

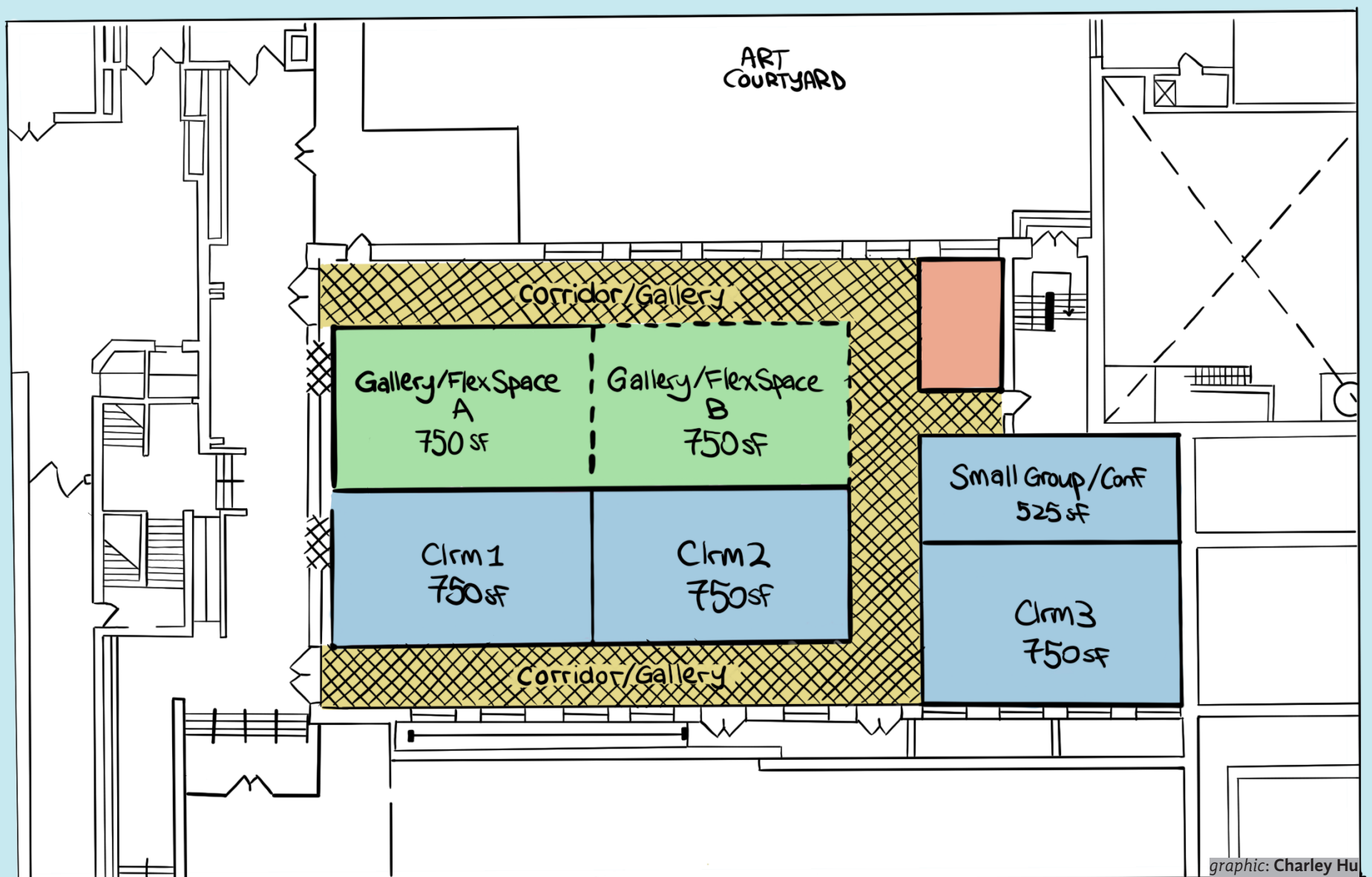
The Tower

96th Year: Issue 4

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

June 12, 2024

Coming this summer: PHS construction



Proposed construction plan for the Numina Gallery and IT department renovations from the PPS Board of Education's budget hearing on April 30.

Leila Guitton, STAFF WRITER
Aarna Dharmavarapu and
Avantika Palayekar,
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Over this coming summer and the next few years, PHS plans to undergo construction to address potential overcrowding and maintenance issues. The need for these changes stem from increasing enrollment numbers in the district, as well as the increasing age of the PHS building itself.

For the summer construction plans, PHS will be using funding from a previously approved referendum in order to modify older parts of the building. These changes include replacing half of the roof of PHS, power washing the other half, getting new doors and locks for the doors, redoing the entire cafeteria to increase its efficiency during break, modifying the school's vestibules, improving the building's wiring and surveillance

cameras, and installing proximity readers which require scanning students' IDs to access different places around the school.

These changes come in addition to the regular maintenance of cleaning the entirety of the building and painting a new section of the school, both of which occur every summer. However, some changes may take longer than the summer to implement.

"There's going to be an update with... the type of ID that we give and the [proximity readers], so there's going to be prox readers on the bathroom [and] rehearsal doors... [but] prox readers are going to happen more around the time between teacher's convention and next year" Assistant Principal Rashone Johnson said.

Plans have been placed on hold until the New Jersey Department of Education approves the referendum, but they push for bigger changes within PHS. The referendum would most significantly change the layout of the Numina Gallery

and technology office to increase school capacity due to school population growth. Overall, the spaces would be split up such that three new classrooms, one small group room, and two other flexible spaces that could be used for the gallery or instructional work could be made. The corridors surrounding these rooms would become the Numina Gallery, and the technology office would relocate to PMS. In addition to these renovations, the school's outdated HVAC system would be replaced as well.

"These [construction layouts] are some of the potential plans and nothing's finalized. We're still working with the school administrators," said Matthew Bouldin, Business Administrator and Board Secretary of PPS.

Tentatively, construction using the referendum will start in November 2025 when the designs are finalized, and construction will be done around December 2027. While there will be

major infrastructure changes over the next couple of years, there are also future plans for the building in order to address other potential problems like overcrowding.

"We put out a report in 2021 as part of [the referendum's] process which shows a potential addition to the high school if you are facing to the right of where the trailers are right now to the [Learning] Commons... it could be something in the future," Bouldin said.

Bouldin emphasizes that the main focus of these projects is making sure that PHS's facilities can accommodate students while maintaining optimal class sizes.

"We can always increase class sizes except for at the very low levels like kindergarten [which] is capped, but pretty much every other grade level, the Department of Education doesn't have hard caps... It's a combination of improving our facilities but also expanding them to be able to house the students," Bouldin said.

INSIDE
THIS
ISSUE

News &
Features

PHS reacts to the
Israel-Hamas War

2

Opinions

PHS is quite
nice, actually

4

Vanguard

Vanguard:
Soda "POP"
Culture!

7

Arts & Entertainment

PHS Orchestra
goes on tour

10

Sports

PHS's support in
athlete's injuries
and recovery

13

PHS reacts to the Israel-Hamas War

Harry Dweck and Reed Sacks,
STAFF WRITERS

On May 9, approximately 50 PHS students gathered around the flagpole, where they chanted and made speeches. This student-led walkout aimed to raise awareness in the PHS community about the ongoing war in Gaza and to support Princeton University students' calls for divestment from Israel.

"When we were at the flagpole, we led two specific chants; 'Disclose, divest, we will not stop, we will not rest,' calling for the boycott of Israeli ties and funds that institutes promote across the country [and] 'Free Palestine,'" said student protestor Asma Qureshi '25.

Many of the students, accompanied by Princeton police, then marched to the Princeton University campus, where they joined protestors at the Gaza Solidarity Encampment in creating art, enjoying food, and performing chants.

The PHS walkout joins a nationwide movement of student protesters demanding that their colleges divest, or break financial ties, from Israel. Many protestors also call on their universities to demand a ceasefire in Gaza, reaffirm students' right to protest, and disclose how their endowments are invested. While some colleges have dispersed protestors' on-campus encampments through negotiations, others, such as Columbia University and UCLA, have utilized law enforcement. Princeton University's encampment dispersed in mid-May after the university both held negotiations and made several arrests.

The main organizers of the walkout, Qureshi and Zia Hughes '26, spread information to fellow PHS students through word of mouth, social media, and flyers.

"When we started the walkout," said Qureshi, "We made it very clear what our intentions were, which is, and it was written on our [flyers] as well, that we are students of peace and are students for justice."

The PHS administration affirmed the student protestors' rights to free expression. They noted that the student protestors largely followed school regulations, including signing out from the Main Office before leaving the campus. An email to parents from Principal Cecilia Birge and Acting Superintendent Dr. Kathie Foster described the protest as "respectful" and "orderly." However, Birge raised several concerns, including the flyers posted in the hallway.

"The walkout on May 9 was not authorized by the school. Therefore, our responsibility was to [safeguard] students' First Amendment rights and [ensure] compliance with school regulations," said

Birge. "In this regard, all flyers and posters in our building must receive approval from [Diana Lygas] before being displayed on hallway walls. We removed all posters that had not obtained [Lygas]' authorization immediately after they were put up."

Cooper Jacknow '26 and Jacob Rotenberg '27, members of the PHS Jewish Club, commented on a chant from protestors that they characterized as antisemitic.

"[At] the May 9 walkout, people were chanting things that I think are anti-semitic," said Rotenberg. "I'm sure they don't mean it ... If they do, then that's [a] problem, and we're glad to help educate them and show why it's wrong."

Jacknow and Rotenberg emphasized that the act of protest and walkout itself was an acceptable expression of freedom of speech. However, they criticized the act of chanting within the building for distracting students. The two specifically took issue with one of the student protestors' chants: "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free."

"When [the student protestors] say 'from the river to the sea, Palestine will be free' they're saying from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea ... but the only thing in between the river and the sea is Israel. And Israel is the Jewish [state], so it feels very targeted when they say [it]," Rotenberg said.

The walkout's organizers reject the idea that this chant was antisemitic. They instead view it as a call for peace in the contested region, removal of Israeli occupation of the West Bank, and nonviolent coexistence between the Palestinian and Israeli peoples.

"Before Israel was created, the land of [historic] Palestine was from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea. [But]... the Israeli government prevents Palestinians from living freely throughout that land, their historic land. [The chant] in no way calls for the oppression of anyone and simply calls for the abolishment of [restrictions]," Hughes said.

In the United States, incidents of both islamophobia and antisemitism have vastly increased after the violence of October 7. According to the Council on American-Islamic Relations, there was a 178 percent rise in reports of Muslim hate incidents in the months following the October 7 attacks. The Anti-Defamation League reported a 361 percent increase in antisemitic incidents compared to the year prior.

In May, the Jewish Club put up posters throughout the school both in celebration of Jewish Heritage Month and to counter rising antisemitism. Birge similarly noted the administration's efforts to combat hate.

"Fostering a hate-free environment within our school is about ensuring a safe and inclusive space for every student. To achieve this, we prioritize educational programs that promote intercultural understanding, diversity, and empathy," Birge said.

On May 3, PHS held its annual Holocaust Assembly provided by 3GNY, an



PHS students make posters at the Princeton University protests after the walkout.

organization that runs workshops designed to provide students with an opportunity for deeper dialogues in smaller environments under the guidance of teachers.

"Our goal is to introduce this workshop to our students next year," said Birge. "We are also actively seeking opportunities to organize a forum involving Muslim leaders from the community, along with engaging in joint interfaith dialogues."

Birge also emphasized the role of the counseling department in helping students to develop emotional resilience.

"Our counseling department plays a pivotal role in addressing sensitive subjects," said Birge. "Some students may feel fearful or anxious when they experience [or] witness conflicts. These are natural physical responses to traumatic circumstances. Our counselors are equipped with the necessary training to assist students in navigating and processing these emotions."

PHS Counselor Rebecca McEvoy wrote that, in addition to speaking with their guidance counselors and trusted adults within PHS, students are encouraged to seek support from religious organizations and find community through activism. McEvoy emphasized that effectively addressing the difficult situation can help strengthen the PHS community.

"Some key lessons that we can learn from this crisis are the importance of empathy and understanding, providing safe spaces for open dialogue, fostering community

through inclusive practices, and continuing to educate students and faculty about the impact of bias and prejudice," said McEvoy. "Through curriculum development, professional development, community partnerships and student leadership, many of these lessons can be addressed in our schools."

In the classroom, history teachers Elizabeth Taylor and Katie Dineen have led lessons about the Israel-Hamas conflict in a way that allows for greater understanding. However, both are careful not to provide students with opinions on specific situations, and focus instead on presenting historical context and critical thinking skills so students can form their own conclusions.

"[In my Sociology class], my goal was to give [students] some time and space to consider what the world and the nation and the PHS community is experiencing. I asked them to apply different theories of conflict and prejudice that we had studied earlier in the year to the situation," Taylor said.

Birge also underscored the need for dialogue to establish critical thinking as a way to promote acceptance.

"[Critical thinking] is not solely about criticizing opposing views ... Instead, it is about understanding different perspectives, developing empathy, and building connections among individuals," said Birge. "[It] guides us as we engage in civic discussions and make informed decisions."



Berenice Liu '24 and Alberta Liu '24 take a look at the posters put up by the Jewish Club in the main intersection hallway displaying a timeline of Jewish history.

PHS Profile: Joe Bongiovi

Kylie Sek, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

After countless tours around the world with his bands, raking in double-digits of ensemble trophies and awards, Joe Bongiovi completes his 18th year as a band director at PHS. He is the sole conductor of the Princeton Studio Band, which frequently competes at both local and national jazz festivals, and this past December, Bongiovi took the band to Abbey Road Studios in London to record a new jazz album that will be released on June 14.

"To prepare for [the recording was] harder than preparing for a [normal] competition because we recorded six pieces that had to be pristine when we got to the recording studio," Bongiovi said.

Most recently, the band won the state championship from the New Jersey Association for Jazz Education for the seventh time. However, their success didn't come without hours of practice and rehearsals.

"We prepare by playing a lot of music, not just the music that we compete on ... we keep looking for more and more difficult pieces

of music," said Bongiovi. "We just break [the music] down [slowly] and try to make it as perfect as possible, [before speeding] it back up."

In addition to directing Studio Band, Bongiovi also co-conducts the Nassau and Tiger bands alongside PHS band director Dave Pollack.

"[Co-directing is] great because ... we can divide the students that are there by instrument [and] work on separate things," said Pollack. "So he can work with brass, I can work with woodwinds, one of us can work with rhythm section, one can work with soloists."

Though currently a music teacher, Bongiovi started his music career in high school, where he played tuba in the school's marching band. He went on to study film scoring and composition at Berklee College of Music. While still in college, Bongiovi began helping his high school band director arrange and compose pieces for a marching band camp. Eventually, he started conducting the pieces that he wrote, which became a defining shift into his career as a teacher.

"I sort of fell into teaching," said Bongiovi. "One day, the director told me, 'You wrote it, so get up and conduct it' ... it was a nice way of meshing composition and teaching."

This led him to go back to school to get his Master in Music Education from the University of the Arts. After getting his master's, Bongiovi taught at several middle and high schools in Pennsylvania and New Jersey; it wasn't until 2007 that Bongiovi began teaching at PHS.

"I came [in the middle] of the 2006-2007 school year. They had an opening and the band director at the time, who was Dr. Downey, wanted me to come and that's how I began teaching here," said Bongiovi. "Being able to create new adventures and creating new opportunities for students has been keeping [my job] exciting."

Isaac Son '27, a student in Nassau II, appreciates Bongiovi's guidance and attitude during class.

"When Mr. Bongiovi is there, he's straightforward with what we do, which I like. He doesn't waste that much time [and] he's a good band director," said Son. "[He also makes] funny jokes [which] make me laugh."



Bongiovi conducts the Princeton Symphonic Band at the winter concert.

Considering that Bongiovi has been teaching for 18 years, he often tries to incorporate new challenges and projects into his classes.

"Four years ago, [at Abbey Road], we did mostly jazz covers of popular songs. This time, we brought in jazz artists to play with us," said Bongiovi. "Creating new adventures and creating new opportunities for students has [kept teaching] exciting ... [I hope to] keep coming up with new ideas."

Tower Investigates: attendance at PHS



PHS security guard Bill Urian asks David Lux-Beteta '26 to display his student ID before entering the building.

**Aritra Ray and Melya Xiong, STAFF WRITERS,
Emily Kim, CONTRIBUTING WRITER**

Attendance in the state of New Jersey is governed by a simple guideline: every student can be absent up to ten percent of the 180-day school year before experiencing loss of course credit. Out of this simplicity, however, complex nuances can arise. PHS uses a variety of policies to ensure students graduate with the required amount of credits.

"At the high school level, you graduate by accumulation of credits. And if you are absent for more than ten percent, which is where that 18 absences come from, then the state law says you automatically lose credit," PHS Principal Cecilia Birge said.

The PHS assistant principals begin reviewing the attendance for every student immediately after graduation to determine who loses credit and who does not. For seniors, this process is especially crucial as New Jersey requires that they earn 120 total credits to graduate. Those who have exceeded the maximum allowed number of absences face the consequence of not earning enough credits to graduate.

Attendance and chronic absenteeism became a widespread issue following the pandemic, as circumstances caused many students to miss more than the 18 day limit for absences. One of the policies PHS has implemented to help seniors recover credit is Saturday Academy, which will be held for two Saturdays during this school year. The academy operates for three hours in the morning and three hours in the afternoon. Since each hour counts for one absence, a senior who stays both times can recover six absences in just one day. Seniors who are just slightly over 18 absences can still gain credit for their classes.

While Saturday Academy does not have regular classes to accommodate every course each student has been absent in, the assistant principals in charge have planned out a way to incorporate some learning as the seniors study and make up for their missing work.

Seniors are asked to write an appeal letter explaining their reasons for absences during Saturday Academy. All appeal letters are then reviewed by an Appeals Committee composed of various teachers and counselors, who then vote on whether or not a senior can receive credit for their classes.

"You leave it up to the people in the room to read your letter to say, 'yes, this person can get credit in this class' or 'no, this person can't get credit' ... So at the end of the day, it is easier to just do what you're supposed to do ... [instead of] leaving your future to the vote of people that might not personally know you," PHS Assistant Principal Rashone Johnson said.

Saturday Academy and the appeals process come into play only after students surpass the 18 day absence limit, after which they lose credit. Under current policy, students only receive consequences for attendance once they reach this threshold, so the school is debating the implementation of measures to deter students from missing class before it happens.

"[Why] should we assign consequences like detention? So that [way] the warning is given earlier, rather than [waiting] till the end of the year," Birge said.

The school acknowledges that reasons for absences vary by student.

"Each family is different, each student is different. [Everyone] has very different needs ... Some students have school avoidance issues, other students have anxieties. Some students have sports needs, [and] other students [are] international students ... who often travel," Birge said.

Acknowledging this, PHS accounts for needs or extenuating circumstances of individual students that may lead to extended absence, allowing attendance contracts and attendance meetings with the assistant principals.

"Those [attendance] contracts are drafted to support the students — to be here for them to take charge of their own learning. The assistant principal [then] has the authority to approve the additional absences," Birge said.

As a result, the PHS administration's approach to addressing chronic absenteeism primarily focuses on individual guidance and monitoring.

"First [we] build that relationship [with our students], continue to monitor them and know their needs, and then navigate, create using different tools, create different programs, [and the continuation of] Saturday Academy," said Birge. "So far, we're doing extraordinarily well. Our graduation rate is anywhere north of 98 percent each year ... Whatever it takes for us to carry them through that finish line, we do it."



Maxime Devico and Anna Petrova,
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

graphics: Emily Kim

PHS students compete in Congressional Art Exhibit

The Congressional Art Competition, sponsored by New Jersey's 12th Congressional District, is a yearly event that recognizes artistic works produced by high schoolers. An exhibit is held in Trenton until the end of May and this year, several Princeton High School students from different levels of art classes were selected to have their pieces showcased. Among these students were Charlotte Regnault, Grace Waldman, Kyuyoung Chung, Luis Santos Solares, Rebecca Zhang, Ngozi O'Keke-Agulu, Drew Trenfield, and Sylvia Schreiber. Winners from each district will have their art displayed in the U.S. Capitol for one year.

Most of the works submitted by PHS students were "identity prints," meaning that they conveyed the artist's individuality; how they perceive themselves, or how they are perceived by others.

"[The art] was all about [the artists'] identity, and how they really express themselves as people and the symbolic aspects of how they represent themselves," said Judy Buckley, an art teacher at PHS who has taught some of the students

selected, as well as encouraged them to participate in the competition.

Grace Waldman '25 ended up choosing to submit a collage that was part of a series of self-portraits on self-reflection that she created for the competition.

"I hope to convey the different layers that there are to an identity. We're all wildly different individuals, I wanted to convey the internal and external layers of myself, represented by the words, phrases, and select images combined with my print," Waldman said.

Waldman sees the competition more as an opportunity for young artists, from varying backgrounds and with unique ideas, to share what they have created with each other and learn from others as opposed to a contest where there is a designated winner.

"Art is something that we all have inside of us. And we all express it in a different way so it's really great to be a part of that creative experience and share what you do with other kids," Waldman said.



Sylvia Schreiber '26, Rebecca Zhang '26, Grace Waldman '25, and Charlotte Regnault '27 display their artwork.

Behind the scenes of this year's Festival Latino



Members of the Latino Unidos club set up stations for activities at Festival Latino.

Latinos Unidos is one of many culture-centered clubs at Princeton High School. On June 3, the club hosted their annual festival to celebrate Latin American culture. The event, which took place in front of PHS, offered traditional food, music, and activities from different parts of Latin America, for PHS students as well as parents. The festival, along with the club in general, is a way for members of the PHS community to connect on a cultural level while learning more about Latin American cultures.

"We hold events such as these to bring the community together and encourage others to get insight on what our club does and what it is about," said Valeria Trullijo '26, a member of the club.

Leaders and members of the club must be able to overcome the obstacles that come with the process of the event's organization, one of these being complications regarding the matter of funding.

"Everything costs money. And we were trying to fundraise. Luckily, the [Princeton Regional Education Association], which is the teacher union, really sponsors us. And we're grateful for that. But finding that support is always a challenge," said Spanish teacher Idania Rodríguez-Mejía, a leader of Latinos Unidos.

Latinos Unidos tries to organize at least one big annual event, typically at the end of the school year, in order to draw attention to the club for the coming year. The event also aims to make members of PHS's Latin American community feel more welcomed within Princeton.

"Princeton is a [predominantly white town]. So as a Latino, I'm super grateful to be able to speak both languages, Spanish and English," said Osbaldo Morales, the club president. "But [for a] Latino who only knows Spanish, it's really hard to get access to things. [Latinos Unidos] is able to show them that they have support."

SUSTAINABLY FARMED • PERFECTLY FRESH

OUR PRODUCE SECTION IS

100% **organic**



WHOLE EARTH CENTER

360 NASSAU ST. • PRINCETON
WHOLEEARTHCENTER.COM
MON-SAT 9-6 • SUN 9-6

NATURAL FOODS GROCERY • SINCE 1970

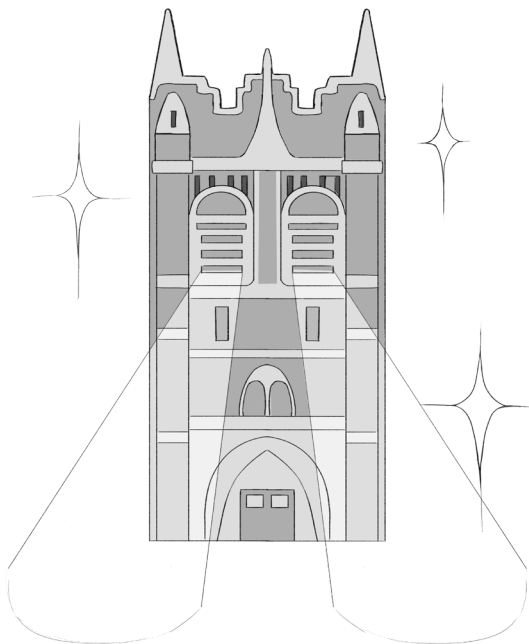
OPINIONS

PHS is quite nice, actually

Alexander Margulis, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

High school, as seen through the lens of the American entertainment industry, is less of a place and more of a threshold. You go to school, sure, but you also go through it: you spend four years mired in a soup of shifting social dynamics and stressful homework assignments and people who you've learned to categorize as jocks and nerds and theater kids and stoners. Do the specifics really matter? Whatever the topography of a building might be, or however many programs a school offers, its students, like millions of other students around the country, are stuck in a vast, unchanging rite of passage.

Perhaps we have Adam Smith's old, obstinate, "invisible hand" to thank for this narrative: if the day-to-day struggles of being an adolescent human being are roughly universalizable, we'll relate to every young adult book on the shelf. When you look a little closer, though, you find that an adolescent's problems are basically inseparable from the material realities of their surroundings. Different schools lead to different outcomes: PHS, with an average graduation rate of 96 percent, according to the U.S. News & World Report, offers its students a very different experience from the average public school in, say, New Mexico, where, according to the New Mexico Legislature, only 76 percent of high schoolers end up with a diploma. Other differences are harder to quantify, but still easy to notice: schools vary in their commitment to the arts, or the quality of their teachers, or the availability of their



graphic: Emily Kim and Avantika Palayekar

extracurricular opportunities. PHS, for its part, offers a wealth of enriching, often unique activities. One of the more obvious extracurriculars in this context is, of course, the school newspaper.

Paradoxically, the school newspaper serves both as an integral part of the stereotypical high school experience and as an agent of specificity. The Opinions section of the Tower is a clear example — articles like "Student council can be more than just another extracurricular," "Bell schedule — hell schedule?," and "Our shallow academic performance," dedicate themselves to picking out small details from our school's milieu, inspecting them for a few moments, and then setting them back down.

Because it's easier to find flaws than it is to celebrate virtues, this section often ends up being filled with complaints about PHS's student culture, classes, and system. Pragmatically, this makes sense: if the things you love aren't being threatened, shouldn't you spend your precious authorial resources trying to bring attention to things that you don't love? But sometimes, a stream of complaints — even a stream of well-intentioned, thoughtful, specific complaints — leaves students feeling tired.

In fact, pointing out PHS's shortcomings without thinking through its advantages leaves the student body with an awfully vague picture of the school as a whole:

“Most of us have been lucky enough to end up at a legitimately great high school.

once you read enough, it begins to seem as though we're just another public school, populated by a diverse range of teenagers who all must suffer through assorted problems for four years.

And so although the argument that I'm going to make here is one that I hope most students would agree with, it's also one that doesn't seem to be articulated very often: I think that PHS is quite nice, actually. In fact, the majority of the student body would have a hard time finding a public high school where they would be better off.

There are plenty of ways that I could support this argument. I could tell you, for example, that our school spends twice as much money on students as the average high school does. I could tell you that while, according to the College Board, around 22 percent of students nationwide passed at least one AP exam in 2023, the percentage at PHS is three times higher. I don't have to tell you any of this, though, because again, I think that if you took the time to ask PHS students whether they think that they attend an above-average high school, most of them would already say yes.

I think our school would be a better place if students followed this train of thought — the one where we realize that PHS is a nice place after all — without being prompted. Sure, "thankfulness is important" isn't exactly new advice, but if you think a little deeper about what that statement really means, you find some interesting insights.

After all, if PHS already offers so many opportunities for its most advantaged students, shouldn't our focus shift away from bolstering those programs for the kids who are already involved with them, and towards making sure that more kids can access them in the first place? It seems to me, at least, that if the quality of your high school actually matters, and if most of us have been lucky enough to end up at a legitimately great high school, we should try to ensure that same outcome for as many other students as possible. Weirdly, it's only when we start to really appreciate PHS that we can spend a little less time thinking about ourselves, and a little more time looking outwards.

PIRL had the right intentions, but the wrong methods

Aarna Dharmavarapu and Kylie Sek, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

These days, racial literacy has become one of the most important skills to learn in order to interact with the world around us. As described by PPS, racial literacy means understanding the experiences and perspectives of different cultures and races, being aware of our biases, and being willing and able to acknowledge and address racial issues. Completing a racial literacy course teaching these skills is a graduation requirement for the classes of 2025 and beyond, and many students end up taking Princeton Introduction to Racial Literacy (PIRL) due to its convenience. Racial Literacy, the in-person option for fulfilling the requirement, is a semester-long course limited to juniors and seniors. PIRL, on the other hand, is a digital, asynchronous class that is open to all students, regardless of grade. However, due to the online and solitary nature of PIRL, student learning is greatly impacted and prevents them from developing the compassion and awareness expected of being "racially literate."

When taking PIRL, there are no opportunities for social interaction among students, which impairs their ability to

effectively retain the information they've learned through the course. Thus, students find themselves missing out on discussions, group activities, projects, and other opportunities to test their knowledge and interact with the material. The course states that communication is limited in order to allow students to reflect on their "thoughts and behaviors about race and oppression," however, in reality, the lack of collaborative projects and feedback on assignments often acts as an obstacle for comprehension. Students can feel as though they are alone in the course and therefore care less about it, which often worsens understanding of the material.

Furthermore, with the need to read and watch lengthy passages and videos that are often difficult to comprehend and carry out the course's intended purpose in a vague manner, students can often find themselves struggling to stay focused on the content. For instance, in a required text called "Stones, Fruit, Sand & Beliefs," students are asked to contemplate the

PIRL should encourage students to speak up about race-related issues.

question, "What do we learn about our beliefs (values) from studying stones, trees, fruit and sand?," and to "identify a proverb that resonates with [them]" from a list of nature-related phrases. This activity has little relevance to the stated purpose of the course, and it is even more likely to cause students to struggle to learn and feel a lack of commitment to learning about racial literacy when paired with online learning's many opportunities for distraction and the lack of accountability in asynchronous environments. As students are only required to complete one activity per module, they often end up doing the bare minimum.

Additionally, the course does not provide students the opportunity to share their experiences with others, or give them a platform to participate in conversations about current racial justice issues. Because they don't get the chance to learn from other students who might provide thought-provoking insights, students who typically do not face racial injustices are less likely to understand the purpose and impact of the course.

Despite its asynchronous format, PIRL should encourage students to speak up about race-related issues. This could be done in several ways, like creating discussion assignments where all students can contribute their opinions, or having mandatory online meetings (on various dates, to preserve flexibility) for students taking the class in order to discuss material and learn from each other. By implementing these adjustments, PIRL can become a course that not only enhances students' understanding and empathy, but also provides a space where students can learn to have meaningful discussions surrounding marginalization.



graphic: Katherine Chen

TOWER MULTIMEDIA



Long-form interviews with teachers and students.
"Papercast" renditions of Tower articles.
Audio journalism. Documentaries. And so much more.



PAPERCASTS
The Tower. Out Loud.



TOWER SHORTS
Multimedia... bite sized!



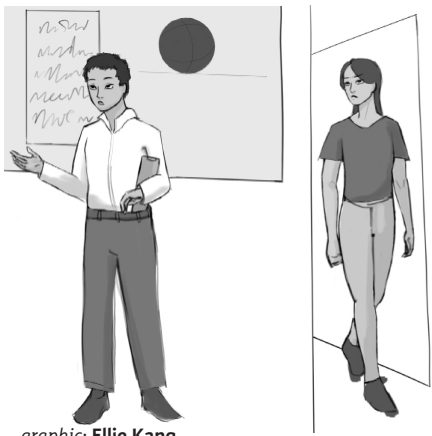
PHS TALKS
Long-form interviews

Opt out, or cop-out?

Harry Dweck, STAFF WRITER
Andrew Kuo, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Through increasing social disagreement in our country, many parents have joined together in an attempt to protect their children from ideas or courses of study that they deem harmful. In order to protect their children from these ideas — whether scientific, medical, or historical — parents lobby and protest so that their children can opt out of certain lessons. It's easy to think of opting-out of controversial content as something that happens far away from the progressive halls of PHS. However, recently, the PPS district has had its own challenges with parental demands to opt-out. In September, Project Veritas (a conservative media organization) released an undercover video of a HiTOPS (an LGBTQ+ non-profit) employee on YouTube. In the video, the employee explained that instead of educating students about LGBTQ+ issues in an opt-outable sex-ed class, the organization had been teaching about it in mandatory Pathways to Racial Literacy classes. As a result, this January, a small group of parents held a protest at Princeton Middle School against the continued inclusion of HiTOPS in the mandatory school curriculum. “[PPS] has had requests in the past to opt-out of [Pathways to] Racial Literacy, [a] graduation requirement, [but] per the state guidelines it's not opt-outable,” said Kimberly Tew, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction. Those who support opting out generally subscribe to the philosophy known as “parents’ rights.” This principle

maintains that parents should have greater control of their child’s experience in public schools. In some cases, this may even mean outright changes to the entire curriculum. In 2023, the attorney general in Indiana passed the Parents’ Bill of Rights with the aim of changing the curriculum to ensure that it “accurately reflects the values of Indiana families.” The justification for this is that parents know what’s good for their children better than educators. These claims should not be immediately dismissed. Parents, after all, spend a lot of time with their children and would be able to notice the emotional needs of their children. However, mental health and education are entirely different. Teachers and school administrators have spent their careers devoted to the intellectual and educational experience of young adults, whereas parents often see things only through the eyes of their own children, making teachers generally more in tune with the intellectual and social needs of students. In addition to a justification for involvement in education, for opting-out to actually happen, parents must take issue with the school curriculum. Of course, parents are entitled to their own opinions about what is right. However, allowing a student to study something does not mean they will be



graphic: Ellie Kang

forced to endorse it. In a school district as accommodating as Princeton’s, students who disagree with the perspective of the educator have a chance to voice their disagreement and express their reasoning. At PHS, students are likely to encounter a much more forgiving and understanding audience than if they were to wait to discuss their ideas until entering our intensely partisan society. In turn, students who had previously agreed with the position of the educator are introduced to another perspective — their world view expands, and they learn that the issue at hand is not one sided. In the end, opting-out depends on a logic that is similar to censorship, as if there are certain ideas or subjects that are so dangerous that they must be deemed out of bounds entirely. But this is hardly the case; we should be exposed to all kinds of ideas — both good and bad — just like the ideas we will eventually be exposed to when we leave the safety of the classroom. Parents, though, still have a crucial role to play in this process of education. Rather than protect their children from “dangerous” ideas, they should provide their children with the analytical tools to form their own interpretation.

AP restrictions: a plea for PHS’s underclassmen

Claire Yang and Helen Yu, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

When course selection rolls around, many PHS students look forward to picking interesting and challenging Advanced Placement (AP) classes, only to find that they’re not available. The College Board has 38 different AP tests, ranging from math to the arts. Many students take AP exams early on in their high school career in hopes of receiving more advanced instruction or to catch the eye of a top college by having a record of challenging classes. AP courses have a fast-paced curriculum, with a test to show mastery at the end. Passing these tests can give students a sense of accomplishment for their hard work. While AP courses are intended for high schoolers, many freshmen in our school are only allowed to take a select few. Even if a student were to meet the prerequisites for these AP courses, they still can’t take them simply due to their grade, which entirely disregards the skill and potential these students have. Academically-driven students deserve to be able to access challenging courses to further enhance their learning. Students may not want to spend a whole year taking a

course they are already familiar with, and they deserve the opportunity to skip ahead. Although these restrictions mainly come from a place of concern and desire to help underclassmen adjust to a high-pressure academic environment, many students are qualified and can take on the challenge. For example, in the case of AP Calculus BC, students at PHS are unable to skip a course even if they self studied and previously scored a five on the AP exam. Meanwhile, in other elite high schools, students can save a year of time by pursuing more advanced courses instead, should they be qualified to do so. Blocking APs from underclassmen also harms their participation in activities outside of school. Many extracurriculars require knowledge that students would only have the opportunity to properly learn in AP courses. This includes clubs such as Distributive Education Clubs of America, Euro Challenge, Model United Nations, debate, as well as business-related clubs that require skills taught in AP Macro-Microeconomics. Additionally, many students in the Science Olympiad would also benefit from more availability of science APs, such as biology, chemistry, and physics. Without access to these AP courses,

students will simply turn to a different solution to enhance their academic knowledge: self-studying. However, self-studying an AP class can not only be extremely difficult for students in terms of effectively learning the content, but also in time management. This is especially the case for underprivileged students, who may not have the resources to acquire study aids and tutors, causing them to lag behind their more privileged peers in these extracurriculars. Rather than having underprivileged students struggle with difficult material to keep up, having equal opportunities for courses would level the playing field and alleviate mental stress for all students. At the end of the day, PHS’s policies should strive to reflect the academic needs that much of our student body demonstrates. Our restrictiveness on AP courses is stifling the academic growth and potential of our underclassmen who are ready and eager to tackle more advanced material. By limiting access to these challenging courses, we not only hinder individual student achievement but also undermine the success of our extracurricular programs and competitive academic teams. Opening up AP courses to qualified freshmen and sophomores would provide equal opportunities for all students, regardless of their background, to not only excel academically but also thrive in their extracurricular pursuits. It is important that we reconsider these policies to foster a more inclusive and intellectually stimulating environment, instead of forcing everyone into mediocrity in the name of equity.



graphic: Emily Kim

PHS SPEAKS OUT: How have teachers implemented the new phone jail policy?

Ruoxi Xu, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

 <p>01 Ashley Nussbaum Economics</p>	 <p>02 Francesca Nunez Spanish</p>	 <p>03 Timothy Campbell History</p>	 <p>04 John Bathke English</p>
---	--	--	---

How have you integrated the new policy introduced this year into your classroom?
In terms of phones, [they] are to be put away at all times. Yet, that’s always an obstacle. Next year, my supervisor will give us ... cell phone holders. I’m happy to embrace it.

Have there been any challenges?
Gradually, they get used to it, [such as] the bathroom pass. As students use the restroom ... they have to sign out on my pass and then the bathroom pass.

Why haven’t you implemented the phone pockets?
I think implementing them at the end of the school year would have had a little bit of pushback, so its coming beginning of next year.

How have you integrated new policy introduced this year into your classroom?
Since the start of the year, there is a phone policy where students upon entry ... have to put their cell phones into the [phone jail].

Have there been any challenges?
Sometimes students forget to put their phones in, but once they’re reminded [by me] they go and do it.

Have you noticed any changes with student behavior because of this policy?
Yes, they are more focused, they complete their work on time, and they are on task when they don’t have their phones with them.

How have you integrated the policy introduced this year?
I’ve always had the phone jail policy ... [its been] going on five or six years now.

Have there been any challenges?
The only challenge is sometimes students “forget to put their phones in the basket,” so I just gently remind them.

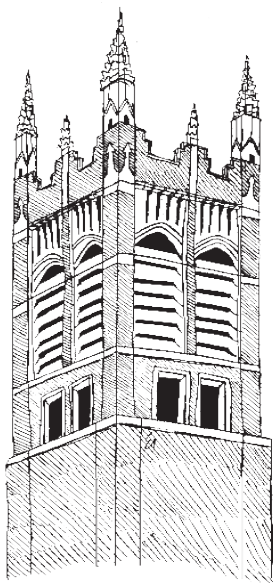
Have you noticed any changes with student behavior because of this policy?
I have. Actually, some students thank me for giving them a break from their phones.

How have you integrated new policy introduced this year into your classroom?
I don’t really like when people use their phones, so unless [there’s] a very specific reason why they’re using their phone [I tell them to] put the phone away.

Have there been any challenges?
Yeah, every day. For the most part, students forget they have their phones out.

Have you noticed any changes with student behavior because of this policy?
I mean for the most part, I think students are more compliant in putting their phones away.

graphic: Katherine Chen
photos: Ruoxi Xu



A transition to mediocrity

Editorial

“The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a nation and as a people,” wrote the authors of the 1983 report “A Nation at Risk.” Since the report’s publication revealed the extent of the United States’ far from exceptional public education, there has been an emphasis on the need to increase rigor in our curriculum and provide for STEM courses to compete with other knowledge economies. With it came an influx of standardized curriculum, like the Common Core and testing in public schools; it also seems more than coincidental that the popularity of AP tests has grown significantly almost every year since the 1980s. While these courses were originally created to challenge high-performing students further, it seems rare to find a student at PHS not taking these Advanced Placement “university-level courses.” On the surface level, we see tremendous progress in the effort and expectation for students at PHS and around the country. But we don’t seem to be better as a nation.

The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) is universally recognized as a benchmark to assess and compare national education systems in different countries, testing 15-year-olds on essential math, reading, and science knowledge and skills. Despite funding for education increasing per pupil every year, the United States’ PISA scores have stagnated or even decreased the past decade. This doesn’t seem to match the fact that alongside millions of students nationwide, PHS students pushed themselves to take a record amount of 1660 AP exams in total this year.

Recently, there has been an avalanche of disappointing decisions by College Board, which is continuing to decrease benchmarks in multiple avenues of standardized testing such as the AP, PSAT, and SAT exams. Under the convoluted mess of positive statistics seems to lie an opposite reality, a downward trend in expectation that seems oddly similar to the fears that led to the publication of “A Nation at Risk.” For example, to be considered “extremely well qualified” in the AP Physics C: Electricity and Magnetism Exam, students need to score just above 50 percent of the total points available. Other more subtle changes show up in the difficulty of

texts in the AP Language Arts and Composition exam or the complexity of questions given in history exams (not to mention the changes to the rubric). Are we stooping to a lower standard in education? With the powerful influence that College Board wields today in curriculum, it seems undeniable. Considering these developments, the very ideals that define American exceptionalism seem at odds with the direction of our schools.

In some ways, the changes are a result of public pressure. The push for self-contentment, relaxation, and work-life boundaries leads us to the conclusion that mediocrity is a far better fate than misery. However, although the US is facing a mental health crisis, especially among young adults, decreasing the expectations and benchmarks of what we can achieve is only further detrimental to education and the self-confidence of the generation most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Simply put, students are confused. This confusion is felt frequently on social media, where students are swayed to believe they can prioritize their mental health, half-committing to learning, while working arduously to be somewhat comparable to other students in the “How I got into *insert university*” videos plaguing their screens. The rise of satisficing in education reflects America’s shifting priorities, exacerbated by the “dumbing down” of expectations that were seemingly achievable just a few years ago. One can’t help to feel as if the United States’ education system is shying away from difficult experimentation and implementation to improve education, and instead deciding to acquiesce in a whirlwind of damaged attention spans and complaints.

It is human nature to want things to stay easy. But for developing teens, when we ignore the growth that can come from pressure, the successive appeasement in the name of overbearing stress removes conviction when surmounting future obstacles. The comfort we feel in mediocrity right now is only temporary.

By definition, only a few are exceptional. But for each individual and as a society, the intense drive to improve upon the previous generation is necessary in order to exceed the stagnation that we currently face. Everyone wants to be the best version of themselves, so let’s put that idea into practice.

The Tower

Princeton High School
151 Moore Street, Princeton, New Jersey

© 2024 Staff of the Tower

Editor-in-Chief	Daniel Guo
Managing Editors	Tamar Assayag, Matthew Chen
News & Features Editors	Matias da Costa, Claire Tang
News & Features Staff	Harry Dweck, Leila Guitton, Aritra Ray, Reed Sacks, Meiya Xiong
Opinions Editors	Tessa Silver, Chloe Zhao
Opinions Staff	Harry Dweck
Vanguard Editors	Syra Bhatt, Zoe Nuland
Vanguard Staff	Asya Morozov, Chloe Zhao
Arts & Entertainment Editors	Marina Yazbek Dias Peres, Sophie Zhang
Arts & Entertainment Staff	Jane Hu, Gabby Kaputa, Chloe Lam, Tessa Silver
Sports Editors	Asya Morozov, Katie Qin, Dester Selby-Salazar
Sports Staff	Kaelan Patel, Claire Yang
Visuals Editors	Katherine Chen, Charley Hu, Emily Kim
Visuals Staff	Avantika Palayekar, Chloe Zhao
Head Copy Editors	James Bertrand, Kylie Sek
Copy Staff	Ero Christy, Yunsheng Xu
Business Managers	Angela Chen, Joseph Hu
Online Editors	Henry Langmack, Ayush Shrivastava
Multimedia Editors	Aritra Ray
Advisors	Lauren King, Doug Levandowski

Mission Statement

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

Editorial Board

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

Letter and Submission Policy

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

The Tower Online

The Tower is available to read online at www.towerphs.com

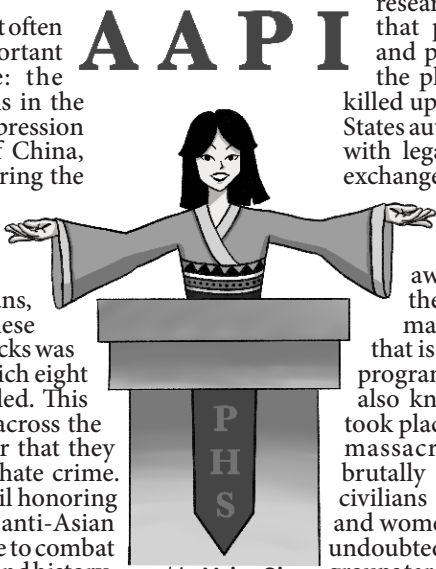
The newspaper accepts advice from the administration and the advisors in regard to the newspaper’s content; however, the final decision to print the content lies with the Editors-in-Chief. The Tower’s articles do not necessarily represent the views of the administration, faculty, or staff.

We should have had an AAPI month assembly

Joy Chen and Stephanie Liao, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Can you name one detail about Unit 731, the WWII research program with thousands of casualties? Probably not, but unfamiliarity with this tragedy isn’t your fault. Rather, the surprising lack of Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) history in the outreach programs at PHS is to blame.

In order to understand why we don’t often learn about these topics, it is important to acknowledge the root cause: the marginalization of AAPI individuals in the United States. One source of this oppression is sinophobia, the fear or hatred of China, which spiked to an all-time high during the COVID-19 pandemic. The branding of the disease as primarily the fault of Chinese people caused a rise in racist name-calling and violent hate crimes against millions of Asian Americans, including those who weren’t of Chinese descent. One of the most horrific attacks was the 2021 Atlanta spa shooting, in which eight women, six of them Asian, were killed. This tragedy rattled AAPI communities across the country, serving as a stark reminder that they could be the target of a prejudiced hate crime. The Princeton community held a vigil honoring these victims and acknowledging anti-Asian racism, but initiatives like this do little to combat structural ignorance of AAPI people and history.



graphic: Maiya Qiu

Historical programs at PHS often commemorate tragedies within western countries, such as the Holocaust, but overlook the suffering that people in Asian countries have faced throughout history. We have never once had an assembly or event about Unit 731, a Japanese research program during World War II that performed unsanitary vivisections and purposely gave victims frostbite and the plague. It is estimated that Unit 731 killed up to half a million people, but United States authorities provided operation officials with legal immunity from these crimes in exchange for research information. Due to Japan’s destruction of evidence, the United States’ compliance, and its exclusion from our history awareness initiatives, few people in the United States learn of this brutal mass murder. To state another event that is overlooked by educational outreach programs at PHS is the Manila massacre, also known as the Rape of Manila, which took place during WWII. During the Manila massacre, the Imperial Japanese Army brutally murdered at least 100,000 Filipino civilians and raped hundreds of young girls and women. Though both of the above events undoubtedly caused significant trauma to the groups targeted, these cruel violations of human

rights may become hidden away and slowly forgotten one day. Worsening this situation, PHS has failed to even acknowledge these horrific war crimes in Asian history during AAPI history month.

In defense of our school’s curriculum, there is only so much our teachers can show us in the vast expanse of history. However, that is exactly why we should be supplementing these parts of AAPI history through speaker events, much like the assembly for Jewish Heritage Month. When we invite knowledgeable scholars to share information about Unit 731, they commemorate and pass down this important piece of world history down to future generations. After all, if we don’t know about the past, how can we stop ourselves from repeating it in the present?

Education, in the face of discrimination and political tensions, is crucial in the fight for AAPI representation. As an already marginalized group, AAPI communities need to see their history portrayed in outreach programs to both teach AAPI individuals about their ancestors and promote understanding within the broader student body. Through awareness, we acknowledge the struggles faced by cultural groups, work to prevent such atrocities from happening again, and celebrate the AAPI individuals within our community. It is time for PHS to take steps towards shedding light on the important topics ignored by our current outreach programs and fostering a greater culture of empathy and understanding of AAPI history in our school community.

PREX
PRINCETON RECORD EXCHANGE



Sodas Around the World

Asya Morosov, SPORTS CO-EDITOR
Vanessa He and Suroor Menai,
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Ramune

Opening a soda just requires opening the bottle cap or tab, right? Well, Ramune can only be opened by pushing a marble into the bottle. Despite being a Japanese soda, Ramune was invented by Alexander Cameron Sim, a Scotsman, while he was living in Japan. Sim was believed to have created this soda drink to prevent cholera, though some disagree and believe he based it off of lemonade. Nowadays, what sets Ramune apart from other soda is its “Codd-neck bottle,” which prevents the carbonated soda from going flat. Now, there are several flavors of Ramune being sold worldwide, such as lychee, peach, or melon, and unusual flavors such as corn soup, curry, and kimchi available online. The original Ramune flavor with tastes of refreshing lemon-lime, has still remained one of the most popular flavors.

Kombucha

Kombucha is made in many different ways, from the commercial fermentation of tea leaves to the more traditional use of mushrooms and fungus. It comes in many different flavors as well, but all have a distinct vinegary undertone. Although it can be hard to get used to, its health benefits have made it a very popular drink. Kombucha is first mentioned in records from the Qin Dynasty. Lauded as the drink of immortality, kombucha was especially popular with Emperor Qin Shi Huang. Its health benefits were well-researched and the beverage quickly became prevalent throughout the kingdom. As the Silk Road was established, kombucha traveled out of East Asia. Notably, it went to Russia and Central Asia, where it became an important part of daily life, with medical records like the “Domostroi” stating that it could heal indigestion and other illnesses. In the 20th century, kombucha finally made its way to the United States, where it was popularized by brands like Synergy that still fill shelves today. Although it may not be an elixir of immortality, kombucha has been proven to help strengthen the immune system and improve gut health.

Jarritos

Jarritos are a well-known type of soda that you’ve most probably seen before when grocery shopping or out on the street. Jarritos originated in Mexico in 1950, but have since spread globally. They are usually packaged in clear bottles and come in many different flavors, but some of their most popular options are guava, mango, and lime. Even though Jarritos are known for their fruity flavors today, the original inventor, Francisco Hill, centered his focus on a coffee flavor. Hill was generally very unconventional with his sodas, but they almost always ended up becoming a staple. For example, he was the first person to ever make a tamarind soda. Once he made the transition from well-known flavors to tamarind, it instantly became a hit with recurring customers. The Jarritos brand is also very focused on their ingredients, making it a point to only use natural sugars and flavors. Overall, Jarritos are a soda that have evolved many times, and in many aspects, but still remain tasty and refreshing to everyone.

graphics: **Emily Kim**

CAN CRAFTS

Ayush Shrivastava, ONLINE CO-EDITOR and Chloe Zhao, OPINIONS CO-EDITOR

We generate a lot of waste in our lives. Metal cans especially can generate a hefty carbon footprint; its metals are first mined from the earth, often eroding its surrounding geography, then refined and shaped with fossil fuels, and finally coated in plastics. According to the Container Recycling Institute, although the aluminum industry has come a long way in reducing greenhouse gas emissions from the smelting process itself, the worldwide quantity of aluminum-related greenhouse gasses has continued to rise due to increased demand.

It might seem like these issues can't be addressed by the average person, but there's actually a lot we can do as consumers to slow or even prevent this buy-throw cycle. You can always embrace minimalism and avoid buying more than you need. Recycling is, of course, always an option. But there's also a third thing you can do: upcycle! Through upcycling, we can not only slow down the flow of trash into our ecosystems and put less strain on important resources, but also save money by utilizing what we already have at hand. Here's a way you can upcycle a used soda can! Check out more ways on the Tower website.



STEP 1
Use a can opener to remove the top of your soda can.



STEP 2
Using a drill, awl, or other sharp object, poke about five holes into the bottom of your can.



STEP 6
Keep the can in or near the sun, water the soil regularly, and you should have a healthy plant grown in an upcycled soda can!

STEP 5
Make a roughly one-inch dent in the center of the soil and add your seed. It's best if you germinate the seed in some moist paper towels a couple days beforehand.



STEP 4
Fill the can with soil. Tap it down so that it's packed but still a bit loose.



STEP 3
If you choose to use pebbles, add a short layer of them to the bottom of your can. This will help regulate the amount of water in the can.



HISTORY OF SODA

Joy Chen and Aarna Dharmavarapu,
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

1767

The first version of soda was created by Joseph Priestley, an English chemist. Aiming to replicate natural mineral water, which was believed to cure illnesses, Priestley infused water with carbon dioxide, developing the first carbonation technique.

1819

The first soda fountain was created in the United States by a physician named Samuel Fahnestock. This original soda fountain was a barrel-shaped machine with a pump that produced carbonated water and was designed to be hidden behind a counter.

1883

Pepsi was originally introduced by Caleb Bradham, a pharmacist from North Carolina, in 1883. This drink, sold at the local pharmacy, was named "Pepsi" because it was believed to relieve dyspepsia, also known as indigestion. The invention and spread of this drink started the "cola-wars," a long standing rivalry between Coca-Cola and Pepsi-Cola, both becoming two of the most valuable soda companies worldwide.

1886

Pharmacist John Stith Pemberton created a sweet syrup that was composed of a mix of the African kola nut and small amounts of cocaine extracted from a cola leaf. This syrup was later taken to a local pharmacy, and was infused with soda water. They named this drink Coca-Cola, which went on to become one of the most common sodas.

1903

The company Sodastream, founded in 1903, became renowned for its home carbonation systems, a machine that helps carbonate water into sparkling water. However, the machine was only available to upper-class households at the time and only became ubiquitous after merging with Soda-Club in 1998.

1982

The launch of Diet Coke by the Coca-Cola Company in 1982 revolutionized the soda market by offering a healthier alternative that retained the classic Coca-Cola taste. This new drink appealed to a broader audience, including individuals with dietary restrictions and those looking for a healthier alternative to the classic soft drink.

2005

Coca-Cola introduced Coke Zero in 2005, with the aim of appealing to consumers looking for a zero calorie alternative to regular Coke, while still preserving the drink's classic flavor. Its launch was a response to the growing demand for healthier soft drink options.

COLA WARS

Jessica Chen and Will Pitman,
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Amidst the phasing out of hippies, growth of the bell bottom jeans, and larger-than-ever perm updos of the 1970s and 1980s, two companies — Coca-Cola and PepsiCo — were battling a business feud that left a permanent mark on American culture. Inducing the age old question: what's better, Coke or Pepsi?

This war started nearly a century before the 1970s, with the founding of both companies. A pharmacist in Georgia invented cola in the mid 1880s, and several years later, the Coca-Cola Company was founded. Not much later, another pharmacist invented "Brad's Drink," a similar sugary drink to Coca-Cola. Seeing the early success of Coca-Cola, "Brad's Drink" rebranded to the now known Pepsi-Cola Company.

A century later, Coca-Cola was outdoing Pepsi-Cola in almost every respect. Coca-Cola's use of literal cocaine (until 1929) as well as an exponentially larger brand name caused the odds to be stacked heavily against Pepsi. Still, Coca-Cola, America's favorite "pop," continued an all-out campaign against PepsiCo, a rising star. But why was this? Well, in the 1980s, one thing was plaguing the frontrunner: it, scientifically speaking, tasted worse.

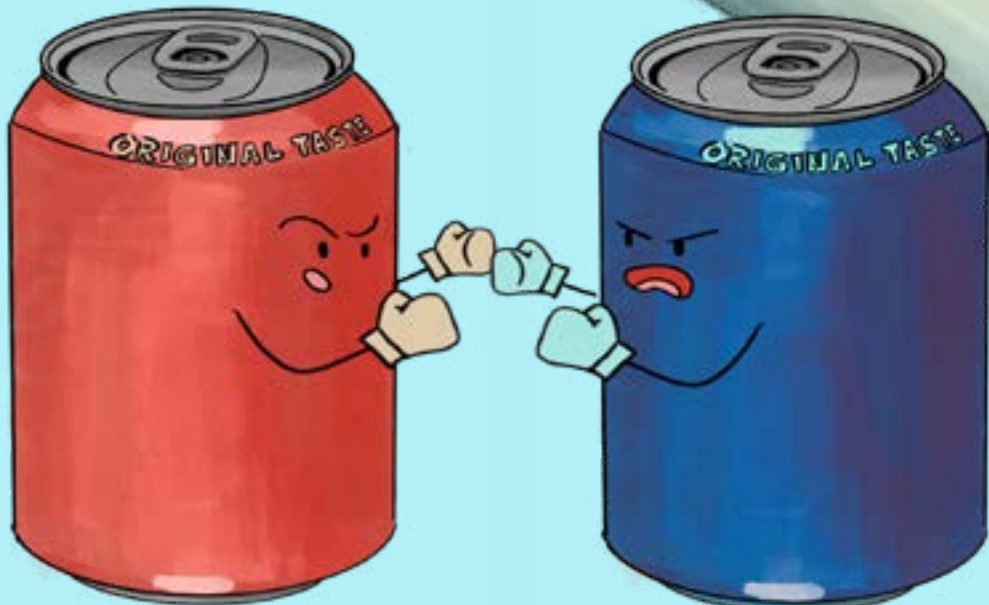
During this time, PepsiCo released several ads of people blind taste-testing Pepsi versus Coca-Cola, and the results were astoundingly in favor of PepsiCo. That being said, the "journalism" pictured in ads was not exactly credible — several sources described that PepsiCo handed out Coca-Cola at much colder temperatures, which weakened the taste. But, after numerous reliable journals investigated this debate and did their own trials, even Coca-Cola's president agreed with the simple fact: Pepsi (generally speaking) tastes better.

In turn, Coca-Cola pivoted, and in a controversial decision they announced "New Coke," with a formula mimicking the sweeter and more syrupy taste of Pepsi. However, fans of Coca-Cola were far from happy. Specifically in the south, "classic-Coke drinkers" detested the switch and decided to boycott, protest, and even call Coca-Cola itself to express their disappointment. In some of these calls, a psychiatrist, who was answering the phone, determined that they discussed the change similar to if they were discussing the death of a family member. One New Coke protester said: "My oldest daughter is 22. Her first word was 'coke.' Her second was 'mommy.'" PepsiCo wasn't silent either. Maliciously targeting the lack of public support, they mocked Coke's switch. In one ad, a first-time Pepsi drinker exclaimed: "Now, I know why Coke did it!"

Thus, just three months after New Coke was announced, with mounting backlash, Coca-Cola went back to its older, less tasty, but ultimately more iconic recipe. As expected, people returned to the brand in swaths, and funnily enough, the switch back to the "Classic Coca-Cola," resulted in an overall net sales increase of Cola again (even counting the previous three months of subpar sales from New Coke).

Forty years later, PepsiCo and Coca-Cola have not entirely relented. Oscillating through periods of harmony and fierce competition, the past few decades are filled with examples of the Cola Wars. Like an animated ad in 2012, where a can of Coca-Cola fought off a city filled with Pepsi. Or, during the Super Bowl in 2019 when Pepsi smothered Atlanta, Coca-Cola's founding town, in promotional material.

It's clear that until either company submerges, this war will never end. But until then, we, the American public, can enjoy it — two multibillion dollar corporations and their silly schemes at getting people to buy cola.



graphics: Charley Hu

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

PHS Orchestra brings unity through music in European tour

Yunsheng Xu and Rebecca Zhang,
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

On May 23, the Princeton High School Orchestra embarked on their 2024 European tour led by PHS Orchestra conductor Robert Loughran. They landed in Milan, Italy after a long flight, and traveled to Venice over the next few days. There, they performed in a music festival at Riva del Garda.

After the music festival, they ventured into Verbier, Switzerland, where they played in two concerts for primary school students. The orchestra finished the tour in Paris, France, where they performed at Lycée International Saint-Germain-en-Laye school and Église de la Madeleine.

Loughran's goal for the tour was to reach a variety of audiences with the contrasting repertoire the orchestra prepared, bringing together audiences from different cultures and backgrounds.

"[We played] a lot of pieces ... close to twenty ... I [was] definitely most excited about the movie theme songs," said flutist Emily Leng '27.

Other soloists in the orchestra, along with two vocalists, Reva Doshi '24 and Nicole Lee '26, played significant roles in uniting individuals through music.

"[We featured] some soloists, like Audrey Kang ['24], and Sunjun Jo ['24]," said Loughran. "[They also did a piece together] called 'Schindler's List' from John Williams."



The PHS Orchestra poses for a photo in Verbier, Switzerland against the view of Mont Blanc.

To successfully execute the iconic melody from the film, the orchestra had to focus on conveying the beauty of the sorrowful sound.

Another soloist featured in the repertoire is oboist Amanda Sun '24, who performed the main melody in "Gabriel's Oboe."

"It's from a movie called 'The Mission,'" said Sun. "It's very lyrical and I [liked] the orchestra's parts as well."

This lyrical style [contrasted] with the music from "Schindler's List," reflecting the orchestra's variety of compositions.

The orchestra's trip to Europe was not only a musical experience, but also a memorable opportunity for the musicians to bond, meet new people all over the world, and explore various cultures.

"The cuisine ... between all those three different regions [was extraordinary]," said Loughran. "[As well as being] able to maximize the potential of trying new things and savoring new tastes."

The European tour was a chance for members to venture into newfound attractions and places, exploring various cultures.

"[I was] just super excited to be in Europe because [I had] never been [to] Europe," said Leng. "[We saw] Moulin Blanc [in Switzerland]."

In addition, the orchestra had the opportunity to explore multiple historical sites, such as the West Bank of Paris where Ernest Hemingway lived, and a French chateau.

"It was so interesting to explore places with such rich cultures and histories," said violinist Meghna Myneni '25. "The trip really opened my eyes to different ways of life."

Ishaan Banerjee '24 remains resolute in his passion for jazz

Marina Yazbek Dias Peres, ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT CO-EDITOR

The Tower has retracted a previous version of this article that appeared in the issue published on May 1, 2024, headlined "Ishaan Banerjee '24 prepares to turn a passion for jazz into a career," and republished a new version. The writer fabricated Banerjee's responses, and The Tower has communicated our sincerest apologies.

When I met Ishaan Banerjee '24 for this interview, I found him fixated on one of the practice room pianos, his saxophone in the corner of the room — undoubtedly part of a rehearsal I had just intruded on. Ever since the third grade, Banerjee has been dedicated to jazz and his instrument, the saxophone. He sees band as a team effort, where supporting each other is key to success — Banerjee has twice switched the type of saxophone he plays to cater to the band's needs. His devotion to jazz has certainly paid off, having given him back a plethora of life experiences. Through his time in high school, he's toured with the PHS Studio Band and Philadelphia Jazz Orchestra, traveling to Disney, Italy, Monaco, France, and Abbey Road Studios in England. This coming fall, Banerjee is off to Manhattan, where he will study jazz at NYU.

What first got you into jazz? Or just band in general?

I was playing piano when I was four years old, and then I got really bored of it. Once I started playing the saxophone in third grade, I had a couple private teachers that got me into jazz. They introduced me to the music, and since I love listening to the music, I figured it'd be great to start playing.

Do you ever struggle with confidence on stage, and if so, what do you do to deal with it?

A lot of times in competition, it's easy to get super nervous and lose confidence, but it's really nice to have a lot of people around me, just like building me up before a performance and making sure that they know or that I know I can sell it really well.

What would you say is your favorite memory in band or Philadelphia Jazz Orchestra?

Going on tour with everyone is super fun. PJO, it's 13 nights of just constant playing and being in a different city all the time. Getting to play in front of a bunch of different diverse groups of people is really cool. And for Studio Band as well, playing in front of really big crowds and seeing crowd reactions is always super fun.



Ishaan Banerjee '24 sits in a practice room, playing jazz music with his saxophone.

How was changing from alto saxophone to barry and back to alto? Why did you change?

I first started playing alto in third grade, and then changed to barry sax in seventh grade because we didn't have a barry sax player, and I figured I could help out. It was pretty funny, because the instrument was bigger than me at that time. And then I continued throughout high school because they needed a barry sax player in Studio Band. And then this year, because we didn't have a lead alto saxophone, Mr. Bongiovi thought it'd be a good idea just for me to switch back, and it's been super helpful, because I think I'm gonna keep playing alto sax in college.

What are your plans going forward, in relation to jazz?

I'll be studying jazz at NYU in the fall, and I don't know if I'm planning on making it a career yet, but studying jazz was always something I wanted to do so I could get better at my instrument. And yeah, we'll see where it goes from there.

Do you think the role of jazz in the has changed over time, and how do you see it's role in music today?

You hear a lot of times like the jazz [is] dead thing, but I think that if you look a little deeper, there's a lot of people that maybe aren't necessarily doing traditional jazz, but are taking concepts from jazz and incorporating it into popular music.

Surprise surprise, JoJo Siwa didn't invent gay pop — here's three LGBTQ+ pop artists to listen to instead

Gabby Kaputa, STAFF WRITER

Since JoJo Siwa's release of her song "Karma," she has exclaimed how she has invented a new genre called gay pop. However, this is simply not the case as thousands of gay pop artists have come before her, such as Elton John and George Michael. But there have also been plenty of new emerging LGBTQ+ pop artists to listen to this month besides JoJo Siwa. Here are three great options.

Chappell Roan

If you have TikTok you have definitely heard of the "HOTTOGO" dance, a series of hand movements spelling out "hot to go" at Chappell Roan's concerts, which has taken the platform by storm and quickly become the YMCA of Gen Z. With her 1980s synth style and dark pop vibe, her songs with scandalous and raw lyrics allow her audience to see all of her flaws and perfections. Her songs show a side of her that is earnestly human to her audience, such as "Casual" and "Love Me Anyway."

Growing up in a strict Christian household, Roan describes her childhood as being "really depressing" and music was a way to escape her harsh realities. After years of posting small singing videos on TikTok, Roan was signed to Atlantic records at just 17 years old, causing her to move from her home in Missouri to Hollywood where she released her first EP which she "hated," as reported by Variety. She then went on to produce music with Dan Nigro, who is well known for his work on Olivia Rodrigo's album "Sour." With Nigro's help, she then released her song "Pink Pony Club," in which Roan describes her experiences as a queer woman in Hollywood.

She was then dropped by her label and moved back to Missouri where she worked a variety of different jobs in order to save enough to move back to Hollywood and

continue her career, which she successfully did after a year and a half. On her return back to Hollywood, Roan produced her second EP "The Rise and Fall of a Midwest Princess," which included a variety of songs that she had produced over the years as well as some new ones, such as "Femininomenon," "Red Wine Supernova," and "After Midnight." All of her songs have a consistent balance of both raw emotion and playful fun that makes you want to dance around, solidifying her as one of the most creative pop artists of her generation.

Roan is currently touring with Olivia Rodrigo as her opener but is also set to go on her own fully sold out tour this summer. Considering how each of her performances warrants different dress-up themes, features local drag queens as openers, and donates a percentage of the sales to For The Growls, a Black, trans-led charity, it's clear that Roan has a lot of excitement in store this summer.



Troye Sivan

When talking about queer artists, Troye Sivan goes down as one of the most popular LGBTQ+ artists of his generation. Sivan has been in many films, television shows, and plays throughout the years, such as "The Idol," "X-MEN Wolverine," and "Waiting for Godot."

He started out his career running a popular Youtube channel featuring song covers and collaborations with popular artists. In 2013, Sivan signed onto the label EMI Music Australia, but not before coming out to his gathered audience due to fear that the label company would try to control when or how he came out after he signed with them. Luckily for Sivan, both his audience and label were incredibly supportive of him and his sexuality, which has not been the case for so many other artists.

They released his first EP "TRXYE" in 2014; the EP, with its mature and personal lyrics, a far cry from his normal electronic pop music, quickly became a hit among his audience. He then went onto release a second EP "Bloom" in 2018 and his third EP "Something to Give Each Other" in 2023. Both albums were immensely successful and displayed Sivan's struggles and triumphs in exploring his sexuality and personality. This resulted in his well deserved Grammy for his hit song "Rush," which celebrates queerness and his openness with his sexuality.

Another of his songs, "One of Your Girls," also was a breakthrough in Sivan's career not only for it's portrayal of his experience in understanding and accepting his sexuality, but also for it's music video where Sivan is portrayed as a woman, representing his struggle with molding himself for someone else's views, not his own.

Continued online

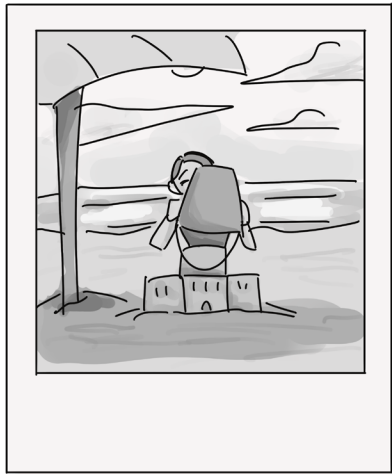
Summertime fondness: memorable moments to cherish

Summers in Germany

Amelie Kraft, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

One of my most cherished summer memories that I often think about is the time I spent with my family at Schloss Elmau in Germany. Scholss Elmau is a resort in the Alps, where my grandparents have been vacationing for a long time, and have regularly invited us to join them. The first time I went was when I was still a baby being pushed around in a stroller. As I grew older, these summer trips were especially meaningful to me because I got to spend time with my dad's side of the family, whom I didn't get to see very often. During these trips, I loved to go to the hotel's pools to swim (my favorite was the outdoor pool since you can sunbathe and see the Alps while you swim). We would go on hikes through forests with trees that looked like they touched the sky, go on bike rides through landscapes and farms where we saw horses, sheep, and goats, go to the sauna that was mostly for the grown-ups because it got very hot, and browse through the sticker books in the bookstores.

The last time we were there was two summers ago. The most memorable part of the trip was spending time with my grandma in the bookstore browsing books together, or her indulging me by letting me buy sticker books, which she didn't think was very creative nor interesting. I also remember my time with her during "kaffee und kuchen," meaning "coffee and cake," which typically took place between 3:00 p.m.-4:00 p.m., when we would be served cake with "apfelschorle," meaning "sparkling apple juice," for kids and coffee for the grown-ups. This is very important to me because my grandma is no longer with us but it continues to remind me of her in a loving way.



My grandmother was an inspiration to my family, whether it was showing us new traditions, foods, and music, or sending my sister and I gifts on our birthdays every year until she couldn't anymore. Thinking about this trip has reminded me even more about her and how she has changed my mindset about music and how to present myself and act at the table for a meal has made me feel very grateful to have such a loving and caring grandmother like her.

These trips were so important to me because they gave me the time to get to know my aunt, cousins, and grandparents better, and it was always very relaxing as we were surrounded by beautiful mountains and landscapes. My last moments with my grandmother on this trip are a constant reminder to never take anyone or anything for granted because you never know if you'll ever be in that moment again.



Starting my sourdough

Meiya Xiong, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

In my house, summer means time for more baking and kitchen projects. The warm weather also means that my kitchen room temperature is warmer, making it the perfect time to make lots and lots of bread.

Starting with reviving my sourdough starter, I begin every summer by rehydrating the starter that I preserved and dried from the previous year. Each morning, I "feed" the starter bits of flour and water, carefully monitoring its growth as the dry and brittle pieces turn into a bubbly and happy mixture.

Once it reaches the stage where it is airy enough to float in water, I would know it was ready to begin making

bread. Taking a portion of my starter, I would then combine it with flour, water, and salt to make a dough. Over the course of the day, the dough would go through kneading and periodic stretches and folds to allow gluten development. Shaping and proofing would follow, before finally baking the dough the next day in a scorching 450 degree oven to give it a fluffy but chewy crumb and a dark and crunchy crust.

Of course, summer sourdough baking wasn't without its mishaps. Sometimes, I would leave my dough in an oven that was turned off during proofing but forget to tell my family. On a few occasions, a well meaning family member turned on the oven to preheat it for a different purpose, resulting in charred remains of a dough, a few melted containers, and even a small fire in our kitchen once. Despite occasional accidents, burnt crusts, or loaves that looked like they exploded in the oven, the bread always ends up tasting good. With their different imperfections, each loaf is unique, and that's part of what makes the process exciting.

As summer rolls around again, I look forward to tending to my starter and baking sourdough again. There's a certain magic to taking simple ingredients into delicious bread. The process, with its required attentiveness and unpredictability, has become a highlight of my summer routine.



graphics: Angela Wu

QUAD EDUCATION

15+ Years of Experience

96% Acceptance Rate

99th Percentile Tutors

\$23M+ Scholarship Awards

Your Trusted Partner In College Admissions

- End-to-End College Application Support
- SAT/ACT Tutoring
- BS/MD & BSN Admissions Consulting
- College Profile Development

Book A Free Consultation!

www.quadeducationgroup.com



Summer vibes for the summer drives: a playlist



graphic: Angela Wu

Jane Hu, STAFF WRITER
Claire Yang, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

With another exciting school year coming to an end, we all have one word in our minds: VACATION! Luckily, for those who are going on road trips by themselves, or with their friends or family, we have created a perfect playlist for long drives.

“Drive By” is a song by American pop rock band Train from their sixth studio album, “California 37,” released in 2012. This song does a good job keeping the mood upbeat and ensuring that your road trip won’t be a boring one. The song describes the story of how the lead singer, Pat Monahan, met his wife. While she thinks their meetup was just a “one night stand,” hence “drive by,” Monahan tries his best to convince her otherwise. Train does an amazing job describing the feelings of Monahan, explaining how his “love for [the girl] went viral / And [he] loved [her] every mile [she] drove away ... Because [he] really fell for [her].” I think that this song is incredibly endearing, especially because Monahan develops his feelings simply through a one night stand. Not only does this song bring back nostalgia of the early 2010s, it is incredibly catchy as well, and great for a road trip.

Similar to “Drive By,” in “I’m Yours” by Jason Mraz, the artist also sings about his love towards a girl, opening up about his feelings towards her, and overcoming the hesitation he has while trying to pursue the girl. With the lyrics, “So I won’t hesitate no more, no more,” Mraz makes it clear he no longer wants to bottle up his feelings about this girl. I think that aside from the endearing message that this song has, the music is catchy yet not overwhelming. The instrumentals are clean; while there are quite a few instruments used, such as the bass guitar, ukulele, and keyboard, the song still has a calm vibe. So, even if you just listen to the music for its vibes, or if you enjoy deciphering messages written by artists, “I’m Yours” will definitely catch your attention.

As for a more recent song, “Espresso” is a trending pop song written by American singer Sabrina Carpenter in 2024. Similarly to the other two songs, this tune is also upbeat. However, the lyrics in “Espresso” are rather humorous. Carpenter begins her song by saying how “he’s thinkin’ ‘bout [her] every night ... say [ing] [he] can’t sleep” because she’s like an espresso to him: addicting. While many artists sing about serious themes, such as love, pain, and breakups, Carpenter deals with more light-hearted subjects. I think that despite this song being repetitive, the catchy chorus makes up for the shortcomings.

“Cruel Summer,” a 2019 tune by international pop star Taylor Swift, is a song that begs to be sung at the top of your lungs on a hot summer day. In it, Swift conveys the feeling of a forbidden summer romance. At one point in the song, she sings, “And I snuck in through the garden gate / Every night that summer just to seal my fate / And I screamed for whatever it’s worth / ‘I love you,’ ain’t that the worst thing you ever heard?” As the highlight of the song, if the previous parts didn’t already, this grabs my attention and convinces me to sing along. For fans of 1980s music, the synth-heavy instrumental contains elements of retro music and gives a sense of nostalgia. Whether you’re a Swiftie or not, this song will get you singing “it’s a cruel summer” along with Swift.

“Curls in the Wind” was released last year by Mark Ambar, an American singer-songwriter mainly focused on indie-pop music. Despite echoing sentiments of romance like “Cruel Summer,” Ambar’s lyrics portray pursuing love as something that is exciting and comforting. The song depicts a more carefree impulsiveness of new romance that gives the listener a sense of freedom when Ambar sings, “Getting lost in a beautiful place / Open fields when I look at your face.” The pace of the song and the clarity of the lyrics make it easy for me to sing along with anyone I’m

traveling with in the car. The sensory depictions embedded in the phrases lets the listener imagine a perfect setting with their loved one and gives a sense of escapism.

Performed by K-pop girl group NewJeans, who is known for hits such as “Super Shy” and “Hype Boy,” the song “ETA” will get you and your friends or family hyped up for summer fun. The refreshing, rhythmic pop sound of “ETA” with its addictive chorus is sure to be a favorite for teens. The chorus is “We can go wherever you like / Baby say the words and I’m down / All I need is you on my side ... what’s your ETA, what’s your ETA.” The lyrical style of this song is similar to conversing with a close friend, inviting the listener to be part of their inner circle. I especially love the meaning of the lyrics and how it comes to symbolize navigating young love with the help of close friends. Even though the song is mostly in Korean, the main parts of the song are in English, allowing people to sing along to the most important parts.

Hopefully these summer bops give you a sense of cheerfulness and spirit no matter what destination you’re headed towards. After a stressful school year, we deserve good music to kick back and relax to. Feel free to explore other songs from the playlist to listen to over your summer vacation!



Finding pride in film: three LGBTQ+ movies to watch

“Happy Together”
Maya Wood, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

“Let’s start over.”

Named after the popular song from The Turtles, Wong Kar-Wai’s “Happy Together” (1997) follows the relationship between Lai Yiu-Fai (played by Tony Leung) and Ho Po-Wing (played by Leslie Cheung). Having had an on-and-off relationship for a long time, the two find themselves lost in Argentina while searching for the other-worldly beautiful Iguazu Falls. Frustrated and sick of each other, they go their separate ways. Eventually, they both end up in Buenos Aires and find each other again, leading to an emotional and complicated reunion.

Wong Kar-Wai, the creator of “In The Mood For Love” (2000) and “Fallen Angels” (1995), brings back his incredible artistic vision using light and color to shape the emotional evolution of this story. The shifting color palettes reflect the fluctuating dynamics of the relationship between Fai and Po-Wing: warm and vibrant reds and oranges when the characters are experiencing overwhelming love or grief; bright and sunny yellow when they feel contentedness; cold blues and greens when they feel depression and loneliness; and black and white when they completely hate each other, capturing the realistic and raw emotions of difficult situations.

This movie was made only six years after the legal recognition of homosexual couples in Hong Kong (though same-sex marriage was not legalized), and was very influential in attaining more visibility for the LGBTQ+ community. Even today, same-sex couples in Hong Kong have no legal protections from discrimination or for marriage. This story mostly took place in Argentina, which in the 1990s was more accepting of the gay community, and now has many legal protections in place for LGBTQ+ individuals.

This is one of my favorite movies from Wong Kar-Wai and I think that he does a great job of going below the surface in terms of emotion, which can add a layer of relatability and representation to some members of the audience. The themes in this film are raw and moving, but not for everyone. It deals with topics surrounding a toxic relationship, so viewers’ discretion is advised.



“Far From Heaven”
Chloe Lam, STAFF WRITER

“I’ve tried, I’ve tried to be like other people.”

Many recent movies have displayed honor and respect towards individuals who have had an impact on Pride Month. “Far From Heaven,” released in 2002, is a drama which takes place in the 1950s. It is a stunning and emotional movie which delivers a powerful message regarding race, gender, sexuality, and escapism during that time period.

The protagonist, Cathy Whitaker, highlights many of the oppressions and expectations women faced during the 1950s, such as prioritizing family needs over her own desires. She marries Frank, who is similarly struggling with living a double life, since he’s secretly gay. He is forced to hide his identity, which leads to psychological distress.

Frank decided to marry Cathy because it would adhere to societal expectations. Through his marriage, Frank has conversations with his psychiatrist regarding homosexuality, and he realizes that there is a widespread belief that homosexuality is a mental illness that could be cured. This untrue belief led to the harm of many LGBTQ+ individuals in real life, in addition to Frank in this movie. The film highlights the homophobia and prejudice in the 1950s, where gender roles took precedence over understanding and acceptance, allowing the audience to be aware of the problem, therefore leading the audience to strive for a greater change in the future.

Soon after, Frank has the courage to move out and decides to find his own happiness. He was able to embrace his own identity despite societal expectations and was able to live authentically in a repressive society. The positive ending to the film highlights the importance of finding the right but painful steps to self acceptance and happiness, despite facing difficult situations.



graphics: Katherine Chen

“Brokeback Mountain”
Rebecca Zhang, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

“I wish I knew how to quit you sometimes.”

On the goldens of the lush plains, thousands of meters above the smokes of life — with rain, with snow, with him — “Brokeback Mountain” tells of the tragic love story when Ennis Del Mar (played by Heath Ledger) meets a rodeo cowboy Jack Twist (played by Jake Gyllenhaal) in a small town of Wyoming in 1963. Introverted Ennis and extroverted Jack soon become good friends as sheep herders on Brokeback Mountain. While both try to avoid it, they notice that they have slowly gone beyond the point of friendship, when one freezing night spent together seals their fate. However, after the job ends, they go their separate ways, longing after their memory of Brokeback Mountain, and only having infrequent, secretive reunions which makes them miserable.

“Brokeback Mountain” shows how the inequalities that LGBTQ+ people face in this world can frighten them because of the risk that they might be physically attacked or publicly shamed by people with homophobic views, especially at that time. Ennis and Jack’s decisions to marry women while having an illicit affair outside of their marriages demonstrates the fragile balance of striving to appeal to the public’s expectations while attempting to understand their own differences.

However, their hesitancy to be together throughout the film makes for a tragic end. They wanted to express themselves, but the need to protect themselves from danger ended up reigning over their decisions. Although the world is now changing, gay love is still widely restricted in many places and many beliefs. Jack and Ennis’ relationship in “Brokeback Mountain” depicts a love which is raw but heartfelt, violent but fragile, emotional but persevering, and desirous but forbidden. The film has not only strong convincing elements for people to accept all differences, but it also puts in so much humanity and vulnerability that reveals the truth behind common yet undercovered encounters with prejudice.

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUM

ART *on* HULFISH



“Don’t we touch each other just to prove we are still here?”: Photography and Touch

May 11–August 4, 2024

The exhibitions and programs at Art on Hulfish are made possible by Annette Merle-Smith; Princeton University; William S. Fisher, Class of 1979, and Sakurako Fisher; J. Bryan King, Class of 1993; John Diekman, Class of 1965, and Susan Diekman; Julie and Kevin Callaghan, Class of 1983; Annie Robinson Woods, Class of 1988; Barbara and Gerald Essig; Rachelle Belfer Malkin, Class of 1986, and Anthony E. Malkin; the New Jersey State Council on the Arts, a partner agency of the National Endowment for the Arts; and other generous benefactors.

LEFT: Tabitha Soren, *Emailed Kiss Goodnight*, 2016. Collection of the artist. © Tabitha Soren RIGHT: Joanna Piotrowska, *A Most Gentle Touch*, 2019. Collection of Alice Russotti. © Joanna Piotrowska

SPORTS

“Challengers” is changing the game

Asya Morozov, SPORTS CO-EDITOR

For decades, sports movies have followed certain plot beats. A typical story might go like this: a young man dreams of becoming a baseball star. He tries out for his school’s team but it’s much harder than expected. He works diligently and makes it in the end, leading his team to the championship finals. When they win, he kisses his girlfriend in the middle of the court and his teammates carry him off to the blaring tune of “We Are The Champions.”

When the end goal for players in most sports movies is to be as strong and successful as possible, it makes for good television, but certainly not a nuanced story. However, sports films today seem to be shifting in a different direction, often by relying less on the same few storylines and excessive motivational messaging.

An older film that exemplifies the typical sports movie plot is “Rudy,” which centers around high school student Rudy Ruettiger who dreams of becoming a football player at Notre Dame University. Although he faces financial and personal obstacles, Rudy is eventually able to transfer to Notre Dame, but decides to quit when he realizes that he is not allowed a starting position on the team. After a conversation with a friend and former



player, Rudy realizes that he shouldn’t give up so easily and leads the team to victory in their final game.

This victory, although extravagant, does not seem undeserved. Viewers have seen how far Rudy has come and are almost certainly rooting for him by the end. Even though he was backed by nothing but his own perseverance, he still achieved the ultimate victory. But this is a very idealized portrayal of the life of a student athlete, following the incredibly common tropes of the underdog and their crucial success in the final match, both of which are tried and true in television but have become too predictable. Of course, it must be acknowledged that “Rudy” is geared towards a slightly younger audience, so its complexity and depth must, to an extent, be limited. However, this limitation does even less to draw in the teenage audience the film hopes to attract. The unimaginable and unlikely success in “Rudy” almost kills the movie’s motivational message as it eventually becomes too overly inspirational to be genuinely relatable past sentimental appeal.

This isn’t the case for some newer sports films, especially not for the recent hit “Challengers,” which centers around the intertwining journeys of three tennis players: Tashi, Art, and Patrick, who meet while in high school and continue to encounter each other throughout their adult lives. The movie explores the multi-faceted romantic relationships between these three complex individuals, the aftermath of a career-ending injury for Tashi versus a successful recovery for Art, and the unpredictable nature of an athlete’s life and profession. In the end, the three players do not regain everything they have lost but keep moving forward anyway.

In “Challengers,” the life of an athlete is not depicted in as clear-cut a way as in “Rudy.” There is no initial setback, initial success, critical setback, and final victory, but rather every success is somehow followed by failure and every failure by success. Tashi is so deeply obsessed with tennis that her injury completely breaks her. Patrick has a bright start but ends up a failed professional. Art pushes himself to the point where he just wants to retire. This movie shows the dangers of obsession with a sport in a way that most sports movies do not. The characters’ determination is not always rewarded with success, which, no matter how painful, is much more realistic. Their relationships and lives are intertwined with their sport and become more complex because of it — something student athletes can certainly relate to as they juggle sports with the rest of their lives.

Unlike “Rudy,” “Challengers” has a higher age rating and therefore more freedom in terms of depth and complex storytelling. For generations, teenagers have begged to be seen and taken seriously, to be treated as mature and capable. Movies like “Challengers” that don’t shy away from the realities of lasting pain and failure in the sports world offer an alternative for the plethora of feel-good sports movies like “Rudy” that already exist. The success of “Challengers” points to a new, more mature market for sports movies that will likely be capitalized on in the future, a move away from the over-optimism and perfect victories in older sports films and towards more relatable representations.

At PHS, student athletes are forced to balance many different challenges to keep up with the school’s intense academic climate, which makes it difficult to absorb the idealized representations displayed in older sports films. According to data collected by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) in the 2022–2023 season, only about 6.6 percent of high school athletes go on to play at Division 1 schools. A study done by Ohio State University in 2017 also found that only approximately 0.023 percent of high school athletes become professionals. The chance of failure is so much greater than the chance of success that it’s easy for student athletes to become disillusioned when comparing their futures to the impressive careers characters their age frequently end up having in movies.

New films like “Challengers” help to counter this unrealistic perspective. By depicting injury, emotional struggle, and failure, these movies combine sports with reality into a much more believable narrative. For hard-working student athletes, this balance is a refreshing break from the standard success story championed by older sports films.



graphics: Katherine Chen

Unconventional sports around the world

Asya Morozov, SPORTS CO-EDITOR

Sepak takraw

Sepak takraw originates from Southeast Asia and shares many similarities with traditional Southeast Asian sports like chinlone, which is from Myanmar, and sipa, which is from the Philippines. Sepak takraw is similar to volleyball but with one key difference: players can only touch the ball with their feet, knees, chest, and head. This makes for interesting, acrobatic matches as players often do flips and bicycle kicks to hit the ball. Sepak takraw was first standardized in Malaysia in 1960. It can be played indoors or outdoors, and teams consist of two to four members. In recent years, sepak takraw’s dynamism and uniqueness have brought it popularity in Europe, Africa, and the Americas.



graphic: Katherine Chen



graphic: Katherine Chen

Hurling

Hurling is a traditional Gaelic team sport with origins in Ireland. The sport is currently administered by the Gaelic Athletic Association. It is an exclusively outdoor game, and teams consist of fifteen players with several substitutes. In hurling games, players use a stick called a hurley to hit a ball called a sliotar into a net. The sport is similar to lacrosse and American football, but the only protective padding players are required to wear is a helmet. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization has labeled hurling as an element of intangible cultural heritage because of its deep connection to traditional Gaelic values. For example, the sport promotes humility by not letting athletes put their names on their jerseys.

Bossaball

Bossaball was invented in Brazil. This sport includes elements of volleyball, gymnastics, music, and soccer. The court it is played on is also unconventional — a large inflatable ring with trampolines on either side of a central net. Bossaball is typically an outdoor sport and is usually played on the beach. Teams consist of four players, and each team can touch the ball a maximum of five times before sending it over the net. The most unique part of the sport is its musical aspect. Referees, called “samba referees,” equally serve as DJs and Masters of Ceremony. The word “bossa” is also associated with “bossa nova,” a Brazilian style of music that has become popular worldwide.



graphic: Charley Hu

PHS’s support in athletes’ injuries and recovery

Katie Qin, SPORTS CO-EDITOR

Injuries are one of the most common and universal things an athlete can experience, whether a minor scrape or a life-altering incident. At PHS, injuries are prone to happen given the sheer amount of sports teams and clubs, which calls for more than just the expertise of school nurses. PHS does not have a medical team at every game to watch out for all students all the time, but this is covered by trainers and coaches. They are a vital part of an athlete’s recovery process, if not their overall success in the sport, as they are in the best position to support a player at a moment’s notice.

Students Adrian Li ’26 and Erin Pilicer ’26 are two of the many student athletes at PHS who have been injured before. Li, a tennis player and skier, fractured his right wrist while skiing last spring. “It was a day when there was a lot of powder. I never really skied powder before. So I started skiing, [and] I lost control and fell, and [my right wrist] broke,” Li said. Thankfully, Li is left-handed, but his broken wrist still significantly hindered his ability to play tennis by forcing him to play solely forehands, a shot he can play with just his left arm. However, with a doctor’s note and support from the coaches of the boys tennis team, Li was able to make the team. “During tennis tryouts, it was really difficult, but ... the coaches ... were very nice because they’d let me try with the broken wrist ... They’re very supportive of me,” Li said. To stay fit for tennis, Li attended physical therapy and rehabilitation for around four to five weeks, but most of this was done outside of school. “A team could have an injury counselor where they address the issue and see how we can make it better, so [athletes can] better play the sport without getting injured ... I didn’t know there was a trainer,” Li said. Another student, Pilicer, also persevered and played her sport, softball, despite her injury. She broke her pinky finger while attempting to catch a ball during a drill. Although a seemingly small wound, it changed her perception of the game. “[The injury] made me more conscious of being safer ... even though I played through it. It scared me whenever I was catching or tagging,” Pilicer said. Although she knew there were medical professionals at PHS, Pilicer attended physical therapy sessions outside of school and had to wear a brace for a few weeks before she could resume playing.

“I ... think [students are] not really aware of [trainers] and what we [have to] offer.”

“When [the injury] happened, I didn’t tell anyone. I went to my doctor ... I didn’t really ask for [help],” Pilicer said. There are a few reasons as to why an injured athlete might not reach out to a school trainer. One such reason stems from the fact that there are only two trainers for the entire student body, and their time and supplies can only be stretched so thinly. For Pilicer, she immediately sought out her doctor because practice was after and outside of school, and it was easier than trying to find trainers stationed elsewhere. By having a larger team and supply sets at every sport’s playing ground, PHS would be able to respond to accidents much more rapidly and more students would be able to receive immediate care. For athletes whose available time is already limited, access to proper health service immediately after getting injured could help them quickly gain



graphics: Madison Charles

back their strength without falling too far behind. However, there seems to be a disconnect between athletes and the medical professionals at PHS. April Daly is one of only two athletic trainers, along with Shannon Koch, at PHS. Although not a doctor, she has many qualifications: a Bachelor in Exercise Science, a Master in Athletic Training, a first aid certification, and experience in pharmacy and psychology. Daly also works for a company called JAG Physical Therapy, which specializes in physical rehabilitation, and she brings her knowledge and experience to help PHS athletes. However, many student athletes aren’t aware of the resources and aid that she provides. “I would say it’s probably fifty-fifty [that injured athletes will come to me], to be honest, because I’ve only been here for a year now, so kids are starting to know me and know my process,” Daly said. A student’s schedule often does not make room for meetings with a trainer. Throughout the school day, students attend their classes, and Daly only clocks in after break, leaving few windows of opportunity open for students to meet with her. Moreover, once practices or games start after school, both trainers must leave the office to observe and care for players on the field. This is where crosstalk with coaches comes into play. “We ... have an EMR, an electrical medical system recorder, that sends emails to the coaches everyday of injury reports, and it will have their game statuses, ... so [coaches] know that [the athletes] are actually coming in here and progressing” Daly said. With fast communication between trainer and coach, an athlete’s status can be closely monitored so they don’t overexert themselves during practice, which allows for a faster recovery. Daly hopes that she can eventually help launch “Project Athlete” at PHS. This program — which was created by JAG Physical Therapy — would help PHS better support athletes who face recurring injuries, and prevent these injuries from happening in the first place. Among other benefits, this program would provide in-person demonstrations of dynamic warmups to decrease the risk of injury and screenings for potential ACL tears. Daly is also creating a website in which students could have access to a general rehab program as well as helpful videos for at-home physical rehabilitation exercises. This website will be accessible to students via QR codes on flyers that she will post around the school. “I ... think [students are] not really aware of [trainers] and what we [have to] offer, so [we’re] trying to roll [the programs] out slowly and see how that goes,” Daly said.

PHS TAKES: Which Olympic sport are you looking forward to watch the most this year and why?

Katie Qin, SPORTS CO-EDITOR



photo: Asya Morozov

“I’m really excited to watch the gymnastics one because the tricks they do are pretty cool ... I am very lazy, so seeing people who are not lazy do cool stuff ... [makes me] feel [motivated].”
- Ashaz Rizvi ’25



photo credits: Shaya Bhatia

“I’m looking forward to the triathlon because I find it really impressive that they are able to do three sports in one competition. Also, I know people who do traithlons so it’s fun to talk about it with them.”
- Shaya Bhatia ’27



photo credits: Enea Meloni

“For the Olympics this year, I’m looking forward to sprinting ... and high jumping because both of these competitions were last won by Italians, and I’m trying to see if we can pull off [another win].”
- Enea Meloni ’24

Athletes of the Month

Theo Lee '24: weightlifting

Dester Selby-Salazar, SPORTS CO-EDITOR

Theo Lee '24 grips the bar, ready to attempt a clean and jerk lift. Lee starts in a squatting position then quickly stands up and swings the barbell up onto his chest with his strength and momentum. After a moment to catch his breath, Lee springs into the air, lifting the barbell high above himself. It's a new personal best.

Lee's journey to becoming a weightlifter is unique in that he didn't begin his high school career knowing that it was his passion.

"Originally when I transferred to PHS ... I [played] soccer and basketball, and [ran] track," said Lee. "I was a full year athlete with different school sanctioned sports,"

After a series of miscommunications with his soccer coach over a foot injury, Lee found himself off of the soccer team and onto the track team. While Lee quickly realized that track wasn't the sport for him, one aspect about track did inspire him: the weight room.

"One day, [in track practice], they put in cleans [a type of barbell lift] to the lifts, and I thought [that] was really fun, and [that] maybe I should do weightlifting," said Lee. "So instead of going to track, I would go to the weight room and lift."

John Torrey, the head of the strength and conditioning department at PHS, was glad to help Lee out with his Olympic style lifts, which are uncommon among weightlifters at PHS.

"Theo had a natural aptitude for the olympic weightlifting, he was just technically very sound and very fast," said Torrey. "Theo did a lot of research and coaching on his own, and after picking up some outside coaching, he's gotten even better."

While Lee was able to see progress largely due to his own desire to improve, he understands that the opportunities which he was able to obtain through his coaches introduced him into the world of weightlifting outside of PHS.

"[Mr. Torrey] told me about a coach who does weightlifting coaching. [He was] hosting a meet and wanted to know if I could [attend]," Lee said.

At the competition, Lee met Jake Ruch, a fitness coach who has helped Lee with his routines, giving him tips on his form and mental strength. Ruch saw Lee's potential to compete almost immediately.

"I said to myself, [Lee] has a determining factor and an inner drive that you don't see a lot," said Ruch. "He has an ability to cope, to not make excuses."

At his second competition, Lee was introduced to many more athletes like himself, who were very competitive. Lee feels that this friendly competition has pushed him to work harder. On June 18, Lee will compete at the USA weightlifting competition, with weightlifters on Team USA.

"I'm looking forward to meeting people from different regions," Lee said. Although weightlifting has been a recent development in Lee's life, he feels as though he has really gotten to know the weightlifting community.

"I think that it would be really cool if we could get some kind of get-together for everyone who's always at the gym," said Lee. "[Other teams] get their events with cake, but the weight room doesn't have that ... it doesn't really matter on paper what you are, it's really about how you come together as a community."

Lee understands the nerves of starting a new sport as well as any young athlete. For anyone at any age thinking about entering the world of weightlifting, Lee thinks that PHS is a welcoming and supportive place to develop.

"Even if you are trying to get into the weight room but you don't really know what you're doing or what type of lifts you want to do, don't be afraid to try new stuff out," said Lee. "because everyone is figuring stuff out. People in the gym are really nice and would love to help you out."

Isabella Posada '24: discus

Claire Yang, STAFF WRITER

Holding the discus, Isabella Posada '24 spins on one leg, generating power, before releasing and letting it fly far.

Posada was introduced to discus through her friend at Cranbury Middle School. Joining the track and field team with her friend at middle school was very important in Posada's process of getting accustomed to the track team, and the sport of discus at PHS.

"[I] started off [with] shotput but then I began to move to discus, and [I] just [kept competing in discus from then on]," Posada said.

Posada attributes much of her success to the work she did with her coaches, from their emphasis on intense training to their ability to counsel and mentor.

"Most of my coaches have been very supportive and have treated me as a daughter of their own, making me love the sport and listen to their advice," said Posada. "I believe a good coach shouldn't have favorites and should push their athletes in the right way and get to know them personally in order for them to achieve their full potential."

Brandon Williams is the coach of the discus team at PHS, and has seen Posada's progress throughout the years; her development is a major source of pride for Williams.

"Isabella has been on our team for about four years now," said Williams. "She's a senior and she's gone through everything. She has been a county champion, and that has been a great inspiration to younger throwers to accomplish what she has."

Transitioning from Cranbury Middle School to PHS, Posada discovered that the community of discus throwers was small in comparison to the sprinters and long distance runners, but soon found herself appreciating this close-knit group.

"My relationship with other discus throwers can be very personal. I feel more connected to some of them because we have grown [together] not just as throwers but as people," said Posada. "If it was a larger sport [with] more people, it would most likely not feel the same."

Osbaldo Morales '25 has been Posada's teammate for the past couple of years, and has seen how her emphasis on team morale has allowed for stronger unity in the long run.

"When I was a freshman, I was a little scared of my upper classmates," said Morales. "As time passed on, and as I got to know [Isabella], I realized that she was someone who was easy to communicate [with]; she is a really easy going person."

Along with being a great person and friend, Posada stresses the significance of team bonding experiences, as she feels that it can help improve results on the field. Morales fondly remembers a moment where Posada sang "Let It Go" in a car ride while the team was bonding over ice cream. Morales feels that this encompasses Posada's spirit.

"It was ... just a really fun time and everyone [was] singing along, because that was the vibe," said Morales. "She was really singing her whole heart out."

While Posada is committed to making sure that the team environment is friendly and cohesive, she is able to employ a competitive mindset when needed. Posada believes that focusing on winning involves several factors.

"I usually try to mentally prepare myself before throwing, by calming myself down and going through my throwing routine," said Posada. "I usually like to think of anything but throwing because it helps me not get in my head [too] much."

Williams feels that Posada's competitive drive is a perfect example of what his athletes should aspire to have, and that such ambition allows them to impact on the field.

"Having athletes that compete with each other on a day-in-day-out basis helps to push each other to make them better, so they can be at their highest level of competition on meet day," Williams said.

Now close to graduation, Posada feels that she has a good understanding of the PHS track team, and has some good advice for freshmen who are beginning their high school careers.

"It's all about mentality and keeping yourself together," said Posada. "A lot of great athletes can easily get in their [own] heads which negatively impacts their performance, especially when they are throwing a discus."



photo:
Emily Kim



photo:
Charley Hu

