go to in a moment where I need to relay a message. And I know that he'll relay that message in a positive way."

In his time on the swim team, he has learned the value of improvement as an individual and as a team, and he hopes the next generation of PHS swimmers will have as much of a positive experience as he has. Guan will treasure everything he has learned from his team and take it with him into his adult life.

"When you're feeling down or feeling blue, [your] teammates will help you," said Guan. "Every time you're swimming ... you're racing yourself as well as the other people. You [race] to help [yourself grow]."

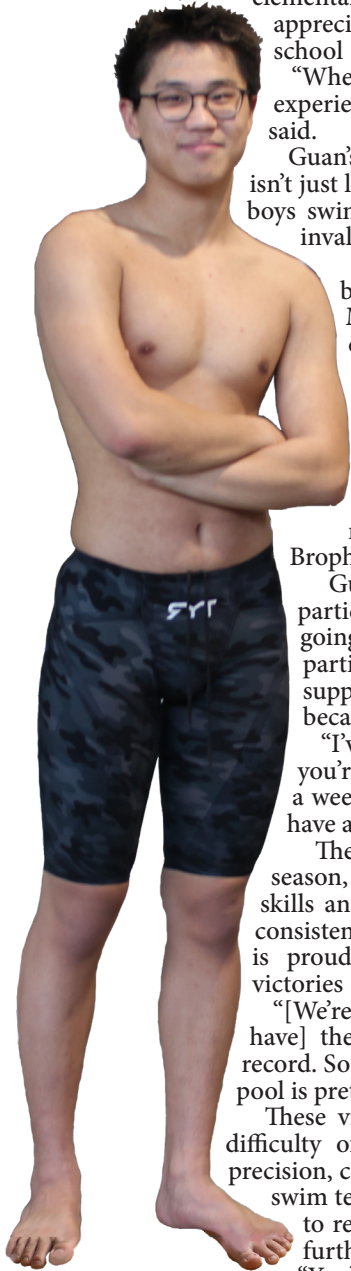


photo: Emily Kim

## Logan Hollingsworth '24: ice hockey

Asya Morozov and Dester Selby-Salazar, SPORTS CO-EDITORS  
Kaelan Patel, STAFF WRITER

Standing in the goal at the far edge of the hockey rink, Logan Hollingsworth '24 watches and waits. As one of the opposing team's players rushes at her with the puck, Hollingsworth wastes no time, shooting out of the safety of the net to perform a two-pad stack, blocking a shot that almost certainly would have gone in.

When Hollingsworth started playing ice hockey for the first time in her sophomore year, adding it to her schedule alongside softball, she knew starting a new sport so late would be difficult. However, she gladly took on the challenge and became an invaluable part of the team, centering her game around teamwork and friendship.

"I want to get better and better," said Hollingsworth. "But for me, it's not all about winning. It's more [about being there to] help my team improve."

Hollingsworth was inspired to join the hockey team by her father, who encouraged her to try new things and to sincerely try her best at everything. She was also inspired by the upperclassmen on her team and sought to replicate

their attitude and leadership on the ice.

Most importantly, she wanted to step

out of her

comfort zone and

learn something she

had never tried

before.

"It's [about]

commitments, if you

start something you

have to continue,"

Hollingsworth said.

Despite her lack of prior

experience, Hollingsworth

volunteered to take on the

challenge of being the

team's only goalie.

Although the habits

she retained from

playing softball,

such as bending

down to get a puck

instead of using her

pads, were an early

setback, her ability to take

criticism and turn every loss

into a learning experience

made a strong impression

on everyone around her.

Head girls hockey

Coach Christian

Herzog was

particularly impressed.

"My first impression of

Logan ... she was willing to

put herself in a position which

is not very forgiving," said Herzog. "But with

each time she played, she got a bit better, made better

saves, made more saves."

Although it has been a tough season for the girls hockey team, with more losses than wins, Hollingsworth has never lost her spirit, staying optimistic and making sure her team learns a lesson from every loss and celebrates every victory.

"The stress never really seemed to get to her," said Herzog. "Honestly, whether we win or lose, she has the right attitude."

As captain and goalie, Hollingsworth's main mission has been to make the team's dynamic as friendly and close as possible, organizing team meetups, weight room sessions, and lunches to bring everyone closer together.

"She brings the team together in a way only she can," said teammate Sophia Lee '26.

"With the effort she puts in at practice and games, we're really proud of all the shots she's blocked this season."

Hockey is a sport that is difficult to adapt to for newcomers: the heavy gear, ice, and fast paced nature strain the limits of the body's capabilities. Hollingsworth, as a goalie, is one of the team's central players. If a game is lost, it's usually blamed on the goalie. Although she's been through many difficult and stressful games, Hollingsworth has always pushed herself to improve and learn from both wins and losses.

"I was ready to give up ... I was just so tired," said Hollingsworth. "But I kept pushing through and, in the end, we didn't win, but it [ended] up being a good game."

Both her teammates and coaches will miss her when she graduates at the end of this school year. She has been an invaluable part of the team, bringing everyone together as captain and preparing next year's goalie to take her place.

"I anticipate she'll be coming back to cheer on the team in future years, even when she's away at college," Herzog said.

Hollingsworth will miss the team she has been a part of for three years, and will consider joining a club team in college. She is excited to see both new and old players succeed in the future, and will keep the lessons she has learned from hockey close to heart.

"A win is a win, but a loss is a lesson to learn from to get better next time," said Hollingsworth. "Even though hockey [is] a team sport, it's also about personal improvement."



photo: Katherine Chen

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