

# The Tower

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## 1,000 attend “Hands-Off” event in Princeton as part of national anti-Tump protest



photo: Charley Hu



photo: Charley Hu

Indivisible Princeton organizers led chants of “Hands-Off!” and “The People, United!” PHS student Maya Halcomb ’25 attended the protest with her family

Andrew Kuo, STAFF WRITER

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1,000 people — including several Princeton High School students — gathered in Princeton’s Hinds Plaza on April 5th to protest the Trump administration as part of a nationwide “Hands Off” movement. PHS students cited a number of reasons for attending, ranging from concerns for LGBTQ rights, threats to the Department of Education, and the Trump administration’s disregard for humanity.

“It’s selfish men and women, men especially, doing what serves their ego best — and what serves their pockets best. It’s so infuriating that we’ve given them enough power to actually be able to hurt people on a mass scale,” said Rica Eleches-Lipsitz ’25, who attended the protest.

Indivisible Princeton, one of the main organizers of the event, noted on their website that one of the core principle of the protest was nonviolence, and encouraged all participants to de-escalate potential confrontations. However, attendees described a strong sense of collective energy and enthusiasm at the protest, which was part of the largest national movement so far against Trump’s second administration.

Lia Eleches-Lipsitz ’27 attended the protest with her family and a sign that read, “The only minority that’s destroying this country are the billionaires.” A different protester held up a sign that read, “We the people have power over the people in power.”

“It was empowering to see all these other people. It’s really easy to read news articles and feel like you’re by yourself with your rage, but it’s nice to see [that] together, we actually might be able to make some sort of difference,” said Lia Eleches-Lipsitz.

Maya Halcomb ’25 echoed this desire for change. “In Princeton specifically, it’s important that we are all coming out and leveraging our privilege. Even though we’re [in] a progressive town, I feel like there’s not a lot of movement that happens, so it’s important that we’re super active in the change — and I think our privilege can do a lot to change things,” said Halcomb.

Princeton University students organized a smaller rally that began at Firestone Library, before joining the main event. The university, along with several other Ivy League institutions, recently saw federal funding cuts, but Princeton University President Christopher Eisgruber has continued to speak out against Trump.

“[Trump] kept \$210,000,000 of Princeton’s grant funding last week, and we believe that research is valuable and that America can only be strong if its universities are strong,” said Isaac Barsoum, a freshman at Princeton University.

The event lasted around two hours, and featured several speakers, including U.S Representative Bonnie Watson Coleman, whose congressional district includes Princeton.

“This is the most corrupt and incompetent — which might you know be helpful — administration in my lifetime,” said Watson Coleman. “This administration chooses to take very important resources from those who really need them so that they can make their greedy folks richer. These people have so much money that if they even just shared a little bit of it — tithe to the poor — we wouldn’t have poverty.”

Though most PHS students can’t vote, Rica Eleches-Lipsitz urged students to engage themselves in politics, whether through protest or education.

“[We] should stay involved in politics, even if it’s not a ton. Just enough to know who to vote for, enough to stay engaged,” said Rica Eleches-Lipsitz. “You don’t have to make it your life — and you shouldn’t, because we need to breathe — but at the same time, we have to keep being there for each other.”

## PHS reacts to federal crackdown on DEI in K-12 education

Angela Chen and Harry Dweck,  
News & Features Co-Editors

On February 27, the Trump administration launched an “end-DEI” portal that allows anyone to report illegal diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) practices in the classroom. Then, on April 3, the Department of Education sent a letter that threatened to withhold federal funding for districts that do not end “illegal DEI practices.” Finally, on April 22, the Supreme Court heard arguments about whether elementary schools can compel students to be present for lessons that discuss LGBTQ characters.

This rapid sequence of initiatives that aim to eliminate DEI programs in education have left administrators, educators, and students across the country — including at PHS — questioning what exactly qualifies as an illegal DEI practice, whether they can continue discussing DEI-related topics, and what might come next.

“The goal is to chill speech. It’s to chill conversation about diversity, equity and inclusion, and it’s very frustrating,” said Kimberly Tew, assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction for Princeton Public Schools (PPS). “Talking with teachers, they’re like, ‘Can I still do this lesson? Can I talk about — you know — maybe they’re a cisgender woman married to a woman, right — can I talk about my family?’ There’s a lot of concern about these things.”

The federal government does not have the right to determine the curriculum in public schools, a power reserved to the states according to the 10th amendment. However, the federal government does fund around 15 percent of total public school spending — which is its primary leverage in enforcing new DEI policies.

New Jersey mandates the teaching of diversity, equity, and inclusion in public schools, including a mandate to teach LGBTQ history, African American history, and Asian American & Pacific Islander history. It’s not immediately clear whether these mandates are “illegal

DEI practices” according to the federal government, which has left districts unsure whether they are at risk of federal funding cuts.

“[Though] the U.S. Department of Education’s request references “certain DEI practices” or “illegal DEI,” it does not define those terms, and there are no known federal or New Jersey State laws prohibiting diversity, equity, or inclusion,” wrote Kevin Dehmer, NJ’s education commissioner, in response to a letter from the Trump administration.

PPS receives only 2 percent of its budget from the federal government (most comes from local property taxes), which means that it is much less beholden to federal funding policies compared to most other districts nationally.

“The district embarked upon an equity initiative starting in about 2018, and since then, we have done a lot of work, both in and outside the curriculum arena, to make this building more equitable. That’s something we’re proud of, [and] we will not change that,” said PHS Principal Cecilia Birge.

PPS administrators are instead concerned with what might happen to NJ education policy. In 2024, NJ experienced the second largest shift to the right nationally.

“You know, my bigger concern is at the state level — who’s coming into the new governor’s office this year, what the State Assembly and Senate look like. Those bodies have much more say about what happens at the school level than the federal government,” said Tew.

However, for now, some PHS teachers are using the crackdown on DEI as a way to educate their students about issues like censorship, historiography, and systemic racism.

“We’re trying to help students understand that it’s part of trying to cut out or cover up different parts of history — we’re noting current events where things like a page about Harriet Tubman on like government websites might be taken down, or [the government websites] on



photo: Katherine Chen

Patricia Manhart (left) discusses with her PHS racial literacy students Jennifer Lopez de la Cruz ’26 (center) and Anuar Viruel Lopez ’25 (right).

the Stonewall Rebellion are dropping the T of LGBT,” said Patricia Manhart, who teaches PHS racial literacy. “We’re trying to get students to understand that the attack is really just an attack on accomplishments by people of color throughout United States history, as well as [a] cover up the legacy of racial inequality that is also very real.”

PHS students have also expressed concerns over the efforts to eliminate DEI, especially concerning the effects it would have on their future educational environments.

“I’ve personally talked to minorities about the topic, and they definitely hold more pessimistic ideas about their own futures, and that’s something I can relate to,” said Jasmine Taylor ’26, a student in the Racial Literacy class at PHS. “It kind of made me feel a lot more pessimistic about college, because I feel like they’re not taking into account very nuanced topics [anymore].”

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# PPS purchases two electrical busses

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In a step towards a more sustainable future, Princeton Public Schools recently announced their purchase of two electric school buses and an electric bus charger.

The district hopes to receive the two 54-passenger Blue Bird electric school buses by the end of August and have them running by the start of the 2025–2026 school year.

The cost of the buses without state aid is \$1,013,069.48. However, a roughly \$700,000 NJ Department of Environmental Protection grant and around \$40,000 in federal aid reduces the out-of-pocket cost for the district to \$300,000, which is comparable to the price of two standard gasoline buses.

“It is our responsibility as elected officials to ensure that the vehicles carrying our children to school do not adversely affect their health outcomes as they grow. That’s why my administration has dedicated \$30 million to date to ensuring that those vehicles are powered by clean energy,” said New Jersey Governor Philip Murphy during a press conference announcing the grant.

The grant was designed to replace the district’s few remaining diesel buses, which will be decommissioned, with a safer and more environmentally friendly option. The remaining buses will have standard gasoline powered engines. 12 other districts in New Jersey with diesel buses received similar grants.

“Not having diesel fumes will make the air quality a little safer for the community



The current fleet of Princeton Public Schools’ busses sit in a parking lot behind the PPS administrative office.

[and] a lot safer for the kids that ride on those two buses,” said Jenny Ludmer, a program manager at Sustainable Princeton who organized much of the purchase.

An average gas-powered vehicle emits around 12,000 pounds of carbon dioxide every year, compared to around 1,500 for electric vehicles. The school also purchased a \$212,000 bi-directional electric charger for the buses, allowing the district to store any excess energy until needed. In NJ, the vast majority of electricity is either from nuclear power or natural gas.

Though the electric buses have a limited range, Ludmer assures that they will not cause any problems and are suited for the district’s transportation needs.

“[Its range] is around a hundred miles, so it’s less than what most vehicles have,” said Ludmer. “But [while] the district does have some long distance routes, these buses would not get used for that situation — they would only be used locally — so they’re not gonna have a problem.”

In the future, Ludmer hopes that the district can acquire an all-electric fleet

of buses. Princeton University recently finished converting its campus-wide Tiger Transit system into an all-electric fleet, as part of its net-zero carbon emissions initiative.

“This is a proof of concept that the electric buses are going to work well, be easy to maintain, and be quieter — and have a more enjoyable ride that way. I think with proof of concept and with additional funding, the district can continue to add more buses to their fleet that are electric,” said Ludmer.

However, Adam Bierman, a current member of the Board of Education, is skeptical that the district will be able to purchase a complete fleet of electric busses in the near future.

“The process right now is very volatile. You have a federal administration that is not pro-electric. Then we might even have a Republican governor — I’m saying this as a nonpartisan — that might want to do some DÖGE-type cuts in New Jersey. The funding is really up in the air,” said Bierman.

PHS students, for their part, are excited about the potential for an all-electric fleet in the future.

“[The current seats] are often ripped and uncomfortable — and they can’t clean them either,” said Griffin Short ’27, who rides a regular bus to school. “The engine noise, you can just hear so much. It’s really distracting and especially early in the morning, it [makes] it hard to focus. Then, obviously it’s much better for the environment using an electric vehicle than gas-powered.”

# PHS works to bring courtyards and lower basin back to life

Joy Chen, MULTIMEDIA CO-EDITOR  
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The Courtyard

From left to right: Andrew Rivera ’25, Elizabeth Chorbá ’25, Julia McGoldrick ’26, Bhavya Yaddanapuddi ’25, and Arnold Zacarias ’26 prepare soil for a garden bed.

In 2023, Princeton Mayor Mark Freda, Board of Education members, and PHS staff and students gathered in PHS courtyard to celebrate the completion of a multi-year revitalization effort, with new gardens and space for activities such as reading or yoga. However, the project never quite reached the level of engagement that was hoped for.

Then, in 2024 former PHS Science Supervisor Dr. Joy Barnes-Johnson received a climate literacy grant to revitalize the courtyards. This year, physics teacher Dr. Insu Yi and several other faculty members and PHS students are using the grant to clean up the courtyard and restore the gardens and research activity.

“The greenhouse was used a little bit for the horticulture class, and the courtyard for research. But they weren’t in great shape, let’s put it that way,” said Yi. “I began getting involved in a team that was formed based on our district grant. [The] initiative was to turn the ... courtyards into spaces for everyone — meaning classes, community groups, even outside groups — but most of the time we spent on cleaning up.”

Yi was initially hesitant to include PHS students, though he eventually began recruiting through his research and physics classes. In the future, he hopes to also include ESL and special education classes.

“I’m really interested in turning something as simple as a garden into a science project. For example, we have solar panels, but the solar panel is placed in the wrong way, so it doesn’t get sun[light],” said Yi. “I calculated with students what angle we should [have] from the horizon to the solar panels inclination, which we calculated to be about 30 degrees.”

The project has now grown to include several organizations. This includes a

Generation Green team led by Dr. Andrea Dinan, director of the IDEAS center and community service programs at PHS. The team uses the courtyard as a way to teach elementary school students about sustainability, and the collaboration of the PHS facilities and custodial staff.

“From a logistical standpoint, if you want to transport 60 bags of soil to the courtyard, you have to navigate it through the school building to get into there. The spaces had kind of fallen into a little disrepair, so there was a lot of cleaning that happened,” said Jacqueline Katz, PHS’s current Science Supervisor. “We [worked] with facilities and custodians to help us move some of the trash.”

Katz hopes that the courtyards can continue to be accessible to PHS students in the future, whether for research projects or educational initiatives.

“We have some students interested in fruit trees, so we’re going to try to bring fruit trees into the space. And we have a student interested in vertical gardening, so he’s going to build some vertical gardens up in the greenhouse,” said Katz.

PHS students recently celebrated the work they’ve already accomplished at a recent sustainability symposium at Monmouth University.

“It was really exciting. We got a chance to have a conversation with Tammy Murphy, who’s the governor’s wife, and she mentioned us in her speech, which was surprising and exciting,” said Raya Kondakindi ’26, a student involved in the project. “We got to communicate with people with similar sustainability goals, and it was a really engaging experience to talk with people who had experience in areas we’re looking into.”



The Lower Basin

The PHS wet meadow basin, currently in process of restoration.

As PHS students pass by the lower basin near the tennis courts, the bare patch of land is often overlooked. However, a new restoration project led by the Friends of Herrontown Woods (FOHW) and PHS students aims to bring the basin back to life.

The basin was first planted with turf grass to help reduce flooding in the area, and was later overplanted with native upland prairie vegetation in an attempt to transition the basin into a prairie-like ecosystem. However, due to the poor environmental conditions, the prairie system didn’t form, and the basin was instead dominated by invasive species.

FOHW submitted a project proposal last summer for the wet meadow basin in response to Princeton Public School’s request for plant care in the area. They are now working with the PHS environmental science class to restore the basin and re-establish native species in the wet meadow.

“We provide support. They provide us with an orderly opportunity to understand that invasive versus native [plants], and what a wet prairie is,” said James Smirk, an environmental science teacher at PHS.

The July contract grants FOHW around \$6,000 for upkeep, workshops at PHS, and new signage around the basin.

The restoration process began with the removal of invasive species, including plantain weeds, and in the coming months will proceed to the over planting of native grasses like little bluestem, soft rush, and ironweed, and various wildflowers. Smirk estimates that a self-propagating basin is still around 20 years away.

Until then, the basin will be maintained through a partnership between FOHW and PHS’s environmental science classes, who use it as a resource for learning.

“Before, I didn’t really know a lot of wetlands and how important they are to nature, and just in general to us,” said Amelie Kraft ’26, a student in Smirk’s environmental science class. “This class has definitely opened me to that, [and] I have a lot more knowledge about wetlands [and] preserves.”

PHS students play an active part in collecting ecological data and conducting their own experiments. This data—including information on native species’ distribution and location—will contribute to a long-term database helping track restoration efforts and biodiversity in the area.

“[The] student role is always going to be data driven,” said Smirk. “We’re [going to] collect data on invertebrates, because [they] are a good indicator for the overall health of the system.”

The basin project is a smaller part of the large sustainability goal throughout Princeton, which is to build an Emerald necklace made up of interconnected green spaces and trails.

“We would like to see that [the] emerald necklace has a component that every school is connected to,” said Smirk. “We want to build a green pathway through every property that eventually connects.”

Though vision for the emerald necklace in physical connection between nature in Princeton, Stephen Hiltner, the president of FOHW, emphasized the importance of a connection between nature and people.

“I’m hoping [the project] will spark an interest in students to start getting to know nature and all the tremendous diversity — nature is very complex, and for some people, that’s intimidating, but for me, it’s fascinating. If you love something, you want to find out as much as you can about it. I’m hoping to spark some of that,” said Hiltner.



# Mercer County Technical School Student Profiles

Avantika Palayekar, STAFF WRITER  
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## Alex Riera ’25, horticulture program



photo: Nick Sakowski  
Riera arranges a bouquet of flowers

Alex Riera ’25 enrolled in Mercer County Technical School’s (MCTS) horticulture and turf care management program at the suggestion of her mother, who thought that it aligned well with her interests in nature and the outdoors. Riera, who will be graduating from the 2-year program in June, is now glad she enrolled.

“Taking care of plants or growing them... [it] does help you mentally. I’ve had an experience when we were planting tomato seeds, and we had these containers filling in the soil. I just remember it felt really satisfying,” said Riera.

“The program prepares around 20 students annually for careers in landscape and agriculture-industries—helping with everything from securing horticulture internships to technical skills.

“[We use] equipment like mowers, turf riders, string trimmers, weed whackers... we [also] identify plants and weeds... and how to get rid of them. And we’re introduced to different ways to get rid

of them, like pesticides or using bugs, for example, [which] benefits the plants and is a better way of getting rid of them,” said Riera.

Riera’s favorite part, however, has been entering horticulture competitions and conventions around the state with a team of two other students from MCTS.

“[For] the Monmouth State convention, we had to do a [presentation] on soil pH, soil levels, and the importance of NPK (nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium). The first time I was introduced to it, I [thought] I would never [be able to] do it and I wouldn’t be able to memorize these scripts... [my instructor] was willing to help me through that and gave me a lot of time to practice. It’s something I never imagined I could do,” said Riera.

Riera only attends MCTS on Friday afternoons this year. In the morning Riera has classes at PHS, and in the afternoons (with the expectation of Friday) Riera is employed as a florist at McCaffrey’s as a part of MCTS’s internship program.

“It was a long process, but I got [the internship]. They make sure that the coordinator comes to check on me if everything’s okay [or] if I have any concerns. And I’m like, ‘No, I’m doing well. This is a great experience, and I’m very grateful to be in it,’” said Riera.

Riera is also involved in Future Farmers of America, an organization that supports education in agriculture. Riera developed the agenda for the organization’s 2024-25 programs and sold over 100 holiday wreaths with the organization.

This fall, Riera will enroll in Rutgers’ horticulture program, a dream that she says was made possible with the support of MCTS. In particular, she plans to explore her passion for horticulture therapy.

“I’ve had so many great experiences [at MCTS], and I’ve learned so much about horticulture,” said Riera. “In my [college] essay, I wrote about my experience at [MCTS]. It really made a huge impact on me.”

This is a great experience, and I’m very grateful to be in it.

## David Lux-Beteta ’26, auto program



photo: Charley Hu

Beteta splits his day between auto work at MCTS and schoolwork at PHS

David Lux Beteta ’26 is enrolled in three automotive programs at MCTS: Diesel Technology, Automotive Technology, and Auto Collision Technology. Through MCTS, he’s learned how to assess damage, repair vehicles, secure internships, and use tools and equipment found in real-world auto shops.

Beteta has been fascinated with cars since his childhood, and recalls deciding to go into the automotive industry after watching the Fast and Furious films as a child.

“You would think it gets frustrating... but it’s something that I’ve always wanted to do, and I enjoy it. The rush of ideas in your head... just disappears, and you just kind of lock into the project that you’re doing — that’s what I found myself getting into,” said Beteta.

Beteta, like many other MCTS students, juggles both in-class instruction and a paid internship at a local auto shop, which he also receives school credit for.

“There’s a range from staying in the classroom — doing paperwork, [filling] orders — to in the shop, [where] we do things like den repairs, spraying primers using the paint booth, [and] sanding using pneumatic technology, which is air-driven technology,” said Beteta.

For the past few months, Beteta has been working on his project for the SkillsUSA championship, the final-stage of a year-long competition designed to showcase talented students from technical schools across the country. The competition requires students to design a project and complete various technical skills in front of a panel of judges.

“I made a custom snap-on toolbox. [I] did all these different custom designs, custom paint — everything,” said Beteta. “I worked from A to Z on the entire thing. The only thing that [my instructor] helped me on was the initial design, but the rest of it was completely my work that took about a month in total.”

Beteta credits MCTS for having both experienced, thoughtful instructors and an excellent environment. His program has around 20 people, which contributes to a tight-knit community.

“The people... have a lot of character [and] a lot of morals. On the first day, there was no awkwardness. It was like we already knew each other. We just went into it, started doing stuff. There was that excitement in the air,” said Beteta.

Beteta hopes that the instruction, internships, and hands-on learning from MCTS will prepare him for a career in automotive technology.

“I plan on going into the army, and then I’ll go into post secondary schooling... for technology, where I can learn both the business aspect of it and [bring] the automotive [knowledge],” said Beteta. “Hopefully, I can take a shot later on in life, have enough money, and completely fulfill my dream.”

The people... have a lot of character [and] a lot of morals.

## PHS Profile: Renee Szporn

Rohan Srivastava and Fangwu Yu,  
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

As co-president of the PHS teachers’ union, advisor to the Science Olympiad club, former Hebrew and chemistry teacher, and current special education teacher, Renee Szporn’s résumé spans 40 years and multiple careers. However, education has remained a constant throughout.

“I love learning, and I want to share my love of learning with others,” said Szporn. “I remember from a very young age lining up my dolls and playing school. I always wanted to be a teacher.”

Szporn, at her parents’ request, majored in Chemistry, though she struggled to find jobs after graduation. After brief stints as a chemistry teacher and a Hebrew teacher, Szporn decided to pursue special education.

“At the time that I was looking for work, there weren’t a lot of science [education] jobs. Teachers were treated with a lot more respect — they had a lot more autonomy in their classroom — and [they] weren’t leaving education, so there were no openings,” said Szporn. “All my friends were telling me, ‘Well, if you get certification in special education, you’ll get a job,’ and that’s what happened.”

In New Jersey, special education teachers must receive certification, accommodate students’ Individualized Educational Plans (IEPs), and adapt to students’ varying needs.

“I’m very glad, but it’s tough. I’ll give an example: here’s Hamlet. I have four different editions. I have kids who need [a larger copy] because of dyslexia. They’ll need a larger print, and then they can rearrange and cut out the letters. Then I have students

that have major comprehension problems, so then I’ll have [a translated copy] ... and then I have kids that really can’t read. And then we do stick figures,” said Szporn.

For Szporn, one of the most rewarding parts of her job is seeing the impact of her efforts. Her special education students have gone on to work on Wall Street, publish books, and attend Harvard Medical School as postdoctoral students.

“I’m making a difference with special education. I’m really helping the kids. I’m glad I made the switch, but it was difficult. I think a lot of people don’t respect special education teachers. I think a lot of people think that we’re less than when we are more than,” said Szporn.

Evan Kang ’25, a student in Szporn’s English IV In-Class Resource Program (ICRP) class, is one student impacted by Szporn. A self-described “introvert,” Kang emphasized how Szporn’s combination of humor and passion has helped him open up.

“[Szporn] makes me laugh every day,” said Kang. “I applied to 26 colleges, and she’s like, ‘You’re crazy.’ I’m like, ‘I’m going to commit somewhere, but I haven’t done it yet.’ And ... she’s like — ‘You’re gonna be the one who makes me want to retire.’ We like to joke around.”

Szporn also serves as one of three co-presidents of the Princeton Regional Educators Association (PREA), a union that represents the interests of all of the teachers in the Princeton Public School district, including salary, health benefits, working conditions, and teaching policies. Just as with special education, Szporn’s position as union president was not originally planned.



photo: Emily Kim

Szporn introduces a video about King Arthur and His Knights of the Round Table.

“[I was told] by my father to never volunteer ... but someone came up to me and said, ‘You used to be a debater [and] you speak very well. Would you like to be in the union?’” said Szporn. “And like a fool, I said yes, and I moved up in the ranks. I had no intention of ever being a union president and then I’m co-president.”

Although she has left a career in chemistry behind, Szporn has kept that part of her life alive by serving as the advisor for the PHS Science Olympiad team for the past 20 years.

“I’m with my nerds [at PHS Science Olympiad]. I don’t like to call them that, but I love them. The kids are so inventive and dedicated and driven and we have a

good time, and I just adore them. I love it,” said Szporn.

Throughout PHS, whether in her special education classrooms, at Science Olympiad meetings, or among her colleagues in PREA, Szporn has developed a reputation as a person who is all-in for the causes she believes in.

“[Szporn] is really smart — she cares a lot about her students. She demands a lot of them, but she also gives them the support that they need to reach those goals,” said Jennifer Bigioni, Educational Media Specialist and Szporn’s colleague in PREA. “[Szporn] is flamboyant, she’s funny, she’s a justice warrior — she’s a very dynamic person.”



# TOWER MULTIMEDIA

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# OPINIONS

## Lunch is for eating, not cooking

Aryan Singla, ONLINE CO-EDITOR  
Asha Nag, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The lunch bell rings at 11:33, and fourth period ends as hundreds of students pour out of classrooms and into the halls of Princeton High School. Some students head to the library, while others head to the guidance office. Some just walk laps — earbuds in, heads down, skipping lunch for the third, maybe fourth day in a row. It is not a diet. It is not a protest. It is not always a choice.

For too many students, lunch has become optional. Not because they are not hungry — they are — but because 35 minutes is not enough time to eat, finish an essay, ask a teacher a question, and review for the quiz they have next period. In the past few years, there has been an unhealthy exaggeration of high school performance and how it affects the futures of these students. Because of this, when given the choice between nourishing the body and “getting ahead” in their studies, the choice seems trivial.

This is not just a PHS problem. According to a 2020 national survey by Yale University, 75 percent of high school students report having negative feelings toward school. The general sentiment seems to be that these students feel negatively towards school because of apathy or laziness. The truth, though, is that these students are under copious amounts of stress, driving them to have these negative feelings.

A New York Times article written by Tim Donahue stated that “we [as a society] have pushed high school students into maximizing every part of their days and nights.” Students feel like they need to do more and more in order to stay afloat. Self-care takes a backseat because students feel like they need to do so much in order to distinguish themselves. They need to get perfect grades, take the hardest classes, be a part of every extracurricular under the sun. Of course, under all of this pressure, physical needs become an afterthought.

The way students cope with this stress is not always visible — but it is often unhealthy. Skipping meals, sleeping

“The way students cope with this stress is not always visible — but it is often unhealthy.”

in fragments, and studying at midnight. It becomes a game of sacrifice: what can be dropped to make room for everything else? For too many, the answer is lunch. A study from the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health found that students given less than 20 minutes to eat consumed significantly less food and nutrients. When the body is not given the nutrients it needs to function properly, productivity drops. This, in turn, harms students’ academic performance.

When students are skipping meals just to keep up — when they feel they have to choose between eating and succeeding — something is wrong with the system, not the student.

We need to stop pretending that this is normal.

Lunch should not be a luxury. It should not be treated as expendable. It is time — real, uninterrupted time — to eat, decompress, exist as something other than a GPA.

So the questions posed are, how do we take back our lunch periods? How do we take our lives back from the grind that academia has instilled in us? There is no single fix, but there are places to start — both as individuals and as a school.

At a school-wide level, the goal should not just be more time. It should be better use of the time we already have. Lunch needs to be protected. No required meetings, no mandatory makeups, unless a student chooses them. The school can also help by making lunch more accessible — a

pre-order system or even a simple form could cut down the lines that push students away. And if we are serious about student wellness, the message needs to be loud and clear: eating and resting are not optional, they are essential. Teachers and administrators should say that out loud. Not just in emails during Mental Health Week, but every day, in how they schedule, how they speak, and what they prioritize.

But change cannot just come from the top. It starts

with what we do, too. That might mean bringing food from home instead of skipping lunch. Taking ten minutes to sit down and actually eat. Using free periods to slow down instead of squeezing in more. Outside of school, it means setting boundaries — around sleep, around work, around the pressure to always do more. And maybe most of all, it means shifting

how we think. Getting the perfect grades and getting into a top college are not the most important things in your life. More than that, needing rest does not mean you are failing. Taking care of yourself is not weakness — it is proof that you are still trying to live, even in a system that tells you to do the opposite.

So when the lunch bell rings at 11:33, you do not need to run. You can stop. You can eat. You can let that be enough.



photo: Julia Li

Ksenia Petukh '27 eats lunch and studies in the IDEAS Center.

## Microplastics are a macro problem

Rohan Srivastava and Fangwu Yu,  
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Walk into any grocery store in America, and you’re bound to find shelves full of ultra-processed foods wrapped in shiny plastic packaging. Ultra-processed goods, products that are prepared using industrial methods, are often high in sugar, salt, and fat. For these reasons, many health professionals and critics on social media have taken to advocating for consumption of “whole” foods such as fruits and vegetables. Although reaching for an apple is decidedly healthier than grabbing a bag of chips, both foods can be sources of a less-discussed health threat — microplastics.

Microplastics are defined as small pieces of plastic less than five millimeters long, and result from the natural degradation of plastic products, such as packaging, synthetic textiles, and paint. Since the coinage of the term “microplastics” in a 2004 University of Plymouth study, its negative effects on marine organisms have been well-established. However, microplastics aren’t just a problem for our environment — they have begun to find their way into the foods that we consume on a daily basis.



photo: Julia Li

Izzah Memon '27 eats a bag of chips during break.

For example, a 2020 study by Catania University discovered that carrots and apples contained high levels of microplastics, likely due to absorption of microplastic-contaminated water. Additionally, according to a National Institutes of Health study from 2023, tea bags made with certain plastics can release billions of very small microplastics into cups of tea. Marine organisms consumed by humans can also have thousands of larger microplastics, and any foods stored in plastic containers contain thousands

of plastic particles of all sizes. When consumed, these microplastics have been shown to mimic hormones, messenger chemicals within the body. One study from the American Chemical Society found that a gene called TRPV4 was over-expressed due to microplastics acting as growth factors, leading to respiratory issues. Microplastics can contribute to an increased risk of cancer, neurological diseases, and respiratory issues. They also exacerbate pre-existing medical issues, or activate latent disease-causing genes in the body.

In particular, many of the microplastics in humans arise from a process known as biomagnification. Because of pollution, there are many plastic particles floating in the ocean. Small organisms eat these plastics, and they are then consumed by predators. The plastics move up in the food chain, becoming more and more concentrated in the tissue of the apex predators. When a human proceeds to eat this animal, they receive a portion of the many microplastics present in the ocean. Biomagnification occurs in a similar sense for land animals like chickens and cows, which often consume contaminated plants. In all cases, the original source of microplastics are man-made materials that pollute the environment.

This is not a problem that can be solved through selection in what we eat, but instead needs to be solved at its origin. We fill our oceans with trash, destroying the single geographic feature that gave rise to all life. As a society, we need to change to save our planet, our oceans, our marine life, and ourselves. Large societal shift begins with small, personal steps. Right here at PHS, students can make a meaningful impact in the fight against microplastic pollution. From the cafeteria to the vending machines, we make daily choices that either contribute to or help combat this growing health and environmental crisis.

If you want to stay away from these life-threatening, cancer-causing particles, start by putting your water bottles in the recycling. The next time you go to the cafeteria or Tiger Café, choose items with less plastic packaging. Bring your own reusable water bottle instead of purchasing plastic beverage bottles from the vending machine. Even small changes like using your own reusable utensils or avoiding plastic straws count. These changes may seem insignificant, but together, we can reduce sources of microplastics that end up in our food, and in our bodies.

## CHEERS

### STUFF WE LIKE

KICKSTART energy drink

TAKE YOUR CHILD TO WORK DAY

COLD BREW

SZA & Kendrick Lamar GRAND NATIONAL TOUR

USC MIND ice bucket challenge

### STUFF WE DON'T

HUMID air

AP SEASON

EXPENSIVE review books

SCHOOL TISSUES

## JEERS

LITTER

RUNNING OUT of pencil lead

Nose BLEEDS

PERFORMATIVE ACTIVISM



# Why inclusive initiatives are failing in the academic space

Chloe Zhao, OPINIONS CO-EDITOR

“Stop GENDER DISCRIMINATION in debate,” reads the cover slide of the hit 2024 Instagram post by the Debate Hotline. This particular post collected (at the time of writing this article) a whopping 2,164 likes and 247 shares, making it probably one of the most notable moments of feminist activism in the high school debate space in recent years.

Any debater with an Instagram account would likely recall the viral impact of this post. Across my feed, debaters of all genders shared the post, creating a powerful moment of solidarity. This moment mirrored activism in other competitive academic spaces — from the #WomenInSTEM movement addressing gender gaps in mathematics competitions to the Women’s Chess

Initiative highlighting similar disparities in chess. Nonprofit organizations have proliferated across these disciplines, each focused on promoting gender equality in their respective activities. In debate specifically, feminism has become perhaps an integral movement. Yet despite this widespread activism, gender disparities persist across all these academic spaces. In mathematics, women still represent less than twenty-five percent of International Mathematical Olympiad participants. In chess, women account for just eleven percent of rated players worldwide. In debate, the disparity remains since the viral post. This raises a critical question that transcends any single discipline: Is our current approach to addressing gender discrimination in academic competitions actually effective?

To approach an answer, we can examine the Debate Hotline post and how the debate space handles inclusive activism. The post features quoted testimonies from female debaters describing misogynistic social encounters they have experienced: “At the Harvard tournament, I advanced

in out-rounds. When a male friend of mine found out, he congratulated me by saying ‘have my babies,’” recounted one anonymous submission. Beyond these accounts, the post presents three key statistics: women are 18.8 percent less likely to win Varsity elimination rounds, 30 percent more likely to quit debate altogether, and notably absent

from half of all national circuit finals. They end with a call-to-action urging debaters to sign a petition that demands the NSDA to implement mandatory judge bias training.

The message of the post reflects the message of the overall feminist movement in debate: biased judging leads to female debaters losing rounds, which drives them out of the activity, ultimately hurting their academic and life opportunities. This rhetoric also follows through in Fem-Kritiks, a popular argument (usually made by female debaters) that urges the judge to drop the opposing team (usually male), and for the opposing team to forfeit the

debate.” In the results section, Yi and Nie continues that “some possible causes of this gap result from a female debater’s environment: potential bias in the amount of resources allocated to competitors by coaches, the gender-hostile environment of a team, or the effect of the perceived stereotype of the activity, to name a few examples.”

This pattern extends beyond debate and into other competitive academic spaces. Chess, for instance, has implemented structural solutions by creating women-only sections and tournaments since 1927. Yet despite these institutional changes, the gender disparity in chess still exists today. The underlying cause mirrors what we see in debate, which is a hostile social climate. Female chess players consistently report implicit exclusion from the broader chess community, which pushes them out from participating. In many academic environments, female participants describe being excluded from study groups, having their contributions minimized, and facing heightened scrutiny of their abilities. These experiences, not competition results alone, ultimately drive many talented women away despite their proven capabilities.

Although misogyny and other forms of inequity is a systemic problem in academic spaces, we need to stop focusing on that — however counterintuitive it sounds. Exclusively deeming the issue to be systemic is how we arrived at our current position. It removes responsibility from the individual. If you are someone who cares about and wishes to solve inequality in the academic space, it is time to address the issue on a personal level: how you deal with and react to hostile situations. Have you stood up for others? Have you excluded team members from resources? Have you actively denounced crude, inappropriate behavior? Have you stopped perpetrators from participating in leadership?

I’m not demeaning current feminist initiatives. Their focus on institutional change remains important. But perhaps we need to focus elsewhere; perhaps our activism has become too copy-paste, too shallow, too performative; perhaps we need to look elsewhere, deeper, within ourselves. Our efforts must address the social climate that shapes our activity from within, not just the institutional structures above. While continuing to advocate for structural change, let’s recognize that creating truly inclusive spaces begins with us.

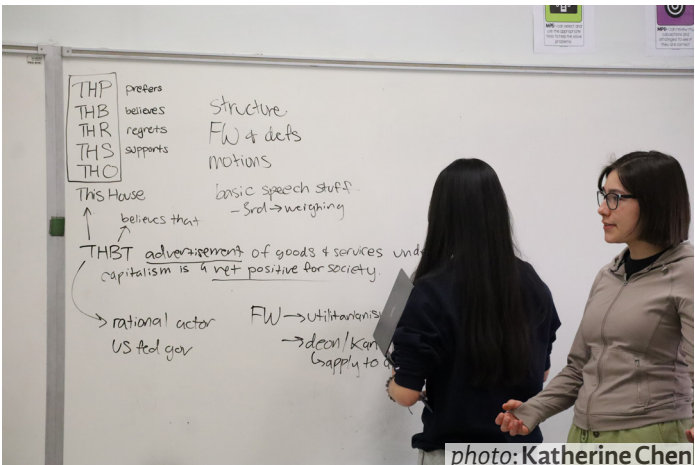


photo: Katherine Chen

Jessica Lee '26 and Elif Cam '26 teach the basics of debate to new club members.

round. This is done in order to even out the win-loss disparity by addressing judge bias.

The problem with this widespread rhetoric is that it is only partially true; a closer look at Yi and Nie’s 2020 study “An Empirical Study of Gender Differences in Competitive High School Debate” reveals something crucial. In Varsity rounds, the study found “a large difference in win rates between teams of different gender compositions, with female-female teams 17.1 percent less likely and male-female teams 10.0 percent less likely to win a debate round against male-male teams.” However, they also found “no gender gap in win rates for novice debaters.”

If the thesis of female push-out being due to judge bias is to be believed, why is there no sex disparity in novice round results? The study follows this discovery by suggesting that “the disparity does not occur from innate entry ability differences, but rather appears alongside experience in

“Our efforts must address the social climate that shapes our activity from within, not just the institutional structures above.”

## PHS SPEAKS OUT

### WHAT IS YOUR FAVORITE STUDY SNACK?

Stephanie Liao and Chloe Zhao, OPINIONS CO-EDITORS



“IT HAS TO BE KINDER BUENOS. I’M A SUGAR FIEND.”

- BRIDGET MCALOON '27



“I JUST LIKE TO CHEW GUM ... I THINK IT HELPS ME CONCENTRATE.”

- PRIYA BAKSHI '25



“I LIKE TO EAT CHIPS WHILE I’M STUDYING ... DORITOS, LAYS.”

- IAN LEE '28



“RED BULL ... BECAUSE IT’S AN ENERGY DRINK AND IT HELPS ME STUDY.”

- LILE KAPANADZE '26

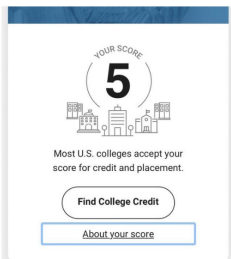
photos: Stephanie Liao and Chloe Zhao



Tower Multimedia Presents...

# ACE YOUR AP AT PHS!

How to Prepare for APs - Teacher Insider's Edition







# Stop putting education in budget cuts

Editorial

President Trump’s recent funding cuts to colleges and public schools has hit especially hard here in Princeton, a town internationally recognized for its high standards of education. The government has cut many research grants at Princeton University as well as colleges and universities across the U.S., and it is currently threatening to pull funding immediately from public K-12 schools if they do not eliminate diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs. The shutting down of the DOE impacts Princeton in various ways. The DOE enforces the implementation of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (commonly referred to as a 504 plan), a federal civil rights law that protects the rights of individuals with disabilities in programs receiving federal funding. In particular, Section 504 formally outlines accommodations and support services for students with disabilities, such as allocating extra time for testing. Without 504 plans, students who need these plans may not be given them, leading to them not succeeding as much as they could because their right to accommodations was taken away. These decisions have already faced mass pushback from many in the nation, including in Princeton. Hundreds of students, professors, and Princeton community members congregated by the Princeton Public Library on April 5, partaking in the national wave of protests on “Hands Off Day,” with over 1,200 other rallies all over the country. Gatherers protested Elon Musk and Trump’s efforts to pull funding from various government initiatives, such as Medicaid, Social Security, and the Department of Education (DOE). With these developments, access to education is becoming a privilege and democracy is deprioritized. Since

1979, the DOE has fought for students’ rights, advocating for inclusion of female, disabled, LGBTQ, and all minority students. With the Trump administration slashing 50% of its workforce, the DOE is likely to fade away as a central authority in maintaining standards for equitable and quality education. Every school is impacted, especially those in rural or under-resourced communities. If education is no longer a civil right, high educational standards are now a privilege reserved for the highest tax brackets and the wealthiest zip codes. By trading educational standards in the name of “government efficiency,” we are quickly letting go of the American principle of opportunity and upward mobility. Our education system should strive to dismantle systemic barriers. The Trump administration’s policies certainly will make it so that inequality will become institutionalized in the one place that ought to provide an equitable launchpad to the real world. While some students receive shiny, new, updated textbooks and modern labs, others that are less fortunate will be struggling to learn with outdated materials and crumbling infrastructure. The social inequalities that fester unchecked in society will bleed into schools and dismantle the educational promise of equal opportunity. If we are serious about upholding our ideals of equal opportunity, and if schools are meant to be a stepping stone to our future, education can not be relegated to a gamble. To the government: thank you for proving to us that you are willing to jeopardize the education of millions of capable, smart, and ambitious American students. Thank you for proving that you do not care for improving equality. We hear you loud and clear.

# What we can learn from controversial figures

Marc-Andre Morel, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

It is well-accepted that the sense of American security collapsed along with the World Trade Center back in 2001. From a country dazed and confused, the War on Terror began, and, soon enough, our generation was born: a population hyper-aware of and sensitive to instances of terrorism. The September 11 attacks certainly dwarfed any instance of non-war violence that the United States had seen in the preceding decades — but terrorism did not start in the twenty-first century. Many students may remember learning about John Brown, who killed several pro-slavery expansionists and attempted a raid on Harpers Ferry to further the cause of abolition. Brown became a Union martyr in the years following his execution, and even today, many don’t necessarily deem him a terrorist. To better understand Brown’s case, consider the definition of terrorism: an act of violence against non-combatants for a political aim. Non-combatants are everyday civilians who are not directly partaking in hostilities, while combatants are the actors in the conflict. Besides a simple semantic separation, this implies a distinction between the right to protection held by each group. Supposedly, the United States conducts

war — an action justified in that it kills people who chose to fight — and its enemies conduct terrorism — an action unjustified in that it kills people who chose nothing. Brown never killed a truly “neutral” person, neither from his perspective nor ours today, because for both, to defend slavery constitutes such an abhorrent belief that it becomes violent by nature. But for the wider view of his day, abolition had become so polarized as a political issue that “neutrality” in its matter meant simply not engaging in physical violence for the cause. Therefore, complications arise when evaluating who truly counts as a combatant. Somewhere between John Brown’s raid and the September 11 attacks may lie someone like Ted Kaczynski, otherwise known as the Unabomber. In Kaczynski’s manifesto, he detailed his fear that modern technological advancements would trigger a world without nature, human freedom and dignity. By mailing bombs to university professors conducting STEM research, airline executives, and advertisers, Kaczynski acted upon his extreme political opinions. With knowledge on the extent of global warming, Kaczynski might have very well argued that the everyday choices of Americans to use ecological resources such as gas and electricity and water, made them combatants against the Earth itself, which he defended.



graphic: Katherine Chen

The question of who is a combatant has come to a larger stage in the trial of Luigi Mangione. Even without any legal determination as to whether or not he murdered United Healthcare CEO Mark Thompson, Mangione has become a folk hero for his alleged action. To his defenders, the insurance CEO is responsible for the violent action of causing people to suffer unmanageable healthcare fees, whereas Luigi, if guilty, is only a victimized soldier in the class warfare that the rich started. The prosecution, meanwhile, sees a man murdered for doing his legal job and a terrorist responsible for that murder. What made these cases compelling and generally socially accepted? Figures such as John Brown, Ted Kaczynski, and Luigi Mangione based their actions off of well researched, passionately defended ideological positions that tapped into public grievances. Their targets were not random but individuals seen as combatants responsible for systemic issues, whether it be slavery, the degeneration of humanity, or healthcare inequality. Their actions were not intended to instill fear into the general public but rather a distinct resistance towards a combatant. In a community like Princeton, where student activism is often passionate and socially conscious, it’s important to ask: how do we define resistance, and where do we draw the line between protest and violence? While we don’t condone acts of harm, we can reflect on the motivations behind historical and controversial figures to understand how they were able to make people so deeply moved by injustice. PHS activists can learn that effective change comes not just from emotion, but from informed, strategic action that taps into shared concerns and presents compelling narratives.

# 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.

## Letter and Submission Policy

All letters and articles are welcome for consideration. Please e-mail all submissions to phstowerseniorieditors@gmail.com. The editors reserve the rights to alter letters for length and to edit articles. The Editors-in-Chief takes full responsibility for the content of this paper.

## The Tower Online

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# Interviews with Princeton High School aviation enthusiasts

Aritra Ray, MANAGING EDITOR  
Atharva Desai, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

## Tyler Cenci '25

### Tell us about your journey to getting a pilot’s license.

I started flying when I was in sophomore year. I soloed a plane, which means I flew by myself, for the first time on my 16th birthday, which was in 2023. Since then, I’ve worked towards, my rating [and] my license, [and] I just got it in January 2025. So, it’s taken almost two years exactly to go from no flying at all to getting a license.

It’s definitely been challenging, but it’s also been really rewarding because there’s a lot of things you need to learn.



### Who have been your biggest mentors when you learned to fly?

Over the course of my training, I’ve had three people that have been mentoring me.

Two of them have been my flight instructors ... I worked with [my flight instructors] Josh [Nunn] and Mike [Lenner] to train and to build up my skills. And then the third person would be my dad. My dad’s also a pilot, so he’s taught me a lot of stuff about aircraft systems and airspace and all of the knowledge based items that I need to learn. He’s been a great help and inspiration to me ‘cause I probably wouldn’t have had the idea to fly if it weren’t for him.

### What are some of your craziest or best experiences flying?

One that just comes to mind immediately is this thing in New York City on the Hudson River ... it’s called the Hudson River Corridor. This corridor is right over the right over the Hudson River in, otherwise really controlled airspace for Newark and JFK and LaGuardia.

But there’s this little corridor over the river that is uncontrolled. So as a private pilot, I can fly in there and I can go see the buildings so touring the Hudson River in a plane [is] probably one of the best experiences that I’ve had. The challenges of maneuvering there have been really fun and enjoyable to go through.

You fly between 1,013 hundred feet. That places you above all of the obstructions bridges wise, but it places you below like the top of the World Trade Center and the Empire State Building, so it’s a really cool perspective to fly alongside the buildings.

### What are your future plans? Do you plan on continuing on your pilot journey and pursuing this further?

As a career, I want to become a commercial airline pilot. I’m committed to the Florida Institute of Technology for aviation. My major is Aeronautic Science and Flight. When I’m there, I’m going to get all of the rest of the ratings that I’ll need to become a commercial pilot. And hopefully once I’m out of college, I’ll work for airlines and then eventually make my way up to one of the big three airlines, which is United, Delta, or American. That’s my end goal.

## Shaurya Ranjan '27

### What do you do during Aviation Club meetings?

Sometimes, we have debates where people are split up into a pro and con side and then they debate it out and try to come to an agreement or a conclusion on an aviation topic. Sometimes, we have open discussions. We give them a prompt and everyone can share their ideas on it. Recently what we’ve started doing is having a “guess the cause of the crash” [activity] where we give them the facts of a crash, but we don’t tell them what happened or why. And it’s up to them to deduce what happened without looking it up.

My goal is for us to develop a community of people that have this interest in aviation or maybe [want] to have an interest in aviation and haven’t found a way to really connect to that yet. [I want to] create an open environment where everyone can sort of share their thoughts and opinions about this topic, and we all grow together as a community.



### What initially got you into podcasting about aviation?

In the summer after eighth grade, I didn’t really have anything to do in August. I knew that my passion for aviation was really strong ... Initially I thought about going into photography because that’s a big part of being an aviation enthusiast.

But with all the camera equipment and then learning all of it, it’s quite a process ... I realized that podcasting was an equally great way to share my thoughts on the aviation industry. And with photographs, you can’t really talk about history ... whereas with my podcast, I could dive into a lot more nuanced stuff.

### What is planespotting and what got you interested in that?

Basically, you go to a place where you would see planes very frequently ... Plane spotting is basically the hobby of going to a location near the airport — in JFK, there’s Rockaway Boulevard, which is right behind two of the runways — you can watch planes as they land, get some good pictures, [and] identify the aircraft. One of the fun games that I like to play while plane spotting is like, I see an aircraft and I try to guess what it is, and as it gets closer, I start to realize what it is.

I think plane spotting is such a unifying thing in the aviation enthusiast community because almost all of us have done it at some point ... If you’re really interested in the mechanics of it and the physics, you really get to see that when you’re playing spotting, and I think that’s a really gratifying experience.

### Do you plan to continue pursuing aviation?

A lot of people’s minds immediately go to me wanting to be a pilot. I think being a pilot is a great career option, but for me, I think my interests and skills lie elsewhere ... I would love to go into making the aircraft.

Managing the engineers that are making it [and] being a part of the team that’s on the frontier of new aerospace discoveries. I like being an engineer in the aerospace industry would be a really great experience [and] I’d really be on the forefront of innovation.

graphics and  
photos: Emily Kim



## Anatomy of a Plane

Kylie Sek and Claire Tang, CO-EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

### Fighter Jet

Fighter jets are high-speed military aircrafts that are designed for air combat. They are equipped with various military-grade weapons and advanced maneuvering capabilities.

**Stabilizers:** Relatively large and aerodynamic horizontal and vertical stabilizers are located on the rear of the jet to enable maneuverability.

**Wings:** As fighter jets often fly at supersonic speeds, their wings are designed to be thin and triangle-shaped with short spans.

**Radome (cone tip of the plane):** Radomes are designed to protect an aircraft's radar antennas, increasing its ability to navigate and communicate.

**Cockpit:** Though the cockpits are pressurized, the pressure increases at intervals rather than continuously. They also have special pressure modes for combat to prevent sudden depressurization if the jet is struck.

**Landing Gear:** Unlike passenger planes that land at a g-force of around 1.3, jets land at g-forces up to 5.5, with the landing gear designed to sustain such extreme forces.

**Jet Engines:** Provides power for high-speed flights through expelling a high-speed jet of hot air backwards, propelling the aircraft forward.

### Passenger Plane

Cruising at an average of 6.6 miles above the earth, this type of plane is meant for transporting people and cargo across long distances. With a long, tube-shaped body, pressurized cabins, and noise-canceling insulation, they are designed to optimize passenger comfort and provide a safe means for transportation.

**Tail Fin:** A vertical stabilizer aligning aircraft with its direction of motion, stabilizing it through gusts of wind and other disturbances.

**Wings:** Designed to generate lift, wings are made of a curved top and flatter bottom, creating pressure differences that push the plane upwards.

**Cockpit:** Enclosed area containing flight instruments allowing the pilot to steer the plane. Its windows — designed to withstand bird strikes — are made of thicker, stronger glass than passenger windows.

**Landing Gear:** The undercarriage of an aircraft meant for absorbing and dissipating kinetic energy during landing, reducing the impact to the airframe. It includes wheels and tires, brakes, retraction mechanism, and struts.

## Around the World in 80 Ways: Unique Flights!

Maxime DeVico, STAFF WRITER

**Fastest plane:** The fastest plane in the world was unmanned. In 2004, the NASA X-43A flew at a speed of 9.6 Mach, which translates to about 7,366 miles per hour. The plane flew at that speed for 10–12 seconds above California.

**Longest non-commercial flight:** Robert Timm and John Cook piloted the longest flight ever recorded, flying for 64 days, 22 hours, and 19 minutes. Their journey began on December 4, 1958 and ended on February 7, 1959, when they landed at Harry Reid International Airport. One of the men would pilot the plane while the other rested, and they would refuel midair.

**Shortest commercial flight:** The shortest commercial flight goes from Westray to Papa Westray, two of the Orkney Islands in Scotland. Offered by Logan Air, the flight lasts 57 seconds to two minutes long depending how much wind there is. The reasoning behind taking a flight this short is because the only other option is to take a choppy and dangerous boat ride.

**Landing On a Beach:** The Barra airport in Scotland is unique because many flights are scheduled to land on the beach Traigh Mhor which happens during low tide. Workers have to ensure that the beach is dry enough before planes land to make sure the plane won't get stuck.

## Paving the Sky: Aviation Pioneers

Anaya Sinha, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

### Amelia Earhart

Born in 1897 in Atchison, Kansas, Earhart grew up with an adventurous spirit and a fascination with aviation that began after witnessing a stunt plane at a state fair. During World War I, she worked as a nurse's aid in Canada and she later studied aviation in California, where she earned her pilot's license in 1923, becoming only the 16th woman in the United States to do so. In 1932, Earhart became the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean. As her Lockheed Vega lifted off the runway, its crisp engine scorched the morning mist and began to carry her through the thick clouds. Earhart flew for nearly 15 hours, enduring fatigue, mechanical issues, and a variety of storms. Her red monoplane eventually carried her into the history books, accomplishing what few dared to attempt. In 1937, she attempted to circumnavigate the globe but her journey was cut short when her plane vanished over the Pacific. Her legacy, however, never faded. Today, Earhart isn't remembered for just where and how long she flew, but for how she made others believe they could reach just as far.

### The Wright Brothers - Orville and Wilbur

What does it take to lift human ambition off the ground? Raised in Dayton, Ohio, the Wright brothers grew up in a home filled with curiosity, books, and encouragement from their father, a bishop who nurtured their love of learning. They got their hands-on experience working at their repair shop, where they primarily repaired printing presses before shifting to bicycles. As their fascination with flight grew, so did their commitment. The Wrights learned how to design, test, and improve machines. Over time, their attention turned skyward. They refined wing shapes as they studied bird flight and tested several control systems, treating the vast sky like a problem they could solve. In 1903, after many years of trial and failure, their homemade aircraft lifted off the dry sand of Kitty Hawk, North Carolina. The flight lasted a mere 12 seconds, but opened an entirely new realm of possibilities for the skies. The Wright Brothers are remembered today as the inventors of the airplane, and proof that bold ideas, persistence, and two great minds working together can change the course of history.

### Bessie Coleman

Forbidden from flying schools in her own country, Bessie Coleman crossed an ocean and a language barrier to take to the skies. Coleman was born in 1892 in Texas, one of thirteen children in a working class Black American and Native American family. As she grew up in the segregated south, she helped support her household through various jobs before discovering her passion for aviation, a dream sparked by stories of World War I pilots. At the time, no American flight school would accept a woman of her background, so Coleman learned French, traveled to France, and attended the Caudron Brothers' School of Aviation in Le Crotoy. She learned to fly using a Nieuport 22 biplane. In 1921, she became the first Black and Native American woman to earn an international pilot's license. Upon returning to the United States, Coleman performed various daring stunts at airshows, gaining popularity as she used her platform to challenge restrictions and barriers in the aviation world. She quickly earned the nickname "Queen Bess" for her fearless airshow stunts, doing figure eights and dives that left crowds breathless. She dreamt of opening a flight school for aspiring Black aviators. In 1926, while training for a show, she died in a tragic plane crash at the age of 34, but her legacy soared far beyond the bounds of her own life. Bessie Coleman opened the skies to generations of pilots who had previously been advised to keep their feet planted firmly on the ground.



Musical variety at the spring choir concert

Asma Frough and Yunsheng Xu, STAFF WRITERS

As spring unfolded across Princeton, the halls of PHS choir classes were alive with the sound of preparation. Singers found their harmony as the choir groups performed their annual Spring Concert at the Performing Arts Center on April 24. A total of nine groups participated in the event, including five choral ensembles and four student-run a cappella groups.



PHS Choir performs at the Choir Spring Concert in the Performing Arts Center, accompanied by pianist and choir teacher Sarah Pelletier and conducted by Vincent Metallo.

This year, the program featured a variety of genres and styles, including pop, folk songs, and musical theater. The five choir classes performed folk songs in different languages while each ensemble and a cappella groups presented two selections. The concert also included international music, such as an Indian raga, an American spiritual, a Japanese folk song, an Italian pop, and a British song.

“We do a lot of experimenting with different styles, and that’s what makes it really interesting,” said Mia Dunlap ’26.

The singers started preparing for the concert around two months before the concert. The choir classes rehearsed for their performances during class or solo work with choir teachers Vincent Metallo and Sarah Pelletier while the student-run a cappella groups selected their own repertoire and rehearsed outside of school.

“We started preparing for the concert in mid to late February, choosing selections for all the groups and immediately diving into breaking them down and working on all the components,” said choir director Vincent Metallo.

The diversity among the songs excited the singers as they rehearsed and performed their musical journey through their songs.

“Through the preparation for this concert, I’ve learned variations in singing style that are included in [the] different signs that we are singing, [and] the different styles that we’re singing. It [has] expanded my skills in being able to sing,” said Benjamin Caswell Klein ’27.

The tight schedule and the lack of enough time had sometimes put the groups into challenges that they had to overcome.

“Consistency is key,” said Metallo. “Some days they sound great, and others, their voices are a little raspy or they’re not as focused. But we encourage them to always strive to take their performances to the next level.”

With much dedication and hard work, the PHS choir groups hoped that their audience came away from the concert feeling uplifted.

“I’m hoping that they feel inspired to learn more about the musical traditions that we [sang] for them [and] I hope they derive some joy from hearing our beautiful singers,” said Klein.

Besides highlighting the musical range of the PHS choir program, the concert also offered a space for students across grade levels and experience levels to perform, collaborate, and connect through music.

The resurgence of Polaroids

Maeve Walsh, STAFF WRITER

Photography has been around for more than two hundred years, capturing moments in time that are forever immortalized with a click and a flash. As technology evolves, cameras can now easily take high-resolution pictures that don’t require any effort whatsoever to develop or share. Editing and filtering apps are plentiful and can help photographers stylize and perfect any image. However, the resurgence of Polaroid cameras has sparked a throwback trend toward imperfect photography. The joy of Polaroid photography is based on its flaws, its spontaneity, and the fun of bringing back what’s old as new again.

Unlike professional cameras or phone cameras, Polaroid cameras are not super-accurate or predictable. Pictures often end up with odd lighting that creates high contrast between the subject and background. Because the photo cannot be edited, the camera captures the true essence of the moment. This type of unfiltered reality is so rare in today’s photography that Polaroids can be a refreshing break from the constant perfection we see on social media.

On social media many people often present false or misleading images of themselves. However with polaroids

people are able to be fun and creative without feeling the need of being judged. “Phones are boring, social media is so fake, but with Polaroids you can’t fake it,” said Viraaj Pasricha ’28.

Since the point is imperfection, people can grab their Polaroid camera and click away without worrying about the precise angle, lighting, background, or even their smile.

“You don’t immediately have to look at the photo so you’re not worried about if your hair looks bad or if you don’t like how you look in the photo,” said Phoebe Decker ’27.

Since the point is imperfection, people can grab their Polaroid camera and click away without worrying about the precise angle, lighting, background, or even their smile.

Polaroids are also a gratifying and different way to share and remember special moments. Our grandparents and even our parents collected printed pictures to document their good times, but few our age have photo albums.

“They’re so much more precious than digital photos,” said Pasricha.

By taking a bunch of Polaroid pictures at an event, friends can each take some home, pin them up on the

wall, and enjoy looking at them in a completely different way than staring at their device.

Ultimately, Polaroids have become so popular due to the recycling of trends. Clothing styles from the 1980s are trendy and old-school cars like the Trans Am and IROC are coveted again. So it’s not surprising that trendy stores are selling Polaroid cameras and film while playing Tears for Fears in the background. Maybe one day our grandkids will dig up the phones that seem modern to us today and call them vintage.

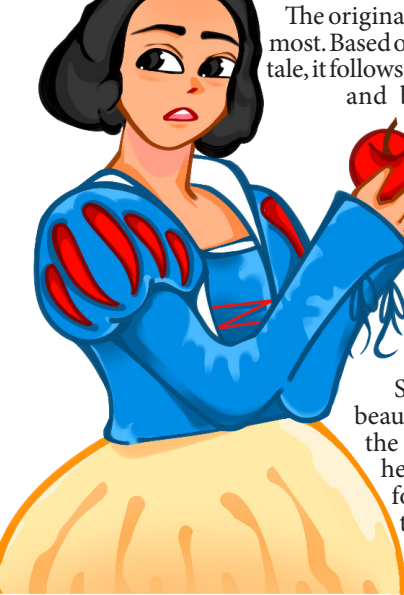


graphic: Mason Charles

Meet Disney’s new Snow White

Samantha Henderson, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

“Snow White” (2025), the recent live-action remake of the classic 1937 animated film “Snow White and the Seven Dwarves,” has been marred by controversy since the moment Disney announced the start of production. What started as an attempt to simply update the classic tale for a modern audience quickly turned into a high profile storm of hate comments and public backlash.



graphic: Mason Charles

The original story is familiar to most. Based on the Grimms’ fairy tale, it follows Snow White, a kind and beautiful princess whose evil stepmother, jealous of her stepdaughter’s beauty, forces her to work as a servant. When the Evil Queen’s Magic Mirror tells her Snow White is more beautiful than she and the Queen tries to kill her, Snow White is forced to flee into the forest, where she befriends seven dwarves. After the Evil Queen

attempts to kill her once again (this time with a poison apple), Snow White falls into a deep sleep, but is rescued by a handsome prince and presumably lives happily ever after.

The charming animation and fun music, combined with the novelty of it being the first full-length animated film made the original movie an instant success, grossing around \$2.3 billion (adjusted for inflation) at the box office, more than any other animated movie in history. So, the 2025 remake had big shoes to fill.

There are some key differences between the original and the remake: instead of a prince, Snow White falls in love with a commoner; and instead of just riding off into the sunset at the end, she deposes the Evil Queen and takes control of the kingdom. Unfortunately, pretty much every aspect of the movie sparked intense dispute, from the two lead actresses’ opposing views on the war between Israel and Palestine to the comments of Snow White’s actress, Rachel Zegler, surrounding the original film, which she called “extremely dated.”

The handling of the seven dwarves in particular became very controversial. The decision to use CGI to bring the beloved characters to life instead of casting actors with dwarfism made many members of the dwarfism community angry, as well as fans. The movie, which came out in theaters a few months ago, was not particularly well received by fans. Expected to gross \$48–58 million in its first weekend in theaters, “Snow White” only brought in a disappointing \$42 million, according to IMDB.

However, the film does have some good elements. Despite Zelger’s comments regarding the original storyline, she brings a fun new twist to the character of Snow White.

She explores a new depth to the character that was not included in the original. The character of the prince has also been updated effectively. Instead of a prince, the love interest Jonathan (played by Andrew Burnap) is a bandit and rebel, giving his character a touch more personality than the original, sort of bland Prince Florian. Additionally, I liked that we get to see his relationship with Snow White evolve over the course of the film, so it’s less insta-love and more realistic.

In my opinion, the best part of the new film is the music. It keeps many of the beloved original songs like “Whistle While You Work” and “Heigh-Ho” for a touch of nostalgia, while also adding exciting new ones like “Waiting on a Wish.” In addition, I thought that the sets were beautifully designed and let you really become immersed in Snow White’s world as the story unfolds. From the imposing, beautiful castle to the seven dwarves’ quaint, cozy cottage, the sets added a lot of whimsy and magic to the film.

However, I do think that the movie had many flaws. For example, I found the use of CGI for the seven dwarves a bit creepy, and I thought they stood out in a negative way among the other characters. I also definitely preferred the costumes from the original film to this one, especially Snow White’s iconic dress, the updated version of which I didn’t love.

Despite its controversies, “Snow White” still has many good pieces that make the film appealing. So, I suggest going to the theater and seeing the movie for yourself before deciding on what you think about it. Even if you are a die-hard fan of the original, there will still be something to enjoy in this magical updated fairytale!



# Student artist of the month: Nikolai Margulis '25

Ivy Cordle, CONTRIBUTING WRITER



photo: Rohan Viswanathan

Ever since the age of five, Nikolai Margulis '25 has embraced music as a defining part of his life. His passion for the banjo has led him to hone his ability over the years, as well as engage in the musical community by coordinating a program with the International Bluegrass Music Association, becoming a signed artist of Prucha Banjos, and winning awards for his playing and compositions. Margulis is considering taking a dual-degree program between Harvard and Berkeley that would allow him to continue studying music while also exploring other paths in life.

### What inspired you to start playing the banjo?

I grew up in Arkansas, and we had a farmer's market every Saturday, and there was a guy there and [it seemed like] he lived in the Gilded Age pretty much. He wore corduroys and a button-down sweater vest with a little pocket watch and I thought he was the coolest guy and he played the banjo. So I asked my mom if I could take lessons. I took lessons with him for seven years in Arkansas. He played a style called classic banjo ... I didn't get into [the style I play now] though, until I moved to Jersey and no one played [classic banjo]. I was gonna give it up, and my mom sent me to this banjo camp with adults, I was the youngest one there ... they all played the three-finger banjo, which is what most banjo players play now, and I got converted [to playing the three-finger banjo] there.

### What work have you done for the Bluegrass Music Association?

I put together this program at the International Bluegrass Music Associations ... called the World of Bluegrass. It's their annual festival in North Carolina, and you get all the stars down there [and it's] where they give out awards. I put together some people who I knew would be up for it, like some of these big winners like Vocalists of the Year and stuff. And I asked them to kind of form a new band that would go play one set where people can request the songs. So as the songs are playing, the audience pays to request what the next [song is] gonna be and the highest bid gets to choose it. And so we raise money for their diversity programs as the International Bluegrass Music Association, and it's also just fun because I get to hear bands that I've always wanted to hear that don't exist, so it's a win-win.

### What was your journey in becoming a sponsored artist for Prucha Banjos?

I met the banjo maker Jaroslav Prucha a few years back in North Carolina. I'd grown up seeing heroes of mine like Russ Carson and Alison Brown playing his instruments and had always dreamt of playing one myself. Jaroslav and I got along great, and in a few months he approached me about making a custom instrument. We spent a few months designing a banjo specifically for my playing, and last fall I officially signed on as the youngest endorsing artist of Prucha Banjos. It's a real beauty of a banjo, and I am [grateful] and proud to play it everyday.

### How is playing the banjo different from other instruments?

When I started playing an instrument, I didn't think about playing anything else. But the more that [I played, the more I realized] that the banjo, the way it's played, is very based on its limitations. It doesn't have much sustain, you have to just throw a bunch of notes out to give the impression of any chord, and you don't get a lot of bass notes. And so I try to find ways to work around that, but now I often find myself having a little envy of pianos or guitars. But I'm happy to play the banjo.

### What was your most memorable performance?

[Tony Trishka is] a real hero of mine. He invited me to come play [at his birthday party] and everyone was there: Steve Martin was there, [Ed] Helms ... from "The Office" [was there, as well as] Béla Flack, who's one of my favorite banjo players ... it was really cool there just to see all these banjo players come together and celebrate.

### What is your process when composing music?

When I sit down and take the banjo out of the cage, I just play stuff for ten minutes. I'd improvise and try and play things that I haven't heard before and often an idea will come out of that that makes me feel something. And it's like emotional problem solving [because] you throw your fingers down, they end up in some place that's new ... The goal is to resolve it in a way that's pleasing in some way, or it makes you feel something that you'd like to feel.

# Student artist of the month: Grace Waldman '25

Maiya Qiu, CONTRIBUTING WRITER



photo: Emily Kim

Having been involved in theatrical productions most of her life, from on-stage performances in middle school to a now leading the PHS Tech Crew and Spectacle Theatre, Grace Waldman '25 finds joy in being able to manage and coordinate the technical aspects of plays and musicals, and ultimately watching it all unfold into a stunning final production for the audience. Waldman began as a member of Tech Crew during freshman year, and is now the stage manager for Tech Crew and Spectacle Theatre. Motivated by the excitement of piecing together shows and building community, Waldman plans to study technical theater in college.

### What do you do as a member of Tech Crew?

I'm the stage manager for PHS Tech Crew and PHSSpectacle Theater. So that means that I oversee the theater program at PHS. I would say I'm the link between the actors and the crew: it's my job to communicate what is going on in rehearsal and let the technical designers and all the crew that we have working know what's going on so that we can have the set work for us.

When we get into tech week, I start calling the shows. I keep extensive documentation of everything, and I write it all down so that I can communicate effectively to the people backstage who have headsets. [This ensures] they know what's going on and that this cue happens at this time and this is the order of everything that happens in the show.

### Do you ever encounter any issues with coordinating the theatrical productions?

This year is my first year as stage manager, so I stage managed "Rumors," the fall play, and "Groundhog Day," the musical, and I'll probably do the choir cabaret. "Rumors" was not a very tech heavy show at all, kind of park and bark if you will. Once we got to "Groundhog Day," it's so technically intense and there's so much going on at every single moment in the show. It was a lot to process and figure out, "okay, this is how I have to approach this sort of thing and this is how I have to be able to communicate;" and how I have to manage [the time spent on] my work outside of school and my work with the show with my homework and everything else ... while being an assistant stage manager is similar and you get a lot of the training ... you kind of just have to go in and learn, "okay, this is the way that I have to do it."

### Did you also do theater in middle school or when you were younger?

[In] elementary and middle school, I did a couple of productions that my school

offered. I also went to a summer camp and every year they put on a musical, so I would do that, I was an actor. I didn't get into the tech aspect of it till high school, but I definitely think that it suits me better. I'm not one for performing on the stage. I'll leave that to them.

### What's your favorite part of being the stage manager?

Especially for the musical ... the auditions are so fun because [there are] some people [that] I don't know. They're just coming in as freshmen and it's so exciting to see everybody be so happy and want to join this community because theater is a really big part of my life. I've done it forever, and my dad is an actor and so it's just really in the family. I also really enjoy the end of the process. Once we actually get performing and see it all come together, tech week can be really stressful and it definitely was this year for "Groundhog Day," but it's always so beautiful seeing everything just come together.

### Do you plan to continue this in the future?

A lot of the schools that I've applied to and that I'm thinking about have some kind of programs or the theater scene in the area is really vibrant. So I definitely think about doing it in the future. I'm not sure if I would want to pursue it professionally, although I did apply to some BFA programs. But I'll see where the wind takes me.

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

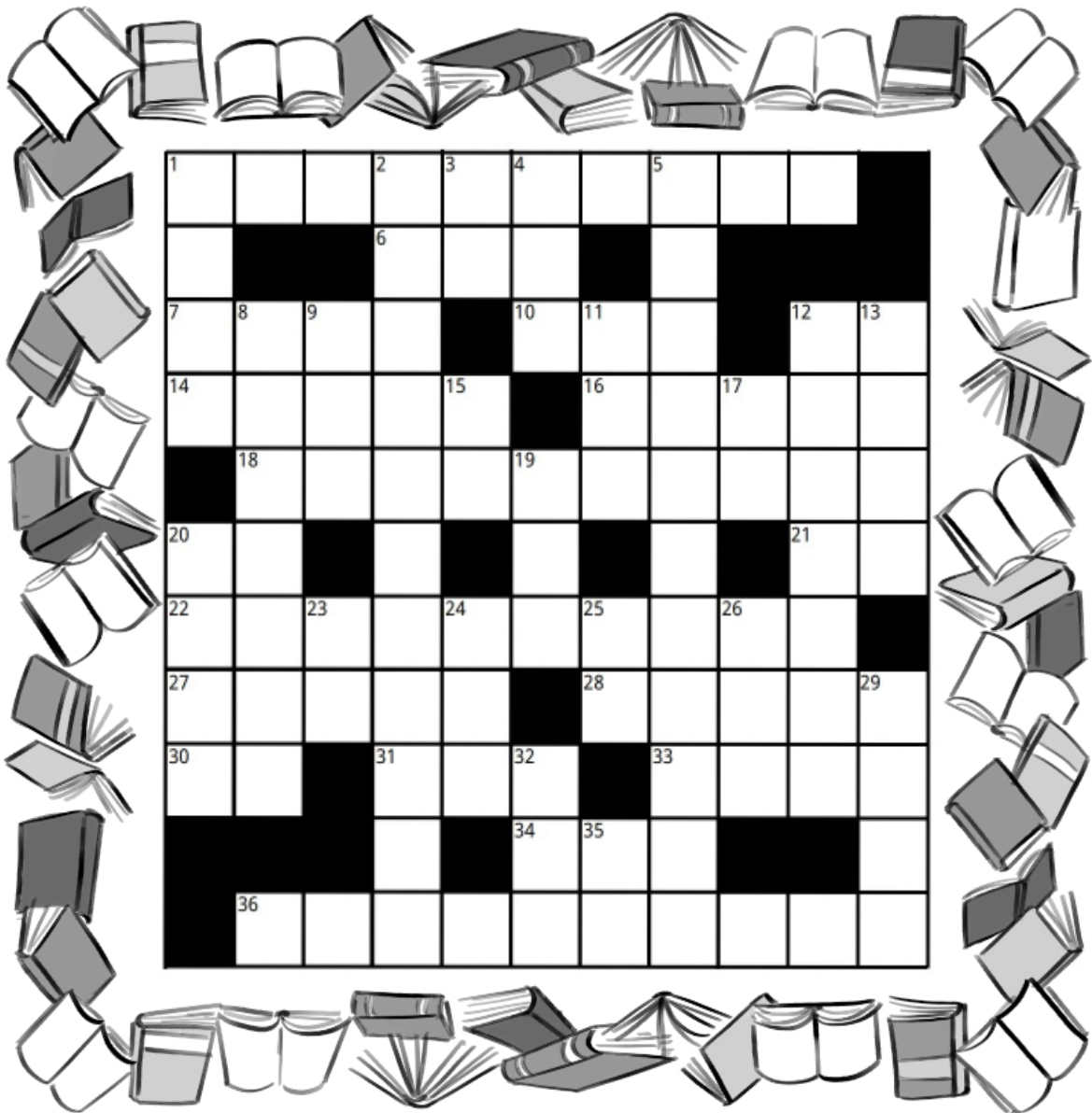


# Literary crossword

Harry Dweck, NEWS & FEATURES CO-EDITOR

- Across**
- 1. Hogwarts School of \_\_\_\_ and Wizardry
  - 6. 1.5 Volt battery
  - 7. It's marked by an X
  - 10. I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings recently received one
  - 12. It's used to make bronze, along with tin
  - 14. Matilda's teacher
  - 16. It protects your eyes from the sun
  - 18. The five senses are for this
  - 20. The exam much of PHS is dreading
  - 21. If it's after BCE
  - 22. It provided the boy with apples, branches, a house, and a boat.
  - 27. Holmes, but not Sherlock
  - 28. Sci-Fi author Asimov who coined "psychohistory"
  - 30. Nintendo's best selling console
  - 31. Harper who published To Kill A Mockingbird
  - 33. Guthrie, but not Woody
  - 34. Golfer's goal
  - 36. Jaws or Goosebumps, to a child

- Down**
- 1. Aladdin's first was to be a prince
  - 2. It's known for being very hungry
  - 3. 10,000 square meters (abbreviation)
  - 4. They're usually yellow in NYC
  - 5. Gatsby is celebrating its 100th
  - 8. The most famous supercalifragilisticexpialidocious user
  - 9. E or A's scrabble value
  - 11. \_\_\_\_ Kaplan, Pentatonix singer
  - 12. "\_\_\_\_ don't feel," Elsa's demand to Anna
  - 13. Impulse
  - 15. Reddit, DoorDash, and Airbnb incubator (abbreviation)
  - 17. The modern form of the metric system (abbreviation)
  - 19. Humpty Dumpty was one
  - 20. This type of wine or cheese is usually more expensive
  - 23. Technique in many video essays (abbreviation)
  - 24. "No", to a Scot
  - 25. B, in fixed do solfège
  - 26. The BFG had a large one
  - 29. Viet - \_\_\_\_
  - 32. Pen in most nurse's offices



graphic: Charley Hu

## “Ne Zha 2” reviewed

Jane Hu, STAFF WRITER

With its box-office-breaking records and eye-opening perspective on Chinese animation, “Ne Zha 2” (2025) isn’t just a film — it’s a cinematic landmark in the animation world. “Ne Zha 2” is an animated fantasy movie loosely based on the 16th century novel “Investiture of the Gods” by Xu Zhonglin, and a sequel to the first movie “Ne Zha.” Written and directed by Yang Yu, or more famously known as Jiaozi, “Ne Zha 2” is a visually stunning and emotional movie.

Following the first movie, Ne Zha, a teenage deity, and Ao Bing, a dragon prince, are struck by lightning, which destroys their physical bodies. To prevent the destruction of their souls, Master Taiyi Zhenren uses the powers of his Seven-Colored Sacred Lotus to recreate their physical bodies. Despite the regeneration, both Ne Zha and Ao Bing’s bodies are still fragile, so Master Taiyi Zhenren advised the two to act with caution. Believing his son to be dead, Ao Bing’s father Ao Guang sends out an order for Shen Gongbao, Ao Bing’s former master, to attack Ne Zha’s hometown Chentang Pass. Ao Bing defends Ne Zha’s home, but unfortunately destroys his weak body in the process.

In order to revive Ao Bing, the Seven-Colored Sacred Lotus must be restored. As a result of a deal, Ne Zha and Ao Bing must share a body for one week, complete three trials to become immortal, and receive a potion that can restore the lotus and create a new body for Ao Bing. As the two strive to combat new challenges, secrets unravel, putting them to their friendship to the test.

Throughout the movie, the visuals and animations stood out

to me. For example, Ne Zha and Ao Bing perfectly contrast each other, with Ne Zha designed to resemble fire and flames and Ao Bing with cool tones, symbolizing ice. Unlike in the previous movie, Ne Zha looks fiercer and more mature with fiery eyes and energy swirling around him. Ao Bing on the other hand is portrayed elegantly, his actions both smooth and regal. The visual contrast between the two characters highlights their personality differences while showing how they balance each other out.

Furthermore, the gods and mythical creatures were also designed intricately. Each character has their own distinct color palette, symbolic accessories, and details that are inspired by Chinese mythology. One of my favorite parts of the movie was when Immortal Wuliang led his army, the Chan sect, to fight in the battle. To show the strong bond between the army, animators depicted the Chan sect in the shape of a golden bonsai tree. The details were mesmerizing, reflecting the countless hours animators put into this project. These fascinating visuals contrast drastically with the precedent set by other Chinese animated films. While many argue that Chinese animations are often “cringy” due to immature plotlines or distinction from western familiarity, “Ne Zha 2” proves these assumptions wrong.

What makes this movie even more impressive is its complete dominance over the box office, grossing over \$2.1 billion. Even though “Ne Zha 2” has been released for less than six months, it has reached number one on the list of highest grossing animated films, surpassing “Inside Out 2,” made by an American studio, by almost

\$500 million. While being an engaging movie with its visuals and colors, the movie also modernizes old folk stories, making it accessible to younger audiences.

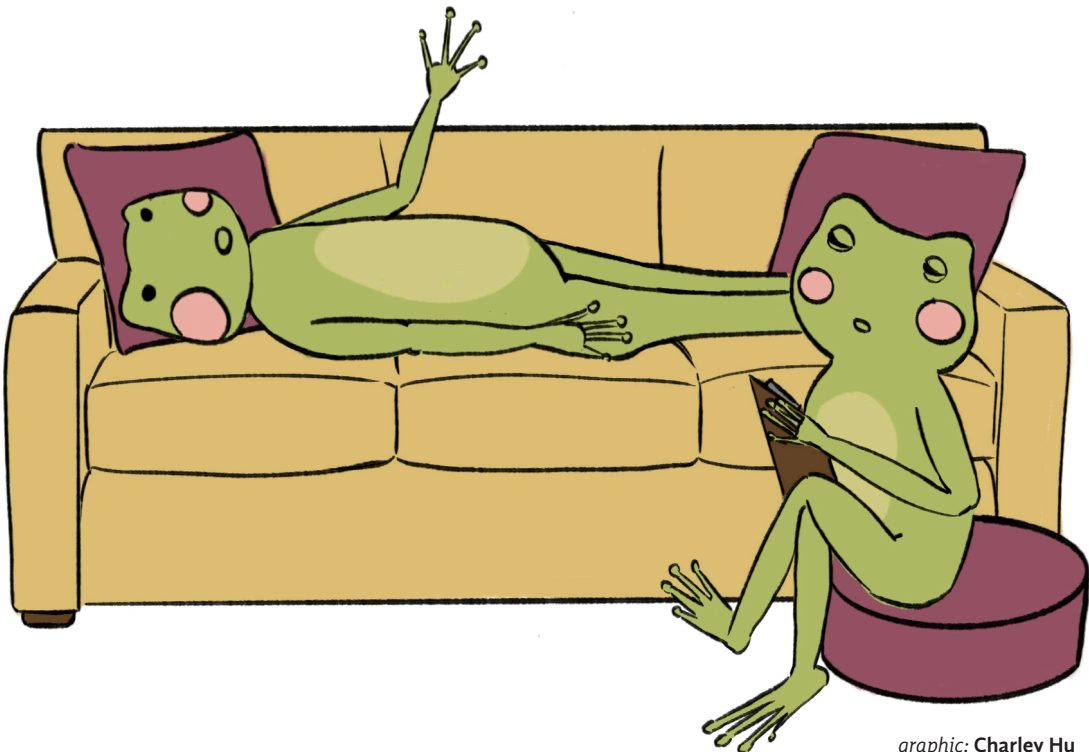
“Ne Zha 2” brings China’s mythology to life through ways unlike before. The movie is a continuation that explores the personal growth of Ne Zha and the other characters through eye-opening visuals. It is a wonderful animation that truly changes the history of Chinese film-making through its visuals and record breaking gross in the animation world.



graphic: Charley Hu

## Caption Contest

This cartoon needs a funny caption! Submit your caption by scanning the QR code below. The winner will be announced in the next issue!



graphic: Charley Hu



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# SPORTS

## Upgrades to athletics facilities at PHS

Katie Qin, SPORTS CO-EDITOR  
Jackson Zwick, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Upgrades to the bleachers, tennis courts, track, and turf are coming to PHS this summer. Bleachers in both the New Gym and stadium bleachers will be improved, the tennis courts will be completely re-done, the turf will be replaced, and new track facilities will be added over the summer.

Principal Cecilia Birge stated that the new, automated bleachers would greatly benefit the custodians who work behind-the-scenes to set up sports events and clean the gym.

“They must do it within 20 minutes or so because, between the end of bell and the start of each game, they only have about 30 minutes. And they have to lay out all the chairs, they have to pull the bleacher out, [and] they have to make sure that the court is ready for the athletic games,” said Birge. “So over time, as you can imagine, there were [bodily] injuries. There were workers [compensations].”

The most urgent issues, including the outdated bleachers, were brought up in the January 2023 referendum. The current bleachers do not follow Americans with Disabilities Act regulations, raising concerns for student safety as well. When the bleachers are renovated, sections of it will be transformed to accommodate seating for wheelchairs. Athletic Director Brian Dzbenski also emphasized the speed of the automated system, which will help PHS smoothly transition between different activities.

“One person can hold [an] electronic device, hit the switch, and [the bleachers] would all come out within 30 to 60 seconds and go back in,” said Mr. Dzbenski. “So in four minutes, you can transfer that learning space to an assembly set up, an athletic event set up, or an open gym space.”

As for the bleachers outside, a center access will be opened, which will ensure the safety of any spectators of events on the field, especially in the case of an emergency such as an evacuation. Additionally, to

promote school spirit, the PHS logo will be painted on the side of the bleachers and in the middle.

The resurfacing of the tennis courts was part of the general maintenance plan. This upkeep was part of the high school’s five-year master plan for athletic facilities that was delayed by COVID-19 and stretched to seven years.

While the tennis courts remain usable, they fall short of regulations set by the New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association because of the excessive wear and tear. Maintenance became an even greater priority, especially after the 2024 earthquake, which left a large crack that trails from the front to the end of the tennis court. Overall erosion from natural wear and tear also made the courts’ surface uneven, and water runoff from the upper field left slippery silt deposits. All of these factors force PHS’s tennis teams to play away games more often.

Over the summer, the court will be rebuilt. To elongate the lifetime of the new courts, a new drainage system will be dug to address the problems caused by excess rainwater. Santi Montoreano ’26, a member of the PHS boys tennis team, is looking forward to the court upgrades.

“I think the courts aren’t in the worst conditions possible. Obviously, there are some schools in the county that have worse court [conditions], but we don’t have the best ones ... I think we should prioritize the court resurfacing,” said Montoreano.

The track’s surface will be extended into the current turf’s space a bit more, creating a D-shape on both ends of the field. This will provide more space for athletes to practice different skills such as hurdles or other techniques that aren’t as doable with so many people on the track. In addition, a pole vault area and self-catching sandpit that prevents sand from spilling over will be built on the farther end of the stadium.



graphic courtesy: Brian Dzbenski

Layout of the new stadium field and track.

Additionally, safety features such as ball-stop netting will surround the football field and shotput fence.

The turf will also see a completely new makeover. The coloring will be changed according to the National Federation High School rules: gold boundaries are for soccer, white for football, blue for boys lacrosse, red for girls lacrosse, and orange for field hockey.

PHS students may be accustomed with the flatness of the current turf grass. This time, PHS has invested in high quality fibers, which have a helix shape that feels much more like real grass and keeps them standing even after long-term use.

“We’re getting a solid green. It uses two different fibers of shades of green to make it look like natural grass ... In addition to that, we have an underlying pad that is going under the turf. That is going to extend the [turf’s] life and also protect our athletes from concussions. So it actually will reduce the impact if anyone falls and hits their head,” said Dzbenski.

These changes, which are taking place over the three months of summer break, took years of planning, collaboration, and research.

“This is where I appreciate our staff so much. We make it look so easy and effortless, right?” said Birge. “When you go to do a volleyball game or badminton or futsal, everything is there ... but we often do not think about the people who are behind the scenes and make it ready and available for us.”



photo: Katie Qin

From left to right: Aashil Patel ’26, Santi Montoreano ’26, and Shaam Beri ’27 have to avoid hitting the ball directly on cracks or slipping on silt.

### Spring season scores

Claire Yang, SPORTS CO-EDITOR

#### Girls Golf

Game date: 4/21/25  
Opponent: Lawrenceville  
Score: 177-168 (L)

#### Boys Golf

Game date: 4/22/25  
Opponent: Princeton Day  
Score: 157-160 (W)

#### Baseball

Game date: 4/22/25  
Opponent: Hopewell Valley  
Score: 2-9 (L)

#### Softball

Game date: 4/22/25  
Opponent: Somerville  
Score: 8-3 (W)

#### Boys Lacrosse

Game date: 4/19/25  
Opponent: Montgomery  
Score: 13-5 (W)

#### Girls Lacrosse

Game date: 4/21/25  
Opponent: Lawrence  
Score: 15-3 (W)

#### Boys Tennis

Game date: 4/23/25  
Competition: Mercer County Championships  
Place: 2nd

## Taking a look into ancient sports

Claire Yang, SPORTS CO-EDITOR

Throughout history, sports have always been a major source of entertainment and activity. The first major sporting event, the Olympic Games, took place over 2700 years ago. Even before, the earliest mention of physical recreation can be found in muddy cave paintings from the Stone Age. While some ancient sports have faded from common practice, many have continued to be carried out today in different forms, honoring the rich cultural roots they represent.

Pankration, a combination of boxing and wrestling with little to no restrictions, was extremely popular in ancient Greece. After being introduced in 648 B.C. at the Olympics, it quickly became a fan-favorite, especially for the warrior-like Spartans. Unlike modern wrestling, the game would only stop if the opponent was rendered unconscious or admitted defeat. The only fouls recognized were biting and gouging, leading to competitors sometimes dying in the ring.

Despite this gruesome aspect, the sport had many myths surrounding it, only fueling the respect and awe of the public towards the athletes. It was believed at the time that the mythical hero, Theseus, was said to have defeated a the Minotaur, and he did it by wrestling the beast with his bare hands. Today, pankration is no longer practiced

due to its violent nature, but it serves as a striking reminder of how vastly different the limitations were of sports in the past.

A popular game in ancient and current times, kabaddi is the second most viewed sport, after cricket, in India. The game operates similarly to a more competitive version of tag. Two teams of seven players start on either side of a court and send one person to infiltrate the other team’s “territory.” The person called the “Raider,” tries to tag all seven players on the opposite team, the “Antis,” in a tricky game of one versus seven. However, the raider also must tag as many opponents as they can in a single breath without being caught to score points for their team. Speculated to have emerged in prehistoric times, the game was essential for developing reflexes for hunting and self-defense.

Known as the “sport of kings” from over two thousand years ago, the Persian sport chovgan is the forerunner of polo. The sport is played on Karabakh stallions, prized Azerbaijan horses that are recognized by UNESCO, along with the sport, as a cultural heritage. The rules are essentially the same as polo; two teams riding horses try to hit the ball through the goalposts using a long wooden mallet. However, no safety gear is allowed for the players — requiring courage in addition to skill to play the game.

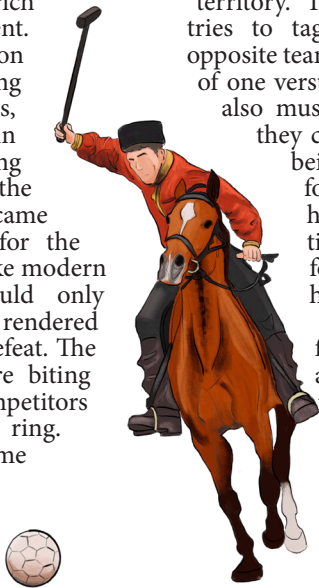
Back in ancient times, musicians would perform traditional music, and storytellers would narrate folk tales. This resulted in a beautiful combination of different cultural elements that displayed a nation’s history and identity in a single game.

Knattleikr, played by the Vikings, was a brutal, unrestrained sport to demonstrate one’s battle potential, similar to pankration. The game was mentioned throughout Icelandic sagas, a collection of thirteenth and fourteenth-century works about the great Viking families. Though the exact details of the sport’s

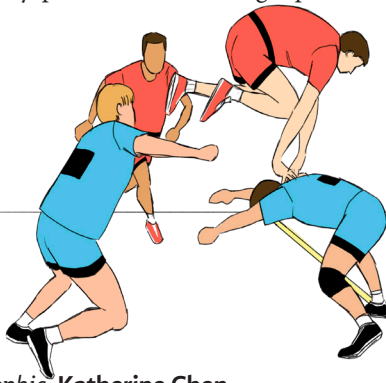
rules remain vague, according to historian William Short, the only objective was to get the ball across the field by any means necessary. The players would carry wooden bats to bludgeon their opponents, which often resulted in severe injuries and bloody spats on the field. Tournaments could go on for weeks, with entire camps set up of spectators coming to watch. Orðstír or glory was seen as the ultimate goal for the Vikings — glory and respect earned from the game lasted even after death. The game joins the list of ancient sports no longer practiced, but certain archaeological groups like the Hurstwic Viking Combat group specialize in safely recreating it for audiences.

These ancient practices were more than just physical activities; they were a reflection of the values and traditions of the societies that created them.

Over time, many have evolved or even disappeared from practice, but their influence remains in modern-day sports. Whether they are practiced in different forms today or lived in the past, ancient sports helped shape our understanding of values and culture in the athletic world.



graphic: Emily Kim



graphic: Katherine Chen



graphic: Emily Kim



# A warning on the social media diet

Josh Huang and Alex Gu, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

While lounging on the sofa and mindlessly scrolling through social media, a fitness influencer pops up, advertising an amazing overnight oats recipe in a “What I Eat in a Day” vlog. It’s easy to prepare and packed with protein, superfoods, and nutrients. Intrigued, you click on the link, but the price is \$70 for just one week’s of supply. However, you want to try it out after hearing the influencer rave, so you buy it. To your dismay, when it arrives two weeks later, the ingredients are in poor condition, and they create something that looks more like a slop compared to the oats that were advertised.

Social media creates an ideal world, but it will always be behind a screen, just beyond one’s reach. But, over and over again, people fall for it — they are blinded by the idea of easy self-improvement and almost expect to shed a few pounds after eating healthy or exercising for one day. This can be especially powerful considering the omniscience of social media, whether it be in the form of “What I Eat in a Day” vlogs, morning routines, supplement hauls, or other baits for engagement. Viewers are often encouraged to try these products for themselves at the risk of their health for the creator’s monetary benefit, which is clearly an unfair trade.

Thus, it becomes critical to be able to differentiate between myths and realities. As a soccer player and weightlifter, Raphael Borentain ’27 has been exposed to dozens of these types of advertisements. It is essential for Borentain to keep his body in good shape, so he has to be able to see through these types of ads.

“A lot of [fitness influencers] act like they got ripped in like two weeks or from drinking one shake a day. But they probably take other stuff or have been working out for years. It’s all for views, honestly,” said Borentain. “I think they mess with people’s heads a bit. Some guys will

start eating super clean or doing crazy diets just ‘cause some fitness dude on TikTok said it worked.”

Instead, Borentain advocates for a more accountable system where these influencers take responsibility for the products they choose to endorse. For example, influencers should carefully review products before they advertise them, ensuring that they perform as marketed.

“People look up to them and copy everything they do, so if they’re lying or pushing random products just for money, that’s messed up, especially when it’s about health,” said Borentain.

Advertisements are an inevitable part of social media and can be difficult to resist the attraction of popular trends. However, the consequences of these often misinformative ads can be drastic. For instance, Brian Johnson, known as the Liver King, promoted eating raw organ meats and consuming expensive supplements by claiming his physique was entirely done by doing so. Consequently, teenagers attempted to mimic Johnson’s success through following the regimens and diet that he had advertised in his videos, which often included expensive ingredients. However, Johnson was later found using anabolic steroids but not before hundreds of his teenage followers had wasted money on the supplements, chasing the hope to attain Johnson’s figure.

These occurrences are not uncommon. Though some influencers may offer scientifically-backed insight that proves to be helpful, people need to be vigilant about what they consume and their general well-being. This is the dilemma that modern teenagers face: who or what can we turn to for reliable advice?

Thankfully, the internet’s speed is not only one of its biggest flaws, but it is also arguably its greatest strength. A quick search can yield professional advice or actual u reviews about a certain product. Even better, a plethora of sites offer similar services such as TrustPilot, the Environmental Working Group’s Food Scores, or even Amazon’s review sections.

Whatever the case may be, wellness and diet content on social media isn’t going anywhere anytime soon, but that doesn’t mean it should be consumed mindlessly. While some creators are genuine with their goal of helping people by promoting healthy lifestyles, others spread unrealistic and even at times harmful messages for clout. This is especially damaging for teens as they are still developing their identity, leading to less confidence in themselves for not being able to live up to the false narrative that some influencers create.

Before deciding to buy a new product or start a new routine based on a viral video, take a moment to think about the promoter’s credibility. Doing research is the best way for protection from an online world that favors aesthetics over authenticity and process.



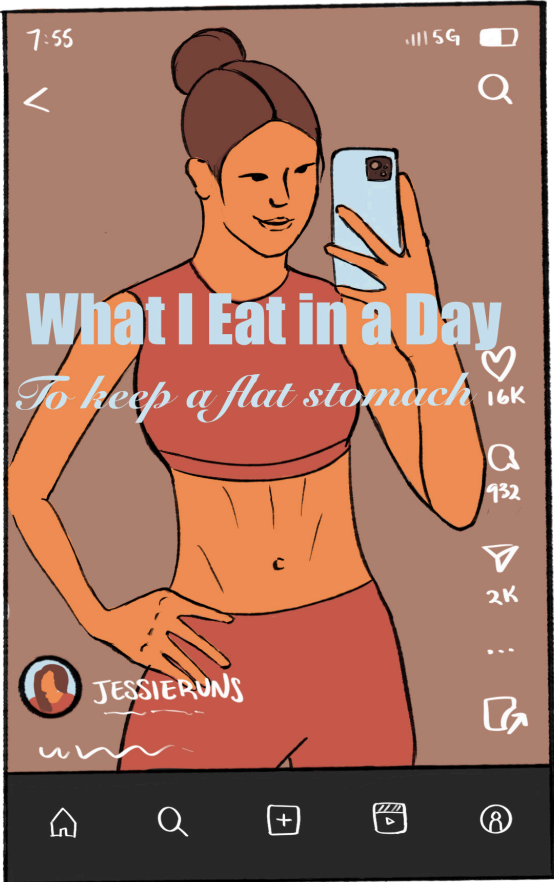
photo: Katherine Chen

From closest to farthest away: Mathilde Pouliot ’27, Kimberly Sarmiento ’27, and Evelyn Salle ’27 watch “What I Eat in a Day” videos to pass time during Learning Lab

## Sports registration revamp

Katie Qin, SPORTS CO-EDITOR

Attention all student athletes! A new athletic registration system called Arbiter Sports Registration will be set up on May 12. Every athlete, no matter the season they play in, will have to register for their sport as soon as possible after this date. Athletic Director Brian Dzbenski will be sending out emails soon with more information and video tutorials, so please pay attention to your inbox.



graphic: Charley Hu

# The dark side of NIL

Kaelan Patel, SPORTS CO-EDITOR  
Luna Xu, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

What was once a level playing field for athletes has become a marketplace. Modern college athletics has reached an all-time high in popularity, becoming a multimillion dollar business built on the backs of athletes who have received nothing for their performance. Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) is an NCAA policy that allows college athletes to earn their own money through branding. This policy prevents brands from misrepresenting athletes or using them to promote their brand without consent. It also allows them to earn cash for brands they choose to represent, eliminating the issue of the NCAA’s lack of compensation. Some opportunities for student athletes to make money through NIL include autographs, merchandise, blogging, commercials, and more. As of 2021, college athletes can make money with the NIL, but some consequences such as wealthier schools gaining more power and student athletes losing focus from their monetary trade have been producing a net negative impact on college sports.

Compared to last year’s 200 players, more than 1700 athletes in men’s college basketball entered the transfer portal on its first day of opening because of their inability to make money and earn recognition in the current colleges they attend. This eliminates a

feeling of school loyalty and prevents smaller schools from building better athletic programs, as they are consistently losing their players to the bigger schools with deeper pockets. Because of the branding, schools with publicized athletes will compete more often and in high-level tournaments, while schools with less publicized athletes with the same or better skill may not have the chance to compete in these tournaments, as selection depends on what the audience wants to see.

Still, many incoming college athletes look forward to these opportunities.

“I think it would be great to be paid for sponsoring someone and use my image to promote their brand. It would be nice to have extra cash for college,” said Sean Wilton ’25, a Brown commit for shot put.

The ability for student athletes to promote their brand and receive payment in college has been a debated issue long before the NIL was passed, specifically because supporters of NIL believe that student athletes should earn compensation for what they accomplish. However, opponents of the NIL believe that college freshmen are simply not responsible or experienced enough to handle these large sums of money. Still, the NIL was officially introduced and passed in 2021. In recent years, well-funded powerhouses have poached recruits from smaller colleges with a much higher salary. These temptations are slowly turning the focus of college sports away from what they were originally, which was for athletes to improve and be able to perform their best.

At first, the limelight and extra cash earned through NIL policies may seem to benefit student athletes, but over time, it has harmed them. These well-funded schools are also more attractive to recruits looking for colleges, creating situations where student athletes are choosing schools for the money, rather than what is the best fit for them. Not only does this create a negative culture, but it also often results in going “one and done” through college, meaning they go to school for only 1 year without graduating to immediately pursue their sport professionally. This leaves athletes in difficult

situations if they are plagued by injury or other career-ending issues and do not have a college degree to choose a different career.

Schools without branding and NIL money don’t get the same chance to recruit better players and be shown more to a national audience. Therefore, athletes who want to be recognized for their talents and make a cash surplus must attend colleges with highly publicized athletes. These well-funded schools ultimately make student-athletes into athlete-students. Despite the benefits of NIL, some athletes are finally seeing the downsides.

“I think right now [NIL’s] actually impacting them for the worse,” said Wilton. “It is hurting more athletes than helping them in some way.”

To prevent conflicts such as unfairness and loss of focus, players and coaches could push for NCAA-recognized restrictions on NIL. One potential solution could be to implement a NIL budget for every school to abide by, regardless of size or wealth, similar to a salary cap in the NFL and NBA. Additionally, policies could be used to regulate player agreements with NIL deals, such as a loyalty clause, where students must stay with a school they commit to for at least 2 years, to ensure both the school and the athlete have equal benefits. This proposition would not only create an equality amongst colleges and universities in terms of NIL usage, but also give college players a better overall college experience.

The initial intentions of the creation of NIL were morally correct in the sense of giving college athletes what they deserve for their hard work, given the amount of money the industry makes. However, there have been many hidden flaws that could have serious negative effects on college athletes’ experiences as they go through their careers. This requires action against the current forms of NIL, and restrictions need to be made before college athletics are changed forever. If college sports continue to uphold this negative culture, school spirit and built-up talent will be replaced by business proposals and short-term gains, leaving behind the true meaning of the game.



graphic: Katherine Chen



# Athletes of the Month

## James Schiavone '25: baseball

Joy Chen, MULTIMEDIA CO-EDITOR  
Michael Yang, CONTRIBUTING WRITER



photo: Jasur Agzamov

Schiavone, who has been playing baseball for 14 years, looks forward to his final season as one of the team’s pitchers, spending it alongside his friends and coaches.

With the baseball nestled in his glove, James Schiavone '25 adjusts his stance on the pitcher's mound for the final time, grounding his feet. Taking a steady breath, he pitches a fastball, watching as it cuts through the air, slipping past the batter, and landing in the catcher's mitt with a solid thump. Strikeout.

Schiavone began his baseball journey at age four, when he played his first tee ball game. Growing up, Schiavone played both baseball and basketball, but ended up choosing to focus on baseball. His brother Kenneth Schiavone '22, a former baseball player, was one of his biggest inspirations growing up.

“My older brother, Kenny, who played for the high school team for four years, taught me when I was younger how to play,” said Schiavone. “Even now, whenever he comes home from college, he comes to my [games] and gives me different tips.”

For Schiavone, baseball is a year-round dedication. Not only does he serve as one of the co-captains of the PHS baseball team, but he is also one of the pitchers for Princeton's Post 218 American Legion team over the summer. The American Legion is a broad organization overseeing multiple baseball teams in all fifty states. Many players participate in the American Legion to improve their skills and as a stepping stone between high school and college.

“We play about 25 games in two and a half months, and then I go straight into Legion, which is another 20 games in 30 days,” said Schiavone.

However, even with the large amount of time and energy that baseball demands, Schiavone is able to find a balance between his athletics and his life as a student.

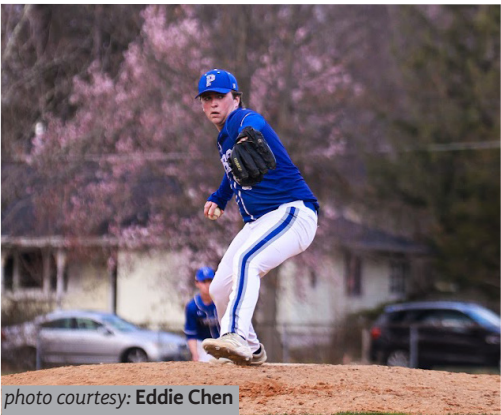


photo courtesy: Eddie Chen

Schiavone winds up to throw a pitch during a home game against Steinert. returned strong as a junior, earning a spot on the varsity team. That season, Schiavone helped the team defeat Hopewell Valley for the first time in over ten years, ending the game with a 2.33 earned run average, which prevented the opposing team from gaining runs and kept Princeton in the lead.

Like any sport, mastering baseball requires a diverse range of skill sets. Schiavone is always looking for ways to refine his game.

“Baseball is a game of failure. You can always improve,” said PHS boys baseball Head Coach Dominic Capuano. “We’ve worked on his hitting and how to stay more balanced pitching-wise. He [has] worked really hard to stay healthy the last two years and throw more strikes and be commanding. And the mental side of the game, we’re always working on.”

Schiavone’s drive for constant improvement and dedication has made him an effective leader on the team according to many of his teammates and coaches.

“He’s always been a hard worker. He’s always been someone who’s had success on the mound and at the plate, and he’s always shown leadership qualities, which have really been accentuated this year,” said Capuano. “He leads by example, he does all the right things. He really truly cares about the success of everybody around him in the program.”

Not only is he devoted captain according to his coaches, Schiavone’s positive attitude and encouraging words during games have also made a lasting impression on his teammates.

“My first year, when I was a freshman, [I was] really scared and I didn’t really know anybody, and James made me feel super welcome to the team,” said Matthew Akey '26. “He’s always been the positive guy ... and he’ll definitely push you to be better.”

After becoming a co-captain of the team this year, Schiavone hopes to continue acting as a role model for his team members.

“I just want to do everything I can to help the team and continue being the leader,” said Schiavone. “I hope that I can be a reason we are doing well.”

This year marks Schiavone’s fourteenth year playing baseball and his final year on the team. Reflecting on his high school career, Schiavone has not only grown as an athlete but also in mindset, and he plans to continue that passion in college.

“I want to, if the opportunity comes to me, play baseball in college,” said Schiavone. “If not, I would just like to play club baseball.”

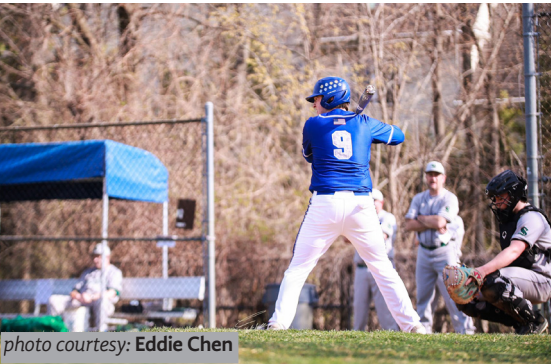


photo courtesy: Eddie Chen

In his final year, Schiavone is part of the main rotation of pitchers and also goes to bat in games.

## Jaqueline Zang '25: golf

Ben Li and Fangwu Yu, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

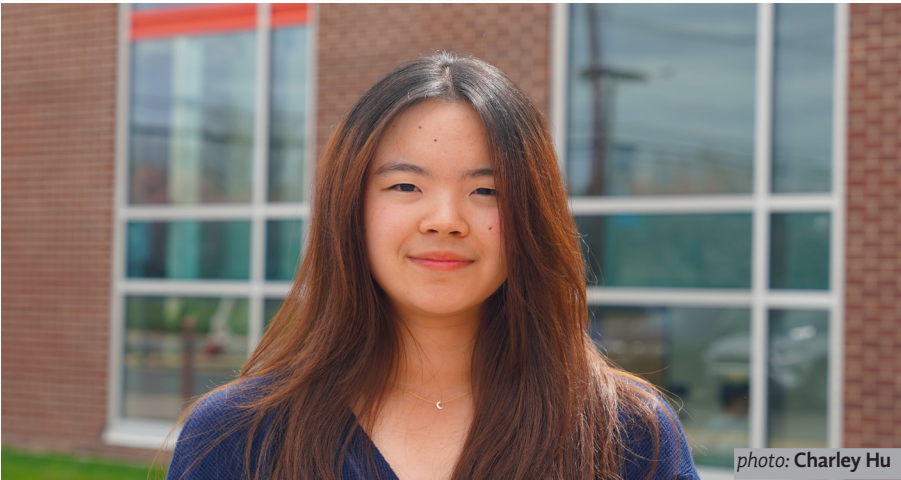


photo: Charley Hu

Zang is one of the original members of the girls golf team, and is preparing with the rest of the team to gear up for the Mercer County Championships in May.

The crowd holds their breath as Jacqueline Zang '25, with her driver in hand, steps up into the tee box of the first hole. She carefully chooses a spot to place her tee and golf ball. Visualizing her shot, Zang takes a confident swing, influenced by her favorite professional golfer, Nelly Korda. Her shot breaks the crowd’s silence as it flies through the sky and lands perfectly on the green.

At age five, Zang began playing golf after her father introduced her to it. She initially only played golf with her family, but later in her career, she would compete in big tournaments.

“I used to play tennis, and when I was around 11, my parents told me to choose one or the other,” said Zang. “It’s funny, because I didn’t want to do tennis because my dad told me I’d be running around in the heat. So I chose golf not because I liked one more than the other, [but] just because I didn’t want to run.”

After deciding to pursue golf over tennis, Zang went to her local country club’s driving range and practiced with her sister, Madeline Zang '23. When they practiced, they would mutually help and encourage one another, along with the additional coaching from their father.

“November through March, I try to do around an hour a day. Sometimes, I skip a few days. In the summer, if I’m not playing a tournament that weekend, I’ll be practicing five to seven [hours],” said Zang.

Zang joined the PHS golf team in her freshman year, when golf was a co-ed sport led by Head Coach Patrick Noone and Assistant Coach Jess Monzo. During Zang’s sophomore year, a girls-only golf team was formed with Monzo as head coach. Over the course of the past few years, Monzo has been able to see Zang grow as a player and a person.

“She’s definitely matured a lot. She’s always been very focused, very lights out,” said Monzo. “[She] knows what she wants to do, but I think as she’s gotten older, she’s developed and kind of matured in the sport and understands that if I don’t make every shot, it’s not going to make or break me.”

Zang’s determination and dedication not only helped her reach her current level but also inspired the rest of her team, including teammate and close friend Kyuyoung Chung '26.

“She’s definitely very skilled as a golfer, and so I think that’s definitely inspired a lot of the girls to practice more,” said Chung. “We’ve seen scores go down from last year, so score-wise we’re doing better than we did last year.”

In addition to being a skilled golfer, Zang, who is captain of the team, serves as a leader and role model to her teammates.

“She also has this sort of leadership [quality] about her, and so she’s just sort of someone you can look up to, [and] I certainly look up to her,” said Chung.

Monzo witnessed the effect of Zang’s leadership on the team and how she serves as a role model for her teammates.

“Every girl looks up to her,” said Monzo. “She’s able to kind of help, and she lends a hand, and she’s always available to give girls advice. So she’s been one of a kind.”

Throughout her career, Zang qualified for the National Junior PGA championship, the highest level of junior golf, being inducted into the Rolex Honor Society, and placing in the top five in an American Junior Golf Association tournament in 2022.

Despite this, there were challenges that Zang had to overcome. Staying calm under pressure and controlling emotions are both aspects of the sport that Zang has learned to play with.

“[The most difficult part of] golf for me [is] probably the mental side. Just being in the moment, committing to it, and actually doing what I’m trying to do on the course,” said Zang.

While individual golf can be mentally challenging and stressful, Zang’s favorite part of golf is a more enjoyable and less stressful way of playing it.

“[My favorite part] ... is team golf because golf is an individual sport, so it can get kind of lonely sometimes,” said Zang. “Everyone plays their own ball, and then you add up each individual sport for a combined team.”

Committed to Carnegie Mellon University, Zang hopes to contribute to another season as one of their best players. As she prepares to leave PHS and start college, Zang reflects on the valuable lessons golf has taught her throughout her years of playing.

“It’s a lot of ups and downs. It’s never really consistent, so when you’re not playing as well, [be] patient with yourself, and keep your hard work up,” said Zang.



photo courtesy: Jaqueline Zang

Zang practices her stroke during a team practice in preparation for the Red Devil Invitational.



photo courtesy: Jaqueline Zang

Zang “reads the green,” calculating the best possible trajectory for her ball.