

The Tower

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PPS to end enrollment of 20-year-old students following review of state law

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Effective the 2026-27 school year, Princeton Public Schools will no longer allow students aged 20 years or over to enroll at PHS following a review of district policy and state law by the Board of Education and the district's attorney. This change does not include students on Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) – who receive special federal protection up to the age of 21 – but still applies to 12 students at PHS, several of whom are English Language Learners (ELL).

According to New Jersey State law, public schools must provide free education to students between 5 and 20 years old, but are not obligated to enroll students beyond this range.

"Districts are required to provide free appropriate public education to students until the age of 20. And then after that, it's the district's discretion whether or not to continue providing that," said Christian Gonzalez, an English teacher who works with ELL students. "If the district is legally able to, at their own discretion, continue that education for that student who's right on the cusp of graduating and who's otherwise in good standing...why don't we just continue at that point?"

PPS has in the past allowed students over the age of 20 to continue enrolling because the district was not aware of the law, according to PHS Principal Cecilia Birge and Supervisor of School Counseling John McMichael. The district made this change following a review this April after an inquiry by a high school staff member.

"I think this was a law that's been on the books for a while and we just weren't following it... I don't think it was

anything intentional," said McMichael. "This is tough because we're talking about students... [but] this is what we have to do to be in compliance with the laws of the state of New Jersey and the Department of Education."

Five graduating seniors will not be affected by the policy. Beyond the graduating seniors, in the current student body, Birge said that the schedule of two students will be updated to ensure that they can graduate on time, which may entail moving the date of their NJGPA test.

"Previously, we would let them just complete the entire school year. [Now] they will still be part of the graduation, because the graduation ceremony is important, but we have to let the student leave school before that," said Birge.

However, several other students will be forced to leave the school without a diploma once they turn 20.

"We have students who are turning 20, but they're so far behind because they're ESL [students and] don't have enough credits. Even if we keep them here until 21, they wouldn't be able to graduate," said Birge.

Additional teachers who spoke to the Tower under the condition of anonymity due to fear of retribution against themselves and their students voiced concerns about the change.

"Students are crying," said one anonymous teacher. "They're okay the day before their [20th] birthday. What changes after that?"

The bulk of students who will be affected are ELL students who enter PHS in freshman year at the age of 16. Priscilla Russell, Supervisor of ELL & Language

Programs, said that she is working with central administration to advocate for students in ELL programs. However, anonymous staff members explained that the change was not communicated to them until May, and they did not receive an official announcement of the change, because it was "under the rug," according to the source.

"This policy is frankly disheartening. Princeton purports itself to be liberal and inclusive, but the community doesn't know what's happening," said the anonymous teacher.

According to Dr. Michael LaSusa, superintendent of Princeton Public Schools, the district will continue to support the students who are not on track to graduate.

"While I am not permitted to speak about specific individual student circumstances, I can say that any student who may age out of eligibility to remain enrolled in our district by graduation has had and will continue to have opportunities to meet with their school counselors and other staff to develop a plan that best meets their needs," said LaSusa.



photo: Rohan Srivastava

For some students, the end of the road will come early: once students reach their 20th birthday, PPS will no longer allow them to remain enrolled to finish the school year — a change largely affecting English Language Learners.

Student leaders unite to organize PHS's fourth annual pride fest

Anya Kshirsagar, STAFF WRITER
Kyle Chen and **Aarav Patel**, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS



photos: Katherine Chen

PHS students gather at the front lawn as they listen to various a cappella groups perform during Pride Fest.

On May 29, PHS students, faculty, and families gathered on the front lawn for the fourth annual Pride Fest in support of PHS's LGBTQ+ community. Clubs from across the school, including the Queer Manga Club, Gender and Sexuality Alliance (GSA), and Student Council hosted booths at the event. The PHS a cappella groups also performed various pieces throughout.

Alex Brown '27, co-leader of the PHS GSA club and main organizer of the Pride Fest, explained how gathering funding and clubs was more difficult this year, with most outreach efforts coordinated by students. In past years, teachers have secured Pride Fest funding through the Princeton Regional Education Association. However, this year, because Pride Fest lacked a faculty advisor, it was unable to receive funding directly from the district.



Semira Schutz '27 works on twisting a balloon to hand out to PHS participants during pride fest.

"We're low on funding this year, so it's just what [the clubs] can contribute ... it's really just a grassroots movement at this point of bringing people together," said Brown. "It's a lot of student-based work right now."

While Princeton provides a relatively supportive environment for LGBTQ+ students, participants explained the importance of acknowledging the challenges that queer people continue to face outside of PHS.

"Princeton is a really privileged area to be living in, and this circumstance is not the same ... in systems in different countries and even in the U.S.," said co-leader of the Queer Manga Club Priscilla Ha '27. "The LGBTQ+ community is suffering so much under the Trump administration [with] all the cuts for things like [transgender] welfare and mental health."

Given this climate, Student Body President Zorah Bess '27 believes that events like PHS's Pride Fest are crucial because they can help LGBTQ+ students feel more connected and included within their communities.

"[Pride Fest is] important because a lot of kids need to be seen in their community ... We have so many clubs that are based on religion or sexual orientation or even race, like base clubs, so people can feel like they have a community here at PHS," said Bess.

Beyond just celebrating the LGBTQ+ community, the event also helped to connect queer people at PHS together.

"Having everyone together and feeling confident in themselves ... it ties the queer community to this fun experience that brings everyone together," said Hannah Suzuki '29.

Bess believes that even students and staff who are not part of LGBTQ+ community can play an important role in creating a more inclusive and welcoming climate just by showing up.

"I'm an ally," said Bess. "I'm not part of the LGBTQ+ community, but I still come and show support ... I want to be here because everybody else is here, everybody's having fun."

Brown hopes that events like Pride Fest help foster greater visibility and build a community for LGBTQ+ students.

"With such a hostile climate today, it's so important to highlight the triumphs of youth," said Brown. "Having that celebration, empowerment, and such a fun celebration is really important, because it just brings comfort to people ... knowing that they're safe in this community."

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Euro Challenge team wins first place nationally

Uma Kleven, STAFF WRITER
Sanya Bhatt, CONTRIBUTING WRITER



Euro Challenge team members take a photo with first place trophy. Left to right: James Draney, Joy Young, Cole Grainger '29, Rohan Sriavstava '28, Sidharth Maghnani '28, Helen Yu '27, Aritra Ray '27, Sebastian Balestri '28, Aidan Sutphin '29, Vasco Leal '28, and Joshua Huang '28.

On April 27, the Princeton High School Euro Challenge team placed first at the National Euro Challenge, an annual economic policy competition for U.S. high school students to learn about the European Union and its currency. Each team picks a country that is in the eurozone, and presents that country's economic policy problems and solutions for chosen issues. Following PHS's first place victory, they traveled to Washington D.C., where they met with an ambassador of their chosen country and discussed the real-world implementation of their research.

PHS's team captains Aritra Ray '27 and Helen Yu '27 chose Slovakia this year, focusing on discussing the country's potential economic growth and prosperity. Yu explained what challenges the team faced during the preparation for the competition.

"There's a lot of parts where we thought the solution was not specific enough ... so we had to think, 'What else can we do that will help bring up a new section that hasn't been paid a lot of attention to?'" said Yu. "In general ... we had to build a team dynamic, and we had to make sure that overall our presentation wasn't monotone."

The team had to divert slightly from their usual process, especially with regard to overall productivity, after not placing first for about five years, though the team did have a fourth place finish last year.

"I think this year we stayed a lot more on task. Having a strict schedule really built [us] up for success, because on the day of the competition, all our members had everything that they needed to know," said Yu.

While Yu and Ray played a role in the research process and the management of the group, the presentation was designated to the freshman and sophomore team members.

"Every year, we pick people [to make the presentation more engaging]. So I was Michal Meško, a [Slovak entrepreneur] ... [and] Rohan was the minister of economics," said Sebastian Balestri '28, one of the PHS presenters.

Along with the changes on their presentation, the club's advisor, PHS chemistry teacher Matthew Krip, noted another unique feature of the PHS team, and other PHS clubs in general, highlighting their student-run nature.

"That dynamic is unlike any other school that was [at the competition], and coming as the teacher who believes in that type of pedagogy, the dynamic is that the students who had competed previously, they became the leaders," said Krip. "That's the ideal pedagogy, because when I saw the other groups, the teachers were pretty much advising everything."

As a prize for the team's first place victory, on June 2 and 3, the team traveled to Washington D.C. to meet with Slovak ambassador to the United States, Matúš Hutka, and explore the possibility of turning their ideas into a reality.

"I think it's about realism and meeting people who have influence, and hearing their perspective validated, and that's very empowering. Any person who has put enormous amounts of time and research into a certain subject, and then going to an authority in some way, honestly, it's kind of interesting," said Krip.

The team spoke to the Slovak ambassador and other Slovaks, hoping to explore the viability of their ideas and whether they could have a real impact.

"I really want to talk to the [Slovak] people, and then [see] if our solutions would be something that they would consider ... and I just want to see how they would respond to [these problems], [if] this is something they've considered in the past, and why they haven't done anything about it yet," said Yu.

Unlike other clubs, the Euro Challenge club allows team members a hands-on opportunity to step into the role of policymakers and carve their own solutions.

"I think Euro Challenge really offers a unique experience, especially when it comes to ... formulating your own solutions," said Balestri. "That's not something that you get with many other clubs."

Ben Carliner, a senior economist at the EU Delegation who worked with the Euro Challenge organizers to plan the Washington trip, echoed a similar idea.

"Putting [students] in front of [adults] who will take [their] ideas seriously and ask questions ... really prepares [them] for the kind of work [they'll] need to do in the real world," said Carliner.

PHS Odyssey of the Mind team receives first ever top ten placement at world finals

Rohan Srivastava, NEWS AND FEATURES CO-EDITOR
Tyler Fiorentino, STAFF WRITER

On May 30, the PHS Odyssey of the Mind team placed 10th at the Odyssey of the Minds World Finals, the highest placement in PHS history. Starting their preparation in September, the four-member team selected the theme "Classics ... the Epic Quest," in which they were tasked with writing their own epic hero's journey. This year, the team performed a story about characters overcoming common teenage problems, such as low self-esteem.

"I played Julius, [who] was the hero of our performance, but he also works with the sidekick Mark, played by Julia Li ['27]," said Marcus Strum '27, a member of the team. "By World Finals, we had settled on major lessons that we were telling through our story, so we had a beast character, which represented ... insecurity."

The team selected this challenge rather than the other options, such as programming a robotic sidekick, because they wanted the competition to be a creative outlet.

"We chose this problem ... [because] we figured that we didn't want to have to have the extra technical barrier," said Strum. "We wanted to have it to be more open ... [to] cool stuff with our set."

After selecting their theme and writing the script, the team needed to find two more members, as their performance required six actors. One person who agreed to help perform and join the team was Noah Lee '27, a member of the club last year.

"I [didn't] feel like it was a burden," said Lee. "I really wanted to do it because I had such a fun experience last year. I was really excited to [participate] again and have fun."

After placing second at state finals, the team used the \$4000 earned from hosting the Odyssey of the Mind New Jersey State Finals to help fund their trip to World Finals. Lee emphasized that the opportunity for different teams to gather at World Finals from all across the globe made it a unique experience.

"I learned that people can have vastly different lives than I do, even though we're in the same grade," said Lee. "Even within such a [similar group], there's a vast amount of different experiences."

Odyssey of the Mind is different from other competitions because of the rubric's more subjective nature, as teams can take on various interpretations of the same requirements. Strum learned that a more thematic presentation may have been the key to their success.

"Last year, part of the reason why I didn't go far in the competition with my team was because there wasn't any special meaning or impact behind what we were conveying in our performance," said Strum. "But this year, we've really tried to make everything symbolic, and I think that's why we got so far going to Worlds."



From left to right, Luna Xu '28, Joy Chen '27, Aarna Dharmavarpu '27, Marcus Strum '27, and Julia Li '27 pose in front of their set after their performance, wearing their costumes, headwear, and face paint.

Latinos Unidos hosts community-centered Latino Fest

Rohan Srivastava, NEWS AND FEATURES CO-EDITOR

Featuring music, food, flags, and much more, the fifth Annual Latino Fest took place on June 1 on the PHS front lawn. Organized by the Latinos Unidos club, the festival aimed to highlight Latino culture as well as to engage the community, showcasing stands from local organizations as well as a free clothing stand. In order to provide these stations, preparation for the event was a year-long process.

"Throughout the school year, we [promoted] a clothing drive, so we had a lot of people bring in clothing [to give] back to the community back for free," said Ainy Solares-Zacarias '26, a leader of Latinos Unidos and major organizer of the festival. "We had to get in touch with a lot of organizations, like the firefighters and the municipality, along with Mercer County."

The festival also included various cultural food stands, served entirely for free for all attendees. Volunteers served tacos with Latino preparations of pork, beef, and chicken, as well as providing drinks. Getting all the volunteers present for the event was also an involved process.

"We invited a lot of alums. The presidents last year came in to support bringing food and Princeton Regional Education Association (PREA) sponsored the food," said Solares-Zacarias. "We also field-tripped students to help us prepare."

The cuisine and clothing attracted Princeton community members who otherwise may not have come to the fest.

"[I was drawn in by] the music and the colors," said Sonya Keaney '28. "[Latino Fest] is making culture so enjoyable for everyone ... and [easier] to share. It's a great event."



photo courtesy: Landon Pesnell



photo: Rohan Srivastava



photo courtesy: Landon Pesnell

Top left: The Princeton community make conversation as they enjoy the food provided at the Latino Fest. Bottom left: Students line up as they receive food provided by Latinos Unidos. Right: Flags decorate the lawn as students explore different activities on the front lawn.

Effect of budget cuts on PHS students and staff

Jacob Rogart, HEAD COPY CO-EDITOR

Aidan Sutphin, STAFF WRITER

Simon Santamaria, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

For the 2026–2027 school year, the district's budget has faced significant stress with rising costs and reduced funding, resulting in changes to budget allocation, positions, and resource distribution.

"The district budget has been cut mostly because of the lack of [monetary] aid from [the] federal government and ... unusually high costs that's market driven, such as insurance costs at the state level," said Princeton High School Principal Cecilia Birge.

Under New Jersey Chapter 44, state regulations strictly dictate how local school districts must handle employee healthcare coverage. Under this mandate, all public schools must enroll teachers in the New Jersey Educators Health Plan, the Garden State Health Plan, or an identical, locally equivalent plan, legally binding all public districts to these specific state-approved programs.

"Princeton [has its] own private insurers, and our cost only went up by 15 percent ... [which is] a lot higher than

the two percent property tax cap imposed by the [Chris Christie administration]," said Birge.

The property tax cap directly limits the amount of money the government makes and therefore limits the money that schools can receive. Therefore, this imbalance in insurance premiums with tax caps creates a deficit.

Transportation costs and teacher contract obligations have also risen due to pre-existing contracts and market demand. Certain teachers receive annual raises that are higher than two percent a year, but the school can't get more than two percent increase in its funding.

"Using this structure, [Princeton Public Schools] cannot maintain this operation in the same way as previous years and year after year," said Birge.

While positions will be reduced next year, administration emphasizes that is due to attrition and not layoffs. As staff retire or resign, the district has chosen to not refill some roles in order to save money.

"All retired teachers, all teachers who have resigned ... are being replaced ... [by] the best teachers who are affordable," said Birge. "We want to make sure we hire the teachers who are willing to grow within our school."

These budget cuts are not planned to affect academics, as the administration emphasized how they have and will continue to prioritize the academic rigor of the school. Instead, the burden will be felt by extracurricular activities, which may not receive as much funds, as previously reported on by the Tower.

"Students are our highest priority. ... I'm not looking at [an] increase of [individual] class sizes because no teachers have been cut," said Birge.

Despite the pressure of budget strain, the administration has stated that it will not resort to cutting down core programs.

"We're still exploring ways to expand programs; that's our bread and butter," said Birge. "[They make] PHS great."

New PHS bathroom policies cause confusion among PHS students

Mira Sethuraman and Haley Oakman, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

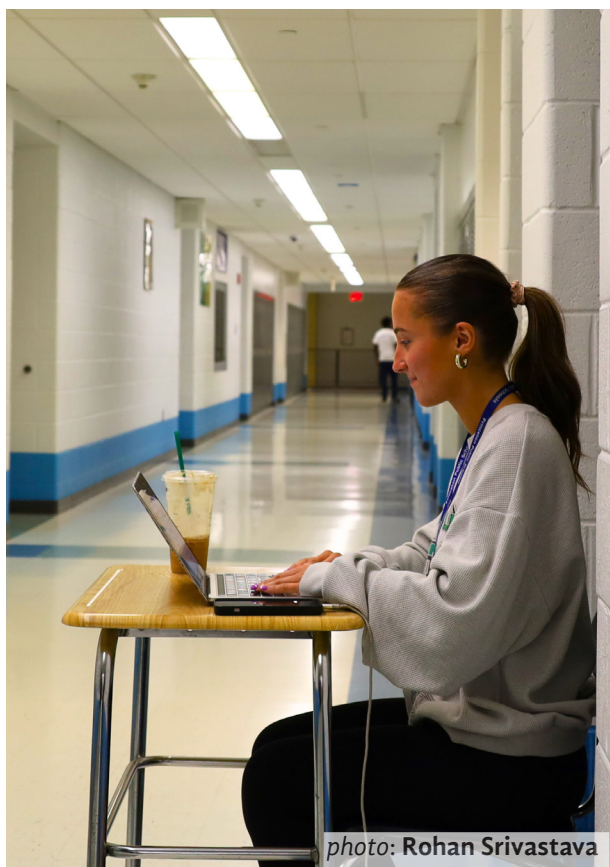


photo: Rohan Srivastava

Alexis Aguiar sits in front of the 180s hallway as a part of the administration's new bathroom monitoring policy.

Due to prolonged misuse of PHS bathrooms, administrators have stationed faculty members outside of certain restrooms to enforce new bathroom monitoring policies. The new protocol requires students to use the restroom one person at a time, with a staff member monitoring the hall to ensure the rule is being enforced.

The supervision of appropriate bathroom use was clarified by Principal Cecilia Birge as an attempt to address the misuse of restrooms rather than a brand new policy.

"When some students [are] gathered together in the bathrooms doing inappropriate things, it's preventing others from using it properly. ... It's not a new policy; it's our philosophy that all bathrooms and everything in the building should be used properly," said Birge. "When it's not used in the proper manner, that's when the administration team steps in and we help students make corrections."

Assistant Principal Crystal Riddick commented that the increased supervision of bathrooms came as a result of recent reports of inappropriate activities such as substance use in bathrooms. She explained how the policy wasn't to restrict students but to help make bathrooms a safer environment.

"It's not a restriction ... We do want to make sure everybody's safe and feels safe in front of [and] in the bathrooms, and make sure everybody is able to use the bathroom," said Riddick.

Birge explained several issues that had risen regarding the use of bathrooms and emphasized the reason for the introduction of the policy.

"There was a concern about increased visits to the bathroom during instruction, and potentially engaging in issues related to substance abuse, so because of that we manage the flow to make sure that people are using the bathrooms with its intended purpose," said Birge.

When asked about their opinion on the new regulations, students mentioned that they weren't notified of this by

the school and felt ill-informed. Upon arriving at the bathroom, many of them were confused why staff were stationed outside and what the intended purpose was for this increased monitoring.

"I saw it firsthand, and there was a substitute, standing out [or] sitting outside of the bathroom," said Julia Shea '29. "There was a sign that said one person at a time."

Additionally, students voiced their concerns about the inconvenience of this new approach to bathroom monitoring becoming a permanent long-term policy.

"I think it's gonna make it really inconvenient for students to use the bathroom and it's gonna make it harder for them to get back to class on time. ... Sometimes the teachers reprimand you for that and say you can only be out for five minutes, but [walking] all the way around the school makes that harder," said Laura Pepek '29.

The increased monitoring of the bathrooms is expected to continue indefinitely as it has produced positive results, creating an increase of appropriate behaviour. During staff meetings, there have been fewer complaints from staff and hall monitors about students being out of class and participating in dangerous and prohibited activities.

"Yes, in short, we have had conversations where people say in certain halls when we're there or when there's a monitor, there has been a change in behavior," said Riddick. "So from my perspective, I have [had] zero complaints, zero reports from adults, from teachers, from building monitors in the past couple of weeks since AP exam time."

Birge also notes that high school students' behavior can fluctuate, so supervision will only continue as needed. As of now, monitoring has decreased, but staff members will help guide students in the right direction if reports of dangerous activities start to increase.

"At this point, [the bathrooms are] a very safe and comfortable place for all students," said Birge. "So we'll keep our eyes on [them], that's the intent."

Save the Dates: 250th anniversary of the United States

Princeton's Annual Flag Day Ceremony

June 12, 2026 12:00 p.m.

Princeton hosts its Annual Flag Day Ceremony at the Municipal Building, just outside in the courtyard at 400 Witherspoon Street. The program includes speeches by this year's keynote speaker Rosemary Kelly, a direct descendant of a patriot from the Revolution, as well as a commemoration of our flag's adoption. Come if you would like to dive into America's past and the ups and downs of American flag adoption.

Devina Sinha and Luna Xu,
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS



Lawrence fireworks and concert

July 1, 2026 6:00 p.m.

At Rider University, come enjoy a lively day filled with a variety of activities, including food trucks and live music. Make your day even brighter by enjoying a bubble show and getting your face painted, followed by fireworks to end your night starting at 9:30 p.m.

Princeton Summer Music Series

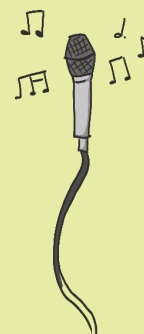
Starts July 4, every Saturday 1:00 p.m.–3:00 p.m. until August

From genres of classic rock, smooth jazz, and acoustic covers, local artists put on a performance every Saturday at Palmer Square for all to enjoy! Sit down at their picnic tables or bring one of your own chairs, buy an ice cream cone and relax. Bring your friends and family and spend the afternoon with live music as you take in the summer atmosphere!

Concert: Freedom Rewind

June 14, 2026 2:00 p.m.–3:30 p.m.

Step into a time machine with Freedom Rewind, a high energy concert hosted right in Palmer Square, celebrating America's 250th anniversary by throwing it back to 1976, the year of the most iconic rock and pop music ever recorded! Local band B.K. Rivers and friends take the stage with special guests to perform hits from artists like Fleetwood Mac, the Beatles, and more. Break out the denim and honor our country's history by taking it back 50 years!



Morven's Fourth of July Festival

July 4 12:00 p.m.–3:00 p.m.

It's the 250th anniversary of the U.S., and Morven Museum & Garden is opening its floor for a community celebration at the historic home of a Declaration of Independence signer. You can explore hands-on artmaking stations, join activities led by community partners, and take garden tours throughout the afternoon. The museum is free to visit, featuring two new exhibitions: Five Independent Souls: The Signers from New Jersey and Northern Family, Southern Ties, along with Morven's permanent gallery on early American history. You can also add your names to a replica Declaration and enjoy music and food!



Hopewell's "old fashioned" independence day

June 27 4:00 p.m.

Join Hopewell for their annual good "old fashioned" fun at the park! Hopewell Township's Fourth of July Celebration brings together awesome summer activities, community traditions, and an evening full of entertainment. You can check out the car show, listen to live music from local performers, and explore a variety of food vendors offering your favorites. As the sun sets, the event wraps up with a firework show that lights up the entire park.

PHS Profile: Steffanie Shoop

Rohan Srivastava,
NEWS AND FEATURES CO-EDITOR

Despite entering college as a basketball player, AP Biology and Biology Accelerated teacher Steffanie Shoop discovered her love for teaching when she first stepped into a classroom, though her love of basketball continues to live on in her coaching position at PHS.

Shoop has been teaching at PHS for 19 years, arriving in 2007 after her first job teaching in South River. Before becoming a teacher, Shoop's family's career in science inspired her to pursue biology instead of an athletic career at Providence College.

"I did not study to be a teacher, [but] I had two options. One of my options was taking a job [in teaching], so I [wondered], 'Do I go for sports, which is not guaranteed, or do I take a job that is guaranteed?'" said Shoop. "I decided to take the route [of] teaching, and when I stepped into the classroom, I knew I was never, ever, ever doing anything else."

Within the classroom, Shoop's teaching style focuses on supporting her students in

every capacity. She aims to help students manage the tensions that come with being a student at PHS, especially considering the difficulties of AP Biology.

"I try to make sure that every kid feels seen because they need to understand that they're not just a grade ... [or] just a class [or] just a test," said Shoop. "They're a whole individual. ... I try to be here as much as I can. ... My door is pretty much open all the time."

Shoop's commitment to teaching has not gone unnoticed by students. Alongside learning the curriculum, students have appreciated the classroom environment Shoop has created.

"She's a really funny teacher," said Abeera Shahid '29. "She makes sure everyone understands [that] you can always ask for help [and] you can be comfortable."

Beyond these personal efforts, Shoop's education style also involves creating diverse lessons that assist different types of learners. She does this by incorporating

hands-on learning, often using models and original labs to explain concepts.

"I want to make sure that there are lessons that are engaging and [that] reach different kids," said Shoop. "So it's not just notes or lectures, it's differentiated, it's thoughtful, [and] it's engaging."

Shoop is dedicated to matching the amount of effort that her students make with her own commitment to teaching and timeliness.

"I have very, very high expectations for my kids because I know they're capable of it. I grade pretty fast, but I do that because if I expect my kids to work that hard for me, I want them to know that I'm working that hard for them," said Shoop.

Outside of school, Shoop finds that the combination of being a mother and a basketball coach occupies most of her time, though she also enjoys decorating cakes and playing the guitar.

"I don't have time to do my art anymore," said Shoop. "I pour my art into my kids."



Shoop explains a concept to Carmela Crepezzi '28, providing feedback on her work.

New energy source for PHS slated to bring up to \$55,000 in savings

Sakinah Lateef, Maiya Qiu, and Eloise Weaver, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

This year, PHS is integrating a new electricity source in order to lower the cost of its energy. The school will still be receiving energy from PSE&G, but they will also be getting third-party energy from PSE&G's supply. The third-party energy source uses the utilities owned by PSE&G but is still their own competitive company. Consequently, when the school pays the bill to PSE&G, a portion goes to the other third-party company. This method gives the school access to more competitive pricing.

For this new electricity source, the district has used an electricity auction, which means it has covered the supply cost using a third party. Another company goes to an auction for the district, and the district has a trigger resolution passed by the board. The trigger resolution states that if the company is able to buy the electricity or natural gas source at a given price, then the bid can be automatically accepted. The district has just gone through the planning process for electricity auctions for 2027.

Sustainable Princeton is a non-profit organization committed to motivating the community to adopt environmentally-conscious and sustainable practices, with Jenny Ludmer as a program manager. According to Ludmer, the benefits of switching to a new source are clear.

"Using third-party for their electricity, [the district saves] \$55,000 a year ... for natural gas, they saved \$20,000 a year," explained Ludmer.

Because PHS has only started its energy auction recently, the 2027 providers have not yet been confirmed. However, the current providers for the district are NextEra for electricity and NRG and Direct Energy for natural gas.

As Ludmer pointed out, switching to a new energy provider will not affect the electricity at PHS, just saving costs.

"It doesn't change anything with the actual electricity [PHS is] getting," Ludmer said. "All it does is help [the school] to save money."



PHS energy meters keep track of electricity usage in the school. In the last week of May, PHS used 69,420 kWh of energy, over double the national average.

PHS surveys options in preparation for next year's statewide phone ban

Tyler Fiorentino and Nikolai Morozov, STAFF WRITERS

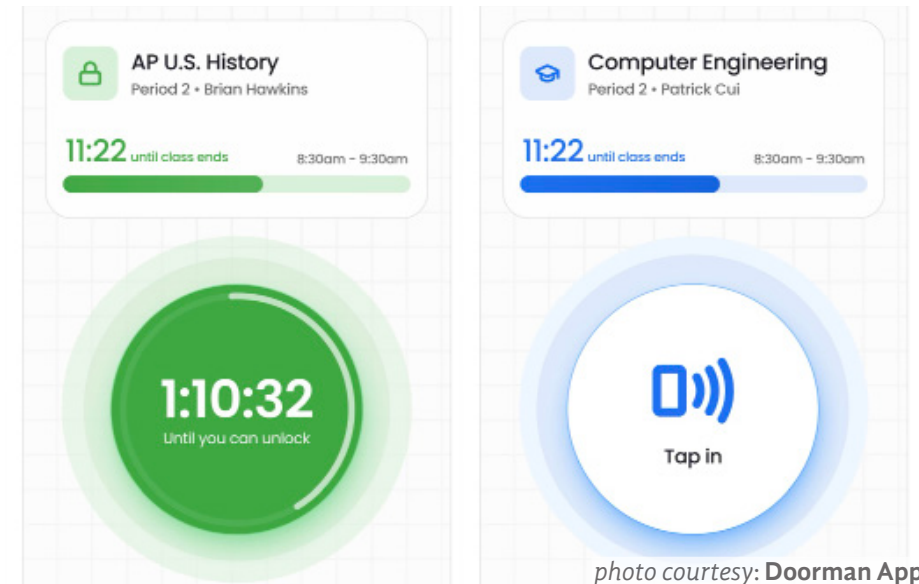


photo courtesy: Doorman App

Rated 1.3 stars on the app store, the Doorman app can be customized to lock phones during instructional periods, and be unlocked during breaks.

Starting in the 2026–2027 school year, a New Jersey State bill passed by Governor Phil Murphy will mandate a "bell to bell" ban on all personal internet-connected digital devices in public schools, which includes iPads, smart watches, and personal computers, in addition to phones. While the PPS administration has started to formalize the PHS phone policy, details are still undergoing development.

"One [way] would be to have a policy at the high school that's just like at the middle school, which is that you can't have your cell phones out ... and if we see your cell phone out, we're going to discipline you," said PPS Superintendent Dr. Michael LaSusa. "The second option would be some type of app, [and] the one that we've been ... in discussions with is called Doorman."

The Doorman application is still in development, meaning that PHS currently plans for the first few months of next year to serve as a trial of the software. Doorman enables administrators to have limited customization as to what is accessible on students' cell phones during school hours.

"The way that [the] app works is students download the app [and] when they come in in the morning, they just scan their phone at a reader of some kind. ... Then the app essentially locks all of the other apps on the phone," LaSusa said.

Administrators can customize Doorman by approving certain apps that may have educational value or emergency use cases. Unapproved apps, such as iMessages, will be locked, unless overridden by an emergency function that notifies teachers or supervisors upon each violation.

"[Students will] still [be] able to make phone calls from their phone, so if there were an emergency, a student could call home or could call the police," said LaSusa. "If we approve certain apps, like for instance ... Canvas ... or Power School, then they could use those apps during the day."

Administrators are waiting to receive various clarifications from the state of New Jersey. Currently, the law implies that a "bell to bell ban" means the start of the school day until the end of the school day, and does not permit access to phones during non-

instructional time periods such as break, or passing times. If this is upheld, then some of the customization of Doorman will not be used, as the ban currently implies that students should not access their phones at all, unless in the event of an emergency.

"With this application, we can actually set it so it can match up with your bell schedule," said PPS Chief Technology Officer Todd MacDonald. "As soon as that period[s] bell rings, we unlock your phone, so it's open through passing time [and] through lunch, so that's where we have flexibility, but we also are still waiting for the state to give a little bit more guidelines for us to make sure we're in compliance."

If a student or their parent refuses to download Doorman onto their phone, then they will not be permitted to have a cellphone during the school day. Teachers can also use Doorman to ensure all students in the classroom are in the proper locked mode. The repercussions for violators of next year's policy have not yet been determined.

During the student forum on May 27, PHS Principal Cecilia Birge wanted to assure students that Doorman is still under legal review, but is expected to uphold state and district privacy regulations.

"[MacDonald] and I met with a principal in Massachusetts who implemented Doorman [in his school] ... he said that [they] chose this company because of the fact that [it] meet[s] the Massachusetts student privacy law, and apparently Massachusetts has one of the most strict privacy law[s]," said Birge.

The school has hosted a series of forums between May 27 and June 1 to answer questions and concerns from students, parents, and teachers. Some teachers expressed their optimism and support for the ban next year. Currently, teachers are required to independently enforce their own classroom cell phone rules due to a lack of a formal universal policy.

"I tend to be most concerned about cell phones [on] things like assessments where it could provide an unfair advantage. ... One of my least favorite parts of my

teaching job is playing phone police," said PHS math teacher Jackson Neuhaus. "Next year [with] the phone policy ban, I'll probably have something more official in place that'll be stricter and have consequences."

Some students have expressed concerns about restricting access to their cell phones. Upon learning of the current plan to disable the text messages app, Joshua Dong '29 cited concerns related to accessibility in communication.

"A lot of time people won't pick up your calls because maybe their busy or their phone's on silent ... text messages are just an easier way to contact people," Dong said.

Woodbury Junior Senior-High School, one of the schools Governor Murphy credited as having implemented a successful phone ban, began using a magnetic pouch system known as Yondr two years ago, resulting in numerous positive effects. The pouch-bound phones are in possession of the students throughout the day, but they cannot physically open the pouch until the end of the day. Portable unlock devices are carried by various staff members and are reserved for emergency or approved situations during the school day.

"We [have] had a lot of kids during our lunch ... they're in the gym playing basketball, they're in the library ... they're playing board games, and it's been a better school environment overall," said WHS Principal Dwayne Dobbins. "I can go into a classroom where there's not a phone distracting a student."

Although the state legislature ultimately forced the district to mobilize for a phone ban, Dr. Michael LaSusa, expressed his support for the ban, citing his belief that phones are an inhibitor of focus in the classroom, and thus education.

"The time we have in school ... is special, and we should treat it as precious, and recognize that it's important to listen, to pay attention, to respect the other human beings that are in a classroom with us, without look[ing] at a device," said LaSusa.

OPINIONS

How to rig elections: a user's guide to gerrymandering

Uma Kleven, STAFF WRITER
Eva Larsen, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

In a democracy, voters are supposed to choose their leaders. But in American politics this fundamental truth is being challenged; politicians are using algorithms to hand-pick their voters. The practice, called gerrymandering, is where an electoral constituency's boundaries are rearranged to favor one group, generally either by party or race.

As gerrymandering continues to evolve, the question remains: do opposing parties fight fire with fire? The idea of gerrymandering began in 1812 when Massachusetts Governor Elbridge Gerry approved a salamander-shaped district designed to favor his party. However, at the time, gerrymandering was a rudimentary political tactic, and the execution of it was not nearly as systematic as it is today. As technology continues to develop, gerrymandering poses a more serious threat, as it is no longer a sporadic tactic vulnerable to human error, but instead, driven by data science and high-tech precision. Partisan gerrymandering continues to legally be used by political leaders to rig elections, especially after *Rucho v. Common Cause* (2019), which eliminated the federal judiciary's jurisdiction to rule on partisan gerrymandering cases — essentially legalizing it unless states took action.

Countless cases have revealed that when political parties choose to retaliate with more gerrymandering, they are not defending democracy, but actively participating in its decline. Sam Wang, leader of the Princeton Gerrymandering Project and former candidate in the 12th

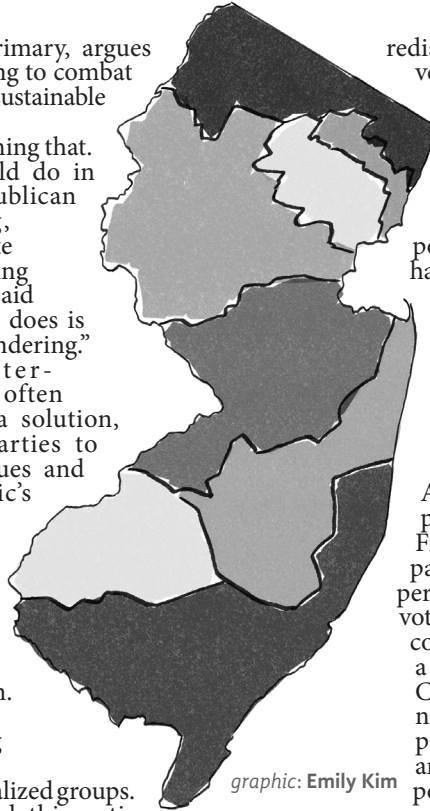
District Democratic primary, argues that counter-redistricting to combat gerrymandering is not a sustainable solution.

"[Redistricting] is a thing that . . . Democrats could do in response to Republican gerrymandering, but I would hesitate to call that fighting gerrymandering," said Wang. "What that does is doubling gerrymandering."

While counter-gerrymandering often masquerades as a solution, it forces both parties to give up their values and pursuit for the public's trust by validating gerrymandering. Gerrymandering isn't a necessary evil to survive politically, and by fighting fire with fire, parties only affirm that assumption. It's also worth noting that gerrymandering disproportionately disenfranchises marginalized groups.

The best way to end this anti-competitive practice is to take

Gerrymandering isn't a necessary evil to survive politically, and by fighting fire with fire, parties only affirm that assumption.



graphic: Emily Kim

redistricting out of the hands of partisan lawmakers (which very few other democracies allow) and instead put it in the hands of an independent commission. Wang believes that the solution lies in independent citizen commissions rather than New Jersey's current system utilizing a group of political appointees.

"Independent citizen commissions act like a jury, and they take the task of redistricting away from elected politicians and put it into the hands of citizens who then have much less self-interest," Wang explained. "The single most predictive factor of a partisan gerrymandering is a process that's controlled by one party."

With the current Supreme Court hostile to voting rights, the two major options for remedying this situation are either citizen ballot initiative or national legislation, both of which would remove the partisan obligation out of politics.

Instead of continuing with gerrymandering, Americans can campaign to end this undemocratic practice. There is a pending Congressional bill — the Freedom to Vote Act — that would not only ban all partisan gerrymandering (the only legal type currently per loophole), but would also implement much fairer voting practices. Congress has the federal power to reclaim control over elections, but whether it passes this bill or a similar one will be dependent on public pressure. As Congressman John Lewis once wrote, "Democracy is not a state. It is an act, and each generation must do its part." Now is the time for our generation to participate and better ensure that each vote does matter. We have popular sovereignty, we are the ones that give these systems power, and when our voices are suppressed, democracy itself is in question.

The resurgence of medical misinformation

Alexander Gu, OUTREACH MANAGER
Saanvi Sharma, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

"2023: Corona ended. 2026: Hantavirus," X user @iamasoothsayer posted in 2022. Since the reports of a recent hantavirus outbreak surfaced, the post has reappeared, garnering hundreds of thousands of likes and responses as users cite it as proof that the outbreak was planned in advance. Alongside these speculations, exaggerated claims comparing hantavirus to COVID-19 are also spreading online, warning about a possible major pandemic despite health officials stating that the virus poses far less of a threat.

Despite the lack of proof for hantavirus epidemic theories, their popularity is evidence of a major problem. Growing at a rate seemingly faster than the actual virus, the rise of misinformation is alarming. Unlike other false claims, medical misinformation has a more direct impact on immediate decisions about treatment and prevention, as well as on trust in medicine as a whole. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated how quickly false claims can spread online. This proves dangerous, as many students, including in Princeton, are exposed to most of their health information digitally.

Medical misinformation shoulders a unique risk because it can shape how people approach taking care of their own health. It may lead to false interpretations of the available evidence, misallocation of health resources and an increase in vaccination hesitancy.

Currently, social media acts as the primary catalyst, with platforms boosting content regardless of accuracy for an audience that focuses on sensationalist headlines.

COVID-era misinformation was characterized by claims that vaccines caused cancer and that hydroxychloroquine was a viable treatment.

Similarly for hantavirus, Dr. Mary Talley Bowden falsely advertised on X that ivermectin was a cure for the disease — an idea that was perpetuated by government officials including Marjorie Taylor Greene.

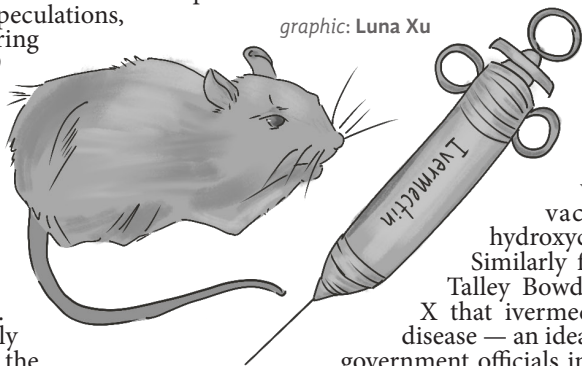
Widespread misleading information has proved damaging to broader public health. Many individuals no longer view routine immunizations as necessary due to skepticism that took off during the pandemic. According to CDC data, vaccination rates for measles, mumps, and rubella (MMR) have dropped to 92.5 percent, falling below the 95 percent herd immunity threshold needed

to prevent measles transmission. At the same time, Johns Hopkins research has also found that nearly 80 percent of countries have reported drops in childhood vaccination rates following the pandemic. Due to the increasing number of false claims about vaccine safety and effectiveness, trust in public health has weakened. As vaccines are only effective when used in combination with widespread participation, communities have become vulnerable. If misinformation continues to push people to opt out of vaccination, the consequences of ignorance toward credible medical information could extend beyond one's personal beliefs and become a health concern for everyone.

The resurgence of false information about hantavirus is proof that our habits of believing anything we see on social media have not disappeared since the COVID

pandemic. Algorithms tend to present perspectives based on how much attention it may garner, whether they are accurate or fabricated. Medical misinformation deals directly with our personal wellbeing as well as broader health, which makes this

issue particularly pernicious. Digital literacy remains a must in this day and age, including skills like identifying clickbait headlines and verifying sources. Ignoring our responsibility to question and confirm online medical claims before accepting or sharing them will inevitably lead to detrimental consequences for all.



graphic: Luna Xu

Widespread misinformation has proved damaging to broader public health.

CHEERS

STUFF WE LIKE

STUFF WE DON'T

JEERS

FREE Rita's

TONY AWARDS opening number

Parallel PARKING

THE BACKROOMS movie

KNICKS IN 4

WEMBANYAMA (Go Knicks)

BRAG sheets

TROPICAL SMOOTHIE CAFE'S free smoothie with flip-flops day

FINAL PROJECTS

BEAR in Obsession

PRIDE MONTH

LARPING

GOGUARDIAN

HUMID CLASSROOMS

The WORLD CUP

LORDE at Gov Ball

Other people LARPING

PRESS-ON NAILS falling off

Starbucks TROPICAL BUTTERFLY REFRESHER

Late CABARET REHEARSALS

Letters to the Editor: *America 250*

The Tower asked Princeton High School students for their opinions on about what America and the American Dream means to them, how America has treated them, and if they feel America lives up to its standards on its 250th anniversary.



My great-grandfather immigrated to the U.S. with no money, leaving his family behind. To my family, the American Dream means doing better than the previous generation, something that wouldn't have been possible for my family had they not come to the U.S.

To me, the American Dream is a sacrifice. Not just in terms of "working hard" but culturally and emotionally too. When I think of my parents, and how they had to be away from their families, had to have lived in a country with different values, raised a child who has values that are different too ... all for a country that still doesn't exactly treat them fairly?

Being surrounded by people of diverse cultural backgrounds, racial makeups, sexual orientations, socioeconomic situations, immigration statuses, career goals, etc., and living in harmony. A place where diversity is supported by both the population and the government and uniqueness is nurtured.

To me, the American Dream means reaching a point in your life of stability, job security, personal happiness, and a guarantee that your children will have a good life — if not better than yours.

Having the opportunity to seek what makes you fulfilled or satisfied. A place where everyone can find success. I don't think the American Dream means any one thing, because all Americans experience and live in this country differently. How can there only be one?

I am disappointed in America. It has treated immigrants cruelly, taken people away, discriminated far too much, and judged people without knowing their history and their values. A piece of paper should not determine a person's worth. America does not meet the standard of its 250 years, because it is detaining immigrants who are simply seeking a better life. So, what is the freedom that America promises and claims to possess?

I guess by definition the American Dream is the ideal of equal opportunity for upward mobility, conditioned on hard work and rule following. But now it feels like the American Dream is to be as rich as possible while putting in the minimum amount of work, and that feels pretty unattainable for a lot of people.

It is something that is no longer possible for most; traditionally, it has meant financial stability and social mobility, regardless of one's origin if they want to work hard enough.

As an immigrant being in a different environment, I am just going to say that I am grateful to be in this country. After all, I am receiving support and many educational opportunities. This country is making me a strong person.

The American Dream. The American Dream is a lie for me. It was created to give false hope to immigrants and refugees. It's unattainable and doesn't guarantee happiness.

The first thing that comes to my mind about America is that it is not only the United States. There are three parts of America in total, which are South America, Central America and North America. With that being said, I like this country because it has given me a better education. The United States is known for people who have dreams and want to achieve their goals. I am very grateful for the seasons of the year, the education, and how clean some places are here. I love living in Princeton, New Jersey and all of the opportunities that it has.

For me, the United States means freedom. After all, it has given me a lot of opportunities. But I have also experienced new emotions during my time here. Many "Americans," as you call them, have very special personalities and may need therapy.

The American Dream means achieving material and spiritual success by whatever your terms are. The American Dream means being able to climb the corporate ladder or pursue any future career regardless of identity such that you work hard. No political, economic, or racial barriers impede this potential.

America means freedom, opportunity, and the chance to build a better future. I think America has treated many people well, but not everyone has had the same experience. There are still problems like inequality and discrimination. On its 250th anniversary, I think America is still working toward fully living up to its standards.

It means how everybody has a fair shot at life and are judged based on their character and not their race.

To me, "the American Dream" means the ability to pursue a career that I am passionate about and build a family without feeling limited by economic, social, or ethnic hardship.

Sometimes the United States can be cruel, because of the current president and his administration. To me, the United States represents an unfulfilled promise of freedom and opportunity. Although it has provided me with education and security, I see that racism and economic inequality prevent many people from enjoying the same rights as others.

To me, America means opportunity and a better future. It has given me the chance to learn, work, and improve my English. Overall, my experience in America has been positive.

To me, it means the opportunity to live a successful life without the constant pressure of being the best at something.

PHS SPEAKS OUT

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE SENIOR MEMORY?

Franciszka Czerniak, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

"MY FAVORITE SENIOR MEMORY WAS IN SEPTEMBER, WHEN I WENT TO A FOOD PACKAGING EVENT WITH A CLUB THAT I WAS IN. IT WAS VERY FUN BECAUSE WE GOT TO PACKAGE FOOD AND IT WAS MY FIRST TIME VOLUNTEERING WITH A BIG GROUP."
-MERCY EBONG '26



"ONE OF MY FAVORITE SENIOR MEMORIES IS SINGING AT THE WINTER CONCERT WITH THE CHOIR. IT'S ALWAYS REALLY FUN BECAUSE IT'S AT NIGHT, THE CHURCH LOOKS BEAUTIFUL, AND I LOVE SINGING WITH THE CHOIR. WE ALWAYS GET TO SING REALLY COOL PIECES AROUND CHRISTMAS TIME WITH THE ALUMNI WHO'VE ALREADY GRADUATED."
-PENELOPE CARDONA-FOX '26



"MY FAVORITE ONE IS WHEN WE WERE DOING CLUE—WE WERE DOING A SATURDAY NIGHT SHOW AND WE ALL WENT TO THE SCHOOL EARLY BEFORE OUR CALL TIME AND WE JUST SAT IN THE DARK AUDITORIUM AND RAN LINES WITH EACH OTHER. IT WAS A VERY CALM AND PEACEFUL MOMENT BEFORE THE SHOW AND I REALLY LOVED IT."
-GRETCHEN MARTIN '26



"MY FAVORITE SENIOR MEMORY IS SENIOR SUNRISE BECAUSE WE WERE ALL SO EXCITED AND I HADN'T SEEN A BUNCH OF PEOPLE OVER THE SUMMER, AND I GOT TO SEE THEM AGAIN AND EVERYONE DRESSED REALLY NICE AND WE TOOK LOTS OF FUN PHOTOS."
-NAOMI CARROLL '26



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PHS's new policies aren't that big of a deal, actually

Rohan Srivastava, NEWS AND FEATURES CO-EDITOR

Over the past few months, the student body has been subjected to many policy changes: websites have been blocked and certain applications no longer open. In response, there has been considerable outrage, demonstrated by means ranging from word of mouth to contact with the tech office. However, these policies do not warrant such a reaction.

Most obviously, each student and their family signed a contract upon receiving a school device, stating that they would follow the acceptable-use guidelines. The vast majority of blocked websites only ensure that students have no mechanism of violating these guidelines. There is no reason to complain about Minecraft being blocked; these devices do not belong to students.

As always, however, the devil lies in the details. There are a number of websites that have been caught in the crossfire, being blocked despite serving a solely beneficial purpose, including Github and certain news sites. This may seem like a negative, but in reality it serves as a lesser of two evils. It is clear that bad websites must be blocked, or else students will continue misusing school devices, and there are two methods of achieving this goal: a whitelist, where a certain list of websites are the only sites allowed to be visited, or a blacklist, where a certain list of websites are blocked. Broadly, the system that PHS is currently using functions more similarly to a whitelist, where only certain

categories of websites are allowed to be visited. Websites get blocked when they are mischaracterized.

The alternative to this would be a blacklist, where the school would need to explicitly list every website that ought to be blocked. This approach obviously would not work as students would create

new websites to evade these bans, or they would find new websites that the administrators were unable to find to block. Essentially, a blacklist

creates a game of cat-and-mouse, where the tech office is overwhelmed and occupied by constantly looking at student usage to find new websites to block while students keep finding new sites; in fewer words, a waste of time for students and administration alike.

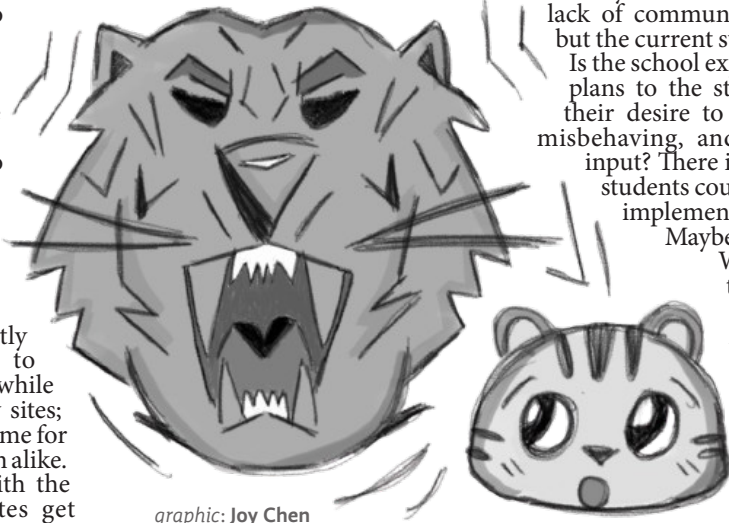
What's the drawback with the whitelist? Certain websites get blocked. Fortunately, there is a very simple solution: any incorrectly blocked website can be unblocked with a simple-to-submit tech ticket. Yes, this

responsibility falls on the teachers, but it's preferable to having students distracted during lessons. As you may have noticed, Github is unblocked as of writing this article, because resolving conflicts doesn't have to be difficult.

Fine, maybe blocking the websites isn't the problem. It's the way that it's done. Students cite a lack of communication as the issue, but the current system is the best one. Is the school expected to reveal their plans to the student body, explain their desire to prevent them from misbehaving, and then accept their input? There is nothing useful that students could provide before the implementation.

Maybe it's the inconsistency? What problems does the inconsistency realistically present? Anyone using their computers correctly is largely unaffected by new policies, and if anything arises, it's resolved by just one tech ticket.

It's okay to make a ruckus when the school does something wrong; there's no need to create a stir about them doing something right.



graphic: Joy Chen

PHS SPEAKS OUT

WHAT'S YOUR FAVORITE RELAXATION TECHNIQUE?

Stephanie Liao and Fangwu Yu, OPINIONS CO-EDITORS
Hannah Chang, CONTRIBUTING WRITER



"I LIKE JUST MAKING MUSIC AS A FORM OF DISTRACTION AND AS A FORM OF EXPRESS[ING] FEELINGS. ... I'M WRITING A SCREENPLAY. ART IS A HUGE PART OF MY LIFE IN GENERAL AND ALSO ... [FOR] DECOMPRESS[ING] STRESS."
- RICARDO MARQUEZINI '26



"I LIKE TO CUDDLE WITH MY DOG BECAUSE SOMETIMES IT'S NICE TO HAVE A COMPANION WHO IS NOT ASKING QUESTIONS OR TRYING TO HAVE A CONVERSATION WITH YOU. IT'S NICE TO JUST BE WITH SOMEONE WHO CAN LISTEN, IN A WAY."
- OLIVIA JOHNSON '27



"SOMETIMES I LIKE TO JUST TURN ON A BIT OF SOME CHILL MUSIC. AND OTHER TIMES, IF I'M REALLY FEELING STRESSED OUT, LIKE I REALLY NEED TO GET THAT ANGER OUT, I WOULD PROBABLY BOOT UP A GAME OF ULTRAKILL, JUST TO GET IT OUT OF MY SYSTEM BEFORE I CONTINUE TO DO HOMEWORK."
- GARLAND LIU '28



"I REALLY LIKE RELAXING BY JUST TAKING A NICE WALK OUTSIDE, ESPECIALLY BECAUSE IT'S JUST SUCH NICE WEATHER. AND IT WORKS FOR ME BECAUSE I HAVE SO MUCH HOMEWORK, AND EVERYTHING'S JUST A BIT STRESSFUL, SO JUST DOING THAT, IT MAKES ME FEEL REALLY GOOD."
- CLAIRE MENAPACE '29

photos: Stephanie Liao, Fangwu Yu, and Hannah Chang
graphic: Luna Xu

PREX PRINCETON RECORD EXCHANGE



Two-fifty and counting: the legacy of the American Dream

Editorial

On July 4, the United States of America will turn 250 years old. For two and a half centuries, America has defined itself not by religion or ethnicity, but through its ideals.

“We hold these truths to be self evident, that all men are created equal, That they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, That among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”

These ideals were put forth in the Declaration of Independence, later becoming the foundation of the American Dream: the belief that anyone, regardless of their origin, can have an equal and fair opportunity to achieve success in America. But ideals are not hard and fast rules — they evolve with time, culture, and personal interpretation. As America approaches this milestone birthday, the American Dream appears less like a broken promise and more like an imperfect vision that generations have continued to cling to.

From the moment the Declaration of Independence was signed, it had already begun to contradict itself. A nation that claimed to offer equality to all allowed slavery to continue for over a century. A government built on the principle of popular sovereignty denied people of color and women the right to vote. A country that celebrated opportunity repeatedly excluded immigrants and minorities from sharing in it, and continues to do so in many cases.

Yet despite these contradictions, the American Dream continues to be rooted in possibility. Millions of immigrants have built businesses, accumulated wealth, and improved the quality of life across generations, shaping America's identity.

What that possibility looked like, though, has developed over time. Although the term “American Dream” was coined by James Truslow Adams in the 1930s, the idea of it can be traced back to before the Revolutionary War. Early Americans often associated

the dream with political liberty, and self-government. By the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries many immigrants viewed it as the pathway to riches. Following World War II, the dream became increasingly tied to the “white picket fence” metaphor — homeownership, stable employment, and suburban life. While meanings changed across the generations, the notion of individual initiative — the belief that destiny is in your own hands — remained constant.

However, trust in that dream has rightfully wavered over time. Discriminatory policies such as the Chinese Exclusion Act, racial segregation, racist housing policies, and unequal education have all opposed the core idea of social and economic mobility for all that is the American Dream. Even today, the legacy of these policies and the systemic flaws in many of our institutions continue to act as a barrier to the promised equality of opportunity.

The truth is that the concept of the American Dream and being able to achieve a better life isn't completely applicable to everyone, and it won't be for the foreseeable future. Our hypocritical history makes that so. The trust in it reveals the strength in struggle — despite the inherently flawed and delusional nature of a dream where any ambition is possible, individuals have clung to this fantasy in hopes of actually achieving it.

Looking back across two and a half centuries of history, these tensions are impossible to ignore. As America approaches its 250th anniversary, these contradictions remain a key part of its legacy. The history of the nation is not a story of success or failure. It is a story of ideals that have been continually challenged, reinterpreted, manipulated, and expanded. The American Dream has endured because Americans persisted despite the flaws in our vision. This optimism is what this anniversary represents. That's what it means to be an American.



graphic: Emily Kim

The Tower

Princeton High School

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Mission Statement

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

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The Editorial Board of the Tower consists of a select group of 23 Tower 2025 staff members. The views of board members are accurately reflected in the editorial, which is co-written each month by the Board with primary authorship changing monthly.

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**NEW JERSEY
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Vanguard presents Forgotten History

Forgetting history does not extinguish the past

Aritra Ray, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Across backyards, ballparks, and barbecues this July, America will celebrate 250 years. Against the backdrop of much fanfare and fireworks, many will celebrate the triumph of the American values of courage, virtue, and exceptionalism. All that makes this nation great. And yet — perhaps America's semiquincentennial should be a time of reckoning and reflection too.

America's history is far from linear. That's what makes this nation what it is today. And yet far from celebrating these twists and turns, the good and the ugly, we let our pride and patriotism glaze over the crackly edges to focus on the big picture. But the truth is, there would be no "big picture" without every dark corner that came alongside it.

Indeed, true courage is looking at history without averting our eyes. We must realize that the same hand that penned the Declaration of Independence was the hand that held hundreds of slaves in bondage at Monticello. We must realize that the voice that rallied the Emancipation Proclamation also signed orders that same week for the largest mass execution in American history — the hanging of 38 Dakota men in Minnesota. By choosing to remember and memorialize the triumphs of our historical figures, yet completely erase their flaws, we present a monochromatic vision of history that drives the rigidity plaguing civil discourse today.

Far from being ashamed of this dichotomy, it is time we celebrate it.

Because beyond its greatest achievements, Americans come together to celebrate one thing: our pride in our nation's capacity to change.

At its core, America is the result of the Great Experiment. A Great Experiment that leaves our nation still in a continuous state of flux. A nation still being built. And it means that our work is far from complete. The preservation of this nation depends on our ability to rise up above our differences to defend the principles of this nation. When contemporary political pressures force audits of the exhibits at the Smithsonian, the result is that history is obscured while the horrors of the past are not erased. Forgotten history is the past that is no longer celebrated, but simply erasing history does not erase the injustices that generations past have faced. Instead, it makes us more vulnerable to repeating our grave mistakes. A nation that does not recognize its shortcomings is bound to fall victim to them once again. Concerted efforts to erase and suppress history are akin to devaluing a race as a whole.

So it is critical we recognize and celebrate our history — all parts of it — on this milestone for our nation. We are a United States held together stronger by our differences, not in spite of them. America had been the envy of the world for its ability to give people a place to co-exist. When we stand to lose this quality on the eve of the nation's 250th, we fail to live up to the promises our founding fathers proclaimed in their writings: equality under the law. And though it has taken 250 years to get to where we are today, we mustn't become complacent and allow ourselves to be carried away.

When the sanctity of America's institutions are at risk, we cannot turn a blind eye. When America's values are being demolished, American voices ring in protest louder than ever. The opportunity to come together, fight together, and unite together is now. If there was ever a reason needed, our 250th anniversary gives us the chance to look back on our shared history and divided past and reconcile, building up each other's stories rather than destroying them.

Hidden history around Princeton

Jaisel Iyer, STAFF WRITER
Olivia Fan, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

We often forget that the place where we go to school and the place we call home are famous historical landmarks. Princeton's history is woven into our everyday lives, whether you learned about the overshadowed Battle of Princeton or simply walked past Princeton University on your way into town. Yet Princeton's past stretches far beyond the well-known stories, containing countless details that remain unfamiliar even to many of the town's own residents.

Many know about the infamous duel between Aaron Burr Jr. and Alexander Hamilton. What many people don't realize, however, is that Burr is buried in the Princeton Cemetery, which was established in 1757. The same cemetery that students pass by everyday holds the graves of soldiers beginning with the Revolutionary War, professors, politicians, musicians, scientists, executives, writers, and those who have called the Princeton area home.

Between 1936 and 1945, nearly 550 acres of woodland were bought by the Institute of Advanced Studies (IAS). Now, the woods and forest are protected and feature many trails where Einstein and Oppenheimer famously walked while discussing their groundbreaking theories. The Institute Woods are located south of the IAS campus, and one of the highlights there is the "Swinging Bridge," which is a suspension bridge that crosses a Stony Brook tributary.

The Tower, Princeton High School's student-run newspaper, has a history that dates back for more than a century. Founded in 1911 as *The Observer*, it was renamed to *The Blue & White* in 1925. However, just four years later, the school renamed the newspaper to *The Tower*, in honor of the newly constructed tower at the time.

Inside the Yankee Doodle Tap Room at Nassau Inn lies a huge mural spanning 13 feet. Princeton alumni Edgar Palmer commissioned the piece's construction back in the 1930s, intending it to be the centerpiece for the New Tap Room. Created by Norman Rockwell, the artwork on the mural represents the crucial role Princeton played in the American Revolution.

Trends lost to history

Layla Krystofik and Nishika Singh, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

MOOD RINGS (1970s):

Mood rings claimed to reveal a person's emotions by changing colors. In reality, the ring reacted to body temperature, not feelings, but people loved believing that the jewelry had mysterious powers. Different colors supposedly each represented different emotions like happiness, stress, or romance. The rings became wildly popular in malls and gift shops before eventually fading into retro nostalgia. However, they have recently made a resurgence in popularity, partially due to an ongoing social media craze.

POGS (1990s):

Pogs were small cardboard discs that became one of the biggest playground crazes of the 1990s. Kids stacked the discs and used heavier "slammers" to knock them over in a competitive game. Schools across the United States eventually banned them because students treated them as gambling tokens and constantly argued over ownership. Huge collections that once seemed priceless now mostly sit forgotten in attics and storage.

UNIBROW EXTENSIONS (1100 BCE - 146 BCE):

To the ancient Greeks, having a unibrow was the absolute pinnacle of beauty, intelligence, and grace, which is a great contrast from modern beauty trends that focus on removing excess hair and shaping eyebrows. The desire to have a unibrow was so intense that women who weren't blessed with naturally thick eyebrows would fake it. They used dark powder, kohl, or soot to paint a thick line connecting their brows. For special occasions, the trend would even push people to glue fake hair (usually harvested from goats) directly onto their skin to create a continuous brow. The look remained a dominant fashion necessity for centuries until the Roman Empire's preference for separate eyebrows eventually took over.

PET ROCKS (1970s):

In 1975, millions of people paid actual money for a plain rock in a cardboard box. The idea came from advertising executive Gary Dahl, who jokingly marketed rocks as "pets" that needed no feeding, walking, or care. Each Pet Rock even came with a training manual full of fake instructions. The fad exploded almost overnight, making Dahl rich within months. Today, the idea sounds ridiculous, but for a short time people were proudly carrying their pet rocks everywhere.

TOWERING WIGS (1770s):

In the 1770s, women of the upper class would compete to have the most monstrous, extravagant wigs. Today, these comical tall white-haired wigs are called "poufs," taking inspiration from these hairstyles. People used wire caging, pads, and grease to keep their hair up. The fad was very extreme at a certain point, and the hair would reach (on average) around three feet tall. Marie Antoinette (the richest of the rich in France) had hairstyles that would reach heights up to six feet tall! These heights would make daily life difficult for these women, where they couldn't fit in their carriages, so they would sit on the floor of the vehicle to be able to travel.

BONE SKATING (12th century):

Before ice skating was invented, medieval age children in Northern Europe would take part in bone skating. They used the shin bones of horses and cows, smoothed them down, and made holes they would string through and tie to their shoes. The "bone skates" were very slick and smooth, so they didn't have enough grip on the ice to push off like modern skates, so the skaters would hold a long wooden pole and use it to push themselves forward. It became a massive winter pastime, and was a staple for a long time, eventually fading out once blacksmiths began mass-producing metal blade skates in the 14th century.

Remembering erased history

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

On the eve of America's 250th anniversary, the erased history of many groups whose stories haven't yet been told are finally being brought to the light. Across the world, the histories of marginalized groups have not been preserved or recognized worldwide as a result of systematic destruction of monuments, books, art, music, and people themselves, often by oppressive governments in power. Whether it be the Dakota 38 or the LGBTQ+ community, these groups deserve to have their stories heard.

A part of our history that is not talked about enough were our efforts to completely strip the New World of Native Americans. One example of this effort is the Dakota 38. The Dakota are a Native American tribe that took part in many treaties with the United States, but these treaties that granted the Dakota land rights were not always followed. This led Dakota warriors to revolt, which caused the unjust sentencing of over 300 Dakota men. From this group of 300, Abraham Lincoln sentenced 38 of them to be hanged, and even now this remains the largest mass execution of our history, though many history books overlook this. Other Native Americans were forced onto reservations and their children placed into boarding schools where they were banned from speaking native languages, forced to replace their traditional clothes with Western suits and dresses, and taught to forget their cultural beliefs in exchange for Christianity. Their history and heritage was being erased in their present as thousands of unique tribal stories rapidly disappeared.

We erase these facets of our history because we are too scared to remember; we want to appear as a land of peace and justice when in reality we haven't been for the majority of our nation's history. Erasing these events doesn't help us. In reality, they make it more likely for history to repeat itself and for subordinate groups to feel underrepresented.

African American stories have also been erased and written over by the wealthy and landowning class of the 18th century and the politicians of the 21st century. The Tulsa Race massacre in 1921 was a two-day attack on "Black Wall Street" in the prospering Black community of Greenwood, Oklahoma sparked by a sensationalized news story about a young Black shoe shiner allegedly assaulting a white, female elevator operator. The massacre was carried out by an armed white mob supported by city officials. It left hundreds more dead. Yet the tragedy was suppressed by the local media with no mention of the event, especially after official police records were conveniently destroyed. "Black Wall Street" burned, homes looted, thousands of Black residents arrested and The event is often not taught in any K-12 history classes and written off as a "race riot" rather than the massacre it was. The nation decided to forget this tragedy instead of taking ownership of such a terrible event. The voices of those who lost everything in the Tulsa Race massacre were silenced by those in power because those voices had the power to bring change and equality in a vastly segregated society.

During the Iraq war and the war in Afghanistan, President Clinton supported a law called the "Don't Ask Don't Tell Rule." Because homosexual people were technically not allowed in the military at the time, this policy stated that the military would turn a blind eye by allowing gay soldiers to remain in the armed forces as long as they hid their sexualities. Although this rule may seem outdated and foreign to us, Don't Ask Don't Tell was officially abolished in 2011, just 15 years ago.

These lost pieces of history must be uncovered and taught more widely in schools because if they aren't then there is a far greater likelihood that history will turn into a cycle. Additionally, by erasing historical events we are blurring the lines between reality and a constructed story of our world. Just because we try to cover up a horrific event does not mean it never happened, and in reality we are solely silencing a group of people whose stories and histories could have been told such as the Dakota. These stories aren't just interesting because we have never heard them before, but they are also necessary for the cohesion of our society.

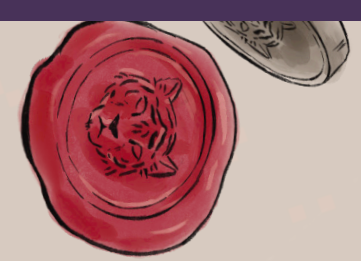


Overlooked historical figures

Jacob Rogart, CO-HEAD COPY EDITOR

SYBIL LUDINGTON:

Ludington is often called the female Paul Revere, but that name understates her own place in Revolutionary War history. As a 16-year-old, Ludington reportedly rode 40 miles through the night to warn militia forces of a British attack, rallying troops across New York's Putnam and Dutchess counties. Through her incredible act of bravery, she became a symbol of courage and patriotism. Ludington stands out because she shows how women contributed to the Revolution in ways that are often overlooked.



YORK:

York was an enslaved Black man who traveled with the famed Lewis and Clark expedition and played a far bigger role than history usually admits. He hunted, helped move supplies, cared for the group, and used his strength and knowledge in ways the expedition depended on. Yet, for a long time, he was treated like a footnote instead of a full participant. York's story reminds us that American exploration often relied on people who were denied freedom and recognition.

ALICE PAUL:

Paul was one of the most relentless leaders of the women's suffrage movement in the United States. She believed that protests had to be loud, public, and impossible to ignore, so she organized marches, pickets, and campaigns that directly challenged the government. Her activism helped push the fight for voting rights toward the Nineteenth Amendment, showing that social change often depends on people willing to confront power head-on.

HENRIETTA LACKS:

Lacks was a mother of five from Virginia who focused on raising her family before her death from cancer changed science. Scientists used her cells for research, and they became important in the medical world because they could keep growing in the lab. Her story is important, but also troubling, since her family was not informed or given credit for years. Although Lacks never agreed to being used for research, her cells revolutionized medicine and remain the foundation for countless medical breakthroughs.

BESSIE COLEMAN:

Coleman made history in aviation by becoming the first African American and Native American woman to earn a pilot's license. Because she could not get the training she needed in the United States, she went to France to learn how to fly. Even though she lived a short life, she inspired a lot of people by showing that Black and Native American women belonged in places where they were often excluded.

BAYARD RUSTIN:

Rustin was an important organizer in the Civil Rights Movement. He helped plan the 1963 March on Washington and was skilled at bringing people together and making big events actually work. Specifically, he successfully coordinated transport, food, and security for over 200,000 people in just eight weeks. A lot of his contributions were overlooked because he was openly gay at a time when being gay led to discrimination, causing people to ignore and minimize his contributions to the Civil Rights Movement. Overall, Rustin played an important role in shaping one of the most important movements in American history.

graphics: Katherine Chen

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Cabaret Night unites the PHS community with diverse performances

Yunsheng Xu, HEAD COPY CO-EDITOR

The audience fell quiet as two figures walked out into the center of the stage. Holding the microphone, Andrew Kim '26 and Onyx Roden '27 began to sing "I Guess Why That's Why They Call It the Blues" by Elton John.

On Thursday, June 11, PHS Choir hosted their annual Cabaret Night, a lively performance to end the year. The concert was a collaborative effort, uniting PHS Choir and musicians from PHS Orchestra and Studio Band for a diverse program of pop, rock, and musical theater songs.

Beginning in 2009, PHS Choir's Cabaret Night performance was intended to be a departure from the program's traditional

concerts. While the usual concerts throughout the year focused on classical choral music, Cabaret Night moved away from that genre and instead incorporated a different type of singing.

"We were thinking it'd be great to do one more concert, something a little bit more lighthearted ... and really focusing on jazz music, pop music, R&B, and musical theater," said choir director Vincent Metallo. "So every year we put together a program, [with] completely different repertoire, [with] songs that feature soloists, duos, and trios."

Although traditional PHS Choir concerts also occasionally feature solos, duos, or

trios, Cabaret Night exclusively focused on them, performing songs by artists like Beyoncé, Elton John, and Maroon 5. With the number of small vocal ensembles, the event is a unique opportunity for choir students to sing in front of a large audience.

"Cabaret Night is a really unique experience because a large majority of people who do choir don't really have the chance to solo ... [so] it's the only opportunity where you get to show off your range and maybe a style that you're not familiar with," said Kim. "It's kind of that learning experience that helps a lot of people grow. For me, I had to sing a really high tenor song, [and] I was able to learn a new style of music and apply [it] to my vocal range."

Along with the new styles of music and genres that Cabaret Night brings, singers must also learn new techniques for their songs.

"There's definitely different ways that you have to sing. There's some songs that you may need to be more careful about [and enunciate your] words," said Anna Gniewosz '27. "And obviously pop songs sound different from [choral music], so there are different techniques you have to use."

While the choir stands still during traditional concerts, Cabaret Night expanded beyond just singing, incorporating some elements of musical theater as well.

"[Cabaret Night] is a lot different from traditional choir concerts, because for [those performances] you're usually just standing still, really serious ... [while] during Cabaret

Night, the energy is really different," said Kim. "For the musical set, we're moving around, we're dancing, ... we're allowed to express ourselves more."

Through incorporating new genres and introducing theatrical elements, Metallo hopes that Cabaret Night can demonstrate that PHS Choir is more than a classical choir, but one that also features diverse genres of music. By doing so, he aims to bring together the wider high school community and explore a different facet of the choir program.

"I think a challenge at any school is that there's all these sort of separate organizations, whether it's the football team, the lacrosse team, the chess club. ... Sometimes it's challenging to bring audiences [together]," said Metallo. "And so we hope that in doing a more versatile program like this, we can [interest] other students who wouldn't normally come to a choir concert."

Although the main purpose of Cabaret Night is to fundraise for the following year's PHS Choir trip, choir members also see it as a fun way to end off the year with an informal and energetic concert.

"I think [Cabaret Night is] just to have fun and have a nice last concert for the PHS choir, and to say bye to the seniors. [The spring concert] was more formal, [but] ... you get to see more personality [in this concert]," said Josiah Hall '28. "I hope the audience has a good time. ... I think the audience, especially parents, just get to appreciate some more modern music, along with the old 1700s [music] ... we usually sing."



PHS Choir members Elena Barreto '27, Abhimanyu Tripathi '26, Lily Berkery '26, Ezra Lerman '26, Penelope Cardona-Fox '26, Milo Molina '26, Julia Scibienski '27, and Simryn Patel '26 (left to right) rehearse for the performance.

PHS Orchestra tours Europe with UNESCO

Maeve Walsh, ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT CO-EDITOR
Kelly Cenci, STAFF WRITER



PHS Orchestra students rehearse before their performance at St. Paul's Church Covent Garden.

From May 22 to May 30, members of PHS Orchestra along with vocalist Tess Boyle '28 traveled on their European Performance Tour, playing in Amsterdam, Paris, and London. Between concerts, the students visited a local Dutch high school, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Headquarters, as well as a variety of famous museums and landmarks.

PHS Orchestra was invited to perform as part of the 2026 UNESCO Culture and Arts Education Week, an annual event that aims to inspire lasting peace across the globe. UNESCO aims to strengthen international cooperation and foster a world of greater equality. As a part of this goal, PHS Orchestra participated in the "In Harmony with Peace" tour.

"I think it's important for artists and musicians to be able to relate to the larger world in general. And it's a beautiful thing that music is able to connect people, and that's essentially what UNESCO is all about: the aspect of being able to reach out and bring people together for greater understanding," said orchestra director Robert Loughran.

The first stop on the orchestra's tour was the Netherlands. After exploring Amsterdam and attending a concert of "A Midsummer Night's Dream," they spent a day performing at Hofstad Lyceum, a UNESCO network high school in Den Haag. After the performance, PHS students spent the afternoon with Dutch students.

"I think the best part [of the trip] was the Dutch high school students, just being able to connect with them. ... It felt like these small high schoolers really just [took]

on such a big matter. ... It was such a big connection, and a bunch of the people on the trip are still texting with [the Dutch high school students]," said Boyle.

In Paris, PHS students also got the opportunity to tour the UNESCO World Headquarters. Here, Sophia Budny '28 and Elif Cam '26 were able to share how they think music helps to connect people across cultures in an interview for a short video on UNESCO's Instagram. During the tour, Moksh Rajpal '28, a violinist for PHS Orchestra, enjoyed learning more about the organization's initiatives and operations.

"We got to tour the facility and we got to learn about all the peace work that they do," said Rajpal.

The orchestra's only performance in Paris at L'Église de la Madeleine, a church in the eighth arrondissement, featured music from Bach, Ravel, Fauré, and Morricone.

"My favorite venue was the [L'Église] de la Madeleine in Paris, and it was this gorgeous, huge church. Coco Chanel had her funeral there and it was huge. It was [so] cool. ... The best part was that it was so famous, it's a tourist attraction, [so] even when we were rehearsing, not only just our performance, so many people were just coming in to watch," said Boyle.

The last stop on the tour was London, with a performance at St. Paul's Church, Covent Garden alongside the Choir of King's College London.

"Imagine [by John Lennon] was a really fun piece especially. We got to hear Tess, everyone in the King's choir, and we got to sing along with them," said Rajpal.

Student artist of the month: Daniel Haiduc '26



From PHS Jazz Ensemble to the Juilliard School Pre-College program, Daniel Haiduc '26 has explored a variety of outlets for his musical passion. As a pianist and leader of the Harmony Project, Haiduc's performance philosophy is centered around giving back to his community through music. Haiduc hopes to continue playing in the future as he enters college.

photo: Emily Kim

Agatha Patten, ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT CO-EDITOR

How did you start playing the piano?

I was in first grade and my mom signed me up for ... an afterschool program where you learned to play on some mini keyboards, and initially I didn't really enjoy it much. I remember my mom had to learn the pieces I was supposed to learn and then she would show off in front of me to motivate me to play. So [I started at] around seven, and then I started to fall in love with it when I was 11 or 12, and that's when I got to the point where no one needed to remind me to practice or anything like that.

Do you have any musical inspirations? How have they influenced your work?

First and foremost, my teachers are always an inspiration. When I was starting in seventh or eighth grade after moving to Princeton, I started studying with a teacher here. Her name's Ingrid Clairfield, Mrs. Clairfield. She taught me the importance of using your music to give back to your community and to make a difference ... as opposed to just winning competitions. ... And this is something I do every year, actually here in the PAC. I give recitals to raise money for the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia. It's called a performathon and it's a bigger effort across New Jersey. ... Another [inspiration] is [PHS's bands]. Starting from seventh grade until tenth grade, I was in the band. In ninth grade, I did PHS Jazz Ensemble, and then tenth grade into the Studio Band. ... That's where I really began to enjoy listening to a lot of jazz music. ... Nowadays I [don't] really improvise because I'm a classical pianist [but] I like to play a lot of like written-out jazz stuff.

How do you prepare for performances?

One thing I'll do is I'll go on Instagram Live just to simulate some of the pressure or nerves I might be feeling on performance day, and sometimes a friend or two will pop on and they'll say something. The day of [the performance], I like to have a routine. I'll schedule everything so I have a plan. When I'll wake up, I might do meditation. ... I try to get [to the venue] a bit early to have time to settle down, ... I'll scope it out a bit, get some water, and then in the minutes leading up to it, I like to close my eyes, take a couple deep breaths, and just be aware of my five senses. So I think [about] what I'm hearing, [which] might be my breathing, might be the audience, might be whoever's playing

before me. ... Then I'll do what's called four-seven-eight breathing, where you inhale for four [seconds], hold for seven, and exhale for eight. ... And then I'll give myself some words of encouragement and motivation, and I'll walk on. ... I take three deep breaths and then I start.

What is the biggest challenge you face regarding music?

Piano is very lonely. I guess if you're in the orchestra, you're around people ... but unless you're a soloist, you don't really get to play with the orchestra much. But you're all by yourself in the practice rooms. I mean, it's probably the case for other [instrumentalists] as well, but there's not a lot of people in the world that really understand or can tell the difference between how I might play and how someone else might play, but yeah, it's pretty lonely.

What has been a memorable experience from your time playing the piano?

One that comes to mind is [from] when I was in seventh grade, I think it was right when COVID started. It was this piano competition, it was the final round. And I had some issues with my hands ... like pins and needles. ... After I started playing, it was so bad that I basically couldn't move my fingers. I pushed myself to play through the piece, but it was a pretty traumatic experience. After that, I didn't touch the piano for a couple weeks. That's when I started to do some research and I found this guy named Jim Taylor. He's a sports psychologist and he writes books about different techniques you can use, like breathing and meditating. So I started to try and incorporate some of those into my piano playing, and they took a year or two, but eventually I was able to regain my confidence.

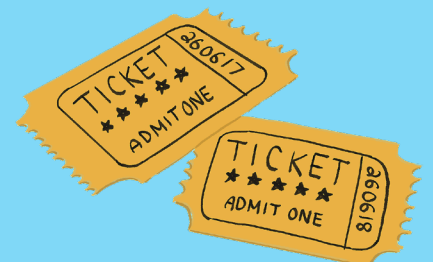
In the future, how do you see music factoring into your life?

I'm not too sure. I ... probably won't pursue ... a career in music. [It's] difficult, because I applied to college this year and so I was thinking "should I do a dual degree program or should I just play on the side," but eventually I just decided ... [that] I might minor in it. I'll probably just keep playing whenever I have the time and I won't stop, because I feel like that's such a shame. I'm here, I put in all this work. So, I'll keep playing, but probably more as a hobby as opposed to a career. I won't be as locked in.



June 2026: Save the Dates

Agatha Patten and Maeve Walsh, ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT CO-EDITORS



Willem de Kooning: The Breakthrough Years, 1945-1950

March 15 to July 26

Acclaimed modernist painter Willem de Kooning is celebrated with an unprecedented collection of his early art at the Princeton University Art Museum. Admission is free.

Faig Ahmed: Textiles of Consciousness

March 28 to August 2

Explore the work of Faig Ahmed at Art@Bainbridge's exhibition, running until August 2. Remixing traditional Azerbaijan textiles with contemporary ideas, Ahmed's work touches on themes of history, consciousness, and Azerbaijan culture.

Princeton Pride Parade

June 13 at 10:00 a.m.

Celebrate Pride Month with the Princeton community on Saturday, June 13. Organized by the Bayard Rustin Center for Social Justice, Princeton's inaugural pride festival will feature a variety of events, including a parade, arts and crafts tent, and vendors.

The Princeton Festival

June 5 to June 21

Join the Princeton Symphony Orchestra for three weekends of performing arts on the grounds of the Morven Museum & Garden. The festival begins Friday, June 5 by featuring Sierra Boggess, a Broadway singer from "The Little Mermaid," "The Phantom of the Opera," and "School of Rock." On Sunday, June 7, the American Repertory Ballet will perform on the pavilion stage to Tchaikovsky, Shaw, Barber, and Francaix. The following weekend begins with Queen Nation on June 13, the number one ranked Queen Tribute Band in America. The final weekend kicks off on June 19 with the "Great Ladies of Jazz," with a particular emphasis on Ella Fitzgerald, Judy Garland, Sarah Vaughan, and Billie Holiday. The penultimate night on June 20 features The Bacon Brothers, a group formed by Hollywood actor Kevin Bacon and Emmy award winning composer Michael Bacon. The siblings will perform a mix of rock, soul, country, and folk music. All tickets for students under 17 are half off but price is dependent on the night.

yART sale

August 1 from 9:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m.

Support the local Princeton art community at the yART Sale on Saturday, August 1, organized by the Arts Council Princeton. In the parking lot of the Paul Robeson Center for Arts, local artists will be selling ceramics, jewelry, prints, and paintings all at studio clean-out prices.

Beach reads for summer vacation

Kelly Cenci, STAFF WRITER

“The Naturals” by Jennifer Lynn Barnes

Cassie Hobbes is gifted at reading people, taking one look at them and piecing together information about their lives. But she doesn't think much about this gift, simply using it to get tips from customers at the diner where she works. That is, until a strange boy shows up one day and leaves her a business card to the FBI.

Cassie is sent to Washington D.C., where she meets Dean, Lia, Sloane, and Michael, the boy who she first met at the diner. These five teenagers make up the Naturals: a classified FBI program for exceptional teenagers like Cassie, and a program where the five members are trained to catch serial killers.

But this story isn't just about Cassie. There's someone else telling it: “you,” an anonymous serial killer slowly closing in on the Naturals themselves. “She doesn't know who you are, but you know her. You've chosen her. She won't understand until it's too late.”

An emotion-reader, a lie detector, a human computer, and two profilers: the Naturals. And when a new killer strikes nearby, the five are going to have to use their gifts just to survive.

“The Naturals” is a perfect book for murder mystery lovers, and anyone who's interested in psychology. Mainly

focusing on Cassie's story, with short “you” chapters in between, Barnes keeps the readers always guessing. This novel is an amazing summer binge-read, with three subsequent books continuing the story, making it a great starting point for fast-paced readers.

With complex character relationships and teenage romance thrown into the mix, this murder mystery is one you won't be able to put down. The characters of “The Naturals” each have precisely developed profiles and characteristics that make the story incredibly emotionally striking. As the suspense of the story builds, so does the pressure on the Naturals, leading to tense confrontations and stressful situations that leave the readers frantic to find out what comes of the bonds between characters.

This suspense-packed story is addictive, and the plot twists are completely unpredictable.

So whether it's a late night or a long car ride, “The Naturals” is a captivating story that will keep you engaged and entertained during even the most boring of summer days.

Last summer, I spent hours laying on my back porch with my head buried in “The Naturals.” As someone interested in psychology, I was left speechless at the amount of effort

that went into this novel. And as I continued reading the rest of the series, I realized that everything was important. Every character, every minor detail, and every word was carefully thought out. That's what made me really love this series: the way everything connected.

“The Naturals” is the first building block for an astonishing puzzle of a series, and it kept me constantly wondering what the Naturals team would do when new challenges arose. This story taught me to expect the most unexpected of turns, and to always trust in the abilities of a group of five teenagers with some help from the FBI.



graphic: Luna Xu

“Better Than the Movies” by Lynn Painter



graphic: Luna Xu

It's her senior year of high school, and Liz Buxbaum's dream rom-com situation is about to come true. Her childhood crush Michael just moved back to town, and he's just in time to ask Liz to prom. But there's only one problem: Wes.

Wes Bennet, Liz's next door neighbor, is insufferable. He's infamous for cruel pranks and making fun of Liz throughout their childhoods, making Wes the absolute last person Liz wants to work with. But Wes is close with Michael, and Liz knows that if she wants Michael to notice her again, she's going to need his help.

So Wes and Liz form a team, and as they work together to secure an invitation from Michael to prom, Liz finds that Wes might not be as much of a jerk as she thought. As Liz questions everything she knows about her dream-come-true rom-com story, she has to balance the ever-building tension over prom with her fears about college and the big changes ahead of her.

“Better Than the Movies” by Lynn Painter is the perfect teen romance story for any and all rom-com lovers. With relationships you could get lost in and bittersweet love stories, this book is perfect for a warm summer day. “Better Than the Movies” is packed with emotions, confessions, and relatable high school experiences.

Similar to the movie “10 Things I Hate About You,” with its strong, likable characters and swoon-worthy

romance, this novel is just unpredictable enough to keep you hooked while still bringing a heartwarming sentiment into your reading. Reading this book, you'll catch yourself rooting for the main couples and catching second-hand embarrassment from some of Liz's less-than-ideal decisions.

Personally, I loved this novel so much because of how it made me really feel the emotions of the story. Even though Liz was a fictional character, I felt like I knew her and truly understood her. Her worries about the future resonated with my own, her nervous habits reminded me of my own, and her obsessions felt all-too-familiar to me. In “Better Than the Movies,” Liz felt like a friend, or even a version of myself, come to life on paper.

Another reason I felt so connected to Liz's story was because I never got bored. Every time the romance storyline slowed down, I was introduced to new characters, new conflicts, and new ideas to focus on. As someone who struggles to get through slow starts in books, “Better Than the Movies” kept me constantly invested, and had more than enough action to keep the story interesting for days on end.

This light-hearted romance is practically designed for a warm day by the pool or laying on a towel in the sand. An entertaining and wholesome novel, “Better Than the Movies” is a great addition to your summer to-be-read.

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Spring musical “Legally Blonde” season awards overview

Maeve Walsh, ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT CO-EDITOR

An asterisk (*) denotes a win.

Central Jersey Marquee Awards

HONORABLE MENTION:

Best Production Number: “So Much Better”

NOMINATIONS:

Best Overall Production: “Legally Blonde”

Best Lead Actress: Tess Boyle '28 as Elle Woods

Best Chorus: “Legally Blonde”

Best Student Orchestra: Robert Loughran

Best Scenery: Jeffery Van Velsor *

Student Dedication and Excellence Award: Jacob Zacks '28; Student Props Team; Student Electrics Team *

Best Direction: Julianna Krawiecki

Paper Mill Playhouse Rising Star Awards

NOMINATIONS:

Outstanding Performance by a Featured Ensemble Member: Jacob Zacks '28 *

Student Achievement: Student Props Team *, Jacob Zacks '28 *



graphic: Luna Xu

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SPORTS

FIFA World Cup gears up in North America

Aarav Patel, STAFF WRITER
Cole Grainger, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

From June 11 to July 1, Canada, Mexico, and the United States will host the 2026 FIFA World Cup. The FIFA World Cup is an international men's soccer tournament featuring national teams that compete for the title of world champion. Held every four years, the tournament draws about five billion viewers throughout its duration.

On May 6, New Jersey Governor Mikie Sherrill announced a \$5 million grant that would be spread across 34 NJ-based organizations hosting fan experiences and community events for the World Cup. One such grant was given to Experience Princeton, Princeton's downtown business association. They will be hosting food-filled World Cup watch parties on June 20, June 28, and July 14. Across the country, various towns will hold watch parties.

These watch parties will create a lively environment and community for soccer fans in NJ. With the World Cup Final and group-stage matches featuring Brazil, France, England, and Germany being held at MetLife Stadium, both Princeton and New Jersey will become major soccer hubs this summer. This will bring lots of tourism and soccer fans to these areas, and is slated to support the state's economy.

"I think it'll be a crazy time, because there's gonna be a lot of tourists in the area, which is a good time to show off New Jersey. I think New Jersey in the summertime is a great place to be," said Ryan Walsh, PHS Boys Soccer Head Coach. "I'm hoping that as people come to watch these games, they'll also get a

chance to step out and see the Jersey Shore and some of the parks."

FIFA announced that this year's World Cup will be the first to allow 48 teams to compete in the group stage instead of the standard 32. Although this lets smaller teams such as Jordan, Uzbekistan, and Cape Verde compete for the first time, many fans have mixed opinions on this change in the tournament.

"I thought that there are too many teams qualifying that don't actually deserve to qualify. It'll be fun because there's more games and because some countries that haven't qualified in a long time are now qualified, but they only qualified because they expanded the tournament," said Walsh.

Although there are concerns about the expanded qualification, the tournament still carries emotional weight for fans around the world. This year's World Cup will be the last that soccer legends such as Messi, Ronaldo, and Neymar will compete in. It's a bittersweet moment for many fans because although these soccer greats are leaving the pitch, they will make room for new talent to step forward. Players like Lamine Yamal and Erling Haaland are poised to become the next generation of greats.

"How do you not talk about Yamal, he's sensational," said Walsh. "I obviously coach the high school team here, and I always joke with the guys. I'm like, 'Hey, he's your age, imagine if he was on this field right now, how great he would be.'"

FIFA also values their exclusive sponsorships for this year's World Cup highly and seeks to protect the rights of these sponsors. As a result, MetLife Stadium was renamed New York New Jersey Stadium, and similar changes were applied to other stadiums and venues.

With the addition of the 16 teams to this year's World Cup, fans expect some interesting matchups throughout the group stages. The United States will compete in Group D, where it will face Australia, Paraguay, and Turkey. Meanwhile, countries such as France, Brazil, Spain, and defending champion Argentina are viewed as strong contenders for the title.

"It appears that a lot of the European nations are more dominant," said Ray Yamada '29. "These nations seem to [have] a lot of talent [on] the team. There are some dark horses [though, for example] last time in the 2022 World Cup, Morocco made it all the way to the [semifinals]."

For many nations around the world, the World Cup is a powerful source of patriotism and cultivates a collective identity. The World Cup also has the potential to unite the globe even during times of turmoil and international unrest. For example, during their 2006 World Cup qualification, the Ivory Coast temporarily paused its civil war so people could watch the

national team play. Beyond moments of global significance, the World Cup also brings family, friends, and teammates together as they watch matches and cheer for their countries together.

"It just brings the whole nation into one sport, which is really nice," said Yamada. "People who don't watch or play soccer normally are also interested as well, so it just brings unity."

As the world shifts its attention to North America this summer, the 2026 World Cup will highlight global excitement and local pride. With New Jersey as a host, the energy of the tournament will be brought into the everyday lives of New Jerseyans, through packed stadiums and community watch parties. The expanded qualification format, coupled with the final World Cup appearances of legendary players, will bring a feeling of anticipation and nostalgia to fans across the globe. In a time when the world can feel so divided, the tournament offers billions a chance to connect, bond, and celebrate.



"[The FIFA World Cup] is a powerful source of patriotism and fosters a collective identity."



graphics: Emily Kim

PHS Triathlon Club co-organizes second-ever Princeton Triathlon

Nathan Bansal, BUSINESS MANAGER
Kelly Cenci, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

On Saturday, June 6, Princeton hosted its second-ever triathlon. Organized by the Princeton High School Triathlon Club in conjunction with the Princeton Recreation Department, the event attracted 16 participants from Princeton High School, as well as from eight states across the country.

The Princeton Triathlon Club has been working on this event for the past three years. The idea for the club started when Shawn Elwood '26, now the Triathlon Club leader, thought that the school could use a Triathlon Club and that Princeton should host a triathlon. As a freshman, he started his own club and tried to start the Princeton Triathlon the first year the club existed. The first year it was attempted, Elwood and the other club members ran into issues with getting a permit from the township. While they weren't able to hold the triathlon that year, they still had valuable planning that was reused for the second year, when they eventually got the permit.

"The township, actually, denied us access to a permit. So year one, we are already facing seemingly an impossible barrier," said Elwood. "But the year after, we doubled down on planning, we compromised when we could, and were able to get the permit ... From there, we actually had to plan the event, which was a large amount of organization."

Last year was the very first year of the Princeton Triathlon, and 250 people participated. It was a supersprint triathlon, which meant a 300m swim, a 5.5 mile bike and a 1.5 mile run. This year, along with the super sprint, they also offered a normal sprint triathlon, which is a 400-meter swim, 10.5 mile bike, and a 3.1 mile run. This year was also the first year that the duathlon (1 mile run, 5-mile bike, 1.5-mile run) and aquabike (300-meter swim, 5-mile bike) were offered, for participants not interested in racing the full length triathlon.

"We've expanded it to a sprint as well, so it's not just the supersprint length ... which is really exciting. It means

more ground to patrol and make sure everything's good ... I think that would be the biggest thing [I'm looking forward to], I'm excited to see how it all works together," said Braedyn Capone '26.

Along with the more race options this year, the Princeton Triathlon offered merchandise, including t-shirts, hoodies, water bottles and more. The organizers of the event were also able to double the cap of participants to 500, up from the 250 that raced last year. They hosted a vlog contest for anyone who was participating, and the top three finishers of the vlog contest received a discount off the triathlon for next year, and had their vlog featured on the Princeton Triathlon's social media account.

"Now that we have the organizational part of it under our belt ... we've invested much more in community engagement. For example, we're introducing merch," said Elwood.

"We have a family corner. I think about 30-40 [percent] of our signups are from families, so we're kind of branding ourselves as the Princeton Triathlon family."

Many PHS students and alumni — including Martin Trkov '29, Deniz Gawiser-Salur '29 and Evan Raphael '26 — participated in the race. A total of 497 people raced in this event, with 429 finishers. These participants put in a lot of time and effort in order to properly train for the event, practicing the swim, bike, and run in preparation.

"My training mainly consists of doing group runs as part of the track team ... as well as doing bluefish in their early season," said Trkov.

Gawiser-Salur agrees that running for the track team has helped him train.

"I never got out of shape since I've been constantly training for track by running," said Gawiser-Salur.

Similarly, lots of effort and preparation was put in from the volunteering and organizing teams, some of whom arrived at the venue at 4:00 a.m. to help set up. From putting up signs to directing people during the race, volunteers were present at every step of the event.

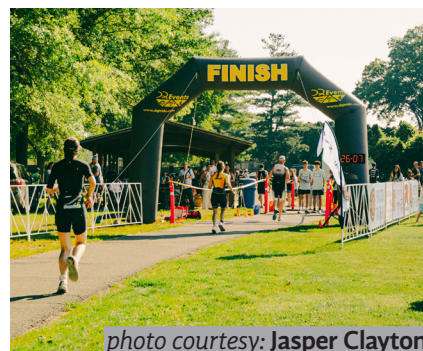


photo courtesy: Jasper Clayton
The race boasted a completion rate of over 85 percent.



photo courtesy: Jasper Clayton
Volunteers helped organize and direct the event.

"I did [the super sprint] last year, and it was a lot of fun ... I saw [Shawn] running around ... he was doing five different things at once and I thought, maybe this guy needs some help, which is why I [helped] him ... I [had] to get there at 4:30 and then he [started] bossing me around after that, I [helped] draw some of the bike course out, [or] just [got] people in lines," said Sonya Keaney '28, a volunteer for the Princeton Triathlon.

This year's top finishers from the high school sprint triathlon were high schooler Luzi Meggers, and Evan Raphael '26 for men, with times of 1:09:03.18 and 1:01:27.48 respectively.

In the supersprint the top PHS finishers were Angelena Gonzalez '29 for women, and middle schooler Nathan Ricciardi for men, with times of 44:38.19 and 44:16.34. Overall, the 2026 Princeton Triathlon provided a unique opportunity for people of all ages to experience a triathlon, and brought the community of Princeton together to support the race and all those participating. With new plans for next year already in discussion amongst the Triathlon Club leaders, it's clear that the Princeton Triathlon is here to stay. Similarly, the Triathlon will only continue to grow with the continued support of eager Princetonians.

"My favorite part is on race day, seeing everything come together, and in the work that has gone on over the past few years ... standing out over the swimming start and watching the hundreds of people extremely excited to jump in and push themselves, it's an amazing feeling," said Elwood.



photo courtesy: Shawn Elwood
PHS math teacher Peter Stanton celebrates his successful finish.

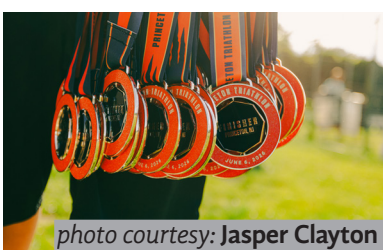


photo courtesy: Jasper Clayton
The triathlon provided medals to each finisher.

The science behind the runner's high

Johanna Kraft, STAFF WRITER

Winston Jung and Yejoon Na, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Long distance running is exhausting, repetitive, and mentally draining. Practices often involve early mornings, sore muscles, and miles of pushing through discomfort. Yet for many runners at PHS, there are moments during a workout or race when the pain suddenly fades into the background and running begins to feel almost effortless, tapping into a mental state where exercise that once felt difficult becomes calming, energizing, and even enjoyable — often referred to as “runner’s high.”

According to the National Library of Medicine, scientists have believed the “runner’s high” was caused mainly by endorphins. These chemicals, released by the body to help reduce pain and create positive feelings, are unable to cross into the brain. Due to this, they realized it could not be the cause. On the other hand, the same study suggests an alternate factor may play a larger role. Specifically, scientists believe endocannabinoids may contribute more directly to the euphoric feelings many runners describe because they can cross into the brain and affect mood, stress, and anxiety. These scientists also believe the phenomenon may explain why many runners feel calmer, mentally refreshed, or less stressed.

Nevertheless, for many runners, the “runner’s high” is difficult to generalize because every athlete experiences it differently. Some describe it as excitement, while others define it as mental clarity or a sudden feeling of confidence during a difficult run.

“It’s just this feel-good feeling,” said PHS track Coach Jennifer Smolyn. “This sense of euphoria or excitement. ... You tend to feel less tired, less fatigued.”

Smolyn explained the experience is difficult to define through only one cause and believes there are multiple contributing factors.

“There’s definitely a [mind-body] connection,” said Smolyn. “Your muscles feel less tired, so stuff is going on in the brain, but [it’s] probably a mix of a bunch of things.”

For Steven Cenci ’26, the captain of the cross country and track and field teams, the “runner’s high” often appears in the middle of a strong race. After the opening miles — when exhaustion normally begins to take over — he described moments where confidence begins to replace doubt.

“Sometimes when you have a really good race, it’s just so exciting to keep going,” said Cenci. “You know you’re gonna do well, and you know you’re gonna be proud of that race when you finish.”

Cenci explained how while training strengthens the body, racing often depends on whether runners can mentally push

through discomfort when their bodies begin telling them to stop. He explains how distance running is as much of a mental sport as it is physical.

“Everyone could go for a run, but it’s not something that most people choose to do, because it is very mentally tough to start doing. ... When your mind wants to give up, it’s not because your muscles have to give up,” Cenci said.

Isabella Franceschi ’28, who runs cross country and track, described “runner’s high” as a sudden burst of energy.

“It feels like you can run forever... right when you start out running and you don’t feel tired at all,” Franceschi said.

According to Franceschi, the “runner’s high” happens on days when you feel prepared, such as when you had a good meal or when you’re really hydrated. Although it’s rare, she believes it can heighten performance by minimizing error and heightening confidence to get past comfort zones. She noted the feeling cannot be forced, making it harder to explain to people who have never experienced it.

Head track Coach James Smirk said his own experiences with running changed as he became more experienced with the sport.

“As I became a better runner, I actually went the other way and associated [running] with [discomfort],” Smirk said. “I enjoyed leaning into the difficulty of the task.”

Smirk explained that he does not see “runner’s high” as only a feeling of happiness during exercise. Instead, he believes many runners experience it through focus, purpose, and engagement with the challenge itself.

“I think a lot of those feelings [associated with] ‘runner’s high’ are feeling accomplished and very comfortable with the work being done. ... You’re doing something just fundamentally difficult,” said Smirk.

Smirk also described running as something that became an important part of his daily routine over time.

“There was this component to my day where I could just stay within myself,” Smirk said. “[I] enjoy[ed] the fact that I was doing a thing that I was in charge of and I was in control of.”

“Even experienced runners may only experience [runner’s high] a few times throughout an entire season.”

Although the “runner’s high” is often talked about among athletes, Smolyn agreed it is not something runners can force. Even experienced runners may only experience it a few times throughout an entire season.

“You’re not gonna achieve that feeling too frequently,” Smolyn said. “Some runners will never experience the ‘runner’s high’ feeling.”

In other words, the runner’s high is an elusive state that is not something athletes can practice or train because it is tied to the pressure and emotions that are unique to competition. On the other hand, Smirk emphasized how people often expect immediate results from running, even though the benefits can take much longer to develop.

“I think people are like, ‘if I just run for 10 days, I’ll feel better,’” said Smirk. “This might take months or years, but just do it a little bit every day and see where that puts you.”

“Some describe [runner’s high] as excitement during a race, while others define it as mental clarity or a sudden feeling during a difficult run.”



graphic: Luna Xu

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What we gain from losing

Aryan Singla, ONLINE CO-EDITOR

Isaac Son, STAFF WRITER

Nishika Singh, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

No one enjoys losing. After all, everyone wants to succeed, win, and enjoy the fruits of their labor. However, the fear of losing often accompanies the drive to accomplish, especially for athletes that are expected to perform well regardless of external or internal conditions that may impact gameplay. As a result, athletes must adopt a tenacity which allows them to handle loss, and to learn and grow from their past mistakes or setbacks.

Often, a loss can expose what a win often hides: weak communication, lazy habits, or poor decisions. When a team wins, faults in individual decision-making or teamwork may be ignored, as the guise of success and victory routinely cover up areas of potential improvement. It stands to reason that the losses hardest to accept are often the most necessary. They ask you only one thing: do you have the courage to keep going? Even at the highest level, the mind is tested, demanded, and challenged — both on the court and long after the game ends.

“Concentration and mental toughness are the margins of victory” said legendary 11-time NBA Champion Bill Russell.

Such mentality not only separates great athletes from good ones, but also exposes the depth of an athlete's commitment. It's easy to remain invested when success is almost habitual, when confidence is high and victory comes with ease. On the other hand, a loss commands effort and progress that is no longer glamorous. Ultimately, a loss

forces an athlete to decide whether the result will carry on as frustration or instill a newfound drive to be better.

The point of losing is not to just give up what you have worked so hard for all because of a bad moment. Where there are ups, there are downs; what matters most is what you decide to do with your losses. For instance, in track, immediate reflection can look like adjusting your pace after going too fast, taking a leap of faith in yourself to go climb up a few spots, or choosing when to conserve energy and when to push following a bad start.

“There's always something you could have done better. [I always have to think about] what [I could have] done better, what was out of my control, what I [can] control, [and] what [I can] do to come back stronger,” said Felix Yu '27

However, improvement is not only limited to physical training. It could also be about how an athlete approaches an event itself — how they handle pressure, make decisions, and adjust in the moment. At times, what once looked like a lack of fitness can actually turn out to be a matter of judgement. A loss can reveal problems that came from

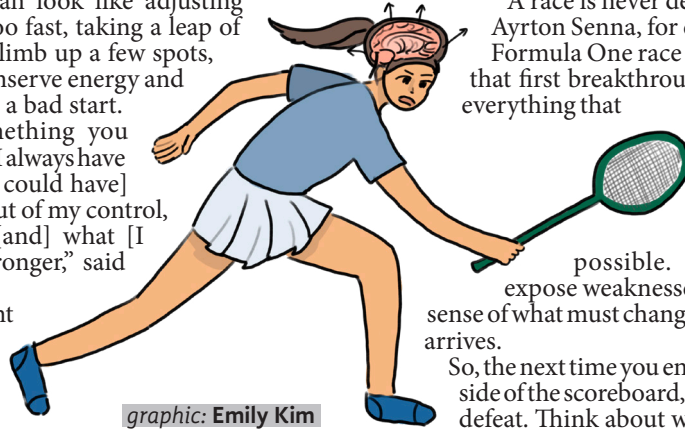
stressed nerves, a lack of proper preparation, or from the way a plan was executed differently than from practice.

“A lot of times when I lose I just think to myself it's just a fitness issue. Now, improvement doesn't come from better training... [it] comes [from] just learning how to [properly] approach races,” said Yu.

A race is never decided by one moment alone. Ayrton Senna, for example, did not win his first Formula One race until his 16th start, however; that first breakthrough became the beginning of everything that followed. A race, in the same

way, is rarely a reflection or summation of one's continued work. More often, it is part of what eventually makes success possible. It can sharpen judgment, expose weaknesses, and leave behind a clearer sense of what must change before the next competition arrives.

So, the next time you end a competition on the wrong side of the scoreboard, don't sulk over the immediate defeat. Think about what you can learn from your loss, and use that understanding in order to prepare for how you might win your next game. Success isn't the absence of failure; it is the result of it, and the perpetual reflection of oneself on their previous losses.



graphic: Emily Kim

Backyard games make a comeback

Kyle Chen, STAFF WRITER

Meilan Hagt and Jayden Zheng, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Starting this year, a resurgence of classic backyard games has swept the nation, with teenagers across the United States reviving recreational pastimes such as frisbee, wiffle ball, cornhole, spikeball, and especially hacky sack. The recent comeback of these sports has reached student life at Princeton High School as well, with students all across campus participating. With little equipment necessary and a spontaneous nature, these backyard games are bringing students together, encouraging them to unplug and stay active throughout the day.

Hacky Sack

The origins of hacky sack can typically be traced back to 1972 at a local festival in Oregon, where co-inventors Mike Marshall and John Stalberger met. Marshall introduced his friend to a hobby learned from his time with Native Americans, kicking a bean bag back and forth for hours on end. Entranced by this rudimentary but engaging hobby, they birthed their company Hacky Sack.

Starting in the Northeast just after spring break, many high schoolers were introduced to the new sport. Spreading like a wildfire through social media, schools have even



photo: Katherine Chen

Left to right: Oliver Spagnoli '27, Sullivan Spagnoli '27, Eric Zhang '27, Alex Paul '27, Alex LeBouef '27, and Rohan Viswanathan '27 play hacky sack during break.

started forming hacky-sack teams that range from the varsity level to exclusively freshman. PHS has decided to join in on the fun too.

Most recently, PHS varsity sacks has been participating in a state wide hacky sack tournament featuring a \$4,000 prize for first place. Each submission consists of a video, showcasing one round of hacky sack, with the public voting for the winner. Members of PHS's own varsity sack team have been putting up flyers to promote participation in voting. Winning both the rounds of 64 and 32, this strategy seems to be working. The future success of our varsity sack team rides on both the skills they can bring to the table and the school spirit we can back them up with.

These sacks are technically called foot bags, with Hacky Sack being just a brand name. But nevertheless, retailers of all kinds are scrambling to keep up with the demand. Co-owner Joanne Farrugia at Princeton's local toy shop Jazams emphasizes this point.

“We brought in several hundred and then sold out pretty quickly, and then brought in more, sold out pretty quickly” said Farrugia. “Now we have another huge order coming in. So, hopefully that will last a little while.”

With this craze infecting the hallways of PHS, students have been finding every chance to play. Many see this revival being a good thing for the students, with one being Marion Walsh '29.



photo: Katherine Chen

Left to right: Moksh Rajpal '28, Nikola Tholens '28, Bruno Giacoppo '28, and Lucius Rufo '28 play hacky sack by the flagpole.

“I think it benefits society because people are together, having fun, [getting] physical exercise, [and] forming friendships and bonds over such a beautiful game,” said Walsh. “It's just a part of my life now, and I wouldn't have it any other way.”

The hold that hacky sack has on this generation can be attributed to its sociable and simple nature. Constant overlap in action forces communication, making hacky sack a great way to build connections. Along with this, all that is needed is a sack smaller than the size of your palm, allowing games to take place anywhere, anytime.

Frisbee

Another backyard game that is popular in the United States today is frisbee. Although activities similar to frisbee can be dated back to the 8th century B.C., the sport was mainstreamed in the United States after the inventor Fred Morrison created a plastic disc inspired by flying saucers. Since then, frisbee has grown into a sport played in at least 70 countries around the world.

Frisbee encompasses many different playstyles, ranging from ultimate frisbee to disc golf. Ultimate Frisbee is played in a similar way to American football, except that instead of a football, players throw a disc around. In recent years, many competitive Ultimate leagues have been established across the United States for all ages. Disc Golf is usually perceived as

a more casual way to play frisbee, usually found in parks or on beaches.

Since many frisbee games can be played either competitively or casually, the sport impacts all kinds of PHS students, one of them being PHS Frisbee Club Captain Julian Grossman '28.

“[If you're] on the same team, it's a very good bonding experience,” said Grossman. “[You] get [to] exercise and be with friends.”

Grossman has been the captain of the club since the start of the 2025 school year and his love for frisbee stems from its uniqueness. Many students specifically choose frisbee over other sports because they value the sport for the people that they can bond with and get to know while playing.



photo: Emily Kim

Left to right: Max Lin '27 and Avish Vispute '27 throw a frisbee during break on the turf.

Spikeball



photo: Katherine Chen

Left to right: Oscar Huang '27, Maxim Styrkas '27, and Daniel Ludewig '27 play spikeball on the front lawn during break.

Ever since its appearance on Shark Tank in 2015, Spikeball has taken the world by storm. The company has managed to sell over five million nets since then and the sport has become a staple part of recreational backyard or beach hangouts.

Similar to how wiffle ball is modeled off of baseball, Spikeball is a hybrid of volleyball and four square. Two teams of two players take turns bouncing a ball back and forth off of an ankle high circular net. Each team gets up to three touches — similar to volleyball — to pass the ball and spike it back onto the net. If a team misses the net, hits the rim, or uses too many touches, a point is awarded to the opposing team.

This backyard game has intrigued PHS students so much that they have decided to form a club. Run by Romy Johnson '26 along with other PHS students, the club provides an environment for students to enjoy Spikeball while meeting new people in the process.

“I think it's just a fun activity for me to do with my friends. It doesn't require you to be super athletic, and it's not like you're getting tired because you're just standing there, but it's still fun and engaging,” said Johnson.

There are other factors that also may influence the appeal to Spikeball. Many people enjoy the connections that they are able to make with friends while playing while others view the game as a break from studying or work.

Spikeball's appeal may also come from its convenience. The entire setup fits inside a drawstring bag, which allows people to play it in various environments. But what makes Spikeball stand out from other backyard games?

“Spikeball is a bit more interactive, it's a bit more intense, getting the ball onto the net, running for it sometimes, there's [these] fun moments that come out of it,” said Ethan Tang '29. “Something like catch [is] just boring. There's not a lot of stuff that happens.”

GIRLS LACROSSE

Ending the season with a 13-6 record, the PHS girls lacrosse team had an improvement from previous years and earned their first home playoff game in four years. Starting off strong with six straight wins, the team continued their success throughout the season and advanced into the semifinal round of the CVC tournament, before finishing their season in the NJSIAA Group 3 tournament.

"I remember it was just so exciting to see everyone work together and play together, and it was just really fun 'cause that was something we were all looking forward to," said Paige Menapace '27.

SOFTBALL

Ending with a 8-15 record, the softball team was able to improve from previous years to score more runs and earn some unexpected upset wins over stronger teams. They beat Lawrence High School for the first time since the 2016 season with a score of 8-6, and they were able to avoid getting "mercied," (having the game end early before all seven innings are played because the other team had such a significant advantage), by Steinert, even scoring a point against them. The team almost made it to states, ranking 17th, one away from the top 16 that qualified.

"The most memorable moments for the season were the games that we did win when we were supposed to lose, because we pulled through and played together as a team," said Elle Villarini '29.

BOYS GOLF

The PHS boys golf team finished the year strong with a record of 11-3 and a dominant 6-0 within the CVC region itself. This stretch of wins also included a tough win over powerhouse Notre Dame, the eventual CVC tournament winners, with a close score of 160-162. Although disqualified during the country tournament due to a scoring mistake and tough results in the state tournament, the team looks forward to next season and improving on their scores from this year.

"It was a success. Our team, our top six, put together consistent scores, and we finished up with a winning record, so I think overall, everything played out how we wanted," said Tyler Cassese '28.

BASEBALL

Ending the season with a 9-15 record, the PHS baseball team faced challenges throughout the season but continued to improve as the season progressed. Although they struggled through a difficult seven-game losing streak in the middle of the season, the team was able to turn the season around with several important victories over Nottingham, Somerville, and East Brunswick Magnet before competing in the first round of the CVC tournament. The team also qualified for the NJSIAA Central Jersey Group 4 tournament where they lost in the first round to Hunterdon Central 6-2.

"I think it really showed us that we have it within ourselves to be the good team we think we are, and I think that also helped us finish the season on a higher note than the start of the season went," said Shaan Patel '29.

SPRING SPORTS RECAP

Michael Yang, SPORTS CO-EDITOR
Jonina Hou, STAFF WRITER
Daniel Gu and Bella Feng, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS



photo: Claire Yang

Eleonora Villarini '29 throws the ball in the catchers position.

Leah Bornstein '26 runs across the field during a game.

photo: Claire Yang



photo courtesy: Alice Ye

Kona Macallister '26 watches his shot fly across the greens.

Chase Hamerschlag '26 ready in position to hit the ball.

photo: Yasur Agzamov

photo courtesy: Alice Ye



photo: Claire Yang

Michael Frenia '27 supports his teammates in an offensive play.

Aleric Deess '28 runs during a meet hosted at PHS.

photo: Claire Yang



photo: Claire Yang

Sadie Gallagher '27 focuses as she hits the ball.

Ethan Feldman '26 practices his forehand.

BOYS LACROSSE

Ending the season with a record of 11-10, the PHS boys lacrosse team had a roller coaster of a season. Initially starting the first five games with only a singular win, the team managed to rally together and turn the season around by winning nine out of the next 11 games, including a win in the CVC tournament. With a difficult loss in the Group 3 Tournament, the team looks to build upon their strengths this year and become a much stronger group next season.

"[Next year, we'll lose] a lot of key players ... but ... I'm really looking forward to it, because I think our roster's gonna be pretty solid," said Maheeb Akhter '28

TRACK AND FIELD

The PHS track and field team has been highly successful in their meets and invitationals. At CVC Champs, both girls and boys teams placed fourth with 56 points each. In NJ sectionals, Princeton, competing in Group 4, placed sixth for the girls team and 17th for the boys team.

"We had a lot of good races, all around, lots of improvements, lots of bonding and growth as a team, as well as with the social atmosphere and training growth," said Eowyn Deess '27.

BOYS TENNIS

In the regular season, the boys tennis team's only loss was to West Windsor-Plainsboro South, but aside from that, they won all of their 11 other matches. A significant match was a match against West Windsor-Plainsboro North, where the team was able to clinch multiple close tiebreaks to win the match 3-2. They ended up placing second in the CVC tournament.

"Stepping up to varsity, it's a lot of fun ... You get a lot more competitive players. But overall, it's been a really fun experience," said Ryan Litvinsky '27.

GIRLS GOLF

Coming into the season as last year's state champion, the PHS girls golf team started off strong by winning nine matches in a row. Their only loss was from a tight match against Peddie, but they continued on to win the CVC and the South Jersey sectional tournaments, ending seventh in the state.

"I think the season went pretty well, we won a couple tournaments, but I think it was mostly the teamwork that really made the whole experience really good," said Hannah Chang '29

Athletes of the Month

Nico Pisapia '26: lacrosse

Olivia Fan and Rena Yu, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS



photo: Emily Kim

Pisapia, after playing for the PHS boys lacrosse team all four years, of high school, earned a captain spot this season.

With his stick in hand, Nico Pisapia '26 charges down the field as defenders close in around him. The ball stays tight in his pocket, his cleats cut across the turf, and the noise from the sideline grows louder. One pass, one dodge, one quick decision.

Pisapia started lacrosse at a young age, influenced by his friend and current teammate Declan Hughes '26.

"I started playing lacrosse around third grade. I was introduced to it by a good friend of mine named Declan Hughes," Pisapia said.

From the moment he picked up a lacrosse stick, Pisapia was completely fascinated. Over time, different parts of the sport became what made him love it even more.

"I just love the sport," said Pisapia. "You need to be so good at so many different things. You need to be quick, you need to be physical, you have to have really good hand eye coordination."

One of Pisapia's biggest inspirations was former team captain Brendan Beatty '25, who lived across the street from him. Watching Beatty play made Pisapia want to improve his own game and pushed him to practice more.

"Seeing him do things on the field really impressed me," Pisapia said, "it led me to practice a lot and really work on my game."

After Pisapia joined the PHS boys lacrosse team in his freshman year, Head Boys Lacrosse Coach Chip Casto, quickly noticed his eagerness and commitment to the program.



photo courtesy: Eddie Chen

Pisapia celebrates with the team during a practice, showing his captain leadership.

"Nico was a freshman, sort of wide-eyed. He wasn't sure what he was getting into, but he was really eager and willing," said Casto. "Once we started the season, he just jumped in and fully committed, and he's never looked back."

As Pisapia adjusted to high school lacrosse, one of his biggest challenges was learning how to handle the physical side of the sport. Coming into high school, Pisapia was on the smaller side, which made practices and games more difficult when he found himself getting pushed around by stronger players. To work through this, he spent more time training with the team in the off season and working by himself in the weight room.

"My personal biggest challenge was my size. I was always a very thin kid growing up. I used to be very insecure about it," said Pisapia.

With hard work and persistence, Pisapia began to grow both physically and mentally. The same sport that once challenged him because of his size helped him build confidence, discipline, and determination. Over time, his role on the team also changed, as he became not only a stronger player, but also a more vocal leader.

Pisapia's growth came from learning how to respond to setbacks. After being placed between JV and varsity his sophomore year, he used the disappointment as motivation to keep improving until he eventually earned a varsity spot.

"It really just taught me the art of persistence and hard work and how if you just put your head down and focus, you can do things that will surprise yourself and so many other people," Pisapia said.

That persistence became even more important during Pisapia's senior season. Although Pisapia hoped to spend his senior season leading on the field as a defender and midfielder, an injury changed the role he expected to play. After his junior season was cut short by a concussion, shoulder issues kept him from completing his final year. Still, instead of stepping away from the team, Pisapia continued showing up to practices and supporting his teammates from the sideline. His continued presence did not go unnoticed by his teammates.

"Nico's been there every day to help lead the team any way he can, and I have a lot of respect for him as a result," said Ben Kahn '27.

Casto also recognized the way Pisapia continued to lead even while injured.

"Not everyone does what he does, which is continue to come to practice every day, continue to be a leader, continue to help us communicate, and hold people to the standards that we've agreed upon," said Casto.

Over time, Pisapia has become a stronger leader as well as someone who values team culture and relationships between him and his teammates. He now understands the importance of having strong bonds within the team, and how attitude can make such a large difference in their performance during a game.

"Without him, we're not doing as well. That's for sure," said Casto. "I would consider him part of the glue that holds the team together."

While Pisapia does not plan to play lacrosse at the collegiate varsity level, he hopes to continue playing club lacrosse in college and stay involved with the sport in the future.

"I want to stay around the sport for as long as I can. I would like to have my kids play the sport, and I would love to coach a team one day," Pisapia said "It's given me so much that it's only fair if I give back."



photo courtesy: Jasper Clayton

Pisapia moves to make a play upfield during a game.

Alice Ye '26: golf

Joshua Huang, SPORTS CO-EDITOR
Meredith Fan, STAFF WRITER



photo: Katherine Chen

Ye's senior year was filled with many accomplishments, including a top 10 finish at the CVC championship.

Taking a deep breath, Alice Ye '26 prepares her swing, adjusting for the heat haze that altered her vision of the course. After a clean drive sent the golf ball soaring, Ye steadily traced the path of the ball as it hurtled across the course.

Although Ye is a core component of the team today, her journey in golf wasn't always a direct path. When she was first introduced into the sport at age seven by her parents, she didn't find any enjoyment; instead, she chose to pursue other sports like basketball, soccer, and track.

"Both my parents play golf, so I would say that would be my inspiration, but it's not," said Ye. "[Instead], I think that was the reason why I didn't play in the first place — the real reason why I kept playing was because of my friends here at Princeton."

After joining PHS's golf program in her sophomore year, Ye has aided the team in securing 8-0, 8-1, and 9-1 records respectively. Notably, the team was able to take first place in their division at the state championships last year, resulting in the obtainment of their first state title. Ye emphasizes the importance of that achievement as not only proof of their dedication but also an opportunity for the team to come closer together.

"It was cool to show up in front of the good private schools and take third overall and first in the section," said Ye. "It was a great team bonding activity, but also a great effort overall for everyone who showed up and tried to do their best."

Similarly, Yasna Shahrarian '27 echoes this sentiment, accrediting part of their confident mentality at the start of the season to the win.

"Last year when we won [the state title] ... we had a lot of confidence going into this year," said Shahrarian. "It was a full team event, overall, it helped morale."

On the other hand, Ye adopted a slightly less enthusiastic perspective on the impact of the confidence boost, pointing out that confidence can often be a double-edged sword in golf.

"For golf, it's very counterintuitive, and everything works backward in a way," said Ye. "If I [get] too overconfident, it ruins my game. ... I get a little arrogant and play sloppily. But without the confidence, I wouldn't be able to commit to the shots that I would need in order to play good golf, and I wouldn't be able to calm down or revive after having hit bad shots."

Beyond her mentality, Jess Monzo, the PHS girls' golf coach, has recognized Ye's growth, citing the confidence and leadership Ye has gained as a testament to her development.

Specifically, Monzo emphasizes the importance of Ye's ability to recover from failure, boosting the team morale and her own personal performance on the course.

"Into her junior year, and definitely into her senior year ... she's taken on a role where some of the younger girls look up to her," said Monzo. "She contributes by bringing exactly what you need to bring to golf ... She has the ability, [in serious situations], to make others laugh, and that is what you really need because in a game like golf, if you're not having fun and enjoying it, you're going to really have an unsuccessful round."

However, Monzo is not the only person to have witnessed her growth — her teammates have seen Ye develop her mentality throughout her career at PHS. "Whenever you're around her, you're always laughing and having a good time. Every single memory I have of her [shows] the team loves her and we all love her," said Shahrarian.

Overall, Ye is a major contributor toward the PHS girls golf team, as she helps everyone be a better version of themselves through her positive attitude and light heartedness, required for the serious game of golf.



photo courtesy: Alice Ye

Ye follows through on her swing from the tee box at a practice.



photo courtesy: Alice Ye

Ye starts her backswing from the fairway.