

# The Tower

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Princeton High School  
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## PPS debuts “Visigo Agent” software to increase student monitoring

Harry Dweck, MANAGING EDITOR

On April 22, a pop-up called “Visigo Agent” appeared on the screens of all PHS-issued devices, requesting permission for input monitoring and screen recording. Though PHS students speculated that the software was being rolled out to detect AI usage, its main purpose, according to Chief Technology Officer Todd Macdonald, is to detect threats to student safety and prevent self-harm or harm to others.

The software, developed by Linewize, will monitor the screens of all student devices. In the vast majority of cases, the data recorded will be deleted immediately. However, if Linewize’s AI models detect a potential safety threat, it will capture screenshots of the student’s device and classify them into one of five levels based on the severity of the threat, with five being the highest.

If the threat is serious, involving an imminent risk to safety, an individual at the district will immediately be notified (regardless of the time of day), while lower level threats will appear on a dashboard to be reviewed.

MacDonald emphasized that the district is not planning to use the system to detect cheating or AI usage, even if a student is suspected of such an action by a teacher or administrator. The system is programmed to detect threats or instances of sexual harassment, extreme bullying, suicide or suicidal ideation, and violence.

MacDonald also noted that while the school district is able to determine which student owns the device associated with a

given capture, administration and faculty are not able to review or request past footage if it is not picked up by the system.

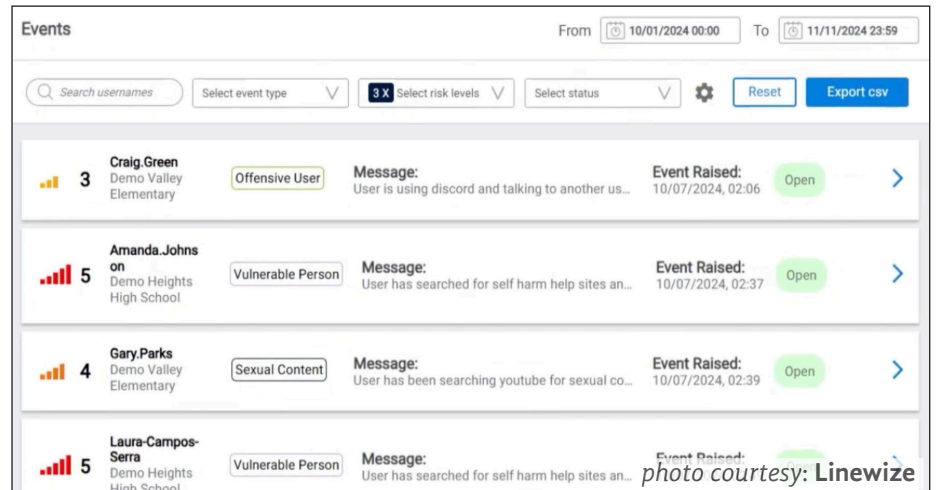
“If a principal says, ‘Hey, I heard a rumor that a kid said this,’ I can’t go into the system. ... It doesn’t work that way. I don’t use the filter to look and see what websites the student [went] to. [The system] is really only looking for active dangers for students,” said MacDonald.

The program has been piloted at Princeton Middle School for the past two weeks and has since detected around 100 threats, with the vast majority being false alarms.

“Most of [the alerts] are nothing to be concerned about. I quickly look and say, ‘Okay, this was a research project about drugs, right? It’s not like a student is having an overdose.’ So I can immediately dismiss that one,” said MacDonald.

The vast majority of school districts in New Jersey already have an equivalent type of software installed, with PPS being relatively late to the game. PHS is also unique in that it provides Macbooks to students, which are harder to install software on and monitor compared to Chromebooks. MacDonald noted that PHS students have a history of attempting to evade monitoring software and restrictions.

“If students refuse to install the software, at some point we will have to lock the devices down. We have to get this working. If it turns out that we can’t get that working reliably, then in the future, we won’t be able



An example of the dashboard district technology personnel will have access to using the Visigo Agent software, with incidents classified into five levels. The dashboard highlights an “Offensive User,” a “Vulnerable Person” and “Sexual Content.”

to have students using MacBooks,” said MacDonald.

PHS students have been fairly resistant so far; the majority of students did not immediately install the software. As a result, PHS administration added a 15-minute homeroom on Monday, April 27 to ensure students complied with the update.

“I honestly think it’s quite invasive ... but kind of necessary, because a lot of people are doing what they shouldn’t be doing in school instead of work. It’s just another reminder that these are not our computers,” said Luca Nicolae-Jozwiakowski

’27. Combined with the continuation of a filtering system such as Mosyle that restricts access to certain websites, MacDonald hopes the new software will help the district better comply with the Children’s Internet Protection Act and protect PHS students.

“I’ve talked to many districts, and almost every one that has set up these types of tools has [saved lives]. There have been several instances I know of ... where [the system] has called a guidance counselor, and they called the police, and the police [arrived], and that student was about to take their life,” said MacDonald.

## Library and Town Council reach budget compromise to end weeks-long standoff

Harry Dweck and Claire Yang, MANAGING EDITORS

Hours before Princeton Town Council’s April 27 vote on Princeton Public Library’s annual budget, the municipality and the library announced they had reached an agreement to make up a \$149,000 budget shortfall that had led to a public, weeks-long disagreement.

In January, the library announced a reduction in hours, closing at 8:00 p.m. instead of 9 p.m. on the weekdays and 5:00 p.m. instead of 6 p.m. on weekends. The reduction, in addition to cuts in online subscription media access, was largely attributed to a 36.5% increase in health insurance costs for staff, alongside rising building utility costs.

However, even after the reduction, the library was still short \$149,000, a sum the municipality had been refusing to cover, proposing instead that the library eliminate parking subsidies for patrons to make up the shortfall. Ultimately, the municipality agreed to increase its contribution by \$75,000, partially offset by a restructuring of the library’s employee parking permits, and the library agreed to cover the remaining \$74,000 through increased fundraising efforts.

In 2026, the town spent 4.98 million dollars on the library. Of that, 3.8 million dollars is mandated by the state, while 1.1 million is a voluntary contribution from the municipality’s operating budget, a

number that Princeton Mayor Mark Freda said might decrease in the future.

“We fund that library really, really well,” said Freda. “That’s a lot of money, and [it] has an impact on every property that’s paying taxes, and the taxes are high in this town, as they are. I think in the long term, the library is gonna have to try to figure out ways to find that money elsewhere, and not assume the town’s going to be able to keep giving them more than what we’re required to give.”

Though the library has a 17.8 million dollar endowment, much of it is restricted and cannot be used to fill any potential budget shortfalls, primarily because of legislation.

“The Friends and Foundation tracks donor intent and distributes funds based on the organization’s authorized investment guidelines and distribution policy in accordance with the Uniform Prudent Management of Institutional Funds Act of 2006,” wrote the library’s Board of Trustees in a statement to the Tower. “This means that because of donor rules and legal guidelines, the money can’t just be used freely to fill a sudden budget gap.”

Before the municipality and the library reached an agreement, Princeton resident and PHS parent Raz Godelnik emailed both extensively, arguing that the town must prioritize library funding.



photo: Katherine Chen

Princeton Public Library is the most visited municipal public library in New Jersey.

“It’s a question of priorities; what are the priorities of [the municipality]? If the library, which is really sort of the most democratic institution, one that is serving everyone ... is not a priority, if you can’t find [\$150,000] to compensate for the deficit, I would ask whether the municipality is making the right decisions about our priorities,” said Godelnik.

However, Freda argued that the town cannot meet the funding needs of any one institution without limitations, particularly with already high property taxes making Princeton increasingly unaffordable for many.

“We could have the greatest services in the world, but if people can’t afford to live here, what good are those services?” said Freda. “If I tell you it’s going to cost you \$1,000 more per year than you can afford to live here and [as a result] you

got to go [leave], it’s like, what good did I just do you?”

Despite the relatively small shortfall, the issue generated a significant amount of controversy in Princeton, reaching the front page of the Town Topics and leading to significant community input. According to Freda, much of it was more emotional than practical.

“Some people decided, ‘Let’s tell everybody that loves the library they must write emails and call the elected officials and say, ‘Give the library whatever they want.’” said Freda. “In spite of all that emotional response, ... there was a small group [from both the municipality and the library that] continued to say, ‘Let’s keep talking, because the budget is not going to be finalized until April 27 and right up until that meeting, we [can] ... see if we [can] figure something out.’”

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# Francophone Festival unites worldwide French-speaking cultures in Princeton

**Aidan Sutphin, STAFF WRITER**  
**Nikolai Morozov, CONTRIBUTING WRITER**

On Saturday, April 11, many PHS students attended the second annual Francophone Festival held on Hinds Plaza at Princeton Public Library. The event, organized by Princeton-based francophone organization Princeton Accueil, was a celebration of the diversity of the French-speaking world and an opportunity for PHS students to learn about the French language and culture hands-on.

“There’s a big emphasis on getting outside of the classroom and focusing on living in [a] cultural context because of the amount of francophone events and francophones in the Princeton community,” said French student and Francophone Festival volunteer Reya Nair ’26. “I think the French curriculum allows you to go beyond that classroom experience and really get into how you practice French as a lived experience.”

This month, in addition to the festival, PHS also invited director and animator Mailys Vallade to PHS French VI classes to share more about francophone culture portrayed through her film “Amélie et la Métaphysique des Tubes” (“Amélie or the Character of Rain”). Vallade, who attended a screening of her film at the Princeton French Film Festival, was nominated for the Oscar for Best Animated Feature in January.

“I think it’s cool to have these really established French [artists] come in and you get to ask them questions about their lives and careers in French as well,” said Joanna Hou ’26. “You get to be able to practice your own language skills while also learning about their lifestyle.”

The Francophone Festival sought to represent francophonie, the French-speaking world, in all of its forms. As francophonie encompasses several countries, ranging from East Africa to Canada and Belgium, oftentimes far-reaching branches of the French-speaking world are not represented. The Francophone Festival was a product of multiple francophone cultures coming together.

“My foundation is from Haiti. In Haiti, they ... speak French ... and I really am very happy here to represent Haiti, because most of the people don’t think about them as a francophone country,” said President of Princeton Accueil and co-organizer of the festival, Nadège Frotté.

In attendance at the festival were 15 francophone authors from French-speaking regions of the world: France, Canada, Congo, Réunion Island, Tunisia, and Belgium.



PHS French class students listen to French filmmaker Mailys Vallade share her creative process in animating the film “Little Amélie or the Character of Rain.”  
*photo courtesy: Gyselle North*

The authors included Christine Le Deurot, Jo Fischer, and Philip Kayne, whose works ranged from children’s books to historical novels.

The event also had far-reaching impacts in PHS’s own French program. French teacher Gyselle North plans to take inspiration from the contemporary writing style of Mabanckou.

“Alain Mabanckou just wrote a book, ‘Ramsès de Paris’ ... which I’m showing to my class ... [It] doesn’t use any punctuation or capital letters,” said North. “He has a very special style of writing, [which] gives me [the] idea to propose that style to my students ... to revise my own rubric.”

In addition to expanding the curriculum, North said it can be difficult to keep the French curriculum up to date, as they can offer limited representation of francophone culture’s breadth. In fact, the French IV curriculum only has one Black voice, lacking contemporary authors of diverse backgrounds. This is why the teachers encourage students to learn from the modern world and not only in class.

“It helps a lot to be involved in the French-speaking community outside of school, to realize it’s not just a class,” said French teacher Malachi Wood. “We encourage students to find French-speaking friends ... but to see that in Princeton, it’s important to interact with that community as well.”

## Future Pathways Program encourages students to explore different careers

**Kyle Chen, Asma Frough, and Aarav Patel,**  
**CONTRIBUTING WRITERS**



Representatives from the Princeton Fire Department introduce Saurish Kapoor ’26 to the requirements for becoming a firefighter.  
*photo: Andrea Dinan*

PHS introduced its first ever Future Pathways Program on April 15, alongside the annual college fair held during April 14 and 15. Across the two days, juniors at PHS explored post-secondary futures that involved higher education through the college fair, as well as alternative careers through the Future Pathways Program.

Since 2005, the average cost of college tuition and fees has increased by 93 percent, according to the Education Data Initiative. Adjusted for inflation, this number is 17 percent in real terms. To address this issue, IDEAS Center Director Dr. Andrea Dinan launched the Future Pathways Program this year.

“College has become incredibly expensive, [but] there’s many different ways to get the training that you need or to figure out what your passion is, so it’s good to keep an open mind and check out all the different experiences,” Dinan said. “There’re so many other jobs and occupations and fields in the world that don’t necessarily need four years of college.”

Juniors who participated in Future Pathways received a passport to get stamped at each of the career paths they visited, with prizes awarded to those who filled out the entire passport. As a result, more juniors were incentivized to consider the opportunities provided by the fair.

“I might stray away from the college path and go to trade school, pilot school, or something like that,” said Tacto Yamada ’27.

Dinan invited professionals, workers, and representatives from a variety of different fields and professions, including USPS, the military, real estate, heating and air, and even representatives from Princeton Public Schools.

“I loved [sharing] with the folks around here because we’re always working with students and trying to get

information out [about] careers, education and training,” said Director of the Mercer County Fire Academy James McCann. “We get people who are from all different backgrounds, and I think they all come with a passion for wanting to do good.”

In addition to directly entering their career after high school, many students choose to pursue a higher education, an opportunity that they learned more about at the college fair. College and career counselor Nipurna Shah has years of experience organizing the college fair and inviting universities to attend. PHS, which is part of a college consortium with other high schools in the area, used its combined resources and connections to reach out to colleges for their attendance at these fairs. This year, over 148 colleges attended the PHS college fair.

“I [was] excited to meet with the colleges that I’m interested in. I’ve been on tours and I’ve talked with these admissions counselors, but I [wanted] to get a more hands-on experience and really see what can pique my interest while I [was] there,” said Ian Lansky ’27.

This year, students were introduced to StriveScan, an online tool used to make the registration and attendance process more efficient and to give college representatives a way to learn about students via a personalized QR code.

Both events have been designed to assist juniors in finding what paths might fit them later on in life — the representatives and PHS advisors aimed to broaden their horizons to future possibilities.

“I always encourage students to really think about what they love to do,” said Shah. “Find what you like, and you don’t necessarily have to know what it is yet in high school, college gives you time to explore that, but look for things that really excite you and ignite your passion.”

## Latinos Unidos share a message of love and unity during Hispanic Heritage Assembly

**Skinah Lateef, Haley Oakman, and Mira Sethuraman,**  
**CONTRIBUTING WRITERS**

On April 28, the Latinos Unidos club led their sixth annual assembly for PHS students in celebration of Hispanic heritage and culture. Students gathered in the gym to watch dances and songs performed by Latinos Unidos, Spanish class students, as well as PHS Studio Band.

This year, students played an active role in deciding which aspects of their culture they wanted to showcase. Suggested by Annelise Narvaez-Salgado ’28, the club put on a Mexican Folklorico dance inspired by her culture. While performances like Narvaez-Salgado’s were more traditional, other musical performances like the Dominican Bachata and Panamanian Reggaeton added more modern aspects to the assembly.

“Our Hispanic culture is very diverse. Celebrating the uniqueness of that [is] important and it has to be recognized and valued,” said Spanish teacher and event organizer Señora Idania Rodriguez-Mejia. “The assembly is for all of us to learn,

including us Latinos and Hispanics, we’re learning from each other as well.”

Members of Latinos Unidos at PHS aimed to create an assembly not only for PHS students to learn about the different traditions of the Hispanic world, but also as an opportunity for different students to participate and perform.

“I think my favorite part is definitely seeing people from different parts of things come together. We have the band, we have people who maybe are not so familiar with the club [that] want to be a part of this. Seeing everybody come together, it’s nice to see that,” said Latinos Unidos club President Valeria Trujillo ’26.

Along with uniting the community, Latinos Unidos integrated a Bad Bunny theme at the end of their assembly, inspired by his recent performance at the Super Bowl half-time show. They centered their performance around his message: The only thing more powerful than hate is love.

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Inspired by Bad Bunny, students from Latinos Unidos hold up the banner to close off the assembly.  
*photo: Katherine Chen*

# Senator Andrew Zwicker's decade-long bill expands voting rights to 17-year-olds

Uma Kleven and Anya Kshirsagar, STAFF WRITERS  
Maiya Qiu, CONTRIBUTING WRITER



Amanda Lee '26 registers to vote by filling out the Voter Registration Application.

This January, Governor Phil Murphy signed the New Voter Empowerment Act into law in New Jersey, which allowed 17-year-olds who turn 18 by the general election to vote in state primaries for the first time, as long as they register to vote by May 12. Andrew Zwicker, the Senator for the legislative district LD-16, which includes Princeton, sponsored this law. "It's the first bill that I ever wrote ... and it took almost a decade before it got signed into law," said Zwicker. "It's your world. The decisions that I make in the legislature right now, whether it is around economic policy, climate change, housing, [or] affordability, they're not going to magically change in 10 years. So

having your voice heard by folks like me is incredibly important." This law expands participation for primary elections, which determines the party nominees for the general election in November. "It's a unique opportunity for young people to have their voices heard," said executive board member and elections chair of the Princeton Community Democratic Organization Rachel Grainger. "The primary election is an opportunity to decide who ends up on the general ballot. So this gives young people more of a voice in that process." Zwicker encourages youth to participate in democratic processes, even if they

have not turned 17 yet. Whether it is by volunteering in a campaign, attending a council meeting, or getting involved on a local municipality level, there are multiple ways to connect with our political representatives.

"Being civically engaged and civically minded is really important. A lot of people don't realize that state local governments have a much more direct impact on people's lives, especially young people's education policy," said History and Government and Politics teacher Timothy Campbell.

However, despite the expansion of voting abilities to youth, only 32 votes were cast by 17-year-olds during New Jersey's 11th congressional district special election this April. Due to the new bill, there are a variety of factors that can affect voting participation, including weather, ballot resources, and information about voting requirements. Campbell believes that these shortcomings can be fixed with a required government class for all high schoolers.

"Not every 17-year-old knows about the registration process. Knowing the requirements [is] especially important," said Campbell. "Seniors graduate from here and go to college ... outside of their home district, they have to know they have a ballot registration process ... that's something that you could learn if a government class was mandatory before graduation."

At PHS specifically, students can access resources and programs that help them learn about and get involved with the voting registration and election process.

The school encourages students to join political clubs, while integrating civics lessons into the curriculum, educating them about elections through Student Council voting, and sending reminders about voting deadlines. Carina He '26 recalls the opportunities she has had throughout school involving civic education.

"I remember [that] in middle school we did mock debates about social issues, and you continue to do similar critical thinking [in high school] where you learn both about the history of America's election cycles and voting issues while also forming your own opinions and worldview," said He.

Eleanor Nayden '26, a senior who recently registered to vote, corroborated that young people are capable of shifting the current state of partisan politics.

"What's needed right now in the very polarized political situation, is to do your research on the different people that are in politics, so that you're not voting for ideals, but people that represent you and your desires and how you want to see the country move forward," said Nayden.

Zwicker urged people to not feel discouraged over the political environment and instead use the power they have as members of a democratic society to make the change they want to see.

"The issue I see is people feel very discouraged given the chaos coming out of Washington and feel like their vote doesn't matter," said Zwicker. "But it's the opposite because if we don't [participate], we end up with elected officials who don't share our values."

## Latinos Unidos share a message of love and unity during Hispanic Heritage Assembly

Continued from Page Two

"I was in my friend's car and her dad was listening to Bad Bunny," said Latinos Unidos leader Aimy Solares '26. "He [said] 'I love Bad Bunny's music,' and 'I want to go to Puerto Rico.' I was so happy that Bad Bunny is bringing all these different kinds of people together."

Student performers were also excited to learn more about Hispanic traditions and to show their classmates what they had prepared. The student organizers like Trujillo tried to make each assembly

different from the last in order to recapture the audience.

"This year we definitely [wanted] to make it more inclusive. We were trying to keep that balance of entertaining and showing how beautiful the culture is, but also educating and familiarizing people with our culture," says Trujillo. "We [wanted] to include people from the crowd [to] be more interactive ... like a game from our culture that we could bring people down to play."

Michelle Donis '29, like many others who attended the assembly, expressed excitement in seeing the Latino representation at the assembly.

"Hispanic heritage [is] my family and culture and how I embrace everything around me," said Donis. "[I was] excited to see what the club had prepared for everybody and to show what our culture means to us and how we embrace it."

In addition to fostering understanding about Hispanic culture, Rodriguez-Mejia

hopes that students in the assembly can become more comfortable in expressing their identity and that the audience feels supported enough to do the same.

"It's my identity that creates me. It is extremely important to be allowed to wear what you want, to speak the language that you feel comfortable with," said Rodriguez-Mejia. "That doesn't mean that you're going to put away or push away other cultures. We're all learning from each other."

# OPINIONS

## Bring back home economics

Anya Kshirsagar, STAFF WRITER

Franciszka Czerniak and Uma Kleven, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

School is designed to prepare students to become contributing citizens. However, when students who can succeed in AP Calculus BC question their ability to cook a simple meal, a serious issue presents itself. A 2019 survey by H&R Block revealed that 84 percent of American adults learned things in school they never used again, and 89 percent wished that they had learned more about practical life skills. Most Americans reported feeling that school prepared them well academically, highlighting a clear imbalance between academic knowledge and real-world readiness. One possible solution is reintroducing home economics classes in schools.

Widely implemented in public schools from the early twentieth century, home economics has been losing popularity since the 1970s and has since been labeled as “outdated” and “sexist.” But this is only the case when the class is not approached from a universal perspective. Home economics classes forge respect for non-academic skills, which is especially important in the uber-competitive environment of Princeton High School. Additionally, teaching life skills to all can actually promote gender equality, making traditionally female roles like cooking and cleaning standardized and non-gender based. These benefits make it clear that PHS should reintroduce home economics as a class that fulfills 21st century credit requirements.

It's easy to overlook the importance of life skills when academics are prioritized. At PHS, it's normal to take college-level classes and spend hours a night on homework. But why shouldn't students also learn skills they will use



photo: Julia Li

Chloe Wu '28 crochets a plush duck in the Ideas Center.

for the rest of their lives? It is not guaranteed that they will use history lessons or chemistry formulas after high school, but one thing is certain: no adult can succeed without having a basic understanding of how to care for themselves. First-year college students often struggle with basic tasks like sewing a button, doing laundry, budgeting money, or cooking meals, which can lead to unnecessary stress and poor habits. Home economics provides a structured way to practice these skills before students are fully on their own, allowing them to build confidence in a supportive

environment instead of learning through stressful trial and error. Learning practical life skills also builds up one's confidence and mental well-being. Without these skills, students may rely heavily on fast food, overspend, or feel overwhelmed by independence. Home economics empowers students to feel in control of their lives, which is just as important as academic success.

Historically, home economics was a class usually only offered to girls, while boys participated in woodworking. Although the concept of home economics was not sexist, the implementation of it was. By fixing this outdated system, it can actually be one of the most helpful high school classes for future preparation. Teaching students life skills regardless of their gender will eliminate stereotypes that assume only women can cook or clean, and instead establish it as basic knowledge. Modern programs would include the same skills taught in the past, with some new lessons about budgeting, meal planning, and basic home maintenance. By updating the curriculum, schools can ensure that the class is relevant and beneficial for all.

Schools are responsible for developing well-rounded individuals, which goes beyond cultivating strong test-takers. Intellectual success alone is not enough to prepare students for life, so even a single semester of home economics could provide lasting benefits. PHS should ensure that students are not just academically prepared to enter higher education and become adults, but also possess tools that make them independent, productive members of society.

## Dark humor desensitizes

Rohan Srivastava, NEWS AND FEATURES CO-EDITOR  
Eloise Weaver, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

“Kirkification,” known for adding Charlie Kirk's face to existing memes, was popular within days of his assassination. In the modern political landscape, memes about news headlines spread fast – often disregarding any respect that could be required for the situation. The media has a large influence over us as members of society, and often affects how we react to global news events.

Rather than regarding these situations with the seriousness and importance they deserve, the memes and dark humor posts spread across the internet downplay the severity of such events. They effectively allow countless individuals to laugh for the sake of lightening the mood, regardless of the harm such desensitization can cause.

The idea of using memes to influence public opinion is called memetic warfare. First coined in 1976 by Richard Dawkins, multiple organizations such as NATO have studied its potential to take control of a narrative. As memes can spread so fast, they are extremely effective at transmitting ideas to younger generations, including perspectives of the news. For example, memes surrounding Sean “Diddy” Combs, which mocked his horrific crimes and undermined the experiences of victims, similarly turned serious events into something that is now easily trivialized by users on the internet. Consider exactly how this influences someone who is trying to form an opinion about the tragedy they have just heard about: despite inherently knowing that political violence and human trafficking must not be tolerated, when

they see that the internet has deemed it socially acceptable to joke about death and sexual crimes, it is unlikely that they will consider higher moral grounds.

When internet users are surrounded by online posts and memes that enable the mocking of such events, it can cause desensitization to serious topics.

leads to a diminished emotional response,” can cause a lack of empathy in young people that is crucial in the modern political climate.

How does desensitization help our country's political machines? Politics thrive off of polarization, pushing people to the extreme ends of the political spectrum to create a divide. As the rise in dark humor becomes more apparent, a lack of empathy can mean that members of any political party can become less likely to understand perspectives of the other side. According to a Pew Research Center study conducted in 2025, 80% of all adults cannot even agree on basic facts with the opposing party, showing just how far

modern polarization has gone. When Nixon took part in Watergate, the Republican party understood that keeping

Nixon in power would lead to the demise of Republican favorability. Now, when Trump incites a raid on the Capitol after fairly losing an election, it only invigorates his voterbase. The modern change is that extreme Republicans and Democrats find voting for the opposing party to be unthinkable, so no matter what happens, any respective candidates from “their side” will be getting their vote – the support based solely on party affiliation.

Currently, there are countless memes circulating around the internet that thirty years ago would shock and offend both faces of the coin – just as the level of corruption in politics, now accepted as normal, would surprise critics of the past. Jokes that trivialize the sexual harassment of more than 1,000 underage individuals at Jeffrey

Epstein's island would rightly horrify many people, but now such crimes are easily turned into memes and “Five Nights at Epstein's” games. It is shocking and terrifying to see how countless people are unaffected by such jokes today.

Still, as long as we keep trivializing such issues, a divide within the country deepens at the cost of our collective conscience. Solutions do not stem from division and mockery, but from unification and empathy. It is important to prioritize your compassion and understanding for others, no matter how “harmless” dark jokes may appear.



graphic: Katherine Chen

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# Letters to the Editor: School Phone Ban

The Tower asked Princeton High School students for their opinions on next year's in-school phone ban for the state of New Jersey. Here's what they had to say:

## The state law lacks clarity

There is a gray area in the state law, which says that the school cannot stop a student from using their phone in cases of emergency. Who is going to outline what constitutes an emergency? Will it be cases of school wide emergency or a student emergency, students with jobs, or students with loved ones who are sick? In some ways, our phones are our only ways to know if these people are OK. I myself had parents in the hospital for multiple months in the school year and was constantly texting family for updates. Would that be an emergency or be a separate exception?

I'm also concerned about how it would affect me and my friends' daily lives, especially when we wouldn't be allowed to use our phones at lunch; for one, would that mean students would no longer be allowed to use their phones to buy food from vending machines or the Tiger Cafe? While that seems like a rather small issue, I know a lot of students just don't carry cash anymore.

With all these things in mind, what I hope going forward is that the school would fill the students in on what direction they are leaning so students can brace themselves. We don't want to be thrown into the deep end of a pool and struggle with whatever the school decides.

Bridget McAloon '27

## A double edged sword

It sounds like a double edged sword. I think the only reasonable law is no phones during class unless authorized by the teacher.

Max Wang '27

**99%**  
of student respondents bring a personal cell phone to school.

## The phone ban is too optimistic

I think it's unrealistic. Students need to contact their parents, their employers, etc. Maybe a student has a doctor's appointment, or has to watch their younger sibling, or their work schedule is changed; now there is no way for them to communicate effectively about these things. That said, I know they are often used for purposes other than safety or communication, so I see where the lawmakers are coming from; phones can certainly be distracting to learning. Additionally, I think people will always find a way around restrictions such as these, whether it be burner phones or some other method. I'm not sure if this will be the best or most effective solution.

Anonymous '27

## Phone bans encourage circumvention

In theory I think the ban is a good idea, but in reality it will only cause more problems. When students are given an obstacle, we'll just overcome it. I feel like the ban is just going to make us more creative at hiding our phones. Phones can also be a safety measure for us, especially with the current climate of our nation.

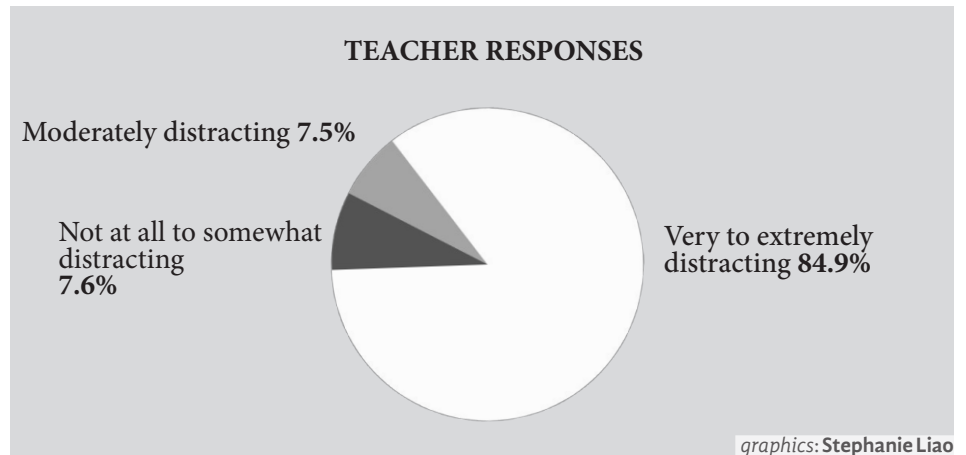
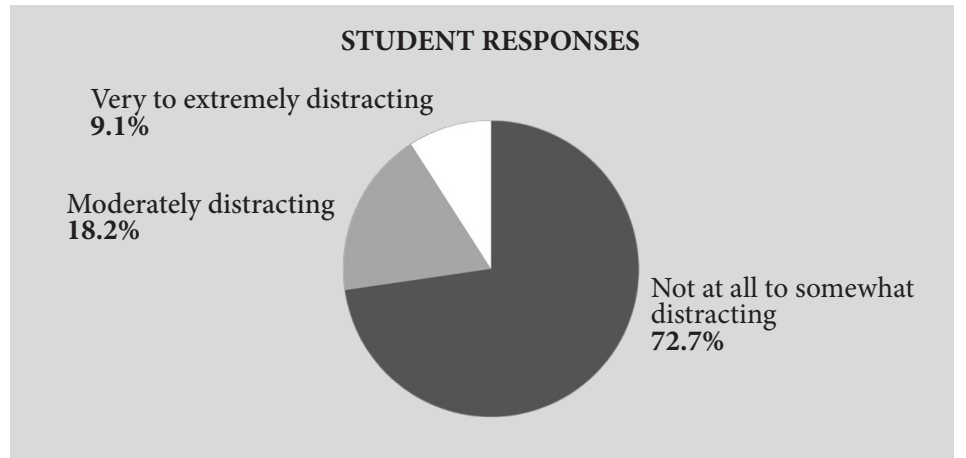
Anonymous '27

## The necessity of phones in school

I don't like the phone ban. While I understand the restrictions and concerns for students, I use my phone to communicate plans with my parents, friends, and clubs. I also use the Outlook app to stay up to date with club responsibilities. It also allows me to listen to music when my teachers let us. I also think that phones being a part of modern life means students should adapt to them, rather than have them taken away. Maybe required courses on digital literacy, coping skills, and balanced phone use would be a better long term solution.

Anonymous '27

## HOW DISTRACTING ARE PHONES DURING THE SCHOOL DAY?



graphics: Stephanie Liao

In the March 2026 PHS Phone Policy Feedback Survey administered by the PHS Tech Department, 413 students and 93 teachers anonymously provided input on the current impact of phone usage in school. The majority of student respondents believe that phones are not at all to somewhat distracting, while the majority of teacher respondents regard phones as very to extremely distracting.

## WHAT EFFECTS DO YOU THINK A PHONE-FREE POLICY MIGHT HAVE?

### Top drawbacks cited by students:

- 1) Issues contacting family
- 2) Hindered communication for school activities
- 3) Hindered communication for emergencies

### Top benefits cited by teachers:

- 1) Reduced distractions
- 2) Increased focus/engagement
- 3) Reduced phone misuse

# The cost of code switching

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

None of us are the same person in every room. The "skill" of changing our tone and mannerisms to match those of the people around us is ingrained into everyday life.

The voice that garners respect in class, the voice that brings you closer with friends, the voice that makes you feel like the kid other parents compare theirs to. It's all to appeal to an arbitrary standard of excellence or importance — to feel like a "better" version of ourselves than we think we actually are. But who cares if we're better than that standard? Maybe it makes us feel better in the moment, but what long-term benefit does it bring us? The answer is, that there is none. The more we cave to the transient expectations of the world around us, the more we lose ourselves in its wave of voices.



photo: Katherine Chen

Benjamin Caswell Klein '27 prioritizes academic focus during AP World History class.

This is not as simple as rejecting code switching entirely. Code switching is a necessary skill for some of the situations we find ourselves in day-to-day lives. The intention is not to discourage it in appropriate settings, but it becomes a problem when a fabricated persona becomes our base-line. Students need to be able to state with conviction who they are and what they stand for. If this skill is lost, we stop being able to choose who we are. Individuality is one of the great strengths of a large, diverse community like the one we have here at PHS. If we let ourselves be shaped entirely by outside forces, then that individuality is lost, replaced by an inauthenticity that hinders positive interactions and social progress.

Inauthenticity has become a quiet force behind the strife we see across the country even today; it estranges us from our own identities, even among those who should understand us the most. It prompts us to wonder: is this version of the person I'm talking to right now the "real" one, or just the one they have learned to present? Regurgitating the same meaningless slang, the same humorless joke, the same printed ideas.

"Imitation is suicide," writes the 19th century transcendentalist-based philosopher Ralph Waldo Emerson.

The point stands in that progress has never come from people who waited to be agreed with, from people who imitated to belong. The space race didn't happen because scientists forced their ideas to fit under what was accepted at the time. The Civil Rights Movement didn't advance because its leaders prioritized comfort and majority perception. Einstein's theory of relativity challenged the foundations of physics before his ideas were ever understood, let alone agreed with.

When our actions aim to conform rather than create, no new innovations are made. Individual paths follow what is known to work, not what actually matters to the person choosing them.



photo: Katherine Chen

Owing to his passion in singing, Klein finds fulfillment in switching to his musical side during Studio Vocals.

People build versions of what already exists. We see it now in the surge of startups, many of which are just AI wrappers that do the same thing with slight variation. They are not built to push an idea forward, but to fit within what is already working.

Choosing not to follow the path well-trodden is a risk, it has always been. You may not fit in as easily, and you may not be understood as quickly. But what you say is your own, and what you choose reflects that.

Every student in this school brings something different to a room. There's value in that; it lets us create works of art with special meaning, and approach problems with unique insights. It creates a vibrant community and a culture that is truly special and meaningful. And by all means we should embrace that.

**CHEERS**

**STUFF WE LIKE**

**STUFF WE DON'T**

**JEERS**

KNICKS in playoffs

CHERRY BLOSSOMS

testing before AP EXAMS

The AC BREAKING

BIEBERHELLA

DEVIL WEARS PRADA 2 out now

running out of TISSUES

VISIGOAGENT

REUNION PRINCETON SWEET PARLOR opening

PORCHFEST canceled



## What is a war nowadays?

Editorial

On February 28, the United States and Israel launched coordinated military attacks on Iran, marking the beginning of Operation Epic Fury. Congress did not officially declare war, nor was there a public referendum on the war before troops were mobilized. This isn't the first time America has done this. In fact, Congress has not formally entered war against another country since World War II.

Every single conflict America has participated in since 1945 has been justified constitutionally as an Authorized Use of Military Force (AUMF) under Article II of the Constitution. Article II establishes the executive branch and outlines the powers of the president, most importantly that of managing the military as Commander-in-Chief of the United States armed forces. With this power, the president is able to make executive decisions on their own and enter the nation into conflicts even if they aren't official wars.

America has not had a majorly popular war since WWII, which happens to be the last time a president asked Congress to declare war. Ask any PHS student who has taken U.S. History II or AP U.S. History, and they might recall learning about the highly controversial Vietnam War. Through the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution, former president Lyndon B. Johnson was granted a blank check for military force in Southeast Asia, spiraling into prolonged conflict. Protests were widespread, especially amongst young people who did not want to put their lives on the line for a conflict they did not agree to.

This manifested in the 1965 Tinker v. Des Moines case, when high school students in an Iowa public school wore black armbands in protest of the Vietnam War. After this caused controversy with the school administration, the Supreme Court ruled that students had the right to express their political opinions unless it caused a reasonable disruption to learning. This critical lens view of democracy still applies to today's conflicts. Shouldn't we work toward a world where conflicts are resolved with peace, and wars are only carried out after deliberation

by congresspeople who represent their constituents? For too long have generations of young Americans grown up hearing news of the country's latest costly military endeavors while homeland prices skyrocket. With Trump's recent war, Iran's closure of the Strait of Hormuz has increased gas prices by upwards of 50 percent.

What the United States has been pursuing since the early 1800s is not noble "counterterrorism," but a foreign policy merry-go-round driven by a delusional sense of American superiority. In this narrative, anything we do is justified and for the greater good of democracy. The bald eagle finds its way into every nest, every den, and every corner. The government makes a mockery of democracy, forcing their will on the majority that is the American public. In wake of the crumbling international order, our military has become an unwieldy tool for regime change rather than the force that protects citizens' well-being.

The constitutional loophole that allows for undemocratic, unpopular, and utterly useless wars needs to be patched. We must dismantle the mirage of American exceptionalism and restore the power to the people, for that is what true democracy is. Our issue was realized over 50 years with the infamously unpopular Vietnam War, where Congress passed the War Powers Resolution in 1973 that allows presidents to extend military intervention only if approved by Congress. If America wants real democracy and a foreign policy rooted in legal legitimacy, legislation like the War Powers Resolution must be enforced by the people. When we stop viewing the globe as a chessboard, we can actually improve our standard of living at home and truly carry out the moral authority we claim to represent abroad.

Operation Epic Fury is not an anomaly, but rather the executive branch's continuation of expansionist precedence. A nation that funnels democracy through the barrel of a gun while bypassing the consent of its own citizens is not a true republic; it is hypocrisy. As the future generation of America, it is time to call the bald eagle back to its nest. Wars we fight should be our own.

## 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 [phstowersenioreditors@gmail.com](mailto:phstowersenioreditors@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

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

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

## The value of our ancestry

Jayden Zheng and Benjamin Wang, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Learning the personal stories of your family members can lead to fascinating treasure troves of information. While some might consider sitting down and talking to family members as awkward, becoming aware of family history is imperative to discovering yourself and improving relationships with relatives. Each family member's experiences and stories are unique, which is why learning your ancestry and how your family grew up should be something that everyone should do.

Understanding your ancestry doesn't just help you understand your family, but also who you are. Marcus Strum '27, who has his whole past three generations of family history mapped out, explains what these stories mean to him.

"I'm proud of my family heritage. ... [My] Italian side has a really interesting story of how we got here," said Strum.

Strum explained that his grandfather, who grew up working in child labor, successfully immigrated to the U.S. Learning about him helped Strum appreciate the efforts and struggles his grandfather went through. He also mentions most of his family arrived in the U.S. before World War II, which deepens the sense of history and connection with his family.

Learning about where you came from and why your parents raised you the way they did can shape your perspective into a unique lens that enables you to view your past and your future. Family stories can also allow

people to feel grounded with their family roots. As shown by a 2005 Emory study, children who were aware of their family history felt a lot more confident and closer with their families. When children feel connected to their family heritage, it helps them develop a bond and feel a stronger presence in their families lives.

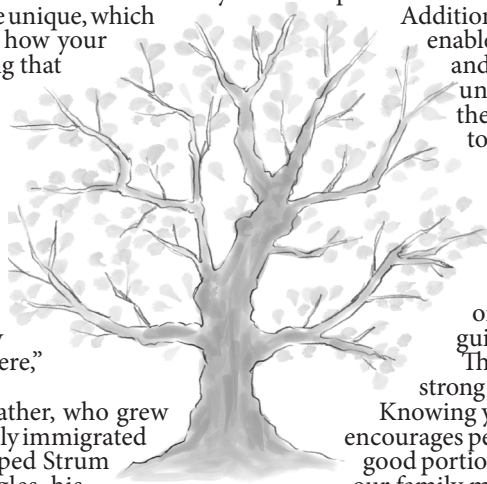
Additionally, learning your family history enables you to gain a deeper understanding and connect with your relatives. Truly understanding your family through their personal experiences allows you to appreciate each and every struggle and victory they went through.

The inspiration that comes from family conversations is also extremely valuable. Brian Hill, a professor from Brigham Young University, says that knowing your origin can start as a base and help guide you in the right directions in life.

This understanding expands into a strong sense of identity for family historians. Knowing your family members beyond names encourages people to embrace heritage. After all, a good portion of our identities are shaped by who our family members are.

Nico Barreto '28 explains how his connection with his family deepened after he visited his grandfather's hometown.

"When I visited Puerto Rico, I got to see the town where my grandpa grew up, and that was very important [for] me to see. It gave me a lot of perspective on my life today by showing me where the people that made me came from," said Barreto.



graphic: Katherine Chen

## The student-teacher gap

Maxime DeVico, BUSINESS CO-EDITOR,  
Aarna Vachrajani, MULTIMEDIA CO-EDITOR

Each generation seems to create their own language, their own way of communication that deems the previous generation out of fashion and the current one king. Viral dance trends and new slang transform communication seemingly overnight, leaving students in the loop and teachers confused.

The same sort of generation gap exists in PHS today within the student culture at the school. "The obvious one is that cell phones have become an addictive instrument. It started out as a tool that was used sometimes. Now it is basically a body part of most students," said Peter Martens, a physics and engineering teacher at PHS. That same sentiment can be seen through the stricter phone restrictions in class, such as the upcoming phone ban as teachers and administrators are beginning to notice more students communicating through their phones rather than in person.

As for the communication gap between students and teachers, some do not seem to feel a struggle in bridging that separation. "Part of it is that I have daughters that are only a little older than you are, so I see it from all angles," said Martens, suggesting that this communication gap extends beyond school.

There are also certain techniques that teachers use to stay in touch and be able to relate to their students.

"Up until recently I was on TikTok just so I could keep up with trends and understand the vernacular," said Robert Dutches, an AP World History teacher.

Having a teacher relate to students in ways like this can bridge the difference between generations and help them find common ground. "I think there are and help them find common ground. I worked in theater as a high schooler, and having similar experiences means you can share certain similarities," said Dutches.

For some teachers, connecting with students isn't the only thing they focus on, and it isn't a huge gesture. "I think [creating that bond] is in the little moments that you don't really think about or you don't plan for, like, when students come into class or in the hallways, or when you see someone who might look like they're having some issues, going up to them and chatting," said Heather Serverson, a gym teacher at PHS.

Communication between students and teachers is also about the students being comfortable enough to talk about their issues with teachers.

"I've had students talk about mental health struggles, possibly harming themselves and trying to get help," said Serverson.

No matter how a teacher approaches the communication and age difference between teachers and students, it is certain that it takes a lot of work, but it is rewarding because it makes the students feel comfortable and heard and it makes the teachers feel closer and supportive of their students.

# Vanguard Presents... GENERATION GAP

## Events that defined a generation

Atharva Desai and Jaisel Iyer, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

### The Lost Generation (1880-1900)

#### Event: World War I

The Lost Generation was a group of young people who grew up during World War I and felt disillusioned by the world after the war. Many writers in this generation, like Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald, describe feeling disconnected, not sure of their purpose in life, and frustrated with the society. They are called the "Lost" Generation because their values, like patriotism, faith, and optimism fully collapsed, leaving them aimless, and "lost".

### Baby Boomers (1946-1964)

#### Events: The Civil Rights Movement & Vietnam War

The Boomers grew up in an era of surprising economic prosperity but also came with a lot of social disruptions. The Civil Rights Movement and Vietnam War shaped the generation to question authority and challenge traditional institutions. This led to them becoming highly political and socially conscious. Overall, these events turned the Boomers into a generation that prioritized individual expression, justice, and skepticism towards those in power.

### Millennials (1981-1996)

#### Event: 9/11

For Millennials, the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, marked an end to the hope and optimism that was generated in the 1990s and the advent of a new era full of global anxiety. 9/11, along with the subsequent War on Terror, reshaped the way this generation saw the world and interconnectedness. Additionally, the beginning of the Digital Age made them very adaptable and concerned with social responsibility toward who they support.

### The Greatest Generation (1901-1927)

#### Events: The Great Depression & World War II

The Greatest Generation was defined by economic hardships and sacrifice. Growing up in the Great Depression, many individuals faced extreme poverty and joblessness, which created a lifelong sense of frugality and financial problems. This era of struggle was followed by their service in WWII, creating a generation that had a strong work ethic and a sense of duty.

### The Silent Generation (1928-1945)

#### Events: The Cold War & McCarthyism

During the rise of the Cold War and the Red Scare, the Silent Generation earned its name by learning that speaking out could lead them into trouble. The overall feeling of McCarthyism encouraged unity and caution as it was safer to not speak and work together to rebel. This shaped the generation into a group that valued security, unity, and loyalty.

### Generation X (1965-1980)

#### Event: Fall of the Berlin Wall

Generation X grew up during a period where there were a lot of shifting societal norms. The fall of the Berlin Wall symbolized the end of Cold War tensions in many people's lives. This event combined with a lack of parental control, created independence, and self reliance. They learned how to navigate the world that was vastly unpredictable, leading to a generation that valued the idea of efficiency.

### Generation Z (1997-2012)

#### Event: Covid-19 Pandemic

For Generation Z, the Covid-19 pandemic disrupted formative years and replaced personal milestones with instability. The crisis made them heavily reliant on digital and online spaces for community, which makes them the most adaptable to it. People of this generation had to switch learning styles quickly as in person school transitioned to online learning, with older Gen Z members having to adapt to their first jobs in this environment as well.

## What is wrong with our generation?

Finn Wedmid, VANGUARD CO-EDITOR  
Aryan Singla, ONLINE CO-EDITOR

If you ask older generations what is wrong with today's youth, they usually have an answer ready before the question is completely asked. We are lazy, addicted to our phones, live in our rooms, incapable of conversation, and somehow personally responsible for the downfall of basic human values. It is truly an impressive list, especially considering that every generation before us was accused of almost the exact same thing.

Soon enough, the famous "back in my day" banter begins. Back in my day, I walked 10 miles to get to school. Back in my day, we went outside until the street lights came on. However, that is not to say that we are above it all either. Just as they ramble about phones being the end of the future, we hear younger kids saying "67" with complete seriousness and start thinking the exact thing.

It is practically a rule: every generation romanticizes itself and scrutinizes the ones around it.

Baby Boomers, known for valuing the workplace as a priority, have viewed Generation X as being "slackers" for straying away from traditional "9-to-5" jobs. Generation X often calls Millennials dependent on technology and too pampered. Generation Z is labeled as fragile, short-attention-spanned, and "stuck" on technological devices. Of course, none of these labels are defined concretely, but they are not rooted solely in falsehoods either. Baby Boomers did live in a "booming" post-war economy during the peak of their working years, and newer generations have used technology much more than previous generations.

That said, there is much more nuance to all of these perceptions. Data on how many hours different generations work, how long each generation is online daily and average median incomes are hard to decode, because statistics from different sources often contradict each other. Every generation is currently at a different point in their lives, so comparing them to one another is impossible. Furthermore, comparing current generations to the equivalent age of previous generations neglects the fact that the social environment surrounding these generations have changed.

On top of that, older generations condemn newer ones for much more abstract reasons. For example, Generation X often critiques modern music as being overproduced and fabricated, as they favor the MTV-era music of their time. Boomers disliked Gen X's music for lacking the melodic structure of their own classic rock and folk. The Silent Generation disliked the Beatle-led "British Invasion" of Boomer-era music due to being "too noisy" and not structured. These arguments are very similar to each other because they represent a cyclical pattern of generation conflict. Older generations, often blinded by nostalgia for their own trends, will dismiss the adaptations of newer generations. In reality, whether these newer adaptations are worse, better, or equal is all subjective to the individual.

These judgements are rarely limited to just work ethic, music, or phones. More often, they reflect discomfort with change itself. When newer generations speak differently, live differently, or value different things, older generations often interpret that difference as a decline, as a regression. A generation raised in a different world will inevitably turn into something different from the ones before it.

So, what is wrong with our generation? Probably the same thing that has been wrong with nearly every generation before it: we are shaped by our time, judged by the people who no longer live in it, and blamed for changes that are larger than ourselves. We all have our flaws, certainly, but so did everyone else. The difference is that ours are simply the newest ones on display.

Maybe the better question is not what is wrong with our generation, but why every generation is so determined to believe the next one is the beginning of the end.

graphics: Luna Xu

## Overcoming Generational Gaps

Layla Krystofik and Laura Pepek, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

We often find ourselves in situations where conversations with older relatives or friends stall out – not due to a lack of care, but simply because of a gap in shared references and life experiences. Bridging this generational gap doesn't require a history degree; rather, it requires a willingness to look for human overlap instead of age differences. While the divide is real, stemming from different cultural moments, tech habits, and life stages, the path to connection is much simpler than you think.

Imagine the gap as two people who both speak English but use different slang. One says "That's lit," while the other says "That's swell." The words are different, but the meaning is the same. A generational gap works the same way: a dialect difference, more so than a full-on divide. The basic human language of joy, grief, excitement, fear, hope, and love hasn't changed. Once you stop translating every word and start listening for the emotion underneath, the divide shrinks dramatically.

For example, to start a genuine conversation, skip the weather. Instead, try asking, "What was your first job like?" or "If you could relive one day of your life, which would it be?" Questions like these open the door to storytelling and pride rather than one-word responses. From there, lean into universal themes – childhood memories, personal aspirations, family food traditions – because these emotional anchors can resonate across any era.

The key is simple: listen for the feeling, not the fact. You don't need to love vinyl records to appreciate the joy of anticipation. They don't need to master emojis to acknowledge the need for connection. While you may not understand each other in certain areas, you don't have to pretend to be interested in the same "stuff" to find common ground; you can simply recognize the emotion they are describing. The generational gap isn't a wall – it's just a different dialect of the same human language. If you ask with genuine curiosity and listen with an open heart, those stalled conversations just might turn into the ones you remember most.

## Social Trends and Memes across Generations

Jacob Rogart, CO-HEAD COPY EDITOR

### 1940s-1960s: Early meme concepts and catchphrases

Ideas spread through posters, comics, and sayings that became part of everyday life. Catchphrases like "Kilroy was here" appeared around the world and even during wartime. These early cultural jokes worked the same way memes work today, ideas that spread person to person and influenced pop culture sayings and slang, like "Make love, not war" in the 1960s.

### 1980s: Digital culture

As computers became more common, people began making and sharing digital jokes. Early online communities used text art and graphics to entertain each other. Around this time, scientist Richard Dawkins introduced and coined the word "meme," showing how ideas spread almost like living things, while pop culture trends like MTV and video games began to start a new digital generation.

### 1990s: The Internet surge

When the internet became more popular, visual memes started to appear. The "Dancing Baby" or "Oogachacka Baby" animation became one of the first viral hits online. Forums and chat rooms helped new internet slang like "LOL" and "BRB" spread quickly. Memes became a part of how people express humor across the internet as culture shifted online through websites and fandoms.

### 2000s: Rise of viral media

Social sites and photo editing made it easy for anyone to create and share memes. Funny pictures with captions, like LOLcats or Advice Animals, took over websites like Reddit and 4chan. YouTube videos like "Rickrolling" showed how quickly jokes could go global in the age of internet sharing.

### Early 2010: Social media boom

Social media turned memes into a major part of pop culture. Twitter, Instagram, and Vine made it easy to spread jokes, relatable posts, and short videos. Everyone started using memes for fun. Examples like "Grumpy Cat" and "Harlem Shake" went viral worldwide and people used platforms to share dance trends, reaction GIFs, and viral challenges. Memes started to become very intertwined into daily lives by becoming a common way for people to react and talk.

### Late 2010: Political and reaction memes

During this time, memes took a stronger voice in politics and social issues. People started using memes to comment on elections, news, and world events, turning humor into a form of protest or support. Many political groups used memes to spread their opinions online, while other people saw this as a sign that memes had become too serious. Popular formats like "Distracted Boyfriend," "Mocking SpongeBob," and "OK Boomer" reflected not just jokes, but feelings about society, culture, and generations. Memes became a way to argue, persuade, and laugh during a time defined by social and online movements.

### 2020s: Short videos and Artificial Intelligence

Today, most memes appear as short videos on apps like TikTok, YouTube, and Instagram. A trend called "Italian Brainrot" showed how chaotic and random memes had become. AI tools can help generate images, captions, and music for memes, letting people create memes faster than ever before. Memes now spread across online in seconds, shaping the way people talk and express humor as short videos and internet trends dominate pop culture.

## Things Passed Down Through Generations

Kelly Cenci and Olivia Fan, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS



*What we inherit from our families is never just physical or biological; it is also the traditions and quiet acts of resilience passed from one generation to the next. Every family has stories of struggle, hope, and perseverance that shape who future generations become. As we move forward, we continue to add our own chapters to that story, becoming the link between the past and the future. By passing down our stories, our values, and the strength we have gathered along the way, we ensure that the past does not fade but continues to guide.*

### Rudy's Catering

In 1930, an eight-year-old boy named Rudolph Cenci spent his mornings running down the streets of lower Manhattan, delivering newspapers. Growing up as the son of an orphaned Italian immigrant, Rudy didn't have it easy. Whether it was not making it past eighth grade or barely having enough money to get by, Rudy and his family had seen poverty and struggle first-hand.

Due to his lack of education, Rudy's skill set consisted mostly of his family's Italian recipes. So, utilizing these skills, Rudy decided to create his own business. He first found success on the northern tip of Staten Island, where he began "Rudy's Delicatessen." There, he spent a few years selling sandwiches, coffee, and newspapers, just like he had as a child.

After a while working there, Rudy took his business to the "Sons of Norway," who offered him some land and a place to set up his very own catering business. It was here that he began Rudy's Catering, what would become an acclaimed business and working opportunity for generations and generations of the Cenci family to come.

Rudy's Catering combined the classic New York-style cuisine with the traditional recipes from his father's original home in Florence. It was this blend of cultures that kept customers coming for years and years: the flavors of Italy brought to America's doorstep by a young man with a love for cooking.

And this passion was passed down in the Cenci family — my family. When Rudy got too old to run the business, it was passed down to my great-uncles, who brought the business to run completely on its own, no longer having to borrow land from the "Sons of Norway." The employees of Rudy's Catering were my family members. My great-grandparents, grandparents, parents, and everyone in between kept the business alive through the years, working and collaborating to make it the best it could be.

To this day, aspects of Rudy's Catering are passed down to my generation. Although the business itself is no longer around, the hard work and dedication of my great-grandfather and his family is not forgotten. Every year, my family gets together to make our time-honored Italian recipes. Every year, we retell stories from long ago, sharing and spreading the culture that shaped how our family is today. Every year, we keep Rudy and his history alive, story by story, generation by generation, bit by bit.

And when the time comes for the next generation to carry the legacy too, we'll share with them the history we've come to know so well: the tale of an eight-year-old boy selling newspapers in Manhattan.

### Fans All Over the World

Unlike the majority of the world, I took my mother's surname, Fan. The surname Fan originated from a wealthy Chinese noble family with descendants of aristocrats, chancellors, and celebrities. Unfortunately, my grandparents never inherited the fame and fortune of our ancestors. Their lives were instead filled with famine, poverty, and labor.

Despite dropping out of school in the second grade to provide for her family, my grandmother was extremely capable. She learned how to sew, identify plants in the wild, and cook by simply observing her surroundings. My grandmother frequently reminisced about the potential she could have had if given the chance to study, and although she never received that opportunity, her longing for an education lived on through her children.

My mother was exceptionally gifted at mathematics. She would wake up at five in the morning just to study. When she was not studying, she was daydreaming about different theoretical dimensions. Her efforts brought her from the rural province of Jiang Xi to the capital city of Beijing to study at Tsinghua University.

While I inherited my mother's love for math, it was freeing to learn for fulfillment rather than survival, a freedom built on the quiet sacrifices each generation made to lift the next one higher.

The last name I inherited is not simply a title, but a symbol to honor what past generations have done. Carrying the name Fan means carrying their unfinished dreams and the unspoken promise that each generation would strive for something better.

As I carve out my own story, I do so knowing that I am not starting from nothing. I am standing on the shoulders of those who endured, those who dreamed, and those who refused to let their circumstances define the limits of what they could achieve. The surname Fan was passed down to me, not just as an identity but as a testament to the generations who built the path beneath my feet.

# ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

## Student artist of the month: Worth Rowley '26



Bella Feng, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

### What inspired you to play the trumpet?

I started playing in third grade. It was when our school system started teaching with instruments, just at the public schools. But I'd gone when I was really little to some music tryouts [and] a bunch of interesting instruments stuff. And I'd tried it before playing the trumpet, and people were like, "Oh, most people can't play it the first time, and you could make a note, which is kind of interesting." So then I was like, I might as well try it. And then I just never stopped playing.

### Who is your favorite composer and what is your favorite piece?

This is a jazz standard and it's called "Joy Spring," the composer is this jazz trumpeter called Clifford Brown. It's a really good one, and you can play it on any instrument.

### What is your favorite part of playing the trumpet?

Being in Studio Band has definitely been one of my favorite parts of playing the trumpet. I guess I really enjoy the togetherness of the band at the school. It's fun playing with people, much more than [playing the trumpet] on your own.

### How has being in the school's Studio Band influenced both your performance style and your high school experiences?

Well, I didn't start in Studio Band. Freshman year I was in Nassau [Band] II, [which is] the third band. But I think over time I just got better through playing with other people. We play all the time [and] practice every day. So it has definitely helped me become a better player. Also, I made a lot of friends through it. A lot of my close friends were in bands, and we get to travel a lot, which is really awesome, and we get a variety of experiences. To some extent, it forces you to be a little professional, because it's so organized.

### What are some memorable moments you've had in the Studio Band?

State finals is always a big one every year. This weekend we just won the National Jazz Festival, so that was good, and we also won that last year. But also we have Band Dances in the cafeteria about every month, and it's always very fun. We get to [have our] families come, and it's community building.

### What are some challenges that you have faced as a trumpet player during your time at PHS?

I would say that auditions are one of the biggest challenges. I didn't have to audition this year because next year I won't be in band anymore. But every year during auditions, it's very stressful, you essentially only get one shot for sight readings. [If] you sight read poorly one time, when the pressure's high, then you get dropped down a band, or you don't move up, or something like that. So that's always stressful, and you have to always prepare for that.

### What are your plans for the future as a trumpet player after you graduate?

Next year I'm going to Tulane University in New Orleans, and New Orleans does have very good jazz music, so I'm excited for that. I'm excited to listen, and hopefully play in a big band there. [Tulane University] has a good culture there for music, and I'm excited for that.

### What are some pieces of advice you would give to new musicians that are joining PHS Studio Band?

I would say just stick with it. At the start, it's hard. ... I remember last year was my first year in Studio Band. I felt like at the start, the jump from Jazz Ensemble to Studio Band was much bigger than I thought it was. And I felt like I was behind everyone. But after a couple weeks, you do get better playing with better people, and it will be fine at the end.

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Photo by: T. Kevin Birch.

# The resurgence of vinyls

Maeve Walsh, ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT CO-EDITOR

With a collection of around 700 albums, I have become obsessed with the ritual of picking a vinyl out of the sleeve, placing it onto the turntable, connecting the speakers, dropping the needle, and hearing the warm analog sound reverberate through the speakers. This tactile experience with music connected me to how music was enjoyed for decades and introduced me to hundreds of artists. For many years, I was an outlier, with many of my peers solely using streaming services. However, due to the trendiness of a vintage lifestyle, vinyls are becoming more widely used and collected by Gen Z listeners. According to Yahoo Finance, vinyl sales surpassed one billion dollars in 2025, with over 48 million units sold. Through this resurgence, old records stored in attics are now becoming coveted collector's items for teenagers.

Using a record player is a process and a ritual. From smelling the dust from records I haven't used in a while to hearing the little crackling noises of the stylus on the grooves of the vinyl, I remember each of these sensory details like the back of my hand, making the experience grounding and nostalgic. The moment the first note rings through the speaker is so gratifying because I spent time preparing it, carefully handling each aspect of the process to ensure the vinyl and record player are preserved as best as possible.

"For vinyl in particular I think people appreciate the entire package the vinyl offers," said Brandon Odobenek, an employee of Princeton Record Exchange, a local hub for vinyl collectors and a prime example of record store culture. "It's not like you're just pressing a button

on your phone or on your computer. You're actually taking the record out of the jacket, putting it on the turntable, dropping the stylus down, so it's a whole different experience. I think that's something that people [who] didn't necessarily grow up with have come to appreciate, and the people who did grow up with it are now returning to it."

It wasn't until the pandemic that I heard my peers talking about buying vinyls and experiencing the record store culture. It can be magical and meditative to flip through vinyls, smelling the aroma of old paper and listening to the background music chosen by the shopkeepers. On top of that, the idea that there could be an original or limited edition pressing hidden within the piles keeps the excitement flowing and makes me feel like a little kid on a treasure hunt.

Once I find what I am looking for, or maybe what I unexpectedly came across, another wave of excitement crosses over me, opening the record for the first time. Besides the first listen, opening it could uncover many of the hidden gifts an album jacket can have, like liner notes, posters, lyric sheets, stickers. One of my favorite discoveries was the four high-quality individual portraits and the large poster with lyrics on the back that I found inside The Beatles' "White Album." Both the tangibility of the music as well as the extra information and memorabilia connect the listener to the music beyond a single dimension, both physically and intellectually.

The combination of its ritualistic nature, the community behind it, and the physicality and interaction fostered

are what revived vinyl popularity and brought it to the forefront of social media, becoming a large part of the vintage aesthetic. Whether it's freshly pressed vinyls from modern artists appealing their audience or well-loved records from forgotten retro artists, vinyls and their culture are accessible to all tastes and levels of interest in music, which is why their resurgence became so widespread and influential.

"It doesn't matter what walk of life you came from," said Odobenek. "As long as you're here because you love music and you're passionate about buying music, that's all that matters."



graphic:  
Katherine Chen

# The benefits of concerts

Arianna Kapoor, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

A room, or a packed stadium filled with music? Being alone, or being with hundreds of fans? Seeing the artist's album cover, or seeing them perform in person? Music has always been important in our society no matter the generation. It conveys a sense of visibility, togetherness, and acceptance. Unfortunately, one of the many beauties of music that is often forgotten or skipped over is its authenticity and its ability to build a community.

Using streaming services is practical, but every song that gets released goes through an extensive production process. The artist most likely sings multiple takes, perfecting their voice over and over again until the song is completely how they envision it. A level of perfectionism is understandable and expected within the music industry, but the joy of music comes from the small flaws. From small voice cracks, to laughter in songs, these moments reveal the humanity of the artist, which finalized songs sometimes lack. Along with the popularization of autotune, musicians are discouraged to release songs that do not fit the standard, contributing to the uniformity of the industry. With concerts, the crowd is composed of people together for one night,

producing a unique environment for the artist to color their music with ad-libs. In this way, performances that are built off the crowd allow a new level of authenticity and creativity.

"When it's live, it's very unique because [Swift] can change the words or she can have a phrase that she says to interact with the audience. It just feels special because whoever is there in the audience are the only people who get to listen to it live like this," said Vivian Lutkowski '28 who attended a Taylor Swift concert.

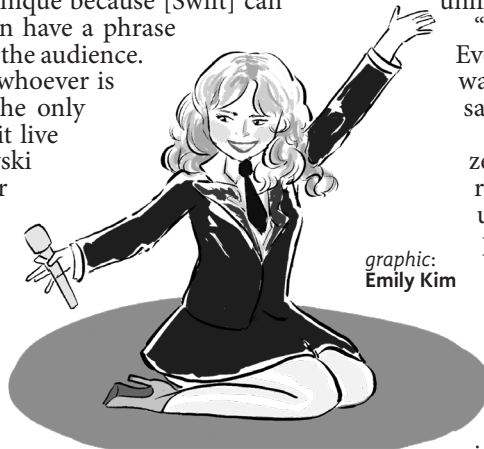
Not only do concerts allow the artist to experiment with performance style, a community and a sense of interconnectedness are also fostered during the performance. All audience members are packed inside one venue to see an artist they

all enjoy, and therefore are uniting under a common interest. Trends such as friendship bracelets as well as custom items like stickers and charms immortalize the moment and provide a way to make friends with unlikely people.

"Everyone, like me, was a super fan. Everyone was being so nice and everyone was trading friendship bracelets around," said Lutkowski.

Unlike studio recordings, artists have zero do-overs or retakes and there is no rewind button for the audience. That unfiltered experience of staying in the present moment can be refreshing and is irreplicable. Going to a concert not only brings people closer together, but it also brings people closer with the artist. Concerts turn songs into moments, and those moments last a lifetime.

"The music felt ... alive and radiant," said Lutkowski. "And I just loved every single time she opened her mouth to sing."



graphic:  
Emily Kim

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# Spring-themed mini crosswords

Kelly Cenci, STAFF WRITER

**ACROSS**

- 1. \_\_\_\_ dragon, a spring flower
- 5. Medical insurance cost
- 7. Based on \_\_\_\_ story
- 8. Natural numbers, in notation
- 9. How people with allergies may feel in the spring
- 10. Common springtime flower that once caused an economic panic in the Dutch Republic

**DOWN**

- 1. Meager
- 2. April Fool's!
- 3. \_\_\_\_ showers bring May flowers
- 4. Physics Nobel laureate Wolfgang
- 6. A pained shout
- 11. Thee, in slang

1	2	3	4	
5				6
7				
8		9		
10	11			

1	2	3	4	
5				6
7				
8				
9				

**ACROSS**

- 1. Poet Teasdale who wrote "Spring Night" and "There Will Come Soft Rains"
- 5. Something that may grow in the spring
- 7. Anxiety or aggravation
- 8. Singer Gray who wrote "Idle Town" about the spring of his high school senior year
- 9. That's someone \_\_\_\_ problem

**DOWN**

- 1. On April 1st, the Artemis II mission sent four people here
- 2. Triple-star system in the constellation Perseus
- 3. When it \_\_\_\_, it pours
- 4. Pillars on the side walls of Ancient Greek temples
- 6. Bronzes, as on a sunny spring day

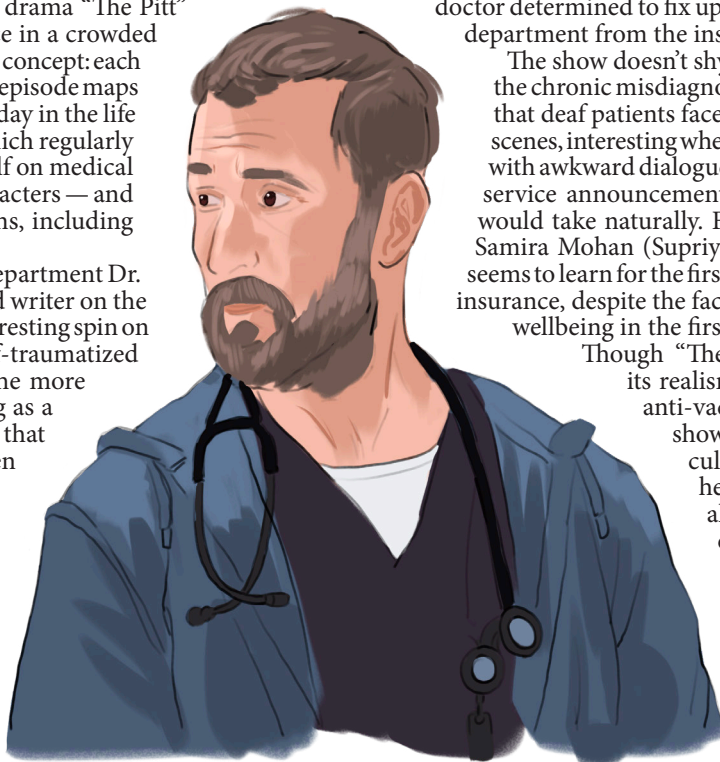
## "The Pitt" season two, reviewed

Agatha Patten, ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT CO-EDITOR

The second season of HBO Max's award-winning medical drama "The Pitt" finished airing on April 16, 2026. The show, which takes place in a crowded Pittsburgh emergency room, operates with an unusual real-time concept: each season follows the characters through a 15-hour shift, and each episode maps an hour of it. This format allows the viewer a peek into what a day in the life of an emergency room worker might look like — the show, which regularly uses gory prosthetics to accurately imitate injuries, prides itself on medical realism. Season two of "The Pitt" follows most of the same characters — and their conflicts — as the first, along with several new additions, including two new medical students and a nurse.

Attending physician and head of the hospital's emergency department Dr. Michael "Robby" Robinavitch (Noah Wyle, also a director and writer on the show) remains the show's focus, though season two puts an interesting spin on his characterization: where in the first season he was a noble-if-traumatized hero-without-a-cape, the second season dives deeper into the more unsavory qualities that stem from his repressed past working as a doctor during the COVID-19 pandemic. Though he insists that he rigidly separates work and life, the line soon blurs between healthy balance and a refusal to confront his many problems.

If the climax of season one was an external event that shocked the hospital, season two's is a slow, creeping internal implosion brought about by old and new rivalries coming to a head: Drs. Trinity Santos (Isa Briones) and Frank Langdon (Patrick Ball), who butted heads last season so severely that it ended with one having to leave the hospital for ten months, are working together for the first time since the inciting incident; an old case comes back for Dr. Melissa King (Taylor Dearden) in the form of a medical malpractice lawsuit; and Dr. Robby can't seem to get along with the new attending physician Dr. Baran Al-Hashimi (Sepideh Moafi), a by-the-book



graphic: Emily Kim

doctor determined to fix up the underfunded and overcrowded emergency department from the inside.

The show doesn't shy away from calling out healthcare biases, from the chronic misdiagnosis of women with heart disease to the struggles that deaf patients face just to communicate with their doctors. These scenes, interesting when handled smoothly, are often fumbled, however, with awkward dialogue that feels more like a clumsy attempt at a public service announcement for viewers than actions that the characters would take naturally. For instance, a season two plotline follows Dr. Samira Mohan (Supriya Ganesh) as she treats a diabetic patient and seems to learn for the first time of the existence of people without medical insurance, despite the fact that she'd been a staunch advocate for patient wellbeing in the first season.

Though "The Pitt" is renowned for its medical accuracy, its realism doesn't end there. Featuring storylines with anti-vaccinators, drug addiction, and gun violence, the show is committed to demonstrating the current cultural landscape, particularly as it pertains to healthcare work. There are moments that feel almost uncannily relevant to recent events: in one episode, an ER nurse is taken into custody by masked ICE agents for defending an undocumented patient, echoing the shooting of intensive care nurse Alex Pretti by federal officers in February 2026.

The second season, which takes place on July 4, 2026 — America's 250th birthday — is an often bleak but well-crafted reminder of the state of the world and the challenges that healthcare workers face.

## "Project Hail Mary" is out of this world

Aariyana Patel, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Drama and comedy mixed with space and science comes together in a perfect twist to create the movie "Project Hail Mary," which had everyone rushing to the theaters after its release on March 20. Directors Phil Lord and Christopher Miller's tenth feature film together is an adaptation of the 2021 Andy Weir novel of the same name.

The movie takes place in a not-so-distant future where the sun has mysteriously begun to dim because of a strange line observed between it and Venus. Dr. Eva Stratt (Sandra Hüller), the leader of an international task force designed to stop this issue before it causes a disastrous ice age, must bring in former scientist Ryland Grace (Ryan Gosling), a once-respected scientist forced into obscurity as a middle school teacher because of a controversial paper he wrote. During his research, Ryland figures out that small organisms, which he calls Astrophages, are feeding on the sun and causing this dimming.

The film oscillates between this plotline and Grace's experience on the spaceship sent to the only star system not experiencing this dimming. On his journey, he meets and befriends an alien named Rocky (voiced by James Ortiz) and the two of them set out to save their respective planets.

Although Ryland and Rocky initially distrust each other, with the help of intergalactic translation technology they quickly overcome their differences and form a close bond. In "Project Hail Mary," not even differences in home planet can limit the strength of friendship. Even the team of scientists dedicated to the Hail Mary mission too came from a wide variety of earthly nations.

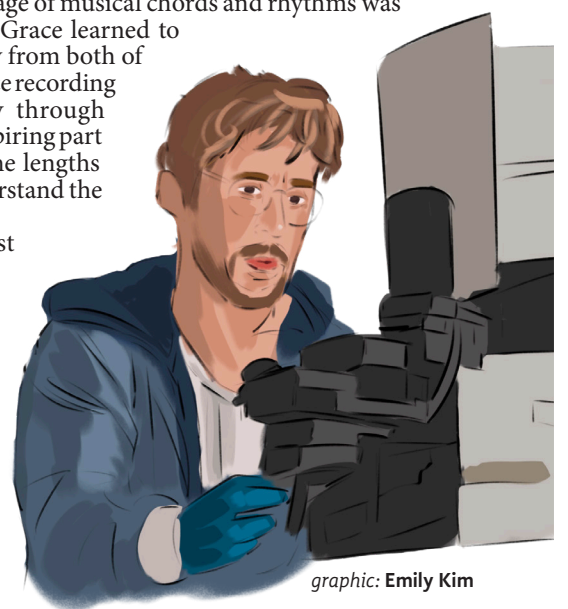
If this ideal of global cooperation seems highly optimistic, the entire movie is. Even characters like Stratt, who would be easy to reduce to caricatures given their limited screen-time and archetypal roles, are given the film's sympathy and allowed glimpses of interiority.

A part I found interesting was the creation of the alien Rocky through a combination of puppetry and CGI. A puppeteer, also Rocky's voice actor, performed as the alien on set,

and computer effects were added in post-production to touch up any mistakes that may have occurred with the physical ones.

In addition, Rocky's alien language of musical chords and rhythms was unique, and the way that he and Grace learned to communicate through technology from both of their societies was fascinating. Grace recording and learning a new vocabulary through Rocky's music language was an inspiring part of the movie, and goes to show the lengths that one can, or should, go to understand the people around them.

Overall, this movie wasn't just about science or space travel; it went deeper to explore values that teach the viewers life lessons, like the power of bravery, strong communication, friendship, and sacrifice. The characters are funny, smart, and heroic, with each adding their own special touch to the film. A fun, high-budget blockbuster with endearing acting and a heartwarming story, "Project Hail Mary" is a memorable, entertaining watch for everyone.



graphic: Emily Kim



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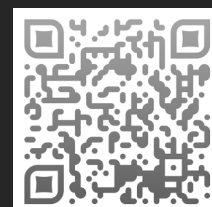
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# SPORTS

## International Olympics Committee bans trans woman athletes

Meredith Fan and Johanna Kraft, STAFF WRITERS



graphics: Katherine Chen

On March 26, 2026, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) banned trans women from participating in the female division of the Olympics. Before the finalization of this new rule, the committee had already been discussing how to divide the female division in Olympic sports by making clear distinctions between biologically born females and transitioned females.

They concluded that, because of scientifically proven advantages in biologically male athletes, it would be unfair and unsafe to permit them to participate. Specifically, the IOC cited close games and high stakes as the reason for their decision.

As part of Olympic regulations, athletes have been required to complete testing to see if they are eligible for the female division. This process usually includes genetic testing, such as cheek swabs or blood samples. The results are used to check for the sex-determining region Y gene, which is typically found in biological males. If the athlete has this gene, they are not allowed to compete in the female division, but if they don't, they are allowed to participate.

James Smirk, one of the head coaches of the track and field team, emphasized the credibility issues of the IOC in itself. Smirk referenced previous Olympic controversies to question the IOC's consistency and fairness in its decisions over the years.

"We can go all the way back to East Germany, [where athletes were] so heavily doping that the female athletes actually had higher registered testosterone than the highest

natural male testosterone ever recorded. [However, the] Olympic Committee did nothing about [it]," said Smirk.

The East German doping scandal was an event where female athletes were given performance-enhancing drugs, synthetic versions of hormones, by their coaches. This leads to an increase in muscle mass, strength and speed, and a raise in testosterone levels in the body. One such drug given was Oral-Turinabol, which was used specifically to enhance strength and endurance. From 1960 to 1989 22 national records were set by these athletes who used drugs.

For Smirk, that raises larger questions about how much science versus outside factors actually influences the decisions the IOC makes.

"I think one of the big things to understand is that when we talk about things like athletics, it's very easy to sit here ... and say, the science, the science, the science. But athletics are [also a] cultural phenomena," said Smirk. "If you go back to other cultures that engaged in competitive athletics, transgender identity was not [considered] an issue. This is more of a cultural issue than it is necessarily a biological issue, and [it depends on] how culturally we define what fair competition represents."

According to the American College of Sports Medicine, notable differences between biological males and females appear at the age of puberty, around 12 years old. These differences are due to the anabolic effects of testosterone in males. During puberty, male testosterone levels multiply by 20 to 30 times, 15 times higher than in females at the age of 18.

Mary Pat Lelinski, head coach of the girls basketball team, explained that while men generally have more physical strength, each case should be considered individually, and if there are no big advantages, they should be allowed to compete.

Furthermore, she spoke about how physical differences between biological men and women often come into play, especially in a contact sport such as basketball.

"Going case by case, if there's an obvious advantage

to [allowing a trans athlete to participate], then they can't participate because it would create a safety issue in a lot of sports," said Lelinski.

Greta Knierem '27, an athlete on the girls varsity basketball team, who has been coached by Lelinski, shared a similar perspective, from an athlete's point of view.

"It should definitely depend on the case. It's just so hard [to judge] depending on how skilled the person may be at the sport and just how much of a disadvantage it could mean to the other opponents in the activity or the sport," said Knierem. "I don't think that they could even [make] a rule on [transgender athletes competing in the women's division since] everyone has different types of skills [and] everyone contributes to their sport differently."

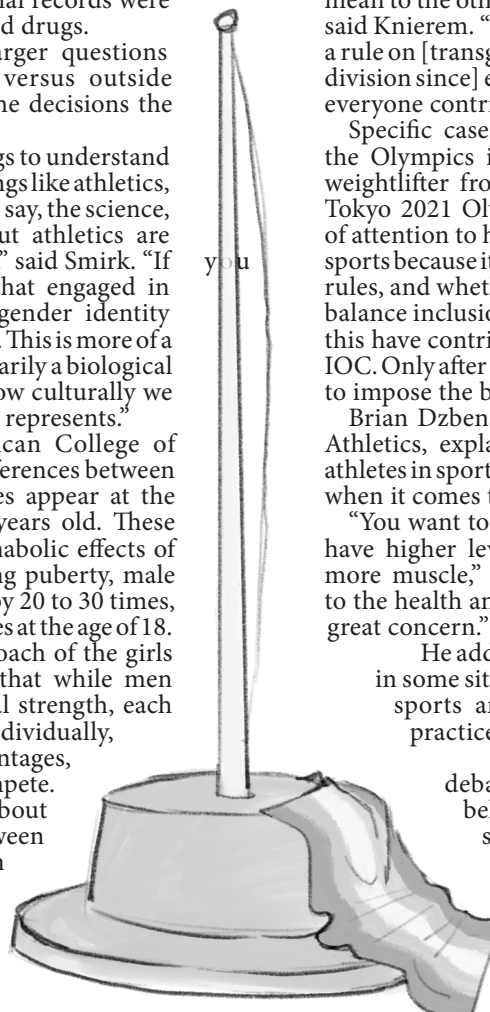
Specific cases of transgender women competing in the Olympics include Laurel Hubbard, a transgender weightlifter from New Zealand who competed in the Tokyo 2021 Olympics. Her participation brought a lot of attention to how transgender athletes fit into women's sports because it raised questions about fairness, eligibility rules, and whether current Olympic policies can equally balance inclusion and competitive advantage. Cases like this have contributed to ongoing discussions within the IOC. Only after collecting years of data did the IOC decide to impose the ban.

Brian Dzbenski, Princeton High School's Director of Athletics, explained that decisions about transgender athletes in sports often involve multiple factors, especially when it comes to competition and student well being.

"You want to use science and utilize the facts ... men have higher levels of testosterone [which] ... builds more muscle," said Dzbenski. "When it comes down to the health and safety of students ... that's definitely a great concern."

He added that while separation may make sense in some situations, applying one clear rule across all sports and athletes is much more difficult in practice.

The IOC's decision reflects an ongoing debate with no easy answer. While some believe the rule protects the fairness and safety in the Olympics, others argue that it oversimplifies a complex issue and does not account for individual differences. As sports continue to evolve, the challenge will be finding a balance that respects both inclusions and fair competition.



## The influx of new PEDs

Joshua Huang, SPORTS CO-EDITOR

Cole Grainger, and Daniel Gu, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

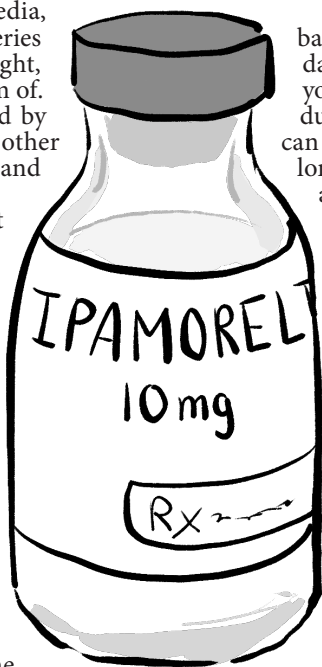
As you're mindlessly scrolling through social media, you come across a fitness influencer talking about a series of new "miracle drugs" that can help you lose weight, gain muscle, or whatever you could possibly dream of. Suddenly, you're thrown into a world surrounded by terms such as BPC-157, Ipamorelin, and dozens of other obscure names. Welcome to the world of peptides and performance-enhancing drugs (PEDs).

In the modern era, our lives are more transparent than ever where social media allows us to see into each other's lives. Unfortunately, this transparency creates an overwhelming pressure to show ourselves in a manner that is as flattering as possible. Consequently, student-athletes increasingly fall into the false promise of a "miracle" from synthesized chemicals.

Through algorithmic feeds, aesthetics and the image of perfect athleticism have been normalized in society. Unfortunately, this lofty image poses a serious threat to young athletes: muscle dysmorphia, a psychopathological phenomenon where one thinks that they are too weak or small. Instead of seeking proper medical attention, teenagers are more likely to compensate for their dysmorphia by giving into the allure of peptides. The issue lies within their lack of education on the topic; a similar issue came in the form of social media, which was remediated over time.

"[Young athletes] know the dangers of social media and that they have to have a positive social media presence," explained Brian Dzbenski, the PHS Director of Athletics. "They should use social media as a springboard to a positive virtual environment because a lot of the coaches do use social media to communicate with players."

There is currently a significant lack of scientific research regarding these newer forms of peptides. Although steroids and stimulants such as amphetamines have been prevalent for years, peptides have gained traction recently for their supposed lack of side effects, which creates concerns for overuse given the lack of medical context. Worse yet, the need for perfection has become embodied in the practice of "stacking," where users consume multiple peptides to optimize benefits. The side effects of this practice are unknown due to the countless combinations that are possible with these drugs.



graphic: Emily Kim

Beyond the lack of scientific backing, peptides can be especially dangerous because the judgment of younger athletes can be easily clouded; due to their lack of experience, youth can frequently struggle to think about long-term consequences. Instead, the aforementioned pressure to win and the lack of proper research leaves athletes susceptible to another source of stress: familial expectations.

"Unfortunately, we have a generation of student-athletes now that have a lot of pressure from their parents, because their parents are living vicariously through their children," said Dzbenski. "They want to see [them] score that goal, and they want to be proud of them, and some of them may have lost sight of the joy of sport."

Nonetheless, there is a bigger concern regarding these drugs: the "quick fix" that is provided by these drugs is an act of cheating oneself, not just

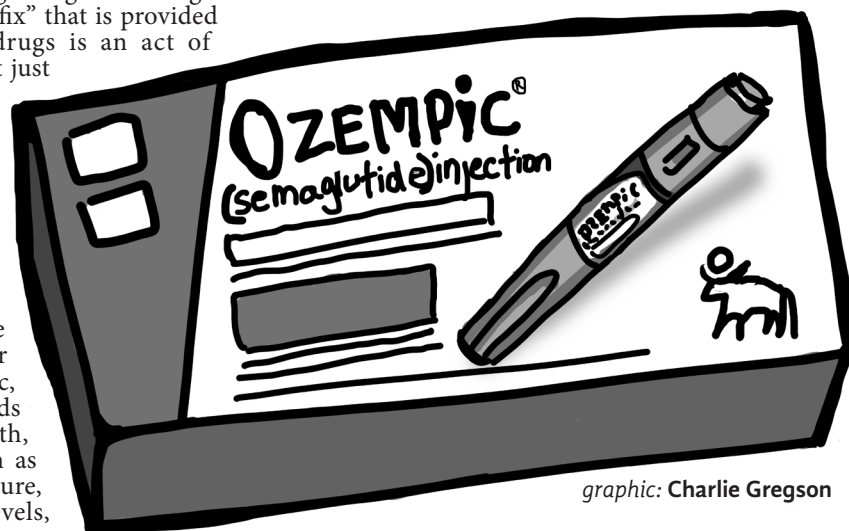
a way to avoid a workout or two. One of the main goals of sports is to improve upon oneself; thus, taking the "shortcut" to become bigger or leaner is a psychological signal to themselves that they do not need to put in the effort to get the reward.

Furthermore, although peptides may have not been researched in depth yet, there is extensive evidence against the usage of steroids. For instance, according to the Mayo Clinic, teenagers who take anabolic steroids risk complications in their growth, along with other health risks such as tendencies toward high blood pressure, addiction, elevated cholesterol levels,

and liver issues. Even if one looks beyond the physical damages, behavioral shifts also complicate the lives of users as "roid rage," a colloquial term used to describe a clinically proven phenomena of sudden bursts of anger, violence, and other negative moods linked to the usage of these drugs.

Outside of health concerns, another obvious issue is the unfair advantage created by these drugs. In 2021, the National Institute of Health reported that more than 14 million teenagers used psychotherapeutic drugs to gain a performance advantage. When athletes exercise after taking PEDs, the drugs dampen the damage to the muscles, which allows for harder and more frequent usage. In essence, these drugs decrease the value of talent, hard work, and dedication, turning sport into a race to the bottom to see which drug is the most effective.

No matter how they are marketed or sold, drugs are still drugs — even if they are "designer" or provide supposed health benefits. However, it is insufficient to reject the usage of these drugs, which is only a symptom of the greater issue: our society that is preoccupied with perfection, or at least feigning it. Simply put, we must protect our athletes, not ostracize them for stumbling under our own pressure.



graphic: Charlie Gregson

# Audrey Chiu '26 wins bronze with Team USA ice skating

Kyle Chen and Aarav Patel, STAFF WRITERS  
Daniel Gu, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Princeton High School's very own Audrey Chiu '26 competed at the World Junior Synchronized Skating Championships, which took place from March 13 to 14 in Gdańsk, Poland.

With her team, the Skyliners, Chiu won third place with 200.40 points, placing second and fourth in the short program and free skating segments, respectively, and finishing 4.46 points behind second place. This bronze medal finish marks the seventh junior world medal for the team.



Chiu competes with her team in the World Junior Synchronized Skating Championships held in Gdansk, Poland.

**What does a typical day of training look like for you? Is training every single day?**

I train in New Jersey three days during the weekdays: Monday, Tuesday, [and] Thursday, and then I skate with my team in Connecticut and New York on Friday, Saturday, [and] Sunday.

**What was your favorite part about competing at the ISU World Junior Synchronized Skating Championships?**

When we got on the ice to warm up, they dimmed the lights and they turned on purple and pink lights, and it was really cool to be in that zone with your team. And I was most proud that my family was able to get to see me skate, because they live in Taiwan, and they've never seen me skate before, and some of them came over to Poland to watch.

**How were you able to adapt to the pressure when competing on the international stage?**

I felt more pressure during ... the practices that we had leading up to the

competition, [than] when we competed. [Competing] was really fun, so it was not that nerve-wracking.

**What's something that you would tell yourself to keep you motivated?**

When I was younger, I didn't really need to be motivated, because [skating] was something I liked to do. If I ever felt like I didn't want to go, I would just tell myself that when you're on the ice, you know you're gonna have fun because your friends are there, you're there, and you're doing something you like [doing].

**What are three qualities that are important for skaters to have?**

Being understanding and being aware of the people around you is very important. [Also], you have to be determined, because [skating well] takes a lot of effort, and [can] sometimes hurt a lot. You [also] have to be very self-motivated [and] you have to [know how] to time manage yourself. You can't rely too much on other people to do stuff for you.



photos courtesy: Audrey Chiu

Chiu celebrates with an American flag after winning third place with her team.

## The right foods for athletes

Michael Yang, SPORTS CO-EDITOR  
Kyle Chen and Aarav Patel, STAFF WRITERS

What separates elite athletes from the average person? The most important factor is what goes into your body. What you eat will dramatically impact your stamina, focus, and even post-game recovery. As a result, athletes experience fewer injuries and less soreness, making an athlete the best version of themselves.

Asker Jeukendrup is a world renowned sports nutritionist scientist known for his research on how the body uses fuel during exercise. He has worked with elite athletes and professional teams including Olympic competitors. Jeukendrup has published extensively in physiology and sports nutrition strategies, focusing on topics like endurance and maximizing energy efficiency during competition.

The first aspect of nutrition Jeukendrup focuses on is the pre-game meal which is critical for immediate performance. The main focus is on both simple and complex carbs. Simple carbs digest quickly, providing a quick dose of energy; but that boost doesn't last long. Some examples of simple carbs include candy, soda, table sugar, white bread, and syrups, all best taken as a quick snack.

"Carbohydrates are the body's preferred fuel during high-intensity exercise," said Jeukendrup.

Complex carbs also provide fuel for the body. However, they are slow to digest and result in a gradual release of energy. These include whole grains like oats and brown rice, legumes such as beans, and starchy vegetables like potatoes and corn. Complex carbs promote sustained energy and help maintain blood sugar levels.

"If I don't eat anything, I'll feel more tired and less capable to play.

But if I eat something before, then I could play better and I feel better," said Juan Rivera '29, a tennis and football player who values eating carbs before matches.

The choice on whether to eat simple or complex carbs pre-game first relies on the time you have, and then the sport. Simple carbs are great for short bursts of activity or when you're on the go. But in long-term activities such as a soccer game or a marathon, athletes should fuel with complex carbs beforehand.

Since that energy won't last the whole game, mid-game refueling is essential. Simple carbs and electrolytes provide a quick boost that helps maintain energy and focus during the play, and options like energy gels, fruit chews, bananas, and even orange slices are all easy and fast ways to get simple carbs in.

Since sweating depletes key minerals needed for muscle function, replenishing electrolytes are crucial to restoring this balance and maintaining strength during games. Electrolyte drinks, salted pretzels, and even coconut water are all sufficient in restoring these essential minerals.

Once the whistle blows or the clock hits zero, the body needs rest, and recovery is key. The most important category for long-term success is the post-game meal, which should be centered around complex carbs. Eating carbs 30 to 60 minutes after will replenish glycogen stores, which were depleted throughout the game. Rice bowls, whole-grain bread, and fruit smoothies are all excellent options.



graphic: Emily Kim

Once carbs are covered, proteins become the focus. Essential for rebuilding and strengthening those same muscle fibers, proteins are the first step to improvement. Meats such as chicken or fish, chocolate milk, and Greek yogurt will all prevent muscle soreness and ensure long-term strength gains.

Wrapping up the post-game meal would be fluids and electrolytes. Rehydration is not only important during the game, but after as well. Athletes lose both electrolytes and water through sweat, meaning that replacing them will only help the body recover faster. More electrolyte drinks, coconut water, and plain water would all prove adequate in replenishment.

The way you fuel your body before, during, and after the game can make a noticeable difference in both one's performance and recovery. By carefully choosing what goes into their body, athletes give themselves the best chance to stay strong, healthy, and focused in their games all throughout the season.

### Chicken and Rice Macro Breakdown

7g fat

28g carbs

245cal

17g protein

### Spaghetti and Meatballs Macro Breakdown

29g fat

100g carbs

550cal

38g protein

graphic: Emily Kim

## PRE-GAME

PREPARE

candy

oatmeal

spaghetti

white bread

## MID-GAME

REFUEL

orange slices

salted pretzel

banana

energy gel

## POST-GAME

RECOVER

whole-grain bread

fruit smoothie

coconut water

chicken

# Athletes of the Month

## Chase Hamerschlag '26: baseball

Nathan Bansal, BUSINESS MANAGER  
Yejoon Na and Jayden Zheng, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS



photo: Emily Kim

Hamerschlag has proven himself a crucial part of team, acting as both a leader and key player at the pitching mound and the home plate. He will continue as a pitcher at Elon University.

As the pitcher unleashed a high-heat fastball, Chase Hamerschlag '26 steadied himself and deftly hit the ball, sending it soaring above the opposing team. As the crowd watched the ball streak across the field, Hamerschlag casually jogged around the bases, scoring a crucial home run for his team against Notre Dame High School.

Dominic Capuano, PHS boys baseball coach, recalls the play and its importance to the outcome of the game.

"[He had] a big home run last year against Notre Dame, which was a big win for us," said Capuano.

These moments are the fruit of years of work and effort. After being inspired by his father and uncle — who both played baseball — Hamerschlag entered the sport when he was four years old.

"I've been playing baseball since I was about four years old," said Hamerschlag. "I look up to my dad a lot in baseball. I just like to always have a non-quitting spirit."

Despite playing other sports — competing as a tri-varsity athlete in baseball, soccer, and wrestling throughout his PHS career — Hamerschlag has held baseball as a priority, primarily citing his love for the game in his decision to pursue the sport.

"Growing up, I did [mixed martial arts], I wrestled, [and] I played tackle football," said Hamerschlag. "I played basketball. I played soccer. But what made me focus on baseball was because it was a sport I really loved. I think that matters if you love doing the sport ... in life, you want to love what you do."



photo courtesy: Alice Ye

Hamerschlag recorded 13 strikeouts in a game against South River High School over six innings.

and really honing his craft in a way that has made him very successful."

Likewise, Hedin, who has accompanied Hamerschlag throughout his career at PHS, expresses a similar sentiment about his teammate.

"[Hamerschlag] has always been really big and powerful, but I think as he's gotten older, he's gotten really in control of himself and he's become very polished," said Hedin.

Over his time at PHS, Hamerschlag has established himself on the field, batting an average of .316. Hamerschlag also batted nearly .400 last year, establishing himself as an elite batter where .300 is considered above average for high school baseball players. Furthermore, Hamerschlag has pitched two combined no-hitters, meaning he and at least one other pitcher prevented the opposing team from getting a single hit for the entire game, a feat that demonstrates his competence from both the pitcher's diamond and the batter's box.

Although Hamerschlag's performance metrics can offer insight into his quality as a player, his mental resilience has been a hidden factor that distinguishes him from the competition.

"When he's pitching, you get into trouble — you get runners on and stuff — and he usually is able to keep his head where other people would get frustrated and start blaming other people," said Hedin. "He just keeps powering through, no matter what goes wrong or how many people are getting hits off him."

In particular, Capuano explains the importance of the mental aspect of baseball, stressing that physique alone is insufficient to succeed in the sport.

"Baseball's a mental game," said Capuano. "Baseball is a lot more a [thinker]'s game and you have to be in it with your mind and your body, so improve mentally."

In his final year, Hamerschlag will attempt to continue the successes of the baseball team through his leadership and individual performances while also sharpening his own skills.

However, his journey with baseball isn't coming to a close; he is committed to Elon University where he will play on the D1 track as a pitcher. Looking toward the future, he is also considering a professional career if his career at Elon goes smoothly.

"I hope that [playing for Elon] can take me to play a little bit of professional baseball over my career," said Hamerschlag.



photo courtesy: Alice Ye

Hamerschlag steps forward to throw a pitch.

## Zoie Reynolds '26: lacrosse

Joshua Huang, SPORTS CO-EDITOR  
Cole Grainger and Bella Feng, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS



photo: Katherine Chen

Reynolds is a key force in the varsity girls lacrosse team, serving as one of the captains of the team and leading the defense, often marking key players of the opposing team.

The whistle blows and the atmosphere becomes tense as the opposing team pushes a fast-break; Zoie Reynolds '26 is faced by two attackers, barreling toward her. Springing into action, she closes the angle with a perfectly timed slide. Before the lead attacker can even look at the cage, Reynolds executes a clean body check, dislodging the ball.

Reynolds started playing lacrosse in third grade after being introduced to the sport by her older sister, Skai Reynolds '21.

"I was playing basketball, then I realized it really wasn't the sport for me, and my older sister played lacrosse," said Reynolds.

Although she began as an offensive player, she found a better way to help her team as she progressed in her career.

"At first, I liked [scoring] goals," said Reynolds. "Then, I switched to defense, and [it] connected with me in a way because I just didn't really like scoring that much. I really liked helping my other teammates."

Serving as a captain of the team for her second year, Reynolds' ability to connect with her teammates is critical and being able to see the game more clearly as a defender helps her understand how to help them to the best of her ability.

"[My focus is] guiding the team in games, always lifting up our teammates ... and just saying, 'I'm here for you, everybody's here for you,'" said Reynolds.

Reynolds' leadership has been noticed by teammates, who have felt supported by her; midfielder Leah Bornstein '26 emphasizes the energy she brings to the team.

"She's a great person on and off the field," said Bornstein. "She's always picking everyone up if they're feeling down, and ... she just brings love, enthusiasm, and leadership toward you."

Similarly, Charles Gallagher, one of Reynolds' coaches, not only acknowledges her ability to dictate play in the backline, highlighting her strong ability to organize the team, but also emphasizes Reynolds' dedication to the team.

"She communicates really well with the senior class ... and the underclassmen when it comes to defense," said Gallagher. "She's a great motivator, and she's a total team player. [Reynolds] is not concerned about the accolades — she just wants to go out there and play."

Outside of her leadership, Reynolds has established herself as an instrumental part of the team's success; despite not receiving the most headlines for her defensive work, her teammates and coaches still recognize her effort.

"[The coaches] like to put her on the best offensive player from the other team because she's that talented," said Gallagher. "She can control those players and limit what they can do as an explosive offensive player, so ... the day before a game, we tell [Reynolds]: 'Hey, Zoie, listen, you're going to need to lock down the best player.' And when that best player doesn't have a great game, everybody knows why."

Furthermore, Bornstein echoes this sentiment while also pointing out that Reynolds' work ethic further establishes her on the field.

"She's a really hard worker, and she doesn't get recognized enough for it," said Bornstein.

In her final season, Reynolds still has plans to improve the team. Specifically, she aims to improve camaraderie off the field to produce stronger performances during games.

"[I am working on] creating more team bonding for the team because when I was a freshman or sophomore, [the team] didn't have a lot of bonding," said Reynolds.

Although she may currently be a focal point of the team at PHS, Reynolds intends to continue her lacrosse career at the D1 level at Boston University. In fact, she has already begun to plan her college education around the sport.

"I already know what I'm going to do, like leaving class early, balancing classes, and also connecting [lacrosse] back to how it would help me in my future," said Reynolds.

After witnessing her development over the last four years, Gallagher is optimistic for her future and has high expectations for career at BU.

"In all honesty, she's going to go down as probably one of the best defenders we've had at PHS lacrosse in a very, very long time," said Gallagher. "Anybody that can go and play that sport in college at the D1 level is a really exceptional player, and she definitely is one of those players."



photo: Claire Yang

Reynolds calls out to her teammates, organizing the defence against Notre Dame High School.



photo: Claire Yang

Reynolds analyzes the field, looking to close down on a passing lane.