

The Tower

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Board of Education approves Michael LaSusa as superintendent

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On January 8, the Princeton Public Schools Board of Education (BOE) appointed Dr. Michael LaSusa as the district's new superintendent. LaSusa will undergo a six-month transition process before officially replacing current interim superintendent Dr. Kathleen Foster on July 1.

LaSusa is currently superintendent of the Chatham school district, and before that began his career as a history and Spanish teacher at Chatham High School. PHS Principal Cecilia Birge believes that he has demonstrated a strong commitment to education.

"When someone stays in the district for that long, especially coming from the teachers ranking, [they] know what our students and teachers feel," said Birge. "His district respects him and has enjoyed the long tenureship that he has given to Chatham."

LaSusa's appointment comes after years of turmoil in the PPS district, with the district going through two superintendents and six PHS principals in the past five years. In making the decision, the Board of Education hired the consulting firm School Leadership LLC and held a series of student and parent forums. In addition, the PPS administration distributed a survey designed to provide a platform for the community to request characteristics and prerequisites that they want to be considered for the superintendent.

"The process started with a pretty wide-cast net. The consultants [and the] search firm, hired by the board, opened it up to the several unions in the district," said Birge. "Each group had a chance to meet with the consultant."

Throughout the interview process, LaSusa emphasized the importance of providing equal educational opportunities to all, according to Kathleen Foster, the interim superintendent.

"[LaSusa] really talked about the importance of making sure that every student is known and valued," said Foster. "[He] encouraged [students] to flourish in the way that they choose. Not everyone has to go in the same path. There are lots of [different] paths after graduation."

LaSusa has received considerable recognition for his work in improving the learning experience for students. In 2019, the New Jersey Association of School Administrators awarded LaSusa New Jersey Region 1 Superintendent of the Year.

"He is [a] very forward-thinking, compassionate leader, he is very student-centered, and actively makes decisions that will benefit the students' experience," said Mary Donohue, Chatham's assistant superintendent. "He wants to create an environment, a learning space where [students] feel supported [and] to help them grow as people and as learners."

In an interview with The Tower, LaSusa highlighted his student-centered vision



photo: Emily Kim

Michael LaSusa listens at his confirmation hearing with the PPS Board of Education.

for the district, committing to support all students, regardless of their background or identity.

"There are students who are underserved or don't have the [same] resources of some of those higher performing students," said LaSusa. "I want to do what I can to ensure that every single student, regardless of their background, what their first language might be, or any other challenges they might have, can all thrive and reach their full potential by the time they exit the [education] system."

LaSusa is now preparing to transition from the Chatham district to Princeton Public Schools. Over the next six months, he will work to familiarize himself with Princeton's background by meeting with school administrators, the Parent Teacher Organization, and staff members.

"I'm going to interact with as many people as I can," said LaSusa. "I'll be listening and absorbing for my first months ... and hopefully from there, relationships will form, and I'll get to have a greater sense of Princeton as each month passes."

PHS Spanish students go to Cuba

Angela Chen, NEWS & FEATURES CO-EDITOR
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The recent Advanced Spanish trip, from January 19 to January 25, marked the program's eighth visit to Cuba since its start in 2015. This trip was designed for students to experience a unique culture, engage in community service, and live through an authentic connection with the local community. PHS Spanish students participated in various activities that ranged from painting murals in Havana to gifting local students donations fundraised by PHS students.

The trips to Cuba began as an assignment in Spanish IV A and Spanish VI A teacher Martha Hayden's El Cine Hispanohablante class, where students were instructed to write letters to a Cuban artist. One student chose Manuel Lopez Olivia, sparking a lasting friendship between Olivia and Hayden. In 2015, when Obama lifted the travel ban to Cuba, Hayden decided to visit Olivia and give students the opportunity to experience Cuban culture firsthand.

"I said to Manuel, I'm definitely coming now. I really want to go to Cuba. I don't know why it just felt like it was so important to now actually meet him in person because he kept writing to me for all those years," said Hayden.

Hayden initially designed the itinerary for the trip with a tour company; however, Olivia disliked it and offered to redesign it from an authentic Cuban perspective with art as the focal point of the trip.

"He thought that it was a terrible program and ... not really totally Cuban ... And he said 'I really want it to be through art. So they [created] this whole program for me so that we could actually travel there. But I gave it a name, 'Seeing Cuba through the eyes of the artist,'" said Hayden.

However, traveling to Cuba required flexibility due to differences in living conditions between Cuba and the United States. For example, essentials such as toilet paper, soap, and even toothbrushes were not always readily available in Cuba. Additionally, limited internet access meant students had to put aside their phones and social media.

"There was very, very limited WiFi at the homestay, so we could call our parents and maybe send a few texts, but that was about it. But most of us had saved music, and I think it kind of added to the experience ... like when we were on the bus, the only entertainment was just to talk and listen to music together and stuff," said Leopoldo Gessner '27, a student on the trip.

This year, as in past years, students and teachers alike enjoyed various activities like bus tours, museum visits, and eye-opening community service events designed to help local kids.

"We put a lot of effort into collecting and then distributing a lot of the supplies that these people needed ... I would say it was a big part of the trip, and it was really amazing to see especially when we were helping out kids ... It's just really nice to see how appreciative they are ... and it was so amazing being able to help out," said Gessner.

Cuban art was an especially important part of the trip. Cuba has many schools for the arts that were installed by former the communist dictator Fidel Castro during the Cuban revolution in the 1950s. However, according to Hayden, Cubans later utilized art to protest against the communist government by creating pieces that resonated with the people, leading to several crackdowns on Cuban artist.

"The fine arts is just unbelievable. It really is. The history behind it and the talent is so incredible. It's different than any museum that I've seen around the world. And I've traveled a lot," said Hayden.

PHS assistant Principal Lauren Freedman, one of the chaperones on the trip, said that the many ways the trip was made to be as authentic as possible improved the overall experience, leading to lifelong memories for everyone on the trip.

"This is like an authentic, real life. We're going to be with the people, like it's not a fake touristy trip. And that makes this trip, I think, extra unique and special too, because it's like you're going to visit family. It felt like we were with family," said Assistant Principal Lauren Freedman.



photo courtesy: Oriana Marcano

Paulo Barbosa '25, Osbaldo Morales '25, Brian Donis '25, Juliet Roden '26, Sabina Ristad '25, Cecilia Reynolds '25, Mia Serrano '25, Tony Perez, Matija Useche '26, Leopoldo Gessner '27, Idania Rodriguez, Marina Perez, Maya Wood '27, and Oriana Marcano '27 pose together in Cuba.

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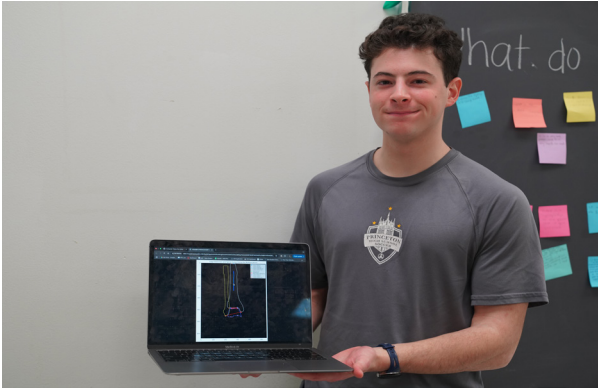
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Three PHS students named Regeneron Scholars

Avantika Palayekar, STAFF WRITER
Michael Yang, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

On January 8, 2025, Benjamin Gitai '25, Amy Lin '25, and Yurai Morales '25 were named Regeneron Science Talent Search Scholars, each winning \$2,000, with an additional \$2,000 going to PHS. Morales was further selected as a top 40 finalist, entitling her to an award of at least \$10,000. The Regeneron Science Talent Search, one of the largest research programs for high school students, selects 300 scholars annually among 2,500 applicants, with the center of the application being a 20-page research paper.

Benjamin Gitai



Benjamin Gitai '25 used AI to measure ankle deformities.

Benjamin Gitai's '25 research focuses on improving the success rate of ankle replacement surgeries. "We can [build] a model to essentially ... try to predict if [failure] will occur and then be able to help stop that from happening," said Gitai. Gitai was inspired to begin the project after attending Princeton University's Laboratory Summer Learning Program, a free program for high school research students. At Princeton, Gitai was part of a group that focused on ankle imaging led by professors Dmitri Kosenkov and Olga Troyanskaya. He saw that the orthopedics, doctors dealing with deformities of bones and muscles, measured the ankle by hand. "[An] orthopedic surgeon [was] telling us about how they take all these measurements, and it just struck me that with all this technology that they still have to [measure by using] these little points [on] this X-ray machine. I thought I could solve that issue and help them with that. From there, I was able to expand that [idea] into the prediction algorithm," said Gitai. Because the idea of using AI to measure ankles is relatively unexplored, Gitai started off his project by studying on websites like Stack Overflow, a question-and-answer site for programmers, and Github, a platform for storing code. "I did lots of research into what [code] libraries and various tools I should be using. I've [had] a lot of experience coding, but I didn't have experience using any of this computer vision material. I had to learn and teach myself all of that from scratch," said Gitai. However, despite his success at Regeneron, Gitai still considers himself at the beginning of a longer journey. Gitai is planning on attending Princeton University next year, and hopes to further his research by using the university's resources. "I think that's one thing that makes this project a little bit special is the fact that it has so much room to grow. We've created the bone detection model, and right now, we're waiting on getting data to be able to further expand the failure prediction. But the truth is that the pipeline that I created applies for literally any bone in any kind of bone deformation. Potentially, this [project] could be expanded indefinitely," said Gitai.

Amy Lin



Amy Lin '25 developed her code in PHS's research program.

Amy Lin '25 didn't expect to be named a Regeneron scholar. "It was a very pleasant surprise because I went in there thinking, 'oh there are some pretty cool projects that they always select, year after year.'" But in early January, Lin was notified that her project, titled "Predicting Compound Melting Temperatures From Computationally Derived Properties Using Machine Learning," had been selected. Her research focused on using AI to predict the melting temperatures of different materials by analyzing their material properties. "The problem I was trying to tackle was that, right now, there are a lot of methods [for] experimentally measuring melting temperature [of] different chemical compounds. And those [methods] are pretty dangerous and pretty costly. And existing simulations for computing melting [points] are also pretty time-consuming and computationally expensive," said Lin. Inspiration for this project came from The Coding School's data science summer research program. "I learned about this topic, which is predicting melting temperatures. I wanted to actually continue this project because I fell in love with machine learning and data science. I wanted to make some contributions to the area and perhaps develop a toolkit to predict melting temperatures and other such material properties," said Lin. After a bit of trial and error, Lin settled on the Random Forest Regression prediction model, which predicts melting points by analyzing other properties with the high correlation to melting point. Throughout the process, Lin relied on PHS research teacher Mark Eastburn and science supervisor Jacqueline Katz. "They really created a great environment for [me] to explore [my] project. They offered a lot of guidance in terms of what [are] good research practices? Or, how do you annotate and read papers properly? Or, how [can we] write our own reports? So that was really helpful," said Lin. Lin emphasized that the Regeneron competition was an honor that has helped develop her appreciation for AI and computer science. "I think the project definitely bolstered my interest in these areas [computer science], because it showed me the power of what machine learning and AI can do to help us learn about the world around us. It's really an amazing tool," said Lin.

Yurai Morales



Yurai Morales '25 studied the bacteria present in a spider.

Yurai Morales '25 has had an unconventional journey to the highest level of high school research. Morales was born in the United States, then moved to Guatemala at age seven, then to Mexico at age 14, and finally back to the United States at 17, when she enrolled at PHS. At PHS, research teacher Mark Eastburn encouraged Morales to develop the work she began in Mexico into a research article. Her final project, titled "How the Lion Becomes a Lamb: Transfer of Bacterial Symbionts From Ant Larvae to Vegetarian Spiders Through Selective Predation," was announced as one of the top 40 finalists on January 23th, the highest award a PHS student has received in the competition. As a finalist, Morales will be going to Washington, D.C. on March 11 to showcase her research to the United States' leading scientists for the chance to win a top 10 prize. In her research, Morales discovered that the species Bagheera kiplingi, which is the only spider known to be a herbivore, is able to maintain its plant-based diet because it eats the larvae of ants. Morales also investigated the bacteria that allows the spiders to extract nutrients from the larvae. "I was wondering why these curious spiders could be vegetarian when their bodies were designed to be carnivores. I was doing this research to understand how their body works and how they can eat plants without having a carnivorous life," said Morales. One of the biggest challenges for Morales throughout the project was not just the research component, but learning English. "English is not my first language. Some of the articles I read [are] in Spanish, but I have to translate [into] English, so it's very hard for me. I'm still learning," said Morales. Morales hopes to continue her project at The College of New Jersey, where she is enrolled for this fall. But for now, Morales is proud of the work she has already accomplished. "I'm feeling very excited. It was very surprising for me; It's such an amazing opportunity for me because I'm learning new skills and doing research. English is my second language, but I'm still here, and I'm very proud," said Morales.

PHS Profile: Shefali Mehta

Angela Chen, NEWS & FEATURES CO-EDITOR
Rohan Srivastava and Simon Santamaria,
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

PHS Chemistry I and Accelerated Planetary Science teacher Shefali Mehta has worked to combine her curiosity for the cosmos and chemistry with a love for teaching throughout her career. Mehta was recently one of 30 educators selected to be part of the 2025 Space Foundation's International Teacher Liaison program. Mehta had always been interested in teaching in high school but tabled the idea after she decided to major in chemistry at the University of California, Irvine. However, after a couple negative experiences in college, Mehta realized she couldn't spend her entire life in the laboratory. We don't always get the results we want, and I [didn't] know [if] I want[ed] to work with such a small team all the time," said Mehta. I kind of thought back again with teaching; that way I could use the chemistry that I've learned and do more with it and hopefully inspire other people [with] chemistry." Mehta started her teaching career in California, where she taught physical science, chemistry, and environmental science. In 2013, she accepted a job offer at PHS after being drawn to the size of the school and the numerous electives PHS offers.

"Because there's so much available [here], I've been able to grow as a teacher and try new things," says Mehta. "I have more colleagues that I work with that [teach] the same classes that I teach, whereas before, I've been the only one ... and there was only so much stuff we could do with the curriculum." At PHS, Mehta has strived to create an environment that encourages curiosity and inquiry and where students are comfortable asking questions. "Ms. Mehta is a teacher where you feel like you can really, if you have questions, you're comfortable asking her, and you know that she'll be able to give you a good answer. And if you still don't understand it afterwards, she can really give a good explanation of the concept," said Audrey Wang '27, a student in Mehta's chemistry class. In addition to chemistry, Mehta has a deep interest in astronomy and research. In 2011, Mehta participated in the NASA Teacher Archive Research program, eventually leading to the opportunity to work with satellites for data collection. "Last year I went to see a launch in Florida for a space satellite ... It was a GOES-U satellite that basically help[s] us



Mehta teaches both Chemistry I and Planetary Science Accelerated.

track weather and things like that. And so I got access to some things from that ... I feel like now all of a sudden I've gotten new ways to access data that is being collected and that nobody's really using," said Mehta. Mehta is also one of 30 recent admits to the Space Foundation International Teacher Liaisons—a program founded in 2004 that provides access to space-related curricula, networking opportunities, and connections to scientific institutions like NASA. This program was founded in order to empower teachers to integrate STEM into their curriculums and enrich students' experiences in STEM classes.

"I get access to other curriculums that people have done and maybe make things more interesting," said Mehta. "The last couple of years I've been looking at trying to ... [do] projects where kids can actually do something that's of interest to them." Even in her limited free time, Mehta continues to pursue her strong passion in science and cosmology, often as entertainment. "I do enjoy reading, especially with science fiction and fantasy. When I can, I try to do that, but I don't always get a lot of time. I really liked was the three body problem," said Mehta.

PHS hosts Black History Month Assembly

Maxime DeVico and Sebastian Su, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS



Arianna Malave '26 and Marissa Moreno '26 rehearse a dance to “Wade in the Water” by Ramsey Lewis.

The annual Black History Month Assembly took place during a 60-minute homeroom on February 27, where students experienced a snapshot into Black culture. Student leaders from the Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN) and Pride, Unity, Leadership, Sisterhood, and Esteem (PULSE) were heavily involved in the planning for this event, after various concerns about the assembly were brought up to the PHS administration by these students. “In terms of actually planning for this year, it’s been since the beginning of the school year. The students met with Ms. Birge and had to advocate for it to happen during the school day and we got approval for that in October,” said Bethany Siddiqui, the advisor of PULSE. The discussion centered around concerns from the administration that previous assemblies had limited

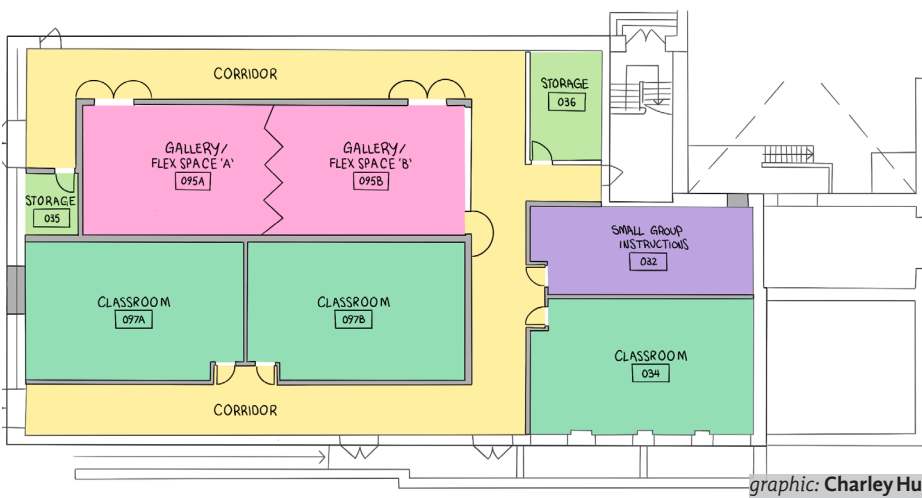
educational value and created issues with student attendance. In a response to an email from the Tower, Princeton Parents for Black Children (PPBC), a group aiming to advance equity for Black students, criticized PHS administration’s comments about the assembly. “The administration made unfortunate and inaccurate comments about the relationship of the cultural assemblies to student absences and academic performances,” said the organization. “The comments seemed to be excuses to validate eliminating or diminishing the assemblies... It simply perpetuated the difficult environment students have complained about for years.” Following negotiations with various student groups, including PULSE and MSAN, PPBC acknowledges the administration’s willingness to work with students.

“We understand that the planning has gone through many ideations and iterations as the PHS administration has become more aware of its importance. We believe PPBC’s meeting with Ms. Birge and vocal student advocacy has helped the administration gain some perspective,” PPBC said in a statement. As a student organizer of the assembly, Will Ponder ’25 has overseen several changes aimed to make it more interactive. “[We will add more] scripts and more acting and we’re also adding a little bit of a fashion show, so we’re gonna be able to incorporate more things than last year [because] we have more time,” said Ponder. President of PULSE, Lena Hamilton ’25, emphasized that continuing to have vibrant cultural assemblies is critical in ensuring students, especially minority students, feel more seen. “It’s really important that schools have assemblies like the Black history assembly, because especially in our current political climate, it’s important to celebrate our differences and our various cultural values and share that we’re not all the same, [which is] kind of a good thing. [We] can celebrate how we’re different and how we each contribute to the foundation of society,” said Hamilton. Patricia Manhart, a racial literacy and social studies teacher at PHS, agreed that while the Black History Month assembly celebrates and represents Black history, teachers need to continue to do work within their curriculum to be representative and inclusive. “There’s way too much history for it to just to be one day, right? It is the job of teachers to make sure that our curriculum is representative, inclusive, and covers all of U.S. history, and it doesn’t just sort of cherry pick or take a white, Eurocentric approach,” said Manhart. Siddiqui echoed Manhart’s sentiments for continued and increased representation of Black history in school curricula. “I think the ... ultimate goal would be for Black history, and any other cultural history, to just be embedded in everything that we do here at the school. I think that’s the long term goal,” said Siddiqui.

Voters approve all three parts of PPS’s \$89.1 million referendum

Aryan Singla, ONLINE CO-EDITOR
Asma Frough, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

After months of debate and community discussions, all three parts of Princeton Public School’s \$89.1 million referendum were officially approved by Princeton voters on January 28, 2025. The first two parts of the referendum, which will fund infrastructure and educational improvements at PHS and PMS were passed by a margin of 2,075–1,317 and 1,973–1,410 respectively, while the third part, which will fund expansions at Littlebrook Elementary, passed by a slightly closer margin of 1,890–1,491. With the referendum approved, the district must now decide how to execute the projects. The money will go towards facility upgrades, including HVAC overhauls, technology improvements, and enhanced security throughout the school district. “The most important [things] that we’re doing with this referendum [are] adding 23 classrooms and five small group instruction rooms, and we’re going to fix the HVAC at Princeton High School,” said Dafna Kendal, president of the Princeton Board of Education. PPS has not yet released the details of the contract process, in which the district hires private companies to execute specific projects. PPS Business Administrator Matthew Bouldin noted that while the district aims to keep the public informed, some details can’t be shared immediately. “We will give periodic financial reports, but we don’t want to be so transparent that we stifle competitive bidding on our projects by telling [contractors] what we think it will cost, or have budgeted,” said Bouldin. “With multiple projects happening at once, we have to leverage our professional consultants — architects, engineers, and construction managers — to keep everything on track.”



Proposed renovations for PHS under the referendum, including the conversion of the current technology department area into instructional spaces.

Inflation and logistical challenges could affect the construction timeline, with some projects expected to begin this summer and others that may take years to complete. Bouldin emphasized that managing costs will be key as inflation and tariffs impact material prices. “We have built-in cushions but may have to do value engineering, which [could mean] scope changes and alternate bids,” said Bouldin. “A referendum cannot use interest earnings to expand the dollars spent, [but] the district can augment [costs] through capital reserves.” That means any interest earned on the referendum’s funds can’t be added to the project budget. However, the district can use its capital reserves, which are funds set aside for long-term projects, to cover unexpected costs or supplement spending if needed.

Despite concerns over inflation and potential of high spending, Kendal believes the referendum was the right financial choice for the district. “Years of planning went into this, and I think that these three questions are the most cost-effective [options] that were available,” said Kendal. “I think that dollar for dollar, we’re going to get the most bang out of our buck, and also the \$19.9 million of state aid, which will help to lower the tax burden.” With the assistance provided through state debt service funding, it is estimated that the three questions passed in the referendum will result in an annual property tax increase of \$532 for the average household in Princeton. This has caused some household residents, especially those without children currently in the school district, to speak out against the referendum. “I am one of those many people whose taxes ballooned more than once in order to support what by now feels like a black hole of need,” said Princeton resident Daniella Bittman in a letter to local newspaper Town Topics. PHS principal Cecilia Birge has a different metaphor to describe the passed referendum. “For the referendum, it’s like our own house, right? For us at the high school level, we live in a 96-year-old building, and things through wear and tear need updating. Every 10 to 15 years, a lot of these machines need to be replaced. New technology comes in, and they need to be replaced,” said Birge. “As a taxpayer, I may not be here in five years, so it’s more equitable for me to pay my portion over time rather than all up front. It allows the burden to be shared by those who are still here when the improvements last.”

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OPINIONS

The harms of AI-generated activism

Iniya Karimanal, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Following an Israeli strike on Gaza in May 2024, an AI-created graphic depicting an aerial view of thousands of displaced Palestinians' tents with the text "All Eyes on Rafah" went viral on Instagram. Celebrities such as Dua Lipa, Lewis Hamilton, Priyanka Chopra, and Gigi and Bella Hadid reposted the image, amplifying its reach to their hundreds of millions of followers. This image rapidly gained traction and people reposted it around 50 million times. Many PHS students joined in on sharing the post, spurring discussion about the crisis within the Princeton community. Afterward, similar AI-generated graphics advocating for an end to violence in Congo and Sudan quickly went viral on Instagram.

The justification for creating and sharing AI-generated images rather than photos or articles is often rooted in a valid concern. Oftentimes, real images of war are removed from Instagram for violating the platform's policies prohibiting graphic and sensitive content. AI images seem to be the ideal workaround for promoting an important message on Instagram. The "All Eyes on Rafah" image aims to depict the scope and severity of the issue without outright posting graphic content. It appears to encourage involvement and discourse with the issue given the simplicity of the image and ease in sharing the message to a large audience of followers.

While sharing such a post may seem like a low-effort way to effectively raise awareness, in reality, it discourages genuine engagement with pressing current issues. These images lack any information about the conflict or resources to take action. People feel content with engaging through the click of a few buttons, neglecting

to take the next step of researching the issue through reading the work of credible journalists and finding ways to make a tangible impact.

The performative nature of sharing an AI-created image in the name of activism is reminiscent of reposting a black square on #blackouttuesday in response to the death of George Floyd and other social media activism campaigns. In a phenomenon known as "virtue signaling," millions of

users publicly expressed empty support for a cause to demonstrate moral correctness for social acceptance.

If this was not bad enough, the fact that the image is AI-produced

worsens this kind of shallow activism. AI-created images are often weaponized in disinformation and propaganda campaigns due to their ease of manipulation and fabrication. The "All Eyes on Rafah" image depicts orderly, neat rows of camps, clear skies, and cotton candy clouds. In reality, Rafah's air is thick and gray. The ground is littered with debris, remnants of buildings that once housed

communities. As many Palestinian activists have pointed out, the graphic is a "sanitized" version of the true conditions in Rafah after the strike. Sharing a distorted image of the situation in Rafah contradicts the aims of many activists. Instead of raising awareness about a calamitous current event, the post paints a misleading picture of the suffering faced by Palestinians on the ground.

As high school students with relatively little power in society, merely reposting an image may seem like an appropriate form of activism. However, instead of sharing grossly oversimplified machine-made content, we should aim to consume and share intellectual commentary and reporting by journalists dedicating their time to publishing thorough, ethical, and factual investigations of current

events. As students, consuming high-quality media makes a difference in how we interact and engage with pressing current events. Instead of checking a performative box by reposting words someone else wrote, prioritize being informed and willing to act beyond a few clicks on your phone.

Apart from reading and educating yourself, there are many accessible ways to make a tangible impact on the causes you care about, whether it be the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or other global conflicts, such as those in Syria, Sudan, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Yemen, and the war in Ukraine, to name a few. You could volunteer your funds or time to grassroots organizations or attend events and demonstrations. Especially in Princeton, a town where activism is found in all corners of everyday life, high school students have boundless opportunities to get involved with the issues they care about, from campus protests to contributing to student-led organizations.



graphic: Madison Charles

The case for taking Latin

Sonya Allee, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Upon opening Powerschool to select new courses, students at PHS have six foreign language options to choose from; the outlier among these offers is doubtlessly Latin, the only dead language. It is natural to wonder if this option should be preserved; not only is Latin the only language you cannot speak, it is arguably the most grammatically complex. After freshman year, I could say little more than "hello," "goodbye," and "the farmer killed the emperor."

There are also little to no travel prospects associated with the language, save a trip to the Vatican. Despite this, I and many of my peers still select this dying language at the end of every year, for reasons that go beyond its application in travel and conversation.

In eighth grade, I decided not to continue with French, a language I disliked and struggled with due to its pronunciation challenges. Most of the other options like Italian or Spanish were also spoken languages, which would inevitably have the same problems as French. Eager to escape the complexity of pronunciation in living languages, I decided to choose Latin. Many current Latin students have similarly dispassionate reasons for taking the language. Just as I did when I began freshman year, they may wish for an easier language class to fulfill a requirement. Others may see the unweighted course as a break or virtual free period, relieving students overwhelmed by AP classes. Lynda Danvers, Latin teacher, notes that a common motivation is the language's ability to "help with the SATs." However, students have many other reasons to take the course. Juliet Roden '26, a student in AP Latin, cited the "really good sense of community," as a primary reason for taking the course. In the classroom and through Latin-related extracurriculars such as Latin Club and Certamen, students have the opportunity to meet others who appreciate the language as much as they do. Danvers supported this outlook, remarking that pupils of

“Latin helps native English speakers improve their understanding of words and grammar, which can yield greater reading comprehension and ability to articulate.

hers have taken Latin after family members "pass down [a] love" for the language and its environment.

In some cases, a student may choose the course specifically for its content, often to explore the mythological and historical aspects of Latin. According to Danvers, "Latin is the only language in which you can spend a day just reading mythology and talking about the gods and goddesses." Although this may seem trivial, there is an unfortunate lack of opportunities to study classical myth and history at most schools (although PHS's Latin curriculum offers a purely mythology-focused elective, it does not substantially cover history). This focus on ancient texts and cultures is invaluable, especially given the loss of ancient history in broader school curriculums.

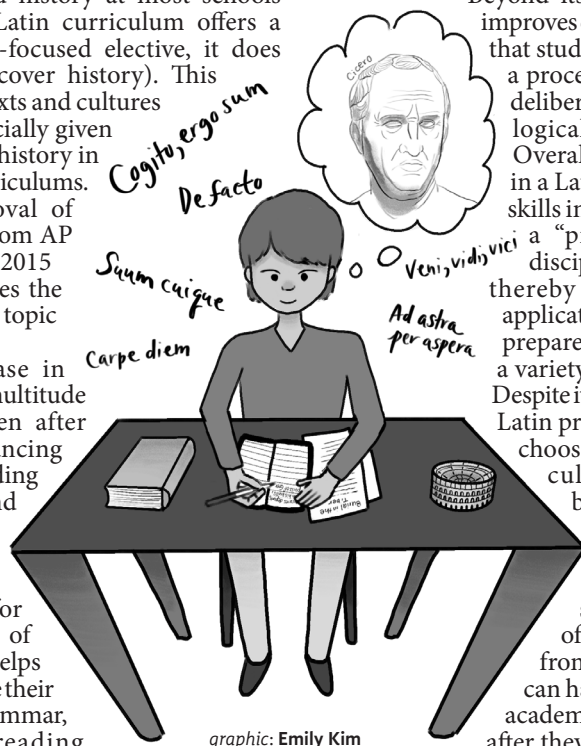
Indeed, the removal of ancient material from AP World History in 2015 made sixth-grade social studies the only opportunity to pursue this topic in a core class.

Furthermore, a strong base in this language can lead to a multitude of benefits for students, even after they graduate. Beyond enhancing vocabulary, and potentially leading to a higher SAT reading and writing score, the roots learned in a Latin classroom are applicable for career fields like medicine and law, or for those seeking a better grasp of the English language. Latin helps native English speakers improve their understanding of words and grammar, which can yield greater reading

comprehension and ability to articulate. Additionally, an understanding of Latin makes it easier to learn the many Romance languages based on it, some of which are offered at PHS, like Italian or Spanish, and others, like Romanian, that are not. Since Latin serves as the foundation for the vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure of such languages, a knowledge of Latin can lay the framework to later learn, or at least have a working knowledge of, other languages.

Beyond its linguistic benefits, Latin also improves cognitive skills. Danvers explains that studying Latin and translating texts, a process that is complex and requires deliberate attention to detail, enhances logical skills and problem-solving. Overall, she believes that experiences in a Latin classroom can "help develop skills in solving puzzles which provides a 'practical application in every discipline ... from English ... to math,' thereby yielding both cross-subject applications and analytic skills that can prepare students to tackle problems in a variety of fields.

Despite its reputation as a "dead language," Latin proves invaluable to students who choose to breathe life into an ancient culture. Although many of its benefits are not as overt as in other traditional languages, Latin is an integral branch of our world language program that more students should take advantage of. The knowledge and skills gained from studying this ancient language can have a lasting impact on students' academic and professional lives for years after they leave our school.



graphic: Emily Kim



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The gentrification of thrifting

Francizska Czerniak, STAFF WRITER

Many people love thrifting. This form of retail developed as a way to provide affordable products for the less fortunate. As the most accessible place for affordable clothing, furniture, and other goods, thrift stores are a necessity for many low-income families. However, the recent rise in popularity of secondhand shopping, fueled by trends on social media and growing awareness of the issues with fast fashion, has created a new problem: the gentrification of thrift stores. Higher demand has caused thrift stores to raise their prices; while some thrift store customers are financially capable of accepting such changes, many are not.

Thrifting is now viewed as a vintage shopping experience. This shift has led to higher prices in order to reflect the perceived “coolness” of secondhand finds. According to a 2024 report from The Record, “Customers of a generally higher income demographic are buying frequently and in large quantities from their stores. As a method of increasing profits (when the cost of inventory is virtually zero), they mark up products of good quality or of a particular brand that is likely to be sought



after, knowing that the inflated cost, although still under the initial cost, will nonetheless be purchased by someone able to afford it.”

This new shift has been driven by several factors. According to the ThredUp Resale Report, the global secondhand apparel market will reach \$350 billion by 2028, growing three times faster than the overall global apparel market. Thrift shopping faces less stigma, especially since the fast fashion industry has been under more pressure for its unethical practices and unsafe working conditions by activists on social media. Coupled with concerns about negative environmental impacts, thrifting has been presented as the solution to shopping with a clean conscience. This idea spread on social media platforms like Tiktok and Instagram, which display influencers

styling thrifted outfits, with unique and vintage pieces as a way to stay on top of trends without breaking the bank. Additionally, there is a growing push back against fast fashion for its negative environmental consequences, causing many consumers to be drawn into thrift stores with the hopes of reducing textile waste.

However, such trends have caused evident consequences for low-income families. According to Tacoma Daily Index, the popularity of thrifting among higher-income individuals has led lower income families to be “priced out” in some neighborhoods. Many families across the nation who once relied on thrift stores or second-hand stores are now having to choose between paying the high prices or going without new clothes or household goods. This newfound situation exacerbates economic disparities and inequalities.

Although thrifting is beneficial for the environment, current thrifting culture perpetuates overconsumption, causing inaccessibility of second hand products for those in need. Purchasing an excess of unnecessary goods, thrifted or not, still creates waste. The most beneficial and sustainable choice is to make intentional and necessary purchases.

The consequences of a blanket ban on phones in schools

Shaya Bhatia, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

On January 14, New Jersey Governor Phil Murphy called for a statewide ban on cell phone use in public schools for students in grades K-12. In his State of the State address, Murphy justified his proposal by declaring that cell phones are fueling a rise in cyberbullying. However, while cyberbullying is a pressing issue, a blanket ban on phones in schools may do more harm than good. Instead, schools should focus on responsible phone usage policies that balance the need for digital tools with classroom engagement.

Phones are not always distractions — they often serve practical purposes that can enhance students’ safety, learning, and mental health. In today’s world, having access to a phone can be a lifesaver. Contacting a parent about an unexpected schedule change, calling for help in an emergency, or receiving alerts about school prompts students to rely on their phones to stay connected and informed. Completely cutting off this form of communication could have unintended negative effects.

Beyond emergencies, responsible phone use offers benefits for education at Princeton High School. During free periods, gym blocks, or even as part of classroom activities, phones can be a valuable tool for learning. With technology at their fingertips, students can quickly research information, use educational apps, and stay organized, all of which may contribute to improved academic performance. As many students at PHS already use their devices for this purpose, a state-wide one-size-fits-all ban unfairly punishes those who have been appropriately using technology for learning and productivity.

“ Instead of an outright ban, the state should encourage schools to develop responsible phone use policies that promote balance by allowing usage of devices for educational purposes.

Additionally, some students rely on their phones for learning accommodations, like text-to-speech apps, calendar reminders, or translation tools for multilingual learners. A total ban would strip these students of the crucial tools they need to succeed, and in doing so, could create unintended consequences such as increased secrecy and tension between students and teachers. Instead of fostering trust, a harsh ban could create an environment of defiance, making classroom management even more difficult.

Instead of an outright ban, the state should encourage schools to develop responsible phone use policies that promote balance by allowing usage of devices for educational purposes. For Princeton High School, maintaining the current policy — allowance of phone use during lunch, passing, and free periods while restricting them during instructional time with phone pockets — could help along with the additional incorporation of brief, scheduled “tech breaks” during block days, permitting students to check their devices at designated times.

Teachers should allow students to use their devices for accommodations and educational assistance upon request, but they should otherwise be kept out of sight during class. Setting clear guidelines for when and how phones can be

used helps avoid confusion and frustration. If students know they can use their phones at specific times or for specific purposes, they may be less inclined to use them during class for non-educational reasons.

Furthermore, rather than discouraging the use of technology, we should focus our efforts on promoting digital literacy. Although PHS requires students to take one year of 21st Century Life and Careers, this is not specifically geared toward digital literacy. Such classes could help students understand the dangers of cyberbullying, how to manage screen time, and how to think about information they see online critically.

While Governor Murphy’s proposal aims to address real concerns, a strict ban on phones in all schools would hinder their current purposes of emergency communication and educational support. Instead of banning them outright, the state should encourage adoption of responsible use policies, similar to that of PHS, in addition to investing in digital literacy resources to address cyberbullying. After all, rather than sheltering students from technology, shouldn’t high schools be preparing its students for a tech-driven future?



Taylor Adair-Heyward '26 places her phone inside a basket upon entering Timothy Campbell's class.

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ICE raids are a direct threat to education

Editorial

One day into the second Trump administration, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security lifted legal protections preventing Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) from conducting immigration raids at “sensitive areas,” including churches, hospitals, and schools. Schools across the country are now bracing for potential ICE raids, threatening the sanctuary that educational institutions are supposed to provide — Princeton is no exception.

The stated purpose of ICE raids is to capture violent criminals, but how often do violent criminals lurk among children? According to a study conducted by professors Jacob Kirksey and Carolyn Sattin-Bajaj, heightened immigration enforcement in schools has a detrimental effect on the learning environment, as it creates a pervasive climate of fear.

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, a psychological theory that organizes the fulfillment of human needs in a hierarchical order, states that the most basic requirements such as access to food, rest, and safety must be met before any others. As a result, students who constantly fear for their safety are unable to focus on higher learning. This directly leads to student absenteeism, declines in academic performance, and overall physiological distress. Even students not directly impacted by recent immigration regulations can still experience its negative effects — ICE does not just target violent criminals and undocumented immigrants. Three U.S. citizens were recently detained during a raid at Ocean Seafood Depot in Newark. The Trump administration

has made it clear that they will stop at nothing to deport as many people as possible. Extending such initiatives to sanctuaries like schools causes an unsafe and unstable learning environment that threatens all students.

Public education should be accessible and welcoming to all students, regardless of immigration status. For people fleeing their home countries, access to these increasingly fleeting educational opportunities is the main reason to immigrate here. The United States is built upon the idea that anyone can achieve success. Equitable access to education lays the foundation for a more prosperous future. Now, this very foundation is being threatened.

Big change starts small — PPS has already taken action to protect its students and their families. Community nights hosted at PMS to help vulnerable communities know their rights in the face of immigration enforcement foster a safer environment. Even simply updating students’ emergency contacts on PowerSchool can be a step towards ensuring safety in dire situations.

However, it is also our responsibility as a community to support our fellow students and families. Princeton residents should reach out to the municipality’s human services to offer help, assist in funding legal counseling, and spread awareness to as many people as possible. Informing people of their right to refuse illegal searches and record evidence of transgressions can help families stay together. The power of community lies in people’s ability to come together and protect their most vulnerable members.

The TikTok ban changes nothing

Andrew Kuo, STAFF WRITER

TikTok is more than just an app; it’s become a cultural force, shaping how millions communicate through online content, with more than a billion users worldwide and 170 million users in America at its peak. Despite this success, TikTok’s future in America seems bleak. On January 19, 2025, Congress passed a law banning TikTok in a landslide 352 to 65 vote. While TikTok did receive an extension, it currently has less than 70 days to conclude its affairs.

So why are lawmakers so adamant about banning TikTok? The first concern is data privacy. TikTok’s algorithm gathers data based on the videos a user skips and the videos a user lingers on. Because those videos are so short, TikTok can quickly accumulate a hoard of information on its users. TikTok can access information on device type, location, IP address, search history, and message content. TikTok can then use this information to infer other factors such as age range, gender, and interests.

The Chinese government could exert control over TikTok to collect this information through ByteDance, TikTok’s parent company, which is headquartered in Beijing. Under China’s National Intelligence Law, companies are required to assist with government intelligence work, meaning ByteDance could be legally compelled to share data. If the Chinese government asks TikTok to turn over information, executives and investors would almost certainly be unwilling to risk asset seizure, imprisonment, and legal action.

But while it’s true that TikTok collects a lot of information, banning TikTok would do almost nothing to protect data

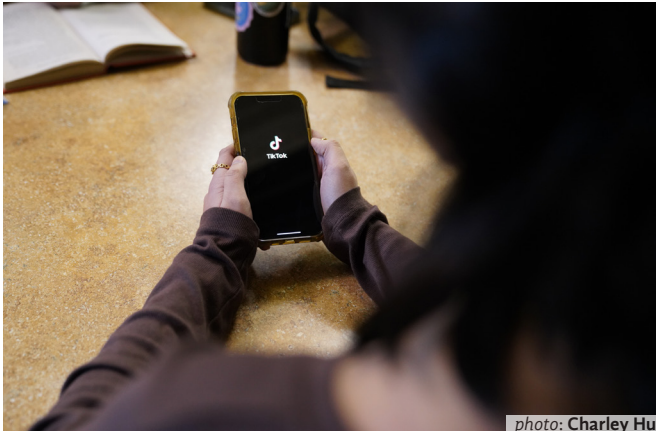


photo: Charley Hu

Soha Jameel ’26 uses TikTok on her phone.

privacy. Nearly all social media companies in the United States sell private data on a market so unregulated that, according to journalist Karl Bode, “Chinese, Russian, and U.S. governments can all just buy data from ... poorly regulated data broker [markets].” The “private” data market is unregulated to the point that a New Hampshire stalker was able to locate and kill a former classmate with \$45 worth of information bought from an online data broker. In 2024, online data broker company Epsilon admitted to selling the data of over 30 million consumers to clients that they knew were carrying out scams. Since data brokers clearly don’t care about who clients are and what they’ll do with bought data, why would China need TikTok specifically to spy on Americans?

Lawmakers have also expressed concern over Chinese influence on TikTok’s content. More than 20 legislators justified their support for banning TikTok by citing risks of foreign propaganda as well as other concerns about the content carried on TikTok, such as the content available to minors and the alleged suppression of pro-Ukraine videos.

It’s true that TikTok has manipulated content in the past. In 2019, leaked documents showed that TikTok had instructed moderators to ban content on highly controversial topics, citing mentions of Tiananmen Square, Tibetan independence, or the banned religious group Falun Gong as examples. Additionally, in 2020, The Intercept reported that its moderators were told to censor political speech in live streams, as well as users deemed too “ugly,

The Tower

Princeton High School

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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 23 Tower 2025 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.

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poor, or disabled” for the platform. In addition to limiting the visibility of topics sensitive to China, some researchers also believe that TikTok promotes narratives reflecting official Chinese stances on global affairs.

However, the government can’t simply ban speech outlets it dislikes, even if those speech outlets contain propaganda. In 1965, the court struck down a law that required the postmaster general to detain “communist political propaganda,” which could be delivered to recipients only after they specifically requested it from the U.S. post office. In its decision, the court reasoned that even this “mere burden” was an unconstitutional effort to “control the flow of ideas to the public.” Also, banning TikTok would still fail to stop the spread of Chinese propaganda. Propaganda accounts thrive on a diverse spread of social media sites, websites, and content distribution systems that extend far beyond TikTok’s reach. Platforms that have recently axed their content moderation teams, such as Facebook and X, are especially vulnerable to Chinese and Russian propaganda accounts.

Ultimately, the TikTok ban is a publicity stunt that fails to accomplish what it promises and ignores deeper issues about American data privacy. If lawmakers genuinely cared about data privacy and misinformation, they wouldn’t single out TikTok while ignoring more significant issues such as unregulated data markets and the proliferation of propaganda across major social media platforms. Instead of performative bans, the U.S. should follow Europe’s lead in passing stronger data protection laws, like the General Data Protection Regulation, to regulate how all American companies collect, use, and sell personal information.

Until then, PHS students should know the inherent risks of social media, educate themselves on how to recognize misinformation, and adjust privacy settings to reduce data collection whenever possible. Students should remember that banning TikTok won’t change a simple fact: on social media, teenagers aren’t consumers — they’re the products.

CHEERS

STUFF WE LIKE

STUFF WE DON'T

JEERS

PORK SUNG bao

PLAYA BOWLS

NOAH MILLER

Poppi SODA

SAYING “TS PMO”

ACCORDION file holders

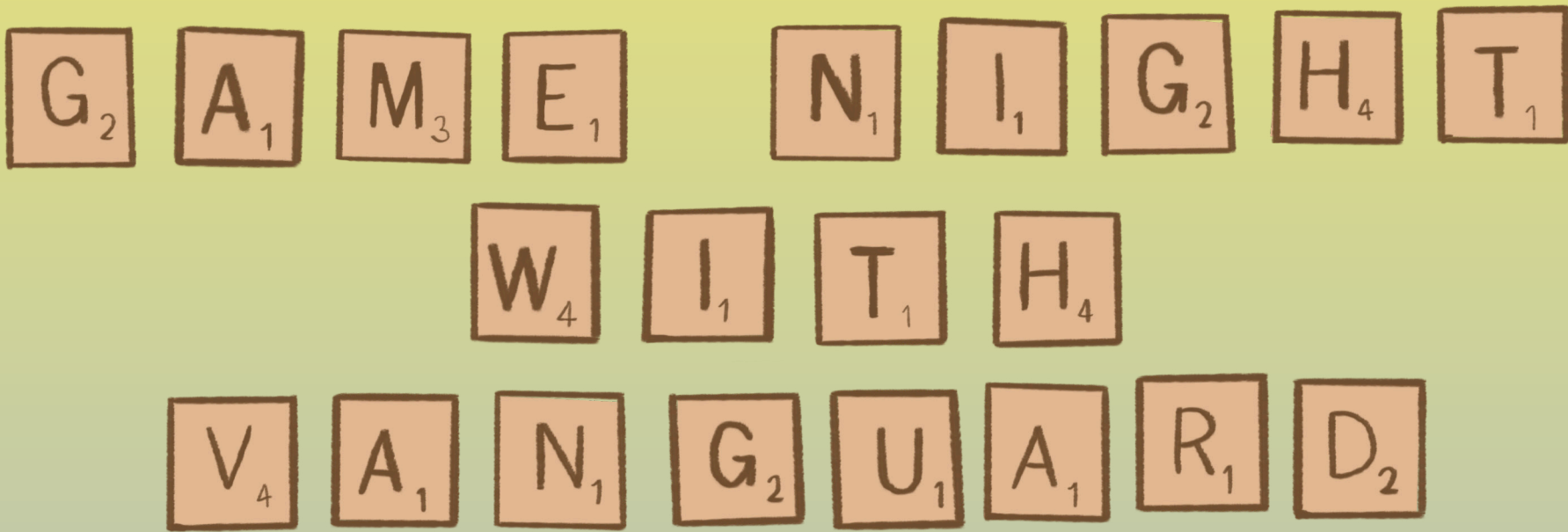
STALE CHIPS

New Instagram LAYOUT

SOGGY paper straws

COURSE SELECTIONS DUE

Delayed openings INSTEAD OF SNOW DAYS



Designing the perfect game: the process behind board game design

Aryan Singla, CONTRIBUTING WRITER



photo: Charley Hu

Doug Levandowski talks about his board game career.

The rattle of dice rolling across a table meets the shuffle of hand-drawn cards. A lucky roll sparks cheers in one corner, while a frustrated player rethinks their entire strategy in another.

Board games have existed for thousands of years, and they still remain a popular pastime across the globe.

“I think [board games] give a good, structured way for people to have fun together,” said Doug Levandowski, an English teacher and co-advisor of the Tower. “[Playing a] competitive game with friends is always fun, so they encourage that.”

Besides teaching English at PHS, Levandowski also is the only teacher of the former Game Design class, which he created to help students see the bigger picture behind a set of rules.

“I want people to start thinking about how games impact people,” said Levandowski. “Once you break it down, it’s really just playing around with pieces that are already there.”

He believes the best first step for any aspiring designer is to explore a wide range of existing games, then ask “What game doesn’t exist that you wish did?”

After developing an idea, designers go through multiple testing stages. The process starts with “alpha testing,” which is a phase of trial and error.

“There usually isn’t any expectation that it’s going to be good yet,” Levandowski said.

Once the basic design structure is nailed down, “beta testing” allows others to try the game with fewer changes as they play.

“If there’s one strategy that’s far and away the best way to win, [you] need to tweak [something] in the rules to make that less optimal so [the player] has more meaningful choices,” said Levandowski.

He also described how the final step — called “unguided testing” — can expose issues the designer never anticipated.

“Usually the creator of the game isn’t there, or if [they] are, [they’re] not saying anything,” Levandowski said. “They’re just watching ... and then you have people try to teach themselves based on the rules, play the game, and you’re really just watching as the designer to see where they run into trouble.”

He compared this process to revising an essay: each test reveals what works, what doesn’t, and how to refine the overall experience. Another key element is understanding the balance between fun and challenge.

“Fun is important, a sense of control over what you’re doing, but random chance [is also] important,” said Levandowski. “They all fit together ... it depends on what you want [the game] to do.”

Furthermore, if the game is too complicated, it will become so inaccessible that no one will play the game, even if it is great.

“I’m keeping in mind the experience players [have] with that game. How are they finding fun with this?” said Levandowski.

Over the years, Levandowski has published role-playing games and created multiple board games of his own, such as “Gothic Doctor,” “Kids on Bikes,” and “Kids on Brooms.” However, one of his favorite creations has been “Home.”

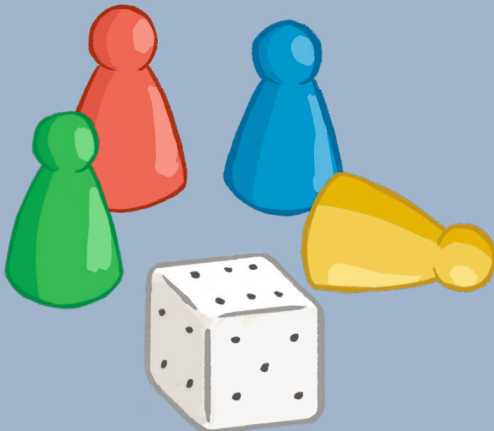
“‘Home’ is a game about trying to survive the night in a haunted house, and each player is playing a character who’s decided for their own reasons to explore this house,” said Levandowski. “As you go, you’re drawing out a map of the house, and you draw cards out of a deck that give you questions that help you tell your story for the night.”

Currently, he’s juggling new ideas, such as a project with his seven-year-old daughter that revolves around balancing scoops of ice cream. For anyone aiming to join the board game making community, Levandowski suggests checking out resources like Cardboard Edison or The Meeple Syrup Show podcast.

“[‘Cardboard Edison’] aggregates good advice about board games, [while ‘The Meeple Syrup Show’] does a lot of interviews so you can hear different perspectives,” Levandowski said.

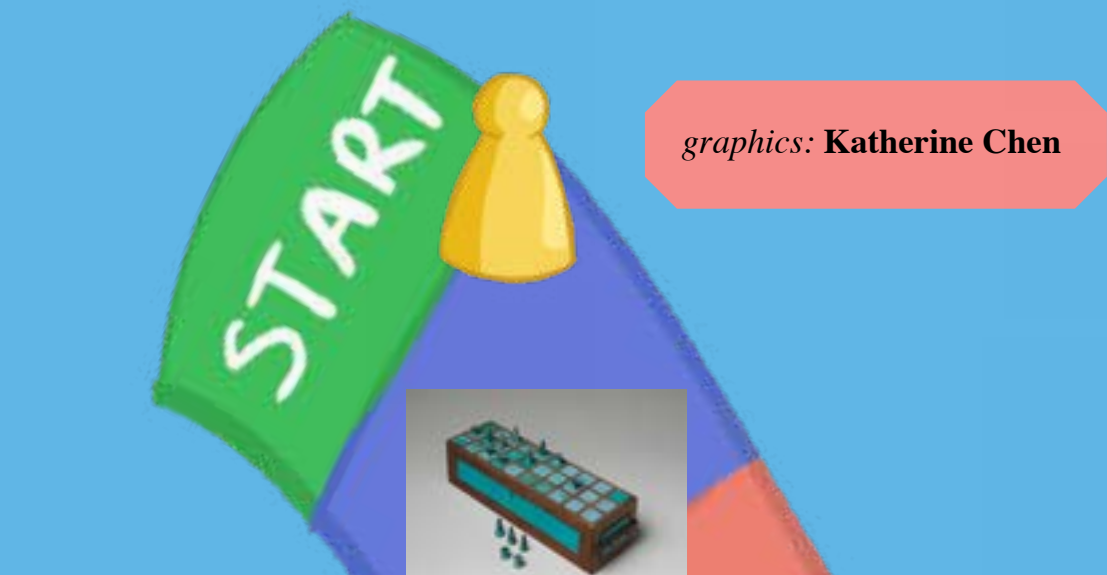
He hopes to bring back the Game Design class in the future. In his view, teaching mirrors the design process of a good game.

“Educating is a lot about motivating people and making the expectations clear,” said Levandowski. “That’s a lot of game design, too.”



The History of Board Games

Vanessa He and Aarna Vachhrajani, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS



graphics: Katherine Chen

3100 B.C., Egypt: Senet

Senet is the oldest known board game, mentioned in the Book of the Dead and played on a 3x10 square board with pawns, throw-sticks, and counters. Historians believe that wealthy Egyptians played Senet in hopes of winning and earning the protection of the gods Ra, Thoth, and Osiris. Although the rules of the game are unknown, it is believed that Senet is similar to an Arab game called Hyena, where players race to the center of the board and capture their opponents (an early form of Pac-Man).

600 A.D., India: Chess and checkers

Chess is thought to be a version of the Indian game, Shatranj, played on a 64-square board with the objective of either eliminating all of the opponents pieces or killing their king. The game was spread globally through the Silk Road as traders carried it with them. To make the game easier to play while traveling, traders tweaked the game to have discs instead of pawns that sit on the lines instead of squares, becoming an early form of checkers.



Evolution of Rich Uncle Pennybags

Maxime DeVico, STAFF WRITER

Monopoly is one of the most popular board games in the United States and around the world. Not only that, but it also has one of the most recognizable mascots of all time: Monopoly Man, also known as Rich Uncle Pennybags. Always found sporting a black waistcoat, top hat, and cane, the Monopoly Man is printed on Monopoly game boxes all around the world. Nowadays, it is impossible to find a Monopoly game without him, but this wasn't always the case.

Monopoly was invented in 1904 by Elizabeth Magie, but under a different name: the Landlord's Game. A left-wing feminist and Quaker activist, Magie wanted to teach people about the theories of the Progressive Era economist Henry George. George's theory advocated for land value taxes, and stated that private ownership of land created vast economic inequality.

Through its gameplay based on buying and renting out properties, the Landlord's Game demonstrated how monopolies and income disparities can arise. The game quickly became a huge success across the country.

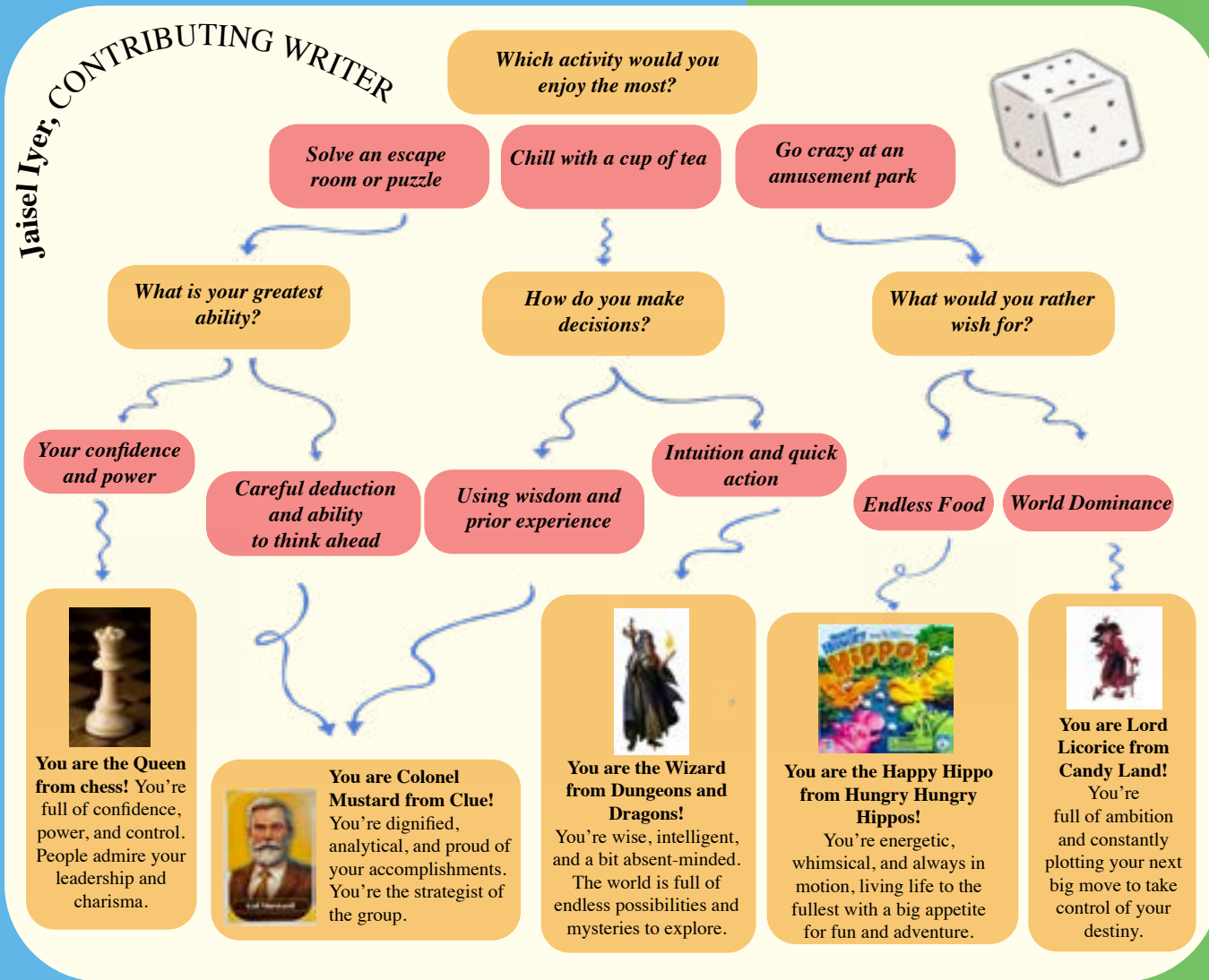
In 1935, the iconic name "Monopoly" was coined and patented by board game designer Charles B. Darrow. At this point, the game still didn't have its mascot, but only months later in 1936, the Monopoly Man would start making his way onto chance cards. He would later become the official mascot and was named Rich Uncle Pennybags in 1946. In 1999, he was renamed Mr. Monopoly. Not until 2013, however, was it discovered that the Monopoly Man was created by Charles Darrow himself. Darrow took inspiration from businessman J.P. Morgan when designing the posh character. In fact, the mascot hasn't undergone any major design changes, other than having been drawn in 3-D as well as some iterations without his famous money bag.

Besides his money bag, the Monopoly Man's monocle is another item that the community has considered crucial to the character's design. However, there has been debate over whether the monocle ever existed on him. Despite popular belief, the mascot has never officially worn a monocle. This means the mascot falls into a category of phenomena called the Mandela Effect, observed when a large group of people misremember the same thing.

Now something larger than a board game mascot, the Monopoly Man has become synonymous with the benefits and follies of capitalism that are experienced in our daily lives, not only when playing a tabletop game.



Which Board Game Character Are You?



1100 A.D., China and later Europe: Dominoes

While first created in China, the game was not popularized in Europe until the 1700s, when the French created a version in which players used the tiles as puzzle pieces to make certain patterns. Another early version of the game was traced to the Inuits in North America who made domino tiles out of bones.



1903, United States: The Landlord's Game

Created by Lizzie Magie, the objective is to buy properties, railroads, and utilities across the board that has a jail and a "go" corner. Magie's hope was to teach children about the unfair way in which monopolies were created through land grabbing. This game was later sold to the Parker Brothers, who rebranded it as "Monopoly."



2016, United States: GamePigeon

A game developer by the name of Vitalii Zlotksii, created the game that would soon be embedded in all iPhones. Their team had learned about the possibility of creating iMessage apps in iOS 10, giving them the idea of creating a mobile game that would be engaging for all. This revolutionary game that took a few weeks to create would soon create a mass of people addicted. There are many games to choose from, including Cup Pong, Crazy Eights, Knockout, and Word Hunt.



photo courtesies: Otago Museum, Wikipedia, Britannica, History Factory, GamePigeon

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

PHS Choir tours Naples, Sorrento, and Rome in Italy

Asma Frough, Dhruv Khanna, and Meiya Xiong,
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

The hills and halls of Italy were alive with the sound of the PHS Choir as the 97 singers embarked on their week-long performance tour this February. In taking the choir overseas, PHS Choir Director Vincent Metallo and Associate Choir Director Sarah Pelletier hoped to give their students the chance to share their music with new audiences, grow as performers and people, and experience Italian culture.

During their time in Italy, the cities of Naples and Rome served as their main hubs for a packed itinerary. They performed six concerts in venues including a medieval castle, churches, high schools, and a university.

“The thing that [excited] me most about visiting Italy [was] the different venues, the different spaces [since] PHS Choir usually only performs in the PAC or at the Princeton Chapel,” said Benjamin Caswell Klein ’27.

The students performed a diverse repertoire tailored to the different venues. Adhering to the requirements of Italian churches, they prepared programs consisting of only traditional sacred music. On other occasions, they sang gospel and folk music, Italian pop songs, traditional Italian music, and more. One of their pieces, “Home” by Philip Phillips, also featured choir member Nikolai Margulis ’25 performing on his banjo.

In addition to their three solo performances, the choir collaborated with some local choirs. During these joint concerts, they sang pieces like “Amazing Grace” and “Total Praise” together.

“[I was excited] to see other performers, and see how we relate to them, how we compare to them,” said Soha Jameel ’26.

The students had begun learning pieces as early as September and refined them in concerts throughout the semester, including an Italian music-themed concert in October, as well as December’s winter concert.

While the trip was music-centered, the choir immersed themselves in Italy’s rich cultural history. Between concerts, students took a day trip to visit the ruins of Pompeii, attended “gladiator school,” toured the Vatican, and tried their hand at Italian cooking in Rome. These were opportunities for students to create lasting memories together and grow closer as a group.

“I learned how to be a part of a team [on the trip]. We really had to work together as a group, especially with 100 people [and] stick together,” said Lily Berkery ’26.

According to Pelletier, group bonding is just one of many reasons the PHS Choir tour, which has been going on since the 1970s, is such a long-lasting tradition.

“When you ask students what are things they remember from high school, this tour is one of the things that they really remember,” said Pelletier. “Because [tour means] really being an ambassador for our school through music ... and taking our music to other countries and collaborating with other groups in these countries, it’s just so meaningful and really makes an impact for the students in what music can actually be.”



photo courtesy: Tony Cruz

PHS Choir, directed by Vincent Metallo, performs the American spiritual “Wade in the Water” in the Basilica San Michele Arcangelo in Sorrento, Italy, in a joint concert with the Grandi High School Choir.

Owen Barry ’25 brings the beat in

Raya Kondakindi, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

For Owen Barry ’25, music has always been a big part of his life. Surrounded by music from a young age, and especially inspired by his grandmother, he started drumming with chopsticks in restaurants. Barry has been playing for over 10 years, and when he got his first drum set at five, he decided to start taking his musical passion more seriously. Barry currently plays in Studio Band, and he’s looking ahead to studying music in college before pursuing drumming professionally.

Who or what inspired you to start playing the drums?

I’d say my grandma, definitely, was a huge inspiration because she was the musician in my family. She was a professional singer and started playing music for me when I was little. She was also the one to get me my first piano and drum set and became the one I looked to as I learned how to play.

What drew you to the drums?

Although I play a little piano, I mostly stick to the drums as it’s what I enjoy most. I used to get chopsticks when I went to restaurants and would play them in the parks of New York City, where I grew up, before transitioning to drumsticks. I just enjoy the different sounds and beats I can make.

What has been the most challenging song you’ve had to play and how did you overcome it?

Right now I’m working on this Charles Mingus song ... and what makes it so difficult is the need to lock in with all the other musicians of my section. Since I play the drums I have to focus on what the bass player is doing, which has been hard because there are so many fluctuations in the piece’s tempo, but it’s sounding pretty good.

What’s it like being a drummer in Studio Band?

I’ve really enjoyed it. It was my goal since middle school and I was able to get in as a freshman. I enjoy the environment which has allowed me to meet new people and make long-lasting relationships that have stuck around even as people have headed to college. I think being able to make music with people is pretty cool.

What’s your favorite thing about the band program at PHS? Can you share your favorite memory?

PHS is obviously one of the best band programs in the country and the opportunities we get are amazing. I’d say being able to record an album and tour in London was definitely one of my favorite memories. Last year we won states in the National Jazz Festival, and sharing that with all the seniors that graduated was also really special.



photo: Emily Kim



Owen Barry ’25 practices improvising on the drums in the band room.

Do you have any tips for aspiring drummers?

I’d say listen as much as you can and play as much as you can. The advice I always got was take any gig or any opportunity to play that you can. It doesn’t really matter whether it pays or not. You can learn a lot from listening to other people and trying to mimic what they are doing.

Where do you see yourself going with music after high school?

I’ve gotten into a couple music schools and am debating which to choose. After that, I kinda just want to perform and maybe teach, but really focus on trying to tour and get into it professionally. That’s the dream.



TOWER MULTIMEDIA

Who is Dr. LaSusa?

A conversation with our superintendent!



photo: Emily Kim

graphic: Tessa Silver

Love letters to ...

“Call Me Maybe”

Jane Hu, STAFF WRITER



“Call Me Maybe” is the kind of song that gets stuck in my head for hours after listening to it. I first heard this track in 2013, and I still haven’t found a catchier song. Even people who don’t listen to a lot of music are familiar with the song “Call Me Maybe.” This song brings people together, whether I’m at a party or warming up for a sports game. The lyrics are simple, but that is what makes it so great. They capture the fun and spontaneity of giving someone your number and hoping that they’ll call. The chorus is impossible to not sing along to, and the whole song emits a feeling of excitement and confidence. What makes this song so special to me is the nostalgia I feel when I listen to it. It reminds me of the good old times when life could just be fun and silly, standing out from other more recent pop music.



While listening to the song, the upbeat melody brings a sense of happiness that is easy to follow and sing along. The recognizable and repetitive lyrics makes it very memorable for everyone.



While many songs get their weekly fame, placing top five on the Billboard Hot 100, “Call Me Maybe” will forever be number one in my heart. Pop music doesn’t always have to be serious to be great. Sometimes, a song just has to uplift you, give you motivation, and make you happy. “Call Me Maybe” does a perfect job doing that; it’s a great example of being a constant big hit in the music industry. It’s proof that a “good” pop song can unite people, not because of its complexity, but because of how it makes people feel.

graphics: Madison Charles

“A Hard Day’s Night”

Maeve Walsh, CONTRIBUTING WRITER



It’s 1964. The Beatles just announced their first world tour and have released a movie based on their newest album. They are the most famous rock group in the world. In a house in Princeton, New Jersey, their records are well-preserved, with the exception of a few scratches on the vinyls and the paper sleeves slightly deteriorating due to old age. One album in particular is at the top of the stack: “A Hard Day’s Night,” with just 14 songs spanning 34 minutes.

To me, it’s crazy that at the time of the album’s creation, the Beatles were only in their early twenties. But their young age gave them room to develop a sense of humor that makes me feel like I too can take a break and let loose. Their ability to move between lighthearted and meaningful, like in “I’m Happy Just to Dance with You” and “Things We Said Today,” strikes the perfect balance.

Not only is the songwriting complex yet playful, but it evokes feelings of nostalgia that are so comforting. As a young girl, I would listen to this album with my parents in our living room, the turntable spinning the black, shiny vinyl round and round. That was a simpler time, where life was easy, and the world seemed to be at peace. Now, I listen to the songs and let my mind wander to when I would dance on the coffee table, screaming along with Paul McCartney during “Can’t Buy Me Love.” It’s a nice escape from the rest of the world when I don’t feel like dealing with reality.

The album’s final track, “I’ll Be Back,” with John Lennon’s smooth guitar and melodic harmonies, always feels like a hug goodbye. Leaving my imaginary world with the final words “but I’ll be back again” reminds me that this album will always be there for me when I need to be whisked away. As the sounds of the acoustic guitar and drums slowly fade away through the speakers, and the needle picks up off the album, I leave with dopamine filling my brain and even more reasons to love “A Hard Day’s Night.”

Damien Chazelle ’03 reflects on his artistic journey

Kylie Sek, CO-EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

El Khristoforova, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Many students roam PHS’s halls without even realizing that just over two decades ago, Damien Chazelle ’03 did the same.

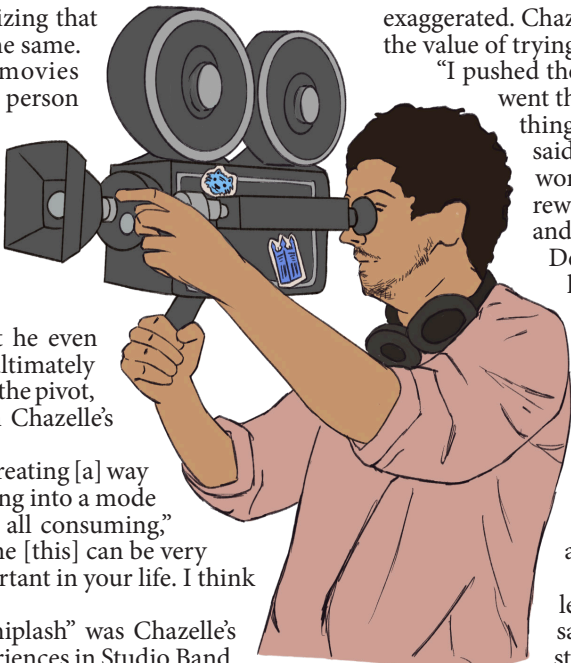
A director and screenwriter known for his movies “Whiplash” and “La La Land,” Chazelle is the youngest person to win the Academy and Golden Globe Awards for Best Director at age 32. He was born and raised in Princeton, and joined the PHS Studio Band as a freshman, which at the time was directed by its founder Anthony Biancosino.

“Ironically, movies were ... my main passion, but [Biancosino’s] overwhelming presence ... motivated me to make drumming my life,” said Chazelle.

Drumming became so important to Chazelle that he even considered pursuing it as a career. However, he ultimately decided to stick with filmmaking, his first love. Despite the pivot, Biancosino’s teachings still had a heavy influence on Chazelle’s approach as a filmmaker.

Looking back, I think [my experiences] wound up creating [a] way of thinking about cinema through rhythm ... and getting into a mode where making art ... was not just a hobby [but was] all consuming,” said Chazelle. “Obviously [when] pushed to its extreme [this] can be very unhealthy, but that sort of intensity of art can be important in your life. I think I kind of owe that all to him.”

Premiering in 2014, the psychological drama “Whiplash” was Chazelle’s breakout film. He drew inspiration from his own experiences in Studio Band and interactions with Biancosino, although the events in “Whiplash” are greatly



graphic: Charley Hu

exaggerated. Chazelle saw the movie as an opportunity to push boundaries and explore the value of trying to attain a costly goal.

“I pushed the narrative of Whiplash ... far beyond what, for instance, I personally went through [as] a student ... I wanted to kind of see if you push this sort of thing into really dark terrain, at what point [do] the ends justify the means,” said Chazelle. “I think, in a way, the moral answer is an easy one ... it’s not worth it ... And yet I keep grappling with it, because it’s hard to imagine ... rewriting history to exclude all of those things, or all those accomplishments, and thinking ‘what does that mean?’”

Despite this dilemma, Chazelle emphasized that when creating movies, he doesn’t think about messaging since it can be too abstract. Rather, he prefers to focus on emotional expression and tries to share a piece of his own world with others.

“In the case of ‘Whiplash,’ it was both the emotion I felt when I was drumming, but also that specific world I was in as a ... young, competitive jazz drummer ... that I hadn’t seen very often in films. [I] felt like I could shine a light on [it] in some way,” said Chazelle.

Chazelle’s experiences at PHS led him to discover his passion for film and have inspired his movie-making process. He has found that everyone has unique experiences that allow them to create distinctive artistic works.

“We all have our influences, and you should be honest about it and ... learn what you can from the past, because that’s what it’s there to do,” said Chazelle. “In following those influences, at some point ... you [will] stumble on to what it is that you bring to the table — that is yours and yours alone.”

PHS students’ favorite rom-coms

Aleena Zhang, CONTRIBUTING WRITER



photos: Aleena Zhang

“My favorite rom-com is ‘How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days’ because I really like the outfits and the main characters.” - Katie Schorr ’26

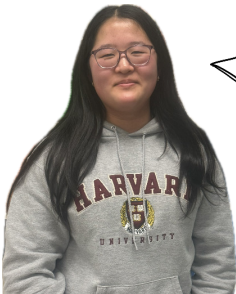


photo: Chloe Lam

“My favorite rom com is ‘To All the Boys I’ve Loved Before’ because I read the book series and I think they did a good job of representing that in the film.” - Juha Lee ’27

“My favorite rom com is “The Proposal” because it’s a really funny movie and it has the perfect blend of romance ... It’s funny romance, very relaxed, and they hate one another at first ... they slowly develop feelings, but they don’t even know they’re developing feelings — that’s what makes it amazing.” - Shreya Gaekwad ’25



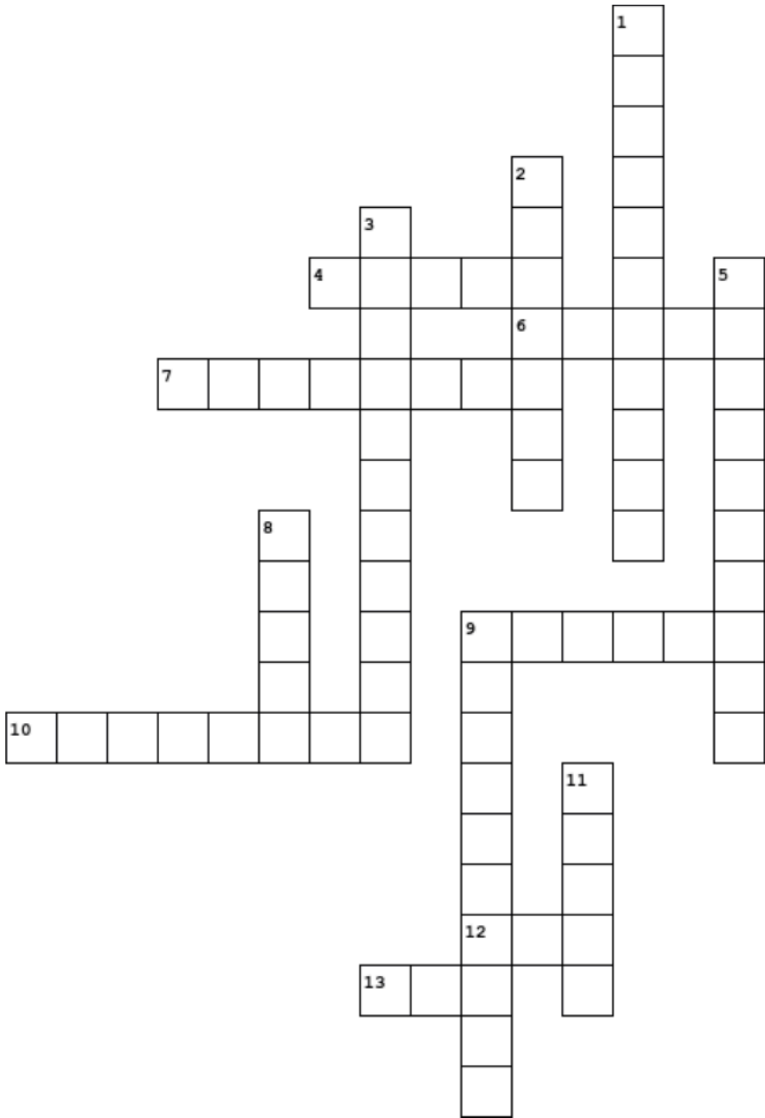
“My favorite rom-com is this movie called ‘Pretty Woman’ because the impossible romance that’s portrayed between the two main characters is played out so purely and innocently ... I think this is a really good example for the many impossible relationships we see in real life. I also really like this movie because of the aesthetics and the setting this movie [has].” - Rebecca Zhang ’26



graphics: Charley Hu

Black History Month crossword

Phineas McCulloch, CONTRIBUTING WRITER



- Across:**
- 4. The first Black American principal dancer at the American Ballet Theatre.
 - 6. The first name of a famous talk show host and the first Black woman billionaire.
 - 7. First African-American woman to win a Nobel Prize.
 - 9. _____ Freeman, actor known for “The Shawshank Redemption.”
 - 10. Last name of the sisters who have dominated tennis for decades.
 - 12. “I Have A Dream” orator. (initials)
 - 13. Landmark Supreme Court case Brown v. ____.

- Down:**
- 1. _____ Railroad, used by slaves to escape to freedom.
 - 2. Singer-songwriter whose music blends R&B, pop, and soul; known for her album “Lemonade.”
 - 3. Act passed in 1964 prohibiting discrimination.
 - 5. Amendment to the U.S. Constitution abolishing slavery.
 - 8. First African-American president of the United States.
 - 9. City that was the site of a bus boycott that was key for the Civil Rights movement.
 - 11. Last name of the Civil Rights activist who famously refused to give up her seat on a bus.

Ramadan recipe: chickpea chaat

Suroor Menai and Yunsheng Xu,
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Fasting is the main tradition observed during the month of Ramadan. During the daylight, Muslims refrain from food and drink while going about their normal activities. Before dawn they eat light breakfast called suhur, and at sunset they break their fast with a special meal called iftar that traditionally consists of just a few dates and water. Finally, after performing the sunset prayers, the family sits down to eat dinner, the first substantial amount of food they’ve had for the entire day. However, not everyone is expected to fast. Young children, pregnant women, the sick, and the elderly are all exempt from taking part in fasting.

Although forgoing food and water for an entire month seems counterintuitive, fasting has many spiritual meanings for Muslims. Ramadan, the ninth month of the Muslim calendar, is considered the holiest month of the year for Muslims because it is believed that the Holy Quran (the central religious text of Islam) was sent down from heaven as a guidance for all. Therefore, Muslims fast during Ramadan as a form of spiritual discipline, bringing themselves closer to God, as well as empathizing with the less fortunate. Since Ramadan is a

time for charity, mosques also hold food drives and or fundraisers for the less fortunate. During Ramadan, Muslims gather for five daily prayers to God. In addition to these, they also gather in mosques for a special nightly prayer called Taraweeh, in which the Quran is recited.

This year, Ramadan begins on February 28 and ends on March 29. After Ramadan ends, Muslims celebrate with a day of festivities, known as Eid al-Fitr. During Eid, children traditionally receive many gifts, including new clothes or money from parents and relatives. On the morning of Eid, a special prayer and sermon is held, followed by a large community celebration. Families spend the day socializing, reuniting with old acquaintances, not to mention eating. Though Ramadan is the month of fasting, Eid is the day of celebrations and eating. Many different types of dishes are served during the community gathering, ending the month with a huge feast.

After a long day, many often look forward to the delicious and traditional Pakistani dish chaat: a dish that consists of a mix of chickpeas, tangy tomatoes, onions, and tamarind, and a variety of spices to add flavor. It’s nourishing, full of protein, warm, just a little spicy, and really hits the spot when you’re hungry.

Ingredients:

- 1 tablespoon of ghee (clarified butter)
- 4 cans of chickpeas (drain out preservatives before using)
- 1 can of tomato sauce
- 2 raw tomatoes, diced
- 2 green chilies, diced
- 10 fresh curry leaves
- 4 cloves of garlic, finely chopped
- 1 chopped onion
- 1 ½ teaspoon turmeric
- 1 teaspoon red chili powder
- 1 ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 ½ teaspoon ground cumin powder
- 1 ½ garam masala powder
- ¼ cup tamarind paste, dissolved in water
- 1 bunch of cilantro, chopped
- ½ onion, finely chopped
- 2 green chilies, chopped

Instructions:

- 1. Take a medium sized pot or deep frying pan and let it sit over a medium-heat flame.
- 2. Add in the ghee and let it simmer for 30 seconds.
- 3. Add in the onions and curry leaves, and let simmer for three to four minutes.
- 4. Add raw tomatoes and fresh garlic, and stir for two minutes.
- 5. Add all the spices.
- 6. Sautee everything for one minute.
- 7. Add tomato sauce and chickpeas, stirring until evenly mixed with the sauce.
- 8. Close the lid and let it simmer for around 20 minutes, or until the chickpeas are soft and the sauce is darker.
- 9. Garnish with fresh cilantro, onions, and green chilies.



photo courtesy: Suroor Menai

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Image: Roberto Lugo, *What Had Happened Was: The Path*, from the series *Orange and Black*, 2024. © Roberto Lugo. Courtesy of the artist and R & Company, New York. Photo: Joseph Hu


Stretches to do after sitting all day

Katie Qin, SPORTS CO-EDITOR


Hold all stretches for 15–30 seconds and repeat on the other side (if applicable).



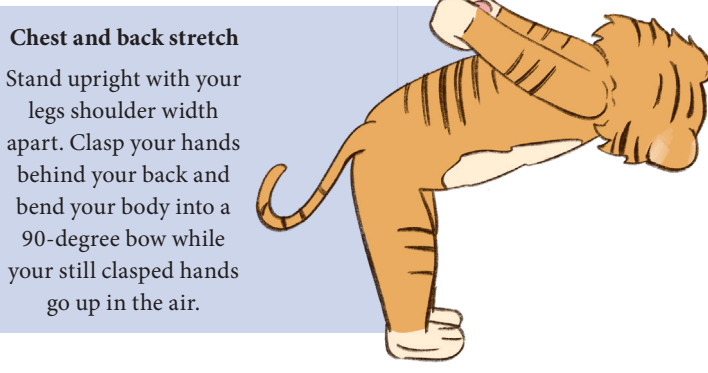
Wrist flexor stretch
Reach one arm out in front of you with your palm facing down and use the other hand to bend back the hand of the outstretched arm.



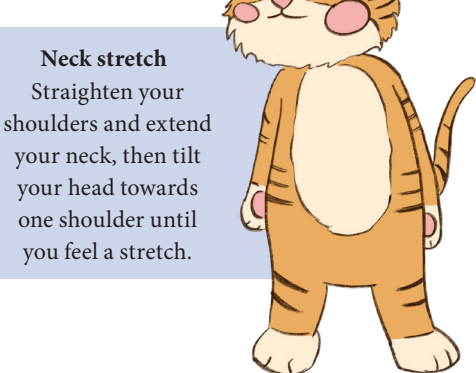
Glute stretch
This can be done sitting down or standing up. Take one leg and cross the ankle over the other leg while pulling it towards you as much as possible. If you are standing, bend the standing leg into a squat.



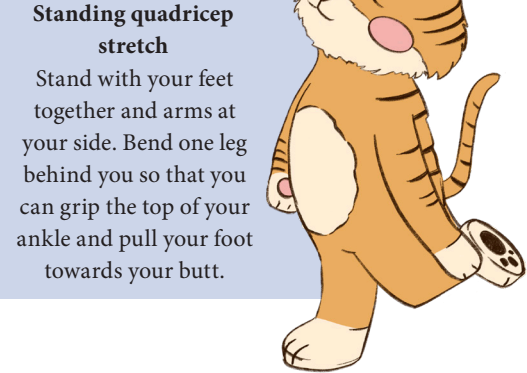
Shoulder crossbody stretch
Bring one arm across the chest and use the other arm to keep it against your body.



Chest and back stretch
Stand upright with your legs shoulder width apart. Clasp your hands behind your back and bend your body into a 90-degree bow while your still clasped hands go up in the air.



Neck stretch
Straighten your shoulders and extend your neck, then tilt your head towards one shoulder until you feel a stretch.



Standing quadricep stretch
Stand with your feet together and arms at your side. Bend one leg behind you so that you can grip the top of your ankle and pull your foot towards your butt.

graphics: Charley Hu

Winter season statistics

Katie Qin, SPORTS CO-EDITOR

Girls basketball

Game date: 2/21/25
Opponent: Steinert
Score: 45–51 (Loss)

Game date: 2/22/25
Opponent: Allentown
Score: 52–45 (Win)

Boys basketball

Game date: 2/10/25
Opponent: Nottingham
Score: 52–38 (Win)

Game date: 2/21/25
Opponent: Steinert
Score: 48–46 (Win)

Girls ice hockey

Game date: 1/28/25
Opponent: Cranford
Score: 3–6 (Loss)

Game date: 2/3/25
Opponent: East Side
Score: 4–0 (Win)

Boys ice hockey

Game date: 2/3/25
Opponent: Notre Dame
Score: 3–6 (Loss)

Game date: 2/5/25
Opponent: WWPS
Score: 6–2 (Win)

Girls fencing

Game date: 1/30/25
Opponent: Somerville
Score: 12–15 (Loss)

Game date: 2/4/25
Opponent: Voorhees
Score: 8–19 (Loss)

Boys fencing

Game date: 1/30/25
Opponent: Somerville
Score: 19–8 (Win)

Game date: 2/20/25
Opponent: Livingston
Score: 12–15 (Win)

Dances around the world

Aarna Dharmavarapu, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Dance is a powerful, universal way to express culture, history, and personal emotions. Throughout history, varying styles of dance have arisen, each with its own distinct meanings and traditions. Some forms of dance, such as ballet and salsa, are extremely well-known across the world. Other forms, such as the seungmu and dabke, though less known, are still powerful expressions of culture and identity. Despite their differences in technique and meaning, all dances share a common role in storytelling, celebration, and community.

One of the most well-known forms of dance, ballet, started in the courts of Italy during the Renaissance, where it was performed as a form of entertainment. It was then brought to France following the marriage of Catherine de Médici, an Italian noblewoman, to King Henry II of France, where it evolved into a more formalized style of dance. King Louis XIV of France, a ballet dancer himself, helped promote the dance as an art with the establishment of the Académie Royale de Danse, the first formal ballet school.

During the 19th century, opera-ballets evolved in Russia, where the combination of dance and classical music tells a story such as “Swan Lake” and “The Nutcracker.” One of the defining characteristics of ballet is pointe work, a technique where dancers perform elaborate

movements on the tips of their toes. The complex sequences of turns, jumps, and steps of ballet require years of practice and dedication to achieve full mastery.

Amanda Lee ’25 has been dancing ballet alongside traditional Chinese dance since she was around five years old. One of her favorite skills is jumping, which is emphasized in the Gamzatti Variation: ballerinas have to leap at just the right moment to capture the burst of bright music.

“I really like the Gamzatti Variation ... it’s really hard but really elegant,” said Lee.

Seungmu, or the Monk’s Dance, is a traditional Korean dance that is said to reflect the cultural of Korean Buddhism. Many scholars believe that the five main parts of the seungmu dance are representative of the Buddhist understanding of life, overcoming the three evils—greed, hatred, and delusion—to achieve the state of nirvana. The dance begins slowly, with a

steady rhythm, to represent birth and the start of life’s struggles. As it progresses, the energy of the dancer’s movements increases, to show the struggle against the three evils. Then, in an extended drumming section, the dance reaches its climax, representing the triumph over these struggles to attain nirvana.

Although its exact origins are debated, the dance is said to date back to the seventh century, where it was traditionally performed by monks during temple rituals. During the Japanese colonial period, the dance was stripped of its religious roots and modernized into a strictly secular dance. In 1969, the South Korean government designated the dance as an Intangible Cultural Property, showing its importance to Korean culture and people.

The name “salsa” is derived from the Spanish word for “sauce,” which

symbolizes how its origin comes from a fusion of cultures and dance styles. The dance, whose origins can be traced back to the 1920s, is highly energetic and lively, with upbeat music and rapid dance movements. The salsa dance is meant to bring people together, through its elaborate partner work and dancer lines. It is typically performed in a four-beat rhythm, where dancers only move to three of the four beats in a measure. Dancers usually keep their upper bodies still, and focus on movements involving their hips. In Latin America, dancers engage in group-oriented styles, where they form circles and are led by a caller, who tells them which movements to perform. Due to its fast-paced movements and ability to bring people together, salsa has become one of the most popular forms of dance across the world.

The dabke is a lively folk dance that started in the mountains of the Levantine region. The word “dabke” is derived from the Arabic word “dabaka,” meaning “to make noise” or “stamping of the feet.” It used to be a work dance, where according to legend, people in the community would gather and stomp their feet to repair roofs that were made out of tree branches and mud. From there, it was passed down generations, reminding Arabic people of the importance of family and community.

The dance is accompanied by songs that have a slow introduction, then gradually speed up. The leader of the dance, or lawweeh, sets the rhythm and keeps up the energy of the dance. Often, they will break out of the dance line to improvise and perform more skilled movements. Today, the dabke is seen as a way of preserving the traditions that were passed down through generations.

Beyond a form of artistic expression, dance is a way for people to express their culture, connect with others, share their experiences, and express themselves in a way that words cannot. Whether it’s through the refined and graceful movements of ballet, the energetic and dynamic steps of the salsa, the bold and synchronized stomps of dabke, or the graceful and spirited gestures of seungmu, each dance is a unique representation of the various cultures and traditions worldwide.



Amanda Lee ’25 (in blue) performs “The Nutcracker.”



graphics: Charley Hu



photo courtesy: Jasur Agzamov

Brendan Beatty '25 aims a shot.

BOYS ICE HOCKEY 7-11

“Our pregame tradition of stirring the pot of freshmen and getting hype[d] after big wins. [Also] our team dinners and hangout[s].”
- Anirudh Kashyap '25

“Winning the first round of MCTs.”
- Jacob Rotenburg '27

GIRLS SWIM 8-2

“Our first meet when we did our team cheer. It was the first time I felt as if I were on an actual team that cared for each other, and having that chant really boosted my morale throughout the entire meet.”
- Ellie Wu '28

“Cheering my team on, swimming the 200 [freestyle] during counties, and senior day.”
- Muen Li '25



photo courtesy: Muen Li

The PHS Girls Swim Team dives in.




photo courtesy: Daniel Guo

The team prepares to start the race.

BOYS SWIM 9-1

“Our comeback against West Windsor South [High School] where we got first and second in the 400 [meter] freestyle relay, [which gave us a] two point lead over them to end the meet.”
- Sergio Navarro '27

“Senior night or getting bagels after an early morning practice.”
- Kaden Li '26




photo courtesy: Jasur Agzamov

Maya Hagt '25 goes after the puck.

GIRLS ICE HOCKEY 4-7

“Celebrating our win after senior night and all our team dinners after home games.”
- Jade Cadjee '28

“Senior night [because] it was sad to say goodbye to all our seniors but spirits were high [that night] and everyone played really well.”
- Sophia Lee '26



photo courtesy: Morgan Evans

Cole Rose '25 faces off against an opponent.

WRESTLING 8-11

“The most memorable part of the season for me was the whole community ... [the team] created. It was super supportive and everyone was friendly even if you didn't expect them to be.”
- Emma Merritt '28

“The [wrestling] meets were very memorable [for me].”
- Alan Li '26

WINTER TRACK

“The most memorable part of the season was working out with the team and pushing each other to improve.”
- Alex LaBouef '27

“The Armory meets in New York because I got to experience running against other schools and teams.”
- Nicola Schmidt '28




photo courtesy: Rohan Viswathan

Kajol Karra '26 races towards the finish line.

Winter Recap

Memorable Moments

Claire Yang, SPORTS CO-EDITOR

BOYS FENCING 8-4

“Our first win [of the season] against Pingry felt really good. Our team spirits were ... [high], and all of us felt pretty good about the season to come.”
- Shaurya Ranjan '27

“The most memorable part [for me] was the first game of the season against Bernard High school ... [because] I learned a lot from that match.”
- William Liu '26




photo: Joy Chen

Helen Yu '27 parries an opponent.

GIRLS FENCING 2-8

“The pizza party because we bonded a lot [over] doing Just Dance.”
- Vritika Singh '26

“The most memorable part of the season has been watching everyone improve, especially during [the] Santelli tournament.”
- Emilia Avalos '25



photo: Charley Hu

Grady Hegland '26 fences with Marcus Strum '27.



photo: Charley Hu

The girls basketball team practices for a game.

GIRLS BASKETBALL 16-8

“Our first win against Hightstown, because it set the tone for our season and we all played really well together.”
- Katie Sharkey '25

“When we beat Del Val because I had a career high of 19 points and got one and one to put us ahead by three [points] in overtime.”
- Chloe Hunt '27

BOYS BASKETBALL 5-18

“Seeing the seniors ... score when they have a chance, because they show up to practice everyday and compete.”
- Raymond Han '26

“Senior day. I'm a senior and it was a nice way to wrap up my high school basketball career.”
- Jonathan Feldman '25



photo courtesy: Jasur Agzamov

Michael Bess '26 leaps for a shot.

Bodyweight fitness: how calisthenics is redefining strength training

Kaelan Patel, SPORTS CO-EDITOR
Avantika Paylayekar, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

A form of exercise, calisthenics, has begun to gain more attention through social media. Online fitness celebrities such as David Laid and Simeon Panda showcase their strength by doing bodyweight movements that seem to defy gravity like the planche or handstand pushups.

“I think there are a lot of pretty popular influencers that do calisthenics, especially in terms of short-form content. For me personally, [that content] is what also inspired me to get started with calisthenics,” said Ronald Qiu '26.

Though calisthenics may seem like a new fad, Angelo Andriotis, owner of the International Calisthenics Academy in Greece, says its roots can be traced back to 600 B.C: “calis” comes from the Ancient Greek word “kallos,” meaning beauty, and “thenics” comes from “sthenos,” or strength. Under Spartan rule, leaders relied on calisthenics to train soldiers. The reason why it continues to be widespread mainly ties back its benefits and the overall nature of the exercise.

The main function of calisthenics, as concluded by Thomas Rosmond et al., is to build functional strength, because these exercises target multiple muscle groups in the body while enhancing flexibility, coordination, and posture. Performing daily tasks in life would become

much easier because a lot of calisthenic exercises mirror daily movements like pushing, pulling, and squatting. Furthermore, with increased mobility, one would be at a lower risk of injuries and have increased joint health.

“I think that one of the best benefits of calisthenics is its [convenience]. You can do it anywhere, anytime, [and] you don't need fancy equipment to do [it],” said Qiu.

Calisthenics is beginner friendly; many basic bodyweight exercises like squats and pushups are relatively easy for people to master without major risk of injury, so people can improve their form and build confidence in their balance and strength. This enables the transition into weight training, but it's important to keep in mind that lifting and calisthenics are separate exercises for different intentions.

“[When] lifting weights ... you're pretty stationary because you're the one pushing the [weight]. With calisthenics, you're using your body as the weight, so it's a lot more mobile, and also, you get better control of your body,” said Qiu.

Like Qiu, Jake Winn '26 started calisthenics two years ago and continues to improve his routine.

“A good [calisthenics plan spans] anywhere from like six days a week, and you probably only need half [an] hour a day to get results,” said Jake Winn '26.

According to Pat Chadwick, a certified calisthenics coach, a plan should start off with the easier moves such as lunges and planks. As the workouts get more advanced, equipment like gymnastic rings, pull up bars, parallel bars, and resistance bands are often used but aren't necessary.

“You could have a pull up bar at home, but you don't need a lot of materials because you could go to any playground or gym and do pull ups, muscle ups, [and] dips,” said Winn.

Though the end result may seem unattainable, it is important to remember that everyone starts somewhere, and the only way to progress is through consistent effort.

“If you're thinking about starting calisthenics, you should, because progression comes fast at first, and it's actually very rewarding to see,” said Qiu.



Athletes of the Month

Jaiden Xu '25: swimming

Jackson Zwick and Joshua Huang,
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS



photo: Charley Hu

Xu, now done with his last high school swim season, is ready to compete at the next level with his commitment to Hamilton University.

The sound of the starting horn reverberates throughout the pool as Jaiden Xu '25 dives off the block, precisely cutting his way through the water. His rivals struggle to keep up, as he glides through the water in a rhythm and pace that has been meticulously cultivated throughout his years of experience. In an effortless display of his underwater prowess, Xu scores the key points for his team.

Xu was introduced to swimming at an early age, with his father kickstarting what would eventually blossom into an 11-year career. His father became one of his inspirations along with 23 time Olympic gold medal winner Michael Phelps.



photo courtesy: Jaiden Xu

Xu performs the freestyle stroke in a critical race for his team at a meet.

much effort into this sport I might as well continue and see how far it'll take me. It's not like it's going to be the end of the world if I don't perform well."

His commitment and dedication to his team paid off, as Xu's efforts aided the PHS boys swim team in clinching the Colonial Valley Conference championship this past January, going undefeated in the regular season and individually placing in the top three. Boys swim coach Carly Misiewicz has noticed Xu's capability ever since his freshman year.

"From his first year he was somebody who was very talented [and] very skilled," said Misiewicz. "He was a top contributor as a freshman ... but he's really grown into being able to swim almost any event."

In between his commitment to the sport, Xu finds time for other aspects of his life, especially his family and his education.

"With my family, I try to spend as much time as I can, especially on the weekends," said Xu. "[For] school work, I try to finish in school so I don't have to do it at home. [But], sometimes I do have to miss practice in order to finish work."

His dedication to excellence is also shown in his leadership. David Xu '25 has been on the team with Xu for all four years, witnessing the behind-the-scenes effort he puts into the sport.

"He's definitely one of the hardest workers out there that I know of," said Xu. "He's always there ... helping and pushing teammates to do their best and go their fastest."

Xu's leadership has been critical to the team's success this year, especially in an important swim meet against West Windsor High School South when it came down to the final relay where the boys needed first and second place to win the meet. That's when Jaiden came up with a strategy.

"[He suggested to] split up our best swimmers into both these relays so we could secure these positions, and it ended up helping us win the meet," said David Xu.

Xu plans to carry his swimming career into the next four years at Hamilton University, where he will continue to compete at a high level in a sport that he has loved since his childhood.



photo courtesy: Daniel Guo

Xu competes in the Sectional Semifinals meet against Summit High School.

Lena Hamilton '25: track

Anna Petrova, VANGUARD CO-EDITOR
Luna Xu, CONTRIBUTING WRITER



photo: Charley Hu

Hamilton, now in her second year as team captain, is excited to demonstrate her leadership and speed in her senior season.

Set — everything falls silent: the cheering crowd, the music, even the pounding of her heart. The gun is about to go off, and all that matters is what lies ahead. A deep breath, then the horn sounds. She's off, spikes digging into the track, every ounce of training fueling Lena Hamilton '25 toward the finish line.

Hamilton has been an athlete her whole life. After 13 years of classical ballet, she switched sports in the spring of her freshman year. She chose to pursue track and field because her dad had run in high school, and following in his footsteps proved the perfect way for her to remain active. Since then, her passion for the sport has only grown.

"I've always enjoyed being competitive, and I found track and field to be a very competitive discipline that I could potentially excel at," said Hamilton.

Since being named captain in her junior year, Hamilton has strived to bring her team closer together.

"I organize pre-season workouts during the fall off season, manage the team social media, design team merch, and plan team bonding," said Hamilton.

For Hamilton, one of the most important lessons she has taken away from her experience in track is of the value of self-sufficiency as a mechanism for improvement.

"You'll never grow as a sprinter if you aren't able to self-analyze and figure out what you need to do to help yourself be better," said Hamilton. "I've definitely gotten better at naming my flaws and working on how to fix them."

Before races, Hamilton likes to take a moment to herself to collect her thoughts and concentrate on her upcoming event. She finds that, when facing race-day nerves, it is critical to not doubt herself and remember just how much she is capable of.

"I like to say prayers to stay focused on my race and to remain confident in my training and my ability to do what I need to do," said Hamilton.

Being a track and field athlete means rigorous training for most of the year. Being a student-athlete means coming home late from practice and immediately shifting gears to focus on schoolwork. For Hamilton, it's crucial to find ways to prevent homework and studying for assessments from piling up.

"I balance school and track by organizing my time and assignments to the best of my ability," said Hamilton.

To her coaches, Hamilton stands out as a positive and motivating force on the team, always working to improve her own individual performance, and that of her teammates.

"[Lena] embraces our team's principles of growth mindset and positive psychology, always striving to improve and encouraging others to do the same," said track head coach Ben Samara. "Her commitment to both personal progress and the success of the team is evident in everything she does."

Apart from being an outstanding runner, Hamilton has a notable impact on her teammates, providing feedback whenever it's needed and cheering them on during races.

"She's very positive, which I think is a nice quality to have, because it gets you thinking in a different approach, [rather] than [thinking of] something negative [that could] happen," said Madison Hamlin '27, a sprinter on the track team. "The advice that Lena gave me was so focused on myself and how to improve myself ... She inspires me because she's like my big sister. She has that connection that works for us."

With already three years of track under her belt and plenty of race experience, Hamilton only has a few words of advice for her younger self: "I would tell my freshman self to sign up for track sooner."



photo: Charley Hu

Hamilton completes a lap around the track as she practices for her upcoming meet.



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