

# The Tower

95th Year: Issue 5

Princeton High School  
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## Students see a familiar face in a new role: Cecilia Birge



photo: Wenya Huan

Cecilia Birge was unanimously approved by the Princeton Public Schools Board of Education on August 31.

**Daniel Guo**, NEWS & FEATURES CO-EDITOR  
**Matias Da Costa**, STAFF WRITER  
**Joseph Hu**, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

September 5 not only marked the beginning of PHS' 2023-2024 school year, but also the first day for a new principal with a familiar face. After a lengthy selection process that spanned close to the entire summer and included a search committee composed of over 20 stakeholders, PPS superintendent Carol Kelley recommended former assistant principal Cecilia Birge as the new PHS principal. This recommendation was

unanimously approved by the Board of Education on August 31.

In an email that includes her recommendation of Birge sent on August 30, Kelley stated, "During this selection process, Ms. Birge showcased her exceptional leadership qualities, along with her deep commitment to the success of all students, her passion for education, and her respect for the entire Princeton High School community."

After a whirlwind of new principals at PHS (four in the past three years) and the lingering controversy over the non-renewal of former

PHS principal Frank Chmiel, a survey was sent out to PHS stakeholders on July 7 asking them what the desired characteristics of a principal at the high school were.

"Our goal was to begin the search process as soon as possible so that we would have an individual at least approved by the Board prior to the start of the new school year," said Kelley. "Because of the reputation of our school district, we saw that even though the posting gave people just three weeks to apply for the position, there was an outpouring of candidates that were interested."

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## Pre-game ceremony honors PHS alumnus Evan Gershkovich

**Jessica Chen**, EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, **Shumona Bhattacharjya** and **Peter Eaton**, MANAGING EDITORS

As the PHS boys varsity soccer team warmed up for their game on September 26, the regular blue jerseys of the team were nowhere to be found. Instead, #IStandWithEvan was plastered in bold letters across their white T-shirts.

This was one of many tributes to Evan Gershkovich '10, the imprisoned Wall Street Journal reporter and former PHS soccer captain, that took place during a pre-game ceremony, where former PHS soccer coach Wayne Sutcliffe, Wall Street Journal financial enterprise editor Ken Brown, and former teammates of Evan all made speeches to spread awareness about his ongoing detention.

The ceremony began with lead event organizer Brown, speaking about the efforts the Wall Street Journal is taking to raise awareness about Gershkovich's situation.

"We [the Wall Street Journalists] have hired lawyers in Russia and have been working with the Biden administration, who's trying to negotiate to get him out," said Brown. "We've [also] done a lot to try to spread the word about the situation ... so that people know what is happening and that he's being unjustly held. He's not a spy. He was doing his job. Journalism is not a crime."

After Brown spoke, Sutcliffe made a speech about Gershkovich's abilities as a soccer player, his leadership, and his humor. The ceremony culminated with former teammates, Max Reid '10 and Thatcher Foster '10, speaking about their relationships with



photo: Caroline Gu

Max Reid '10, Thatcher Foster '10, Building Monitor Scott Goldsmith, and former PHS soccer coach Wayne Sutcliffe, give speeches during the pre-game ceremony.

Gershkovich both as a friend and a teammate.

"I think his superpower is the ability to connect with all different types of people. It made him a really good captain, but also makes him a really good friend, teammate, and reporter," Foster said.

Brown reached out to boys soccer Head Coach Ryan Walsh, Assistant Principal Rashone Johnson, and Principal Cecilia Birge to organize the event. Being one of the biggest games of the season, Walsh felt it was best to schedule the ceremony on that date. He highlighted how the biggest impact comes from keeping Evan's name in the news.

"The best way to get Evan back safely is to continue to put pressure

on the United States government to get him home. They're the ones who can get him home," said Walsh. "If [Evan] is forgotten, then the U.S. won't feel the pressure and they'll stop fighting."

When the boys' soccer team found out about Gershkovich's situation, they immediately extended their support and demonstrated collective solidarity for the former player.

"It's important that we send a message to the world saying that we have not forgotten Evan ... He's an alumn[us], which means a lot. This program has been built on a tradition of creating strong teams [and] strong brotherhood," said PHS varsity soccer player James

Reynolds '24.

Even with constant press coverage, Gershkovich's freedom in the near future is still far from being guaranteed. However, Caitlin Ostroff, a reporter at the Wall Street Journal who worked closely with Gershkovich in the Journal's London office, believes that there are still reasons to be optimistic.

"I'm honestly mostly hopeful based on the people we meet at random, who asked me about my 'Free Evan' button. I'm inspired by the people who've all come out to the soccer game. I'm inspired by random people who messaged me and say 'I heard about Evan, what can I do?'" said Ostroff. "It's just a matter of keeping pressure." ■



# Club Culture at PHS

Hangyeol Cheong, NEWS AND FEATURES CO-EDITOR  
Mattias Blix, NEWS AND FEATURES STAFF

Club Culture

Passionate  
Extensive  
Miscellaneous

Gilly Bennett:  
Mock Trial



photos: Wenya Huan



Tommy Birge:  
Rock Climbing

Club Culture is ...

Unifying  
Strong  
Creative

graphics:  
Sara Hu

Club Culture is ...

Social  
Collaborative  
Relaxed

Ronald  
Aung: Asian  
American Club



Yuvraj Singh Bedi: Sikh Awareness  
and Punjabi Culture Club

Club Culture is ...

Exciting  
Inclusive  
Educational

```
If (you.want == learning_code) {  
System.out.println("Rida Kas");  
}
```



graphics: Caroline Gu

Claire Tang, STAFF WRITER  
Elif Cam, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Students who want to learn the code above should take one of the classes taught by Rida Kas, who replaced Graciela Elia, a programming teacher who retired the previous year. She currently teaches AP Computer Science, Algorithms and Data Structures, Introduction to Java, and Object-Oriented Java.

With this year marking her ninth year as an educator, Kas is familiar with the education industry. When she first started teaching in 2014, Kas taught computer science courses and robotics at Piscataway High School, then taught the same subjects at Plainfield High School.

"In my new teacher's orientation, they kept telling us that there is a right way, there is a wrong way, and then there is a Princeton way. I [have] been exploring that Princeton way as a new teacher," said Kas. "I wanted to see how that is bringing change into our students' lives, [and] how [Princeton's] opportunities are different from what was offered in my previous school. The climate and culture that the students create [here are] ... much different from my previous experiences, and I want to see what kind of impact they have on me."

While Kas has grown to love computer science and teaching over the years, she didn't always plan for a career in this field. Initially, inspired by a close friend, Kas dreamed of becoming an architect and even took an entrance exam for an architectural undergraduate course.

"I soon realized that [architecture] was not something I saw myself doing for the rest of my life," said Kas. "My father motivated me to [major] in IT. Today, I am so glad that I followed his vision, because [now] I see the importance of technology in the growing world."

Prior to becoming a teacher, Kas had three years of experience in the programming industry. After graduating from Mumbai University with a bachelor's degree in information technology and a masters in business administration, her first job focused on taking outdated, obsolete pieces of software and converting them to cloud services, automating software at technology firms in India and New York.

A defining moment in Kas' journey to becoming a teacher was the birth of her children. Kas felt that the demanding and inflexible schedules of her previous jobs left little time to spend with her two young kids. After taking a hiatus from working, Kas searched for a profession that could fit with her experiences both as a programmer and as a parent, finding a job in the education industry to be most fitting.

"As a parent, I bring experience from home as to what students like to learn, how they respond to certain things, and that allows me to be a parent and teacher at the same time," said Kas. "I had a lot of moments where I realized that [teaching] was what I wanted to do for the rest of my life."

In her classroom, Kas hopes to create an environment where her students can not only grow intellectually but emotionally as well.

"My goals I originally created when I started my educational journey were more related to intellectual learning and academics. But recently I revised them," said Kas. "I want to make sure I incorporate a lot of social [and] emotional learning for my students, wherein you learn not just by being present, but by being happily present in the spot that you have chosen to be in."

Amy Lin '25, a current student in Kas' AP Computer Science A class, appreciates how Kas maintains an engaging and interactive environment in the classroom.

"She walks around helping [by explaining] concepts, which differs a little bit from the past when we would basically learn stuff on our own, and the teacher would be there to help us in that process," said Lin. "Ms. Kas is more hands-on and she hopes to do activities like her teaching instead of us learning by ourselves."

On top of her engaging lessons, her compassionate attitude and attentiveness toward student needs make communicating easier and comfortable.

"She keeps in mind the students' pace, so she is never going too fast or too slow," said Vritika Singh '26, a student in Kas' Introduction to Computer Science class. "She always puts the students first and always makes sure our questions are answered."



photo: Caroline Gu

Kas assists her student, Daniel Haiduc '26, in java.

While a lot of programming-related clubs and events such as HackPHS were suspended due to Elia's retirement, who was their previous advisor, Kas plans to take over those positions in coming years.

"I really like the idea of HackPHS, [but] I don't know whether I'm ready to take the responsibility this year," said Kas. "Maybe [I will] take my time over the summer break and plan something for our students in the form of an extracurricular activity, or maybe a club."

Outside of school, Kas enjoys spending time with her kids, going to the park, cooking, and, as of recently, biking.

"These days, we've been doing a lot of bike riding," said Kas. "My youngest one just learned how to ride her bike, so it's very exciting when we go out to the trails for a bike ride."

At the end of the day, Kas is grateful for the opportunity to teach at PHS.

"Princeton is such a pinnacle, a standard, [and] a beacon when it comes to education," said Kas. "When you hear the word Princeton, you know it's coming from high standards, it's coming from rigor, [and] it's coming from challenging standpoints." ■



# Debut of Learning Labs have freshmen free periods under supervision

Meiya Xiong, STAFF WRITER  
Leila Guitton, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

This year, the PHS administration introduced Learning Labs, a supervised study environment replacing any free periods in freshmen schedules, including their P.E. free periods. Learning Labs aim to help new students get acclimated to the high school schedule and environment and are held in the New Wing.

“We really just want to support students [in] the transition [from middle school to high school]. As educators and as parents, we find that [it] can be challenging,” said PHS Assistant Principal Dr. Nicole Mantuano Lacsamana. “We’re also providing [guidance on] ... some of the soft skills that ... are not explicitly taught in regular classes: anything that will help them be successful in high school.”

Improving safety at PHS is a priority this year, as mentioned in this year’s strategic plan. As part of new safety measures, Learning Labs provide supervision for freshmen during their free periods so that fewer students are unaccounted for during a given period.

“When an emergency happens, I [should] know where you are so I can confidently say to parents, ‘You’re safe in this field,’” said PHS Principal Cecilia Birge. “If you wander off during your free time, I can’t do that. ... Legally, you’re getting your parents into trouble. You’re getting all the teachers you love into trouble.”

All freshmen have at least one Learning Lab in the span of one schedule rotation, but Learning Labs can also be assigned to students in other grades to make up for excessive absences. During Learning Labs, students can do many of the things they would normally do during a free period, including catching up on homework, doing independent work, and scheduling meetings with teachers.

“We are not trying to micromanage, but we are taking attendance, [and] we are responsible for them. For the most part, students work on school-related work,” said PHS special education teacher Adiba Syed, a teacher of a Learning Lab.

The freshmen of PHS have found the Learning Labs quite helpful. Along with the transition to high school and a heavier workload, the Learning Labs provide them with an environment that’s both efficient and productive.

“Learning Labs are pretty helpful. ... If [students] have work, they [can] focus on their work, but if they don’t, then they can just spend time with their friends, [which is also] nice,” said Ivy Cordle ’27.

While the Learning Lab as a monitored environment seems restrictive compared to a traditional free period, many freshmen still find that they have enough freedom, and at times, even too much.

“Because there is so much freedom, I found it very easy to waste the period socializing or procrastinating,” said Harry Dweck ’27.

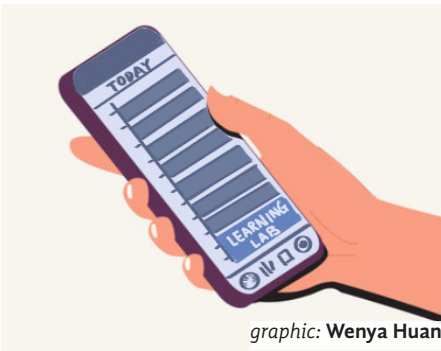
However, in the future, additional op-



Juha Lee '27 and Xiaoqing Cui '27 work on homework in the New Wing during their Learning Lab.

portunities and events will also be offered in Learning Labs to students, including lessons in note-taking, executive functioning, social-emotional learning, and cultural proficiency. Since Learning Labs are new this year, the administration and Social and Emotional Learning team are still determining how to organize these activities to maximize the opportunity.

“I think it is actually doing a great job [so far] of supplementing classroom instruction,” said Syed. “Students have been utilizing it [and] taking advantage of it to the utmost.” ■



graphic: Wenya Huan

## Students see a familiar face in a new role: Cecilia Birge



photo: Wenya Huan

Birge goes over her schedule for the day, which has been filled with meetings.

Continued from page 1

Apart from the community survey, the Board also surveyed PHS faculty about their wants and needs for the new principal. Immediately, Birge stood out as a front runner with her past experience and reputation at PHS.

“The staff that was involved on the interview committee really wanted an internal candidate. They said that the school was fragile and that they couldn’t really take someone who didn’t understand the culture at the school. ... When you have the staff saying that this is what we need, the board is gonna listen to that,” said Dafna Kendal, President of the Board of Education.

According to Kelley, the job opening received 25 applications during the three weeks it stayed open; two of these applications came from internal candidates, while the rest were external. The process consisted of three rounds of interviews. The first round was a paper screening to identify the candidates with the suitable qualifications and characteristics desired by the community, while the second round was a short virtual screening of four questions; this collectively narrowed the candidates down to five, including the two internal candidates that skipped these first two rounds. The final round was an hour-long interview conducted by a stakeholder committee for each individual candidate, consisting of an open-ended question of the candidate’s outline on the first 100 days of school as PHS principal, as well as ten questions that focused on the candidate’s trustworthiness, communication, and responses to pertinent school affairs. Afterward, the committee rated each of the candidates according to their responses, culminating in the recommendation of Birge by Kelley to the board.

Keeping with her philosophy of placing the well-being of students and teachers at

the forefront, Birge, despite enjoying her assistant principal position, mentions one of her primary reasons for applying to be principal in the first place was to provide missing continuity.

“When somebody from outside the community applies, the learning curve is really steep. And that means that will cause additional learning curves. Students and teachers — that was really the main reason for me to apply,” Birge said.

After retiring from being a bond analyst on Wall Street, Birge began her time in education in 2012 and has seen and guided the growth of thousands with different job titles along the way. Starting as a substitute teacher for former PHS math teacher Valerie Rodriguez, she later secured a tenure track position at Dwight Morrow High School in North Jersey teaching math the next year, where she worked with special needs students. Wanting to make a greater impact, Birge obtained her certification in special education and later returned to PHS in 2015 as a special-ed math teacher.

“When somebody from outside the community applies, the learning curve is really steep. ... that was really the main reason for me to apply.

perspective and a much higher level of appreciation for public education and how teachers can touch student’s lives,” Birge said.

Now, after watching Birge’s exceptional performance, as well as the board’s unanimous approval, Kelley believes that Birge’s experience, combined with her involvement in the PHS community, will bring long-awaited stability to PHS.

“I feel that [Birge] is going to do a really marvelous job. ... She’s not just an administrator, but she’s been a teacher

and parent at the high school,” said Kelley. “I think that her background in other industries and the experiences that she has had serving, as mayor [of Montgomery Township], on town councils, on town committees ... creates an individual that’s right for being principal of Princeton High School.”

In addition to her extensive professional career in public service, Birge believes she can readily adapt to unfamiliar environments due to her experiences as an immigrant coming to the U.S. from China without knowing much English.

“I still remember the days when I stood in the cafeteria at my college, trying to order food, and didn’t know what to say to get the food. I think that my experience as an educator [and] my passion for our students is very much framed by my experiences as an immigrant and being unfamiliar with the system,” said Birge. “I think that my diverse professional background really has been great because school is a microcosm of society.”

When asked about her methodology and guiding principles when making decisions for the future, Birge mirrored Kendal’s sentiment about putting teachers and students at the center.

“As an administrator, my philosophy has always been that my job is to support the teachers, because if I support the teachers, then the teachers can place [the] students as their priority. ... You will never hear me blindly choosing some statistics just for the sake of statistics, as the students and the teachers must be front and center in everything,” Birge said.

This school year, Birge does not hope to change much around the school and will instead try to focus on having a strong and communicative relationship with PHS stakeholders, in addition to the strategic plan that the PPS administrators and board members have decided upon.

“I want to be out there, to be visible in the community. I’m in the process of meeting with community groups, [such as the] PTO and other groups to update our communication channel. The Tiger Tribune will probably return, in addition to Letters from the Principal,” Birge said.

Furthermore, Birge has taken various actions to update an outdated system she sees as geared towards survival during a period of COVID-19 instead of a thriving school ecosystem. Several of these include requiring lanyards and revising punishments for plagiarism and unverified absences.

“All of these [new] policies and handbooks and whatnot. ... What we all realize is that after surviving the past three years post-pandemic, we need to be re-educated about what real school feels like,” Birge said.

Birge fondly remembers her time as an assistant principal mainly because of the

relationships she was able to form with students, as well as jokingly mentioning her comfortable old office.

“In many ways, the assistant principal’s job is the best job in a school in the sense that each day is different. You just don’t know what to expect each day and the same thing with principals. But the assistant principals’ focus is on the students. They’re there to support the students and the teachers, but with direct contact with the students. So the principal is a step removed,” said Birge.

On September 26, the Board approved the transfer of former PHS mathematics teacher Lauren Freedman to the assistant principal position as a one-year leave replacement for Stephanie Greenberg. She has worked in various capacities with the current PHS administrators and feels ready to be present on a larger platform.

“I believe that my transition into this new role will go well, as I have been working closely with the administration team over the years on various committees. ... I have had the opportunity to work with Ms. Birge and had the honor to co-teach precalculus with her,” said Freedman. “I am most excited to have the opportunity to directly engage with the entire PHS community. In this role, I will get to work directly with staff members from all departments, the entire student body, Valley Road, and other community members.”

Freedman is also deeply connected as a former student, former mathematics teacher, Peer Group advisor, field hockey coach, student class advisor, and Corner House advisor, among many other roles. Similarly to Birge, Freedman believes she can utilize her wealth of experiences to impact students in her new position.

“I have a deep-rooted commitment to Princeton High School, my alma mater. I began my educational journey at Riverside as a kindergartener, attended the Princeton Middle School, and graduated from PHS in 2004. I have taken on a variety of leadership roles with the PHS administrative teams, and I have planned and coordinated both district-wide and building-level initiatives. I feel that the AP position gives me an opportunity to provide a wider range of support to our students,” Freedman said.

In the future, despite her new position being a “step removed,” Birge similarly hopes to continue to work more closely with students and watch their growth as the years pass.

“Be the good student leaders, the role models that you are. ... Make an appointment with me or walk with me,” said Birge. “Learning can be painful and difficult, but that’s why graduation is so beautiful, because at the end of the year, we reflect that there isn’t a single child who doesn’t grow fast and significantly.” ■

“The students and the teachers must be front and center in everything.”



# OPINIONS

## What are the standards for our political candidates?

Tamar Assayag and Jane Bennett, OPINIONS CO-EDITORS

If we think of past U.S. presidents, many of them come from humble backgrounds, where hard work and passion ultimately secured them the presidency. Think Jimmy Carter, the humble peanut farmer who rose to fame. Or Barack Obama, the boy who moved back and forth from Hawaii and Indonesia and eventually discovered a passion for public policy. Even in the good old days of presidents we liked, there was always a lack of trust in the truthfulness of the electoral system in our country. But recently, we have developed a sense of numbness to political scandal. In the wake of recent political behavior, including sexual assault charges, impeachments, lawsuits, slur usage, and arrests, our understanding for how we evaluate candidate behavior must change.

As the presidential election looms over the American population, the comparison of candidates' actions becomes an overwhelming topic of debate. Some candidates' comments stand out over others, such as Trump's "nasty woman" or Kamala Harris' "Mr. Vice President, I'm speaking." Although both of those examples have become synonymous with political candidates, viewing them with the same level of concern is unfair considering the contexts in which each comment was made. While Trump's comment to Hillary Clinton was intentionally offensive and very unnecessary, Harris' comment to Mike Pence was far more justified, as the former vice president interrupted Harris multiple times throughout the vice presidential debate of 2020. As more students turn 18 and have the power to vote, it is more common to hear the PHS politics buffs comment that the next election will be riddled with terrible candidates, or that they would rather have Chris Christie than Ron DeSantis as our next president. Granted, Christie did have his picture in Princeton Soup and Sandwich (we love a good local business supporter). But considering the George Washington Bridge shutdown scandal of 2013, where

Christie seemingly caused traffic jams to get back at another politician, such a statement ten years ago would have been unthinkable. However, in comparison with criminalizing abortion, banning books, or prohibiting drag performances in public, a simple traffic jam seems small.

Through this comparative lens, we can weigh candidates based on the worst things they have done relative to one another. However, this method of comparison makes it almost always possible to make the claim that one candidate would be better than another comparatively, which is not the most effective way to choose the next congressperson, senator, Board of Education president, prom queen, or,

most importantly, president. Similarly, should we really be settling for an ideal leader of a country who is just one step above a mugshot?

Generally, when it comes down to a final presidential election, party loyalty creates the divide between candidates. A 2021 study by the Washington Post regarding the 2020 election concluded that about 95 percent of registered Democrats voted for the Democratic candidate while only about 5 percent voted for a Republican candidate. A similar trend can be seen with registered Republicans, about 95 percent of whom voted for the Republican candidate. Based on each person's political party-based biases, it makes sense that they will believe that the candidate that has

done the fewest bad things will be the one who aligns with their own political values. Therefore, considering that the final election comes from party loyalty-based biases, we would hope that the primary elections would eliminate the candidates that would have the most "wrong with them," however you want to define that. Thus, the final candidates in a presidential election would hopefully not only have the least wrong with them, but would allow the trend of party loyalty to stay intact with a reasonable candidate on either side to settle for, as the most polarizing and problematic candidates would have already been eliminated.

In this context, doesn't it mean that, in crunch time, we should be working to eliminate the candidates who are the most problematic rather than settling for ones based on our lowered political standards? Granted, we assume that the final two candidates in an election would already be the least problematic, but we know from recent elections that our trust in a more moral candidate such as Hillary Clinton can still be surpassed by Donald Trump, a very controversial candidate that some people would have assumed would have been eliminated earlier on. Although cancel culture is cancellable in and of itself, it seems that any candidates who have cancellable traits such as sexual assault charges, evidence behind their stealing of an election, or slur usage, should not have as much power as they do. When we see these kinds of traits in the art or music world, we do our best to separate the art from the artist, but in this context, the art of public policy is so directly tied to the artist's views and past actions that we should not be letting them slide or lowering our standards. While America continues to search for the presidential candidates, we should not look for the biggest persona or the most wealthy candidate, but instead, remember the humble peanut farmer. Carter's time in office is long gone, but he's a prime example of the candidate that we desperately need — hardworking, relatable, and passionate about truly improving the country. ■



graphic: Caroline Gu

## CHEERS

## STUFF WE LIKE

## STUFF WE DON'T

## JEERS

Our **FRIENDS**

"GUTS" by Olivia Rodrigo

Season two of "HEARTSTOPPER"

MERCURY OUT OF retrograde

TOWER sign-ups

DELTA MATH'S updated interface

HOLLY CHRISTIANSEN'S natural hair color

Waking up **EARLY**

SAT PREP

MAIN INTERSECTION traffic

Tower **DJ-ING**

CRYING at PHS

Accounting for **SIGNIFICANT FIGURES**

Lorelai **GILMORE**

PHS **COLDS**

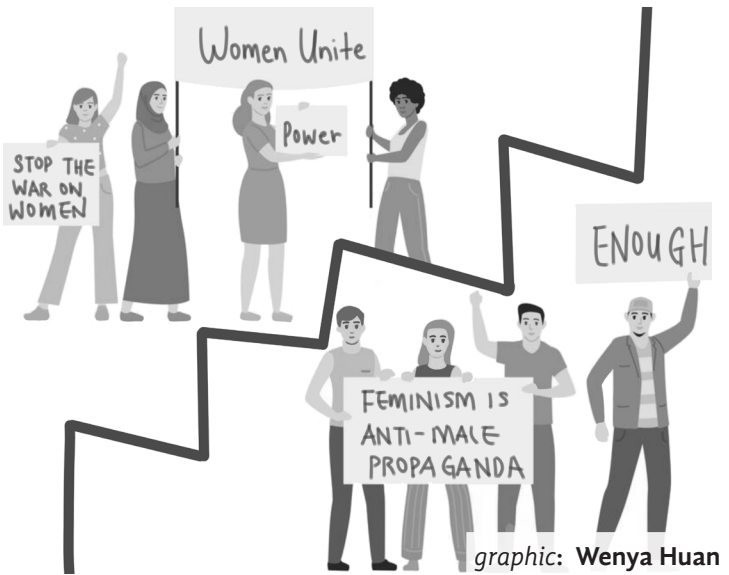
PHS SPEAKS  
OUT HAS GONE  
DIGITAL!

TO FIND OUT PHS STUDENTS FAVORITE FALL DRINKS VISIT  
TOWERPHS.COM OR CHECK OUT THE TOWER ON ALL  
PODCAST PLATFORMS



# Feminism is misunderstood

Chloe Zhao, CONTRIBUTING WRITER and Claire Tang, STAFF WRITER



“She’s Barbie. He’s just Ken.” This tagline from “Barbie” (2023) brought the topic of feminism into the spotlight upon the movie’s anticipated arrival in cinema. While garnering support from a majority of the public, an enraged side of the audience jumped to accuse the feminist film of misandry and “toxic femininity,” with the movie even being dubbed as “anti-male propaganda” by USA TODAY. This is an all too common response to any form of feminist media, with the negative connotations surrounding feminism leading to misconceptions about the goal of the movement: achieving equal rights and opportunities for men and women.

Not all supporters of the principles of feminism are keen on identifying with the word itself. While 94 percent of people believe that gender equality is important, according

to 2019 Pew Research Center, a YouGov Omnibus study from 2018 found that only 38 percent of women in the United States identify as a feminist. So why the discrepancy? The hesitation to identify with the movement partly stems from the belief that all feminists are extremist. A study by Routledge from 2012 brought to light the fact that the associations of the term “feminism” with “man-hating” and lack of femininity, an association amplified by the widespread slandering of feminist media, were key factors in people’s decision to reject the label of being a “feminist.”

Especially for those born into a world where women have the right to vote, one where so much progress towards equal rights has already been

made, it is easy to view modern feminism as obsolete, with ignorant individuals harboring misconceptions that men and women already have equal rights. From a 2020 study by the Pew Research Center, while 64 percent of Americans see feminism as empowering and 42 percent as inclusive, in the same sample size, 45 percent also saw it as polarizing and 30 percent as outdated. Why is feminism seen as outdated when misogyny still persists in the present day? While women make up two-thirds of the world’s working hours, they only earn ten percent of global income, a reverberating effect of women globally spending three times as many hours on unpaid domestic work as men.

Additionally, there are still 18 countries in which husbands can legally bar their wives from working. This lopsided distribution of unpaid care and domestic work prevents women from entering the labor market, with only 47 percent of women at working age participating in the labor market, in comparison to 74 percent of men, according to the United Nations in 2020. While achieving perfect 50:50 male-to-female ratios in sex-based economic studies is unlikely, feminism aims for equal opportunities so that sex isn’t a burdensome factor in an individual’s livelihood or career aspirations. Currently, women make up two-thirds of the world’s illiterate population, a result of gender discrimination stemming from

the normalization of women’s sole roles as family caretakers in patriarchal social systems. Poorer communities often favor boys when investing in education, while girls face large amounts of gender-based violence at school. These are all factors contributing to the gender gap in education, a major accelerant of the patriarchy. Under the patriarchal social system, men hold a disproportionate amount of power in society. Out of the 11,000 people who have served in the U.S. House of Representatives, since its founding, only 375 have been women. Even today, only 28.7 percent of Congress are women. Being underrepresented in politics directly leads to being underrepresented in decision-making at all levels, consequently suppressing the female voice and undermining their ability to rule on important regulations regarding female focused issues. The International Parliamentary Union conducted research in 2014 proving that an increased presence of women in politics had a positive impact in moving issues of violence against women’s health and education onto the political agenda. The ideals that feminism stands for cannot be silenced when so much misogyny and underrepresentation of women in many fields continues to exist.

What anti-feminists often fail to notice is that the patriarchy,

the very social structure feminism aims to deconstruct, ultimately harms both men and women. Under the patriarchy, a man’s sense of personal worth is reduced to shallow outward achievements: the amount of money he makes, his social standing, and the attention he gets from women. Without valuing and loving themselves based on holistic properties, men may feel worthless and easily disposable, and struggle under the expectations set up for them by a patriarchal society. The rigid gender roles that define “masculinity” also pressure men to not seek emotional help when needed, contributing to the rise of male suicide rates, with men committing suicide four times more than women.

As more media begins to focus on feminism, it’s important to interpret them with a clear eye and remember feminism’s principles of equality. PHS students who wish to become allies for marginalized communities can begin by assessing their own privileges and understanding the true principles of social justice movements. When having conversations about marginalization, instead of promoting division, it is important to maintain an open mind and respect for others so that these equality issues can be effectively tackled. Ultimately, achieving equality starts with having some empathy. ■

“Why is feminism seen as outdated when misogyny still persists in the present day?”

## Trade vs. higher education

Iniya Karimanal, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Princeton is known across the world for one thing: its prestigious university. In town, it’s not uncommon to see shops adorned with Princeton memorabilia or to overhear conversations about famed professors, impossibly difficult classes, and groundbreaking research. This academic air reverberates through our community and has found its way into our high school. PHS’ emphasis on pursuing academia undermines the importance of trade professions as a future career path.

A trade occupation is a career that involves extensive education

to specialize in a craft, but does not require a 4-year college education. Rather, education can begin early through trade schools, apprenticeships, and training on the job, which can begin directly out of high school, or even in high school for students in a dual enrollment program. At Princeton High School, students have the option to dual enroll at the Mercer County Technical Schools as early as in eleventh grade, providing them with a plethora of options for an early start in trade professions. MCTC offers courses in, among other things, culinary arts, health science, and STEM, and is open to any Princeton High School student who meets a certain academic threshold and is interested in pursuing these fields.

At a time where many parts of the workforce are constantly changing, trade jobs are in demand.

The problems that we are grappling with in the 21st century present broader applications for trade professions, from sustainable agriculture to information technology. The demand for more skilled tradespeople in these professions has existed for years, but became even more prominent with the passing of the Inflation Reduction Act in August 2022, which poured billions of dollars in funding into climate-friendly projects. Tradespeople are indispensable for installing and maintaining green infrastructure, and the lack of these professionals makes it near impossible to attain climate goals. As a society, we need to adapt to the changing economic and environmental landscape by engineering practical solutions to growing challenges. The increasing demand for solar panels to combat harmful energy use, for instance, requires a skilled workforce of tradespeople across industries.

Affordability is another major selling point for trade school. In a world where student loan debt affects millions of young people, the Center for Employment Training reports that, “Students who attend trade school graduate with an average of \$10,000 of debt, while students who attend college collect an average student debt of

\$36,327.” That’s why, according to Options Skills, one of the UK’s lead trade training providers, by the age of 22, tradespeople can earn a living wage. Since this path prioritizes the rapid attainment of skills relevant to a specific profession, those pursuing the trades are granted a speedy entrance to the trade workforce and can achieve financial stability much sooner. Attending college and potentially having to pay off loans delays the process of entering the workforce, which is why for the general population, earning a living wage often doesn’t happen until the age of 29, according to the same study by Options Skills.

One main reason people hesitate when deciding on whether to attend trade school is the societal stigma associated with trade professions. Many have preconceived notions about what kinds of people pursue such careers, often connecting tradespeople with those who are simply unsuccessful in school settings. In reality, those who pursue trade have a diverse array of unique skills that require focus

and top-notch problem solving abilities. The hands-on experience can appeal to many who seek challenges that aren’t provided by a typical higher education setting. While the importance and relevance of trades professions and trade school has not ceased, there is clearly a major stigma against this career path in modern society, especially in academically driven schools such as PHS. The idea that tradespeople are somehow inferior to those in academic, business, or other non-manual fields simply because they have a different educational background is quite simply incorrect. PHS should do more to support students interested in trades careers, instead of further contributing to the stigma that follows these professions. A sense of curiosity surrounding where each student is going after PHS is completely understandable, but assuming that pursuing higher education is the norm continues to downplay the importance of trades within our society. ■

“As a society, we need to adapt to the changing economic and environmental landscape by engineering practical solutions to growing



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# Why PHS is more than a ranking

Editorial

The appeal of the US News and World Report’s yearly ranking of our country’s institutions of higher learning is obvious. Students and parents alike are transfixed by what, in the midst of the undeniably stressful college application process, feels like the right way to quantify the degrees of a senior’s “success” or “failure.” But the effects of highlighting a handful of highly selective institutions — and feeding into the aura of status that comes with them — stretch far beyond validating roughly 70,000 undergraduates that attend Ivy League schools each year. In fact, the US News boasts that over the past 12 months alone, 35 million people consulted its rankings.

In the midst of this search for a definitive hierarchy of America’s colleges and universities, some are stopping to wonder whether the US News’ list has too much influence over the undergraduate admissions process. Recently, schools have begun to raise protests about the rankings, highlighting how they can be biased against programs hoping to further socioeconomic diversity and often fail to reflect institutional values. As a result, Columbia University, Colorado College, Bard College, Rhode Island School of Design, and Stillman College recently withdrew from the company’s undergraduate rankings, while Yale, Harvard, the University of Pennsylvania, and Stanford dropped out of law school rankings. It’s time that the US News’ high school rankings came under the same scrutiny. PHS’ drop from the 490th spot to 534th on the 2023 rankings, which were released on August 29, should not be a cause for alarm; rather than panicking about our “excellence” coming to an end, we should thank the school for pivoting away from the blind pursuit of a test score-driven image of perfection.

Although a number of factors are considered when US News formulates its high school rankings, an almost overwhelming emphasis is placed on standardized tests. In fact, out of the criteria for the rankings, 40 percent of all “uniquely weighted factors” relate directly to AP classes and another 50 percent relate to state testing performance, while only ten percent relate to graduation rates. This means that in order to top the rankings, uber-competitive high schools must encourage even their freshmen to struggle through AP-heavy course loads, a move that even the College Board, the company behind the exams, disapproves of. Because grinding through inscrutable textbooks and mountains of test prep resources restricts free time and prevents students from actually enjoying the process of learning new things, this single-minded focus on test scores forces schools to undervalue the mental and behavioral health of their students. Even as top-tier universities switch to test-optional admissions policies, the “best” high schools are forced to teach their students how to maximize their scores on stale state-wide examinations and shoulder the unreasonable course loads required to take upwards of five AP classes at once.

Because few students are able to function in the high-pressure environments of the US News’ top-ranking high schools, most don’t have open enrollment. Take PHS’ standing as the twelfth-best public school in New Jersey by the company Niche, for example. Although the eleven schools ranked higher than PHS are technically public schools, they are all defined as magnet schools, meaning that they allow for selective admissions policies.

While ranking systems like those used by the US News and World Report are for a large part without alternatives, it’s time for everyone to recognize that there is more that defines a school than just test scores and graduation rates. To more accurately assess a school, we have to keep in mind that there are some factors that cannot be quantified — students’ emotional well-being, safety, ability to pursue their passions — but are nonetheless significant. ■

# From highlighters to Post-its: our take on romanticizing studying

Shaya Bhatia and Joy Chen, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Social media has only intensified our obsession with romanticizing school and studying. The hashtag #romanticizemyourlife has garnered over 131 thousand posts on Instagram, with #studyaesthetic beating it with 198 thousand posts. These posts are composed of anything from flawlessly organized desk set-ups to vlogs of cafe study dates. As fun and harmless as all that may sound, oftentimes these idealized studying mindsets set unrealistic expectations for school and contribute to hustle culture, a societal pressure to remain productive and on-task at all times.

It is understandable that students may feel as though without some method of motivating themselves, they cannot focus on their schoolwork. This is why many people turn to romanticizing their tasks to persevere through their workloads. Yes, it can put a fun twist on otherwise mundane activities, and for some students, that may be a good enough reason to adopt this as a motivational technique. However, what these students do not realize is that the negative effects of this tactic may outweigh the positive ones. At first, building a pleasurable routine around studying — which may include perfecting your handwritten notes, lighting a candle, or color-coordinating your supplies — can be overwhelmingly tempting. But after a while, one begins to notice the overall toxicity that these behaviors create. The high standards for the aesthetic of it all can be unrealistic, and the push to always be constantly and diligently working

creates unnecessary pressure, which breeds a destructive collective mindset surrounding the trend.

Romanticizing studying creates an image of the perfect way to study for tests, review notes, and complete homework. However, it is sometimes difficult for students to achieve such “perfect” study sessions. Not all people have the time, energy, and financial resources to buy supplies often tied to romanticizing school and studying. Through general media, fancy stationery and other aesthetic supplies are promoted almost everywhere; this sets materialistic standards that are quite exclusive and unrealistic. Students that participate in this trend most likely get the idea from films and videos that present often unattainable studying routines and environments. When we realize that reality is different from the expectations formed when watching these characters we idolize, it often results in disappointment, shame, and an unnecessary pressure to work hard toward unreasonable standards in order to imitate these online or fictional personalities.

Not only does romanticizing studying set unattainable standards for students, but it also acts as a form of procrastination. It has granted students a way to slack off from actually studying, yet still feel as though they are accomplishing something. By creating an aesthetic to-do list and adding calligraphy titles to our notes, there is an illusion of accomplishing productive tasks, but are any of these add-ons as important as actually studying? The urge to make



graphic: Caroline Gu

our studying environment perfect and ideal may end up leading to a decrease in productivity because of all the time spent on unnecessary tasks and distractions.

Another distraction that may arise when one romanticizes their studying is external noises and sounds. Some people recommend listening to a studying playlist while completing schoolwork, as it creates a certain ambiance that is helpful for some individuals. However, that may be extremely distracting for other students, and having outside noises while trying to focus on work can be very off-putting and unhelpful. The same is true for people who find it difficult to study in public spaces. There is a branch of this trend that fixates

# The Tower

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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 14 Tower 2023 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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Why PHS should have a marine biology class

By **Zoe Nuland**, STAFF WRITER and **Chloe Zhao**, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

It’s mind blowing to grasp that the vast expanse of dark blue water we watch while relaxing on the Jersey Shore makes up less than a fraction of the entire ocean, which houses 76,878 known species of marine animals and occupies almost 71 percent of the Earth’s surface. As with all mysteries, questions arise and studies accompany them; marine biology, the study of marine life, and human impact on the marine ecosystems, places a focus on the miracle that is our oceans. As pollution and climate change have become recurring topics in current times, the need for environmental awareness has surged, and a general environmental science class may not meet the demands for in-depth study of marine science.

Due to the diversified nature in the PHS course catalog, students are able to take a deep dive into specialized science topics, including organic chemistry, planetary science, environmental science, anatomy, forensics, and more. Yet for some reason, marine biology is absent. On a hot summer day, the common thought process of a New Jersey resident would be to spend a day at the beach and swim in the ocean. Being exposed to the staple that is the Jersey Shore, many New Jersey students develop a love for the ocean, and in turn, the marine sciences.

“We are a coastal state. New Jersey is famous for its beaches. There’s so many opportunities in the state that I think we should take advantage of. ... We should absolutely be integrating more into our curriculum,” said biology and research teacher Mark Eastburn.

Unfortunately, an extended trip to the shore might be slightly out of reach for the average student. Including a marine biology course at PHS, however, could make learning about the ocean more accessible, fueling the curiosity of students who don’t have the resources to go down to the shore for longer periods of time.

Aside from fostering greater curiosity about the ocean among students, a marine biology class could also help point students toward a prospective major. Recently, students have increasingly been undecided about their majors when entering college. Fortunately, providing more specialized courses that properly direct students could remedy this disorientation. In essence, a marine biology class may just be the specialized science class PHS students need.

The sheer amount of undiscovered and understudied marine substances and life could have a plethora of uses – possibly discovering alternate biofuels to save the planet, or even curing diseases. PHS’ resources and university collaboration opportunities can play a role in developing scientific interests, possibly resulting in future discoveries.

“This is a very unique place where you can make amazing things happen. You can’t do this anywhere else. One town over, Westminster; they can’t do this. Montgomery; they can’t do this. We can do this. And we’re the only ones, so let’s leverage that,” said Eastburn. “Let’s not be West Windsor. Let’s not be Ewing, let’s not be Montgomery. Let’s be frickin’ Princeton.”

graphics: **Sara Hu**



Deep Ocean Tech  
**Asya Morosov**, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The deep sea is one of the most mysterious places on Earth, less accurately mapped than even Mars. Many robots and remotely operated vehicles have been sent down to explore the deepest known parts of the ocean, the Mariana Trench and Challenger Deep. However, previous deep ocean robots were too big and bulky, making maneuvering through unknown territory nearly impossible. This changed in 2021; a Chinese robotics team, led by Guorui Li of Zhejiang University in Hangzhou, sought to apply soft robotics to deep sea exploration. The team's soft robot was based on the Mariana hadal snailfish, a creature native to the Mariana Trench. The team mimicked the snailfish by creating a more flexible "skull," able to withstand crushing pressures, and by incorporating fins so that the robot could move more freely. After preliminary testing, the robot was sent to explore the Mariana Trench while attached to a deep sea lander, a mission it returned from with great success. Although the soft robot was slow and weak against currents, its navigability, small size, and deep diving prowess were a big step forward in biologically inspired robotics and deep sea exploration. ■

How Southeast Asia is fighting back to save coral reefs  
**Katie Qin**, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Due to the ravaging effects of climate change, coral reefs globally are on the decline. United against the same problem, both scientific and local communities in the Coral Triangle are working to protect their reefs. At Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok a team led by Dr. Suchana Chavanich is focusing on coral spore cryopreservation, a technique by which scientists preserve coral sperm for future generations. Additionally, native divers of Tidung Island, Indonesia, concerned about damage caused by pollution and overfishing, are transplanting coral all around the island to encourage growth. Thankfully, these efforts have been working. On the island, coral growth rates are 10-15 centimeters annually, and projected to increase even more. This island's success story really goes to show that every community can make a difference, and that the ocean *can* be saved. ■

Diving into myth: the legacy of Atlantis  
**Jieruei Chang**, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The ocean is quite a poetic oxymoron. For hundreds of thousands of years, it has separated cultures with vast seas and treacherous storms, and yet it has also unified them in contemplating the same majestic waters. As they gazed, they thought of stories. What does the ocean hold, hidden beneath its seemingly endless waves?

One story in particular has transcended both cultural boundaries and time: the lost city of Atlantis. This myth originated some two thousand years ago when the Greek philosopher Plato wrote the "Timaeus" and the "Critias," in which a fictional character, Solon, tells Critias a story about a land that sank beneath the waves some nine thousand years before his time. According to Plato, Solon heard of Atlantis from some Egyptian priests while journeying in Africa. In reality, Plato likely made it up.

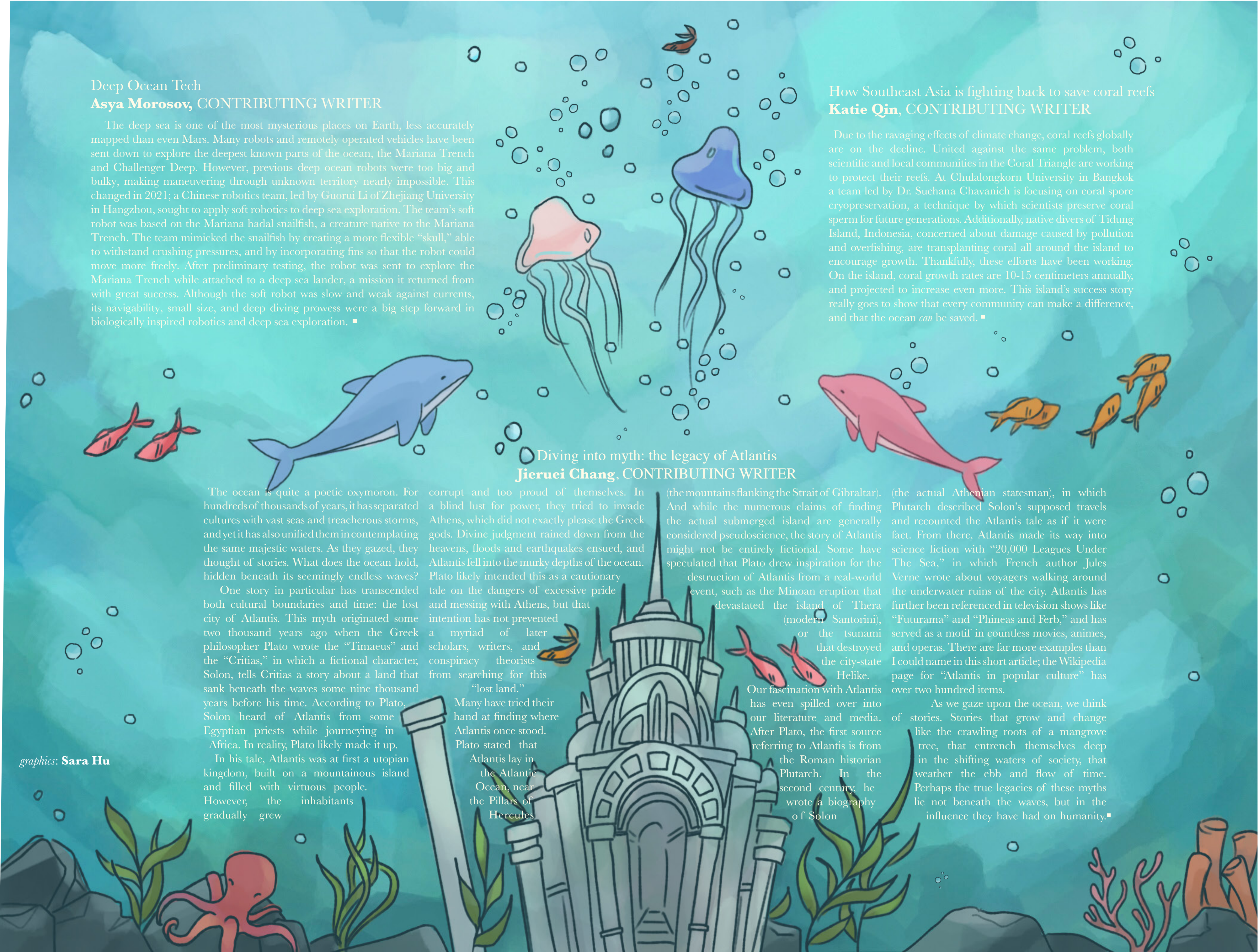
In his tale, Atlantis was at first a utopian kingdom, built on a mountainous island and filled with virtuous people. However, the inhabitants gradually grew

corrupt and too proud of themselves. In a blind lust for power, they tried to invade Athens, which did not exactly please the Greek gods. Divine judgment rained down from the heavens, floods and earthquakes ensued, and Atlantis fell into the murky depths of the ocean. Plato likely intended this as a cautionary tale on the dangers of excessive pride and messing with Athens, but that intention has not prevented a myriad of later scholars, writers, and conspiracy theorists from searching for this "lost land."

Many have tried their hand at finding where Atlantis once stood. Plato stated that Atlantis lay in the Atlantic Ocean, near the Pillars of Hercules (the mountains flanking the Strait of Gibraltar). And while the numerous claims of finding the actual submerged island are generally considered pseudoscience, the story of Atlantis might not be entirely fictional. Some have speculated that Plato drew inspiration for the destruction of Atlantis from a real-world event, such as the Minoan eruption that devastated the island of Thera (modern Santorini), or the tsunami that destroyed the city-state of Helike. Our fascination with Atlantis has even spilled over into our literature and media. After Plato, the first source referring to Atlantis is from the Roman historian Plutarch. In the second century, he wrote a biography of Solon (the actual Athenian statesman), in which Plutarch described Solon's supposed travels and recounted the Atlantis tale as if it were fact. From there, Atlantis made its way into science fiction with "20,000 Leagues Under the Sea," in which French author Jules Verne wrote about voyagers walking around the underwater ruins of the city. Atlantis has further been referenced in television shows like "Futurama" and "Phineas and Ferb," and has served as a motif in countless movies, animes, and operas. There are far more examples than I could name in this short article; the Wikipedia page for "Atlantis in popular culture" has over two hundred items.

As we gaze upon the ocean, we think of stories. Stories that grow and change like the crawling roots of a mangrove tree, that entrench themselves deep in the shifting waters of society, that weather the ebb and flow of time. Perhaps the true legacies of these myths lie not beneath the waves, but in the influence they have had on humanity. ■

graphics: **Sara Hu**





# ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

## “Barbie”: a lesson, not a solution

Todor Pophristic, STAFF WRITER  
Tessa Silver, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

From memes to style inspiration, it's been hard to escape “Barbie” (2023) this summer, and for good reason. Though one might not expect much more of the movie than its bright pink hues and sparkles that are heavily featured in its beginning sequences, “Barbie” has a lot more to it. As the film progresses, “Barbie” reveals director Greta Gerwig’s examinations of womanhood and of the role of the patriarchy in today’s era.

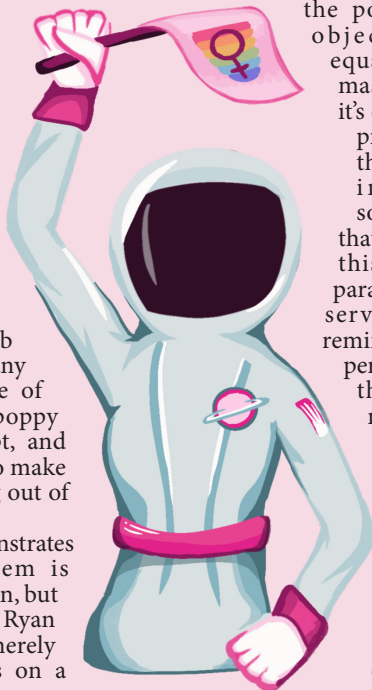
In Barbieland, each of the Barbies has her own job, from doctor to president, while the Kens are devoted to constantly supporting the Barbies in all that they do. The Barbies believe that this depiction of women has “solved feminism” in the real world, and they are proud of themselves for helping women realize their capabilities. But their female empowerment has its limits, as the Barbies shun all imperfections. They are terrified of being any less than perfect, and when the stereotypical Barbie (played by Margot Robbie) starts noticing defects in herself, she’s willing to do anything to revert back to her perfect life.

When her journey takes her to the real world, she discovers that the lives of most human women don’t contain any of the dream houses and dance parties of hers. An impassioned speech by Gloria (played by America Ferrera), a woman in the real world, sheds light on the impossible standards women constantly face: “You have to be thin, but not too thin. And you

can never say you want to be thin. You have to say you want to be healthy, but also you have to be thin.” Though the Barbie doll is known for her unattainable body and enforcement of stereotypes about women, the movie itself takes a contrasting point of view, arguing for the acceptance and embracement of human flaws. This message isn’t exactly original or groundbreaking, but it is more than you would expect from a movie about Barbie, and it does the important job of giving a spotlight to many feminist issues. Its message of acceptance, along with a poppy soundtrack, humorous script, and stylish costumes, is enough to make any viewer feel good walking out of the theater.

Additionally, the film demonstrates how the patriarchal system is detrimental not only to women, but also to men. Ken (played by Ryan Gosling), once considered merely Barbie’s accessory, embarks on a transformative adventure that exposes the insidious nature of objectification. As he ventures into a fiercely competitive and toxic male environment, Ken finds himself surrounded by a culture that

objectifies women, reducing them to mere commodities. This environment, unfortunately, thrives on the possession of these objectified women, equating sexism with masculinity. However, it’s only once Ken has a profound realization that he is “Kenough,” independent of societal expectations, that he breaks free from this toxic masculine paradigm. His journey serves as a powerful reminder that, along with perpetuating misogyny, the patriarchy also negatively impacts men, trapping them in a never-ending cycle of insecurity and unhealthy competition. “Barbie” masterfully explores these themes, offering audiences a thought-provoking narrative that encourages us all to challenge and dismantle harmful societal norms. “Barbie” (2023) takes responsibility

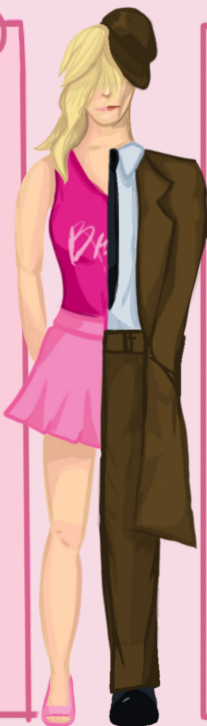


graphic: Mia Gatzke

## “Barbenheimer”: the clash of the summer

Marina Yazbek Dias Peres, ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT CO-EDITOR

When the first pictures of Margot Robbie playing the title role of “Barbie” were released, everyone knew it would be the movie of the summer of 2023. Shortly after the announcement, fashion labels quickly began to dress their models in hot pink — most memorably Valentino and Versace — and this hot trend covered the runway for most of 2022 and part of 2023. In January, Pantone even declared the color of 2023 “Viva Magenta,” designating this year’s color a vibrant shade of pink, similar to the one Barbie has frequently worn. Many brands also had official collaborations with “Barbie,” such as Zara, Crocs, Vans, and ASOS, all offering pink products with the Barbie logo on it. ■



graphic: Mia Gatzke

On TikTok, the app’s users began to share what outfits they were wearing to “Barbie” or “Oppenheimer,” creating videos where they entered the movie theater fully decked out in either hot pink or charcoal outfits. This even sparked a debate among users across the platform over which movie they would see first and at what time (a common consensus was to watch “Oppenheimer” in the morning and “Barbie” in the afternoon). Other than on Tiktok, Barbenheimer was also trending on all other social media platforms such as Twitter and Instagram, where users had a field-day photoshopping “Barbie” posters together with the posters for “Oppenheimer,” creating even more excitement for the opening weekend, which led to an incredibly successful result in the box office. ■

Both “Barbie” and “Oppenheimer” caused an immense surge in movie theater attendance, bringing in \$337 million and \$175 million respectively in their first debut weekend, according to TIME Magazine. Currently, “Barbie” has surpassed \$1.3 billion at the global box office. “Barbie” has also broken many records in the box office. It has had the most success ever in the box office for a Warner Bros. movie and it is currently the highest grossing movie by a female director (Greta Gerwig), marking a huge success for women not only in the movie’s message but in the response it got from audiences. ■



graphic: Sara Hu

## Student takes: Team “Barbie” or Team “Oppenheimer”?

Meghna Myneni, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

“‘Oppenheimer,’ because I like physics so I very much like good movies or dramatic movies or TV series about some well-known physicists. It’s also directed by Christopher Nolan, and I like that director. ‘Barbie’ was more like a promotion of social equality, which is interesting to me, but it’s not as central to my life as physics is”. Orion Wei ’24.

“I liked ‘Barbie’ more because it showed strong, independent women creating a future for themselves that sets a good example for other young women.” Besa Liese ’25.

“I would prefer ‘Barbie’ because ‘Oppenheimer’ was very long, but I loved the whole ‘Barbie’ vibe. I watched the trailer [for Barbie] over and over, [and] I really liked the movie. I liked the whole set and all the doll things, and it was a really great movie.” Phineas McCulloch ’26.



graphic: Mia Gatzke

photos: Meghna Myneni



# Matthew Pembleton wins Art Educators of New Jersey award

Avery McDowell, STAFF WRITER



Matthew Pembleton teaches his studio art IV class.

On June 20, PHS Visual Arts teacher Matthew Pembleton received the Art Educators of New Jersey High School Division award for demonstrating an exceptional teaching methodology that helps students blossom to their fullest potential.

According to the AENJ, this award is given out to teachers who have “achieved the highest level of professionalism in the field of visual arts education” and have “contributed their services in an exemplary manner to the Art Educators of New Jersey and the goals espoused for the profession.”

“It’s nice. I’ve been teaching [for] almost ten years, [so] this is nice encouragement and positive reinforcement,” Pembleton said.

Throughout his career at PHS, Pembleton has focused on a holistic approach to art, grounded in contemporary theory, practice, and skill building. In order to do this, he uses art history and modern events through images and current news to help inform instruction. Along with using this holistic approach to the curriculum, he also works to nurture connections with his students by creating a very student-centered classroom.

“He provides us with the freedom to take projects in our own direction, but he gives suggestions in a way that fosters creativity,” said Kaja Buettner ’24, a student in Studio Art IV.

Pembleton demonstrates a sense of tranquility deeply valued in education. Because of this, among the art department at PHS, he is viewed like a rock, grounding everyone and calming the environment around him.

“He’s been a great mentor to me over the past couple of years, and he’s fun to be around because he brings my energy back down to a calm place,” said PHS art teacher Bridget Schmidt. “Nothing really fazes him in terms of chaos; he’s just very strong and instruction is the primary focus of his room. He [instructs] in a way that is calm, approachable, and just inviting.”

One of the most fundamental pieces of advice that guides Pembleton’s method of teaching is to have students step outside of their comfort zone.

“Trust yourself, even if it feels uncomfortable or different. If you’re feeling anxious, that’s okay; it means you have room to grow and you need to grow biologically, emotionally, or technically — whatever it is,” Pembleton said.

In both the classroom and throughout the hallways, students have shown their appreciation for Pembleton’s unique teaching methods. Throughout her three years of being mentored by him in Studio Art I, III, and IV, Mira Sawant ’24 has valued his method of honing in on technical skills while also venturing out into personal style and strengths. One of her favorite ways to cultivate her artistic abilities in his class has been through his sketchbook assignments, which have allowed her to practice consistently and try new artistic techniques.

“He’s a really great teacher, and he gives his students the most creative freedom possible, and in my experience, this has really allowed me to improve over the years I had him,” said Sawant.

Students also value how Pembleton lets each student stay true to their personal style, giving them a sense of independence in their work.

“I don’t like hovering art teachers, or art teachers that talk too much, or try to do your work for you,” said Buettner. “I feel like all these things take away from the actual action of making art, and also infringe on my own creativity.”

Instead of imposing himself on their work, Pembleton encourages students to become independent in their own method through small suggestions to problems.

“By providing sketching and painting projects, he helps me to reinforce my own style. He has also introduced me to new art forms, like papermaking. Working with this new medium helped me step out of my comfort zone, which is really important when making art,” said Buettner. “I think his personality and ideas make art class such a fun place for me; his passion for art is also so evident, and inspires my creativity.”

Pembleton’s deep passion for art has influenced his immense care for what he does and ultimately led to him earning the Art Educators of New Jersey High School Division award.

“I really think [art is] one of the most human things that people do,” said Pembleton. “I love teaching art ... You can learn so much about culture, history, and humanity with the artifacts people make. It’s a lot of fun, and I certainly wouldn’t want to do anything else.” ■

## Audrey Kang ’24 finds community through the violin

Sara Shahab Diaz, ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT CO-EDITOR

Audrey Kang ’24 is a passionate violinist who first began playing at the age of four; however, she first started taking the instrument seriously in middle school. She started competing in violin competitions in 2016, with her first achievement being an honors award in the 2016 NJMTA

spring recital. Over her years performing, she has won a multitude of awards, including first prize in the 2020 New York International Classical Music Competition, a gold medal in the 2021 Trinity International Music Competition, and second and third place in two separate categories of the

2023 Great Composers Competition Series. Additionally, Kang has been part of the PHS Orchestra since her freshman year. Throughout her time there, Kang has formed many friendships and created a tight-knit community that she continues to both support and rely on.

**What obstacles have you encountered and what made you keep going?**  
I would say time is my biggest constraint. Sometimes it’s difficult to find enough time to be able to play. But I like to play with my friends, and that is what encourages me to keep going.

**What is your favorite performance you’ve put on?**  
My favorite performances are whenever I perform at a hall. In my most recent experience, I was auditioning for a concerto competition. It was the first time since the pandemic; it was very silent, and you were able to hear your own sound echoing off the walls. It almost felt out of this world in a way.

**What opportunities has it opened up for you?**  
I currently go to the Manhattan School of Music for their pre-college program, so violin has allowed me to do that. It’s also allowed me to be a part of [the] PHS Orchestra, including being a part of the musical and plays. I find [it] really fun to accompany music for many great songs as well.

**How was your experience auditioning for the PHS Orchestra?**  
It was a while ago. I used the second movement piece of Burch’s Concerto and a Mozart sonata to audition. You record a video and just send it in, so it was all online. With that, I was able to have lots of do-over opportunities, so it wasn’t too nerve-racking.

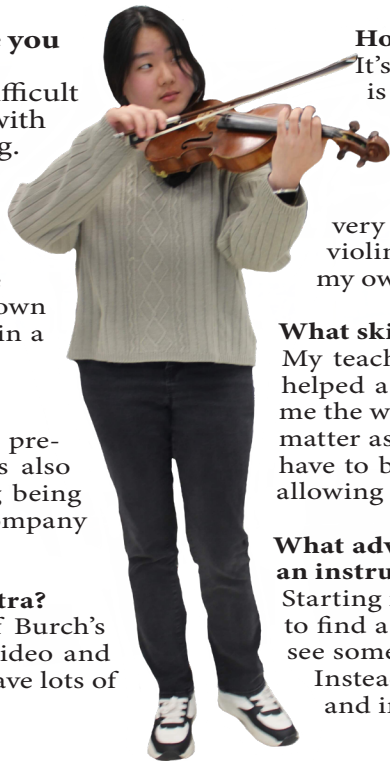


photo: Caroline Gu

**How is your current experience in the PHS Orchestra?**  
It’s so fun. I have so many friends in the orchestra, and playing is really a social experience for me. I get to collaborate with my friends and talk about music with them.

**Who is your biggest inspiration in your career so far?**  
My violin teacher is my biggest inspiration because she’s very encouraging. I also love watching YouTube videos of violinists because I find it very inspiring to see people, sometimes my own age, be able to play so well.

**What skills have you gained that have helped you play effectively?**  
My teacher, Bela Horvath at the Manhattan School of Music, has helped a lot with my technique. I had a previous teacher who told me the way you hold the bow or the way your hand is shaped doesn’t matter as long as you can play the notes, but Horvath told me that I have to be relaxed and hold the bow correctly without being tense, allowing for a much brighter sound, which helped fix my technique.

**What advice would you give to anyone who wants to start playing an instrument?**  
Starting is hard — it’s always hard — but it really helps if you’re able to find a reason beyond just focusing on technique. Also, when you see someone play really well, don’t try to view it as discouraging. ... Instead, view it as inspiring and a way to keep moving forward and improving. ■



# A love letter to fall comfort foods

## Pumpkin cookies: the best solution to indecisiveness

Raya Kondakindi, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Autumn’s leaves have dusted the ground, crunching beneath my shoe’s soles as a yellow bus fades into the distance. The air has gotten chilly as the season for knit sweaters, scarves, and winter jackets unfolds. Excited for the weekend ahead, my walk home breaks into a run. When I’m holed up in my room, wading through the mountain of homework at my desk, only the waft of sweet pumpkin rescues me from this strenuous affair. As the chilly air reminds me of the promise of falling leaves and freaky costumes in the month ahead, one thing that never fails to warm my heart is a plate of pumpkin cookies.

My most prominent memory of these cookies is how I first invented them. It was over Thanksgiving weekend when the issue of a near-expired can of pumpkin purée presented an opportunity for creativity. At that time, I was struck by a sudden desire to make macarons. What occurred then is the same as what leads to both great ideas and disaster: I combined both projects. Two failed attempts and a boatload of eggs later, I was finally

satisfied with the batch I made as I stuck the shells into the oven.

Fifteen minutes later, the delectable smell of pumpkin made it irresistible to not stand in front of the oven, counting down the seconds until I could pull the tray out. Somehow, the pumpkin-flavored macaron crackers tasted good! I was baffled at the result, and left without the desire to create a filling. So, they remained shells, or what they are now known as the Kondakindi family’s famous pumpkin cookies.

Pumpkin cookies, albeit a dessert with a common fall flavor choice, are now a staple comfort food in my household by the time fall arrives, especially as Thanksgiving turns the corner. Their golden edges, crumbly sugar-cookie-esque texture, and buttery yet flavorful taste provides the perfect dessert in autumn. Picture curling up with a good book by the windowsill, watching the last green leaves turn auburn, with a steaming cup of tea and pumpkin cookies beside you. What better way to enjoy the autumn day? ■



## Confession: I love pumkin spice lattes

Chloe Zhao, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

It was late October, and I braced myself against the chilly air as I took a sip from my paper coffee cup; suddenly, I was enlightened — the warm, rich coffee brought out all the notes of cinnamon and nutmeg sugar beautifully. I began to understand why the drink was so popular, especially among other teenage girls. I lowered my cup and glanced down at the warm, golden liquid filling it, regretfully recalling all the years I had missed out on this delicious drink.

The “I’m not like other girls” epidemic hit me when I was in kindergarten. One day on the playground, a girl decided that pink was no longer the best color, and that blue was instead. The reason? Pink was too girly. In a cascade effect, everyone else followed suit. Soon, I began rejecting the pink shirts and dresses my mom had picked out for me in the morning. My notebooks changed from pink and sparkly to blues and grays. I put away my pink plastic gem necklaces. All the other girls in my class followed. We were not like other girls.

This mentality followed me throughout my elementary and middle school years, just now under a different packaging. The “basic white girl”

stereotype was introduced, and it was understood that succumbing to it was undesirable. Ugg boots, Lululemon, knit hats, scarves, and iced coffees, specifically pumpkin spice lattes, were things to avoid because of their association with the stereotype. I followed these rules to avoid being “basic,” pushing away the pumpkin spice options that land on my menus every fall without ever trying them.

However, as I went throughout my middle school years, I realized every attempt I made to avoid conforming to society simply followed a new adherence to the rules. If I wasn’t trying to fit in with the “basic” trends often seen on social media, I was then following the opinion of the girl on the playground. In either scenario, I was listening to what others thought was best, rather than what was actually best for me.

Now every fall, I happily run to the nearest coffee shop to order my pumpkin spice latte; not to conform to anything, but just because I like how the drink tastes. Looking back on my previous actions, I feel silly depriving myself of things that I love just to conform to society. ■

## Finding comfort in food and family

Ruhee Hedge, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Of all the perks of the fall season, the food has to be the most spectacular benefit. As the days get shorter and summer habits gradually fade away, we come to realize that fall is a time of both completion and transition. While the transition between summer and autumn is often a time of productivity, it is also a time of beauty and shedding of the old, the end of the growing season for crops in particular. Also known as the harvest season, autumn ushers in a time of celebration for many farming cultures as they gather their crops. This time of change and new ingredients is a staple of fall culture, and although there are many ways we can show our love for the season, mine has always been cooking in the kitchen with loved ones, preparing some of my favorite autumn delicacies.

This season of autumn ushers in a feast for the senses, with an abundance of colors, scents, and textures. Since fall foods carry all these distinct traits, they create meaningful experiences for all. From trying out the new Starbucks fall drink menu to making our own cranberry jam, my friends and family all have our own traditions we practice every year that involve food.

One of these traditions was going to a farm in our old town when it was open to the public every autumn. Some of my fondest childhood memories were spent running around in the

pumpkin patches, playing hide-and-seek in the orchards, and, of course, making our own apple cider. The farm is also where I discovered apple cider doughnuts, and was immediately hooked. Through these experiences, I soon began to realize that the process of transforming typical fall ingredients into meals can be a way of appreciating the gifts of the season.

As a result of this newfound enjoyment, it became clear that fall foods in particular promote a sense of belonging. Every meal during this period of time tends to be hearty and comforting since it provides sustenance and warmth in preparation for the colder months ahead. This was especially prominent during several occasions in which my family and I would participate. During Diwali, which usually comes around in early November, many of our relatives would prepare savory snacks and dishes as a way of coming together and celebrating our gratitude towards each other. Diwali is a time of spiritual reflection and renewal, and many of the customs my family follow involve the sharing of food with others by inviting them to our place. This again embraces the idea of giving, pleasure, and finding light in the midst of darkness. As I’ve gotten older, I have come to realize how symbolic food is to our fall celebrations and how we can all stay appreciative during this seasonal transition. ■



graphics: Mia Gatzke

# Scan this QR code for this month’s A&E playlist!

Sara Shahab Diaz and Marina Yazbek Dias Peres, ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT CO-EDITORS



graphics: Wenya Huan

As the weather grows cold and the leaves turn orange, here is a playlist that immortalizes this warm feeling of autumn. With songs old and new, from “September” by Earth, Wind & Fire to “the way things go” by beabadoobee and “There She Goes” by The La’s, this playlist will remind you of both the sad parts and the beautiful parts of autumn. In both cases, it is sure to represent this season’s cozy aesthetics. Click the QR code to listen (and maybe take a look at our past playlists too)! ■





# PRINCETON UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUM

## ART *on* HULFISH



### Art about Art: Contemporary Photographers Look at Old Master Paintings

Through November 5

## ART @ BAINBRIDGE



### Threading Memories MiKyoung Lee

October 21–January 7

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

LEFT: Yasumasa Morimura 森村泰昌, *Princess A*, from the series *Daughter of Art History*, 1990. Courtesy of the artist and Luhring Augustine, New York. © Yasumasa Morimura  
RIGHT: MiKyoung Lee, *Bubble*, 2016. Collection of the artist. © MiKyoung Lee. Photo: Joseph Hu



# SPORTS

## PHS football team determined to make a difference

Matthew Chen, SPORTS CO-EDITOR

The Princeton High School football team is off to an amazing start, boasting an impressive record of 3–2. The team already has three shutouts under their belt heading into their sixth game, an achievement that hasn’t been reached in over ten years. With dominant performances over opponents Lawrence and Haddon Township, the Little Tigers have proven that they mean business and are ready to play.

A handful of different factors, one of which being the turnout of athletes heading into the summer pre-season and fall regular season, have attributed to the team’s sudden change in momentum in comparison to previous seasons.

“It really is about the sheer number of kids that we have here,” said head varsity football Coach Charles Gallagher. “Last year we had 42 kids altogether . . . This year, we’re sitting right now at about 63. All those kids I feel like have embraced what we’re trying to do.”

While the vast numbers may seem to make the biggest impact, the hard work, motivation, and, most importantly, dedication of these athletes before and during the season have played an integral part in their success as well. The preparation for this season began last December, and for some carried on towards the end of the summer. Gym sessions, team scrimmages, and team bonding have all been the core of this team’s exciting start.



Cornerback Ben Walden ’24 getting ready for a defensive play in Princeton’s game against Haddon Township



Defensive Lineman Richard Jean-Pierre ’25, Jake Angelucci ’24, and Anthony Famigletti ’24, along with strong safety Remmick Granozio ’24, line up for a big defensive play against Haddon Township in a dominant 23–0 victory.

“We’ve been in the weight room and on the field, and we knew since then that this year was going to be different,” said Joseph George ’25, a halfback on offense and middle linebacker on defense on varsity. “Throughout the whole summer, we spent everyday with each other [and the] chemistry is definitely there. . . . We all work well together, we all communicate, and that’s played a big factor so far this season, and we’ll continue to do this.”

Compared to previous years, this year’s team is much more experienced, as many veterans returned to play their third or fourth years and a strong class of freshman and sophomores joined the team. The upperclassmen, with more game time and experience from previous years, are now able to guide the new members of the team. As for the underclassmen, there could not be a more suitable time for them to grow, develop, and eventually lead the team themselves.

“We had to start a lot of sophomores and juniors last year, just because we didn’t have the numbers of the senior class,” said Sean Wilton ’25, a left tackle for the varsity team. “Now that we all have one [more] year of experience, we’re a lot better.”

While the off-season work for the Little Tigers has immensely improved their performance, the mindset

and mentality that the team carried entering the season has played a prominent role in establishing a precedent for upcoming games.

“I have high expectations for the guys, so I expect us to win the division,” said co-captain Tyler Goldberg ’24. “I set the highest expectations for everyone on the team, so we should get there.”

This high bar is set by not only the captains, but also the team members themselves. As a result, the change in mentality and approach heading into their games has had significant impacts on the team’s results.

“For this year, in particular, our goal, and something I really never talked about at all in my 11 years, is, at the end of the week, we want to be 1-0. That’s it,” said Gallagher. “For high school kids . . . short term success is important; they’re not thinking long term . . . Let’s not think about a 7–3 record, let’s not think about 2–9. Let’s just think about being 1–0 at the end of the week.”

The team has demonstrated that it will take more than just brute strength to beat them, as they continue their season with high morale and unbreakable drive. The Little Tigers came ready to play this season, and are keen on finishing what they started.

“We [have] the heart . . . We care more. We want to win, we know that we can win,” said Wilton. “So let’s do it.” ■



Strong safety Remmick Granozio ’24 coming in to make a big tackle against Haddon Township

## A dive into gender bias in sports

Sophie Zhang, SPORTS CO-EDITOR  
Kaden Li, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

In the sports industry, where records are defeated and rising athletes triumph, one challenge remains unaddressed: gender bias. While both genders established by the binary of the sports world share exceptional skill levels, women’s sports have received less funding, media coverage, and recognition than their male counterparts. Oftentimes, women find themselves left in the shadows, while men get to shine in the spotlight. This contrast is not a reflection of ability, dedication, or passion, but rather a matter of the gender inequality that persists in the sports world.

One of the most notable examples of sex discrimination is when the U.S. women’s soccer team fought for equal pay and treatment back in 2022, arguing for compensation equal to that of their male counterparts. Although they boasted outstanding achievements, they lacked recognition for their dedication to the game. Even athletes of different sports, such as basketball and ice hockey champions, shared a similar sentiment and resonated with this lack of equality. The lawsuit gradually spread its influence worldwide, as more female soccer players from various countries advocated for a better, more equitable playing field. Eventually, this discrimination brought on by the U.S. Soccer Federation came to an end when the dispute settled in favor of the women’s team.

Unfortunately, the equal pay lawsuit is not the only example of gender imbalance in the world of sports, despite the progress made since the United States’ 1972 Title IX law, which forbade sex-based discrimination in federally financed programs. This gender disparity is partly influenced by the demands of the sports entertainment industry, which revolve around decisions regarding championship funding, amount of equipment, and even the quality of food for sports teams, according to a 2021 investigation of the National Collegiate Athletic Association.

“Everything in this country revolves around money,” said Brandon Williams, a PHS physical education

teacher and track coach. “Men’s sports bring in a lot of money, [while] women’s sports bring a lot of [financial] problems.”

Recently, gender inequality in women’s sports teams was yet again highlighted when Jorge Vilda, the coach of the Spanish women’s soccer team, was dismissed on September 5, 2023. The allegations of inappropriate behavior against him included forcibly kissing an athlete on the team, which became the turning point in his demotion. These accusations have followed Vilda since he was hired in 2015, with accounts of sexism, controlling behavior, and unequal pay. Last year, 15 Spanish players, with 12 from his own team, protested against his inappropriate behavior, but it was only until after these concerns reached the breaking point that they were effectively addressed.

A reason for the monetary gap in women’s sports seems to lie in what the average person finds entertaining in sports. A bold rush down the field. A powerful slam dunk. These are the actions that often get fans riled up during major sporting events, enhanced with dramatic angles and gripping commentary. For viewers, stunning feats of athleticism are eye candy, which, according to an NBC News article in 2018, increase hormone levels and neurotransmitter chemicals such as dopamine, a chemical that increases happiness and excitement. As a result, it is no surprise that men’s sports, which often demonstrate more action, can be seen as more popular.

“I think people who watch sports want to look more at physicality . . . and men’s sports seem to fulfill those

people who want to watch those more entertaining sports,” said Jaiden Xu ’25, a basketball enthusiast.

However, in pursuit of forging the latest, hottest sports highlight, a Duke University article stated in 2015 that men’s sports often make sacrifices on the tactical aspect of the sport — an area that women, conversely, tend to focus on more. In sports such as tennis, gymnastics, and volleyball, where the technical aspects stand out, female athletes tend to excel. Yet when it comes to male athletes competing in these female-dominated sports, preferences seem to shift. As reported in an article written by The Atlantic in 2015, fans express greater interest in watching men perform exhilarating shots and breathtaking moves, indicating that there is some unresolved gender bias in the sports industry.

However, public perception of women’s athletic ability seems to be shifting after the Nebraska volleyball team set a record for the highest women’s sporting event attendance, with over 92,000 fans cheering in the crowd. In addition to that astounding record, FIFA recorded more than 1,715,000 tickets sold out for the 2023 FIFA Women’s World Cup hosted in Australia and New Zealand, with staggering attendance numbers at its openers. With this surge of interest taking a turn in achieving gender equality, women’s sports are receiving the recognition they deserve for their exceptional skill and talent. While watching women’s sports undoubtedly offers a source of entertainment, it’s also an essential step to facing the inequality women have carried on their backs for far too long. Perhaps it’s time for people to explore an alternate side of sports and embrace a fresh approach to the game. In breaking down these barriers, the sports world can move forwards towards a more inclusive environment, where, regardless of gender, athletes can be celebrated for their abilities. ■

graphics: Sara Hu





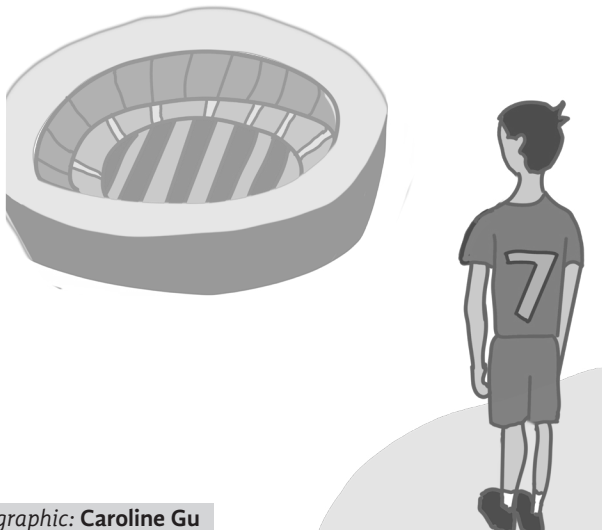
# PHS athletes navigating the pressure of going pro

Matthew Chen and Sophie Zhang, SPORTS CO-EDITORS  
Jaiden Jain-Edwards, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Many student athletes dream of solely competing in the sport they love, but achieving this feat is a rare opportunity that requires hard work and commitment. According to the National Collegiate Athletic Association, only 495,000 of eight million high school athletes possess the skill and talent to make it beyond high school sports. After all, the journey to becoming a recruited athlete is not a decision to be made lightly, as achieving this goal demands players to navigate through a cutthroat environment, rigorous training, and most of all, inevitable sacrifices. Despite this, numerous student athletes at Princeton High School have found a path as a means to continue playing their favorite sport at a higher level: committing to college sports.

Patrick Kenah '24, who was offered a spot at Lafayette College at the beginning of his junior year, is one of these committed individuals at PHS. Having verbally committed to playing Division I lacrosse, he's eager to compete at such an exceptional level.

"I've always loved lacrosse, but I realized that two or three years ago ... [I wanted] to pursue it as my main sport," said Kenah. It was after his freshman season, where he broke the freshman scoring record at PHS, that he began to be noticed by college programs.



graphic: Caroline Gu

Kenah doesn't solely play lacrosse on his school team, but also plays year round for his club Tri-State, dedicating an immense amount of time to the sport.

"I look forward to ... playing my four years in college and seeing what goes on after college with lacrosse," said Kenah. "I'm not too sure which route I want to take there, but I definitely want to keep lacrosse in my life, as it isn't really a huge profession."

Many student athletes face the dilemma of not knowing the career they want to choose, constantly tossing a coin between honing their athletic or mental agility. At a young age, students are forced to make this choice, and it's become an inherent custom to recruit athletes early. Although some coaches, such as Travis Hudson of Western Kentucky's women's volleyball, reject the idea of imposing this pressure on young athletes, they must take the next step to search for fresh skills as a demand of their job.

On the other side of this situation, countless players worry out of fear that they'll be left out of the recruiting process, equating their self-worth to not being able to achieve their dream. In the end, experienced players dedicate numerous hours to elevating their game and work excessively to stand out amongst their talented counterparts, contributing to their negative mindset of not being skilled enough. Although hard work may be beneficial to improving their performance, players feel the toll of continuously having to beat the top of their game, leaving way for dejection to influence their mental health.

"I think this applies to any sport, but just the mental game; you can have a completely different game if you're in a certain mindset," said Leah Rose-Seiden '24, who recently committed to Hamilton College to play Division III field hockey. "Confidence is my biggest issue ... There's a lot of girls that are playing at really high levels of field hockey, so just playing with them [got] my confidence up."

While the vast number of student athletes committing to colleges for sports gives the impression that the process may be easier than it seems, the constant hard work and dedication, not to mention the anxiety caused by potentially not making it, oftentimes are the story for many athletes for the majority of their lives. The constant grind related to their sport usually sprouts from the fear that they may not be good enough to commit to their top choice college, and many athletes consequently end up training day in and day out

every week for years to ensure that they get offered a spot. The competitive nature of this environment increases the load these athletes have to carry, on top of the immense effort put in to get noticed by coaches.

While the satisfaction of seeing their hard work pay off both in their performance and the stat sheet makes the athletes remember why they put in the work in the first place, the road leading up to that point is scattered with rough patches. Many athletes have gone through either physical or mental adversities during their journeys, setting them back while sowing seeds of doubt in their abilities.

"I was hospitalized [last year in January] with a problem with my heart and it really pushed me back physically and mentally," said Brian Donis '25, a varsity soccer player looking to play at the college level. "Not being able to do any type of exercise really hurts me because exercise [and] soccer [is] my life."

The physical injuries of athletes tend to set them back weeks, and, in extreme cases, months, but the unseen side of the story relates to hardships athletes are challenged with the mental battle they face every time they step on the field, court, or pitch. While for the most part, injuries are a sudden occurrence that over time can be recovered from, the mental side of sports, the feeling of never being good enough, or previous rejections set many athletes back. On the bright side though, these mental tokens reminding them of their previous setbacks serve as motivation for them to improve and better themselves.

"Being dropped to a lower team [in middle school] than I was before ... made me realize if I wanted to do something in this sport, I'd have to start working, working, working as hard as I could," said Donis. "And looking back at it, yeah, all of it was worth it. But at the same time, I wish I would have started way, way earlier, [because] as a little kid, ... I just [liked] playing for fun."

For many student athletes, their life after committing for sports, although fulfilling, can also be filled with mixed emotions. The uncertainty of their next step after those four years can be daunting, but all the while enjoyable. While their future is undetermined, they know one thing for sure: they will keep the last few years of hard work close to their hearts and cherish the journey that got them there.

"[I'll] just play whatever I can, pick up games, [and] just always keep the stick in my hand," said Kenah. "This... brought me to where I am." ■

## PHS TAKES: What are your thoughts on the climate change protests and slow plays controversies at the U.S. Open?

Chloe Zhao, CONTRIBUTING WRITER



"[For] most of the people I play against [in tennis], we always wanted to keep it ... fair, but since there is a competition, it's inevitable that some people will want to manipulate the scores."  
- Max Li '26



"I think most people who play tennis have integrity ... There are always some people who cheat, but not most people. [But] I think [there are] ... kids [who] cheat, because of the immense pressure to win, so ... if there was less external pressure, [then] there would be more fairness."  
- Katie Schorr '26



"The [U.S. Open] controversies ... don't shock me, since these kinds of conflicts are expected to show up in all sports."  
- Vritika Singh '26



# Athletes of the Month

## Nick Matese '24: soccer

Chloe Lam, CONTRIBUTING WRITER  
Dester Selby-Salazar, CO-EDITOR

The clock is ticking down, and with the game tied, Nick Matese '24 eyes the ball flying towards him. Spotting a chance, he turns to kick the ball, scoring a goal. Matese has been a key player for the PHS boys soccer varsity team ever since he joined the team in his freshman year. Playing at center back, Matese not only is a great asset to defense, but can score for offense as well. Growing up, Matese was inspired by his mother playing sports and found an interest in various sports at an early age.

"I tried a few other sports [besides soccer] growing up, like basketball, but never really continued to play them as I got older," said Matese. "My mom played a bunch of sports... but I picked the only sport she didn't play."

At PHS and the club level, Matese's talent for the sport was quickly picked up by his coaches, who took him under their wing, and helped him grow as a player and as a person. For Matese, he couldn't be more grateful for their help.

"I've been really lucky to have great coaches throughout all my time playing soccer. The coaches I've been with... have all noticed parts of our team's game that need work, and [they've helped] us improve," said Matese. "Beyond that, our coaches create a team environment that inspires hard work and allows teammates to support each other."

Matese has had many accomplishments in his time playing high school soccer.

Last season, he was able to score three goals even as a center back, an accomplishment that he takes pride in.

Along with a successful season for the high school, Matese and his club team became under-16 national champions, winning the Presidents Cup.

As Matese prepares to leave high school, he also leaves a lot of positive impressions from the people that he's trained and played with.

"I'll always enjoy spending time with Nick because he is the most dedicated guy I know and a great guy to joke around with," said Matthew Chao '25, his teammate. "It's a pleasure being able to practice alongside a talented player like him."

Matese's leadership has allowed him to bring the whole team together. He is able to show leadership skills on and off the field and is someone who leads by example.

"His leadership is often a calming presence for many, especially during intense games," said Chao. "Overall, he's just a great guy and a great leader whom we can rely on."

As team captain, Matese was the eyes and ears for his coaches on the field. Ryan Walsh, the head coach of the PHS Boys Varsity Soccer, also reflects appreciation for Matese's leadership.

"Every single day he goes about his business the right way," said Walsh. "He's not the most vocal guy, but he leads by example, and guys gravitate towards him."

Although Matese's high school soccer career is coming to an end, he has made many memories with his teammates that he can cherish. One of his most memorable experiences he remembers is scoring a goal against Notre Dame. "It was my first high school goal, and also probably one of the best goals I've scored," said Matese. "It was on Senior Day against Notre Dame, who is kinda our rival."

Recently, Matese announced that he committed to the Swarthmore College men's soccer team. While the commitment process was difficult for him at first, he's glad about the end result.

"Honestly, [playing for Swarthmore College is] a dream come true, to be able to play soccer at a great school," said Matese. "I'm looking forward to the challenge of playing at the next level."

For anyone thinking of playing soccer in the future, Matese has some inspiring words. "Find friends to train with, and play as much as possible with people better than you. Find your weaknesses and make them your strengths," Matese said. "Weaknesses and make them your strengths," Matese said. ■



photo courtesy:  
Nicolas Niforatos

## Delaney Keegan '24: field hockey

Dester Selby-Salazar, CO-EDITOR

As Delaney Keegan '24 steps onto the field, she quickly scans her surroundings, the buzzing crowd, and the arriving opposing team. With a deep breath, she tightly grips her field hockey stick. Game on.

When Keegan began playing sports, she didn't know that field hockey would end up being her main focus. Her dad was a Division I swimmer, and from a young age, he made sure that Keegan partook in a wide variety of sports.

"My parents let me choose in the sense that they threw me into sports and they said, 'If you enjoy it, you enjoy it,'" Keegan said.

Looking back on her early years, Keegan remembers the unconditional support that she would get from her family, and is very grateful for it. "My dad was my biggest supporter," said Keegan.

"He was someone who was always there for me to help me through all of it, because he understood what I was going through [as an athlete]."

Keegan first tried field hockey in sixth grade, when one of her friends encouraged her to try it out. Initially she didn't think that anything would come of it, as she had been playing on a travel softball team for the past ten years; but, as she played more, her passion for the sport only grew stronger.

"I realized that I loved playing field hockey more than softball, so I started taking field hockey more seriously, and it became my path," Keegan said.

Fast forward to present day, and Keegan has become one of the most important figures on the PHS varsity field hockey team, being trusted with the captain title along with three others. Head Coach Heather Serverson acknowledges the importance of her presence. Keegan's talent for field hockey has not just been noticed by PHS coaches, but also by the USA Nexus national team, a national program which builds young athletic prospects to become future Olympians.

To get to this point, a player must have attributes that sets them apart from the rest. For Serverson, Delaney has a few.

"I think she has really good vision for both the offensive and defensive transitions," said Serverson. "She's just really good at seeing two plays ahead."

Outside of hockey, the team likes to spend lots of time off the field together, such as pasta dinners on Sundays, Halloween parties in October, and a banquet at the end of the year. These traditions are in place to make sure that they keep that special bond for when it matters most on the pitch.

"We're all a really tight group," said Keegan. "We all love each other no matter what; we're kind of like a cult. It makes me so happy, because even outside of field hockey, we're so close."

For Keegan, this past year has been a significant one, as she recently announced her verbal commitment to Cornell University, where she will continue playing field hockey.

"I was shocked, and it still hasn't hit me yet," said Keegan. "I feel like once I get that acceptance letter, it will actually feel real, but it's crazy to me that I'm going to a school that's so academically competitive."

To Serverson, Keegan being accepted into Cornell is a fantastic accomplishment, but it's not much of a surprise.

"Cornell's a good program and they're a really good school as well. So they're not going to take a good athlete [who isn't academic]. They are looking for an athlete that also has the smarts to go with it," said Serverson. "She's kind of like the whole package."

Some of Keegan's goals while at Cornell are to make friendships and to continue to build connections. Keegan looks forward to meeting new faces in her last year of high school as well.

For anyone thinking of playing field hockey in the future, Keegan displays the same supportive attitude as her father. "Don't give up," said Keegan. "There's always another path; there's always another way to go. Just keep trying." ■

photo: Angela Wu



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