

The Tower

96th Year: Issue 6

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

October 2, 2024

PHS travels to Peru for its 24th annual trip

Meiya Xiong, STAFF WRITER
Angela Chen and Joy Chen,
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

This summer, 23 PHS students visited cultural sites in Peru as part of the annual PHS Spanish language department trip. Organized by Sra. Idania Rodriguez and Sra. Martha Hayden, these trips to Peru are part of a long-standing tradition in the Spanish Department.

The trip consisted of two groups: one tour group and a homestay group. The tour group left Peru after nine days, while the homestay group stayed behind for another 12 days. Students in the homestay group attended a private school in Lima alongside their “exchange siblings,” who were paired with them based on shared interests and self-evaluations.

“It was really fun because they really treated you like their own,” said Mila Trkov ’27, a student part of the homestay program. “Anything that you [wished] to do, they would try and make it happen regardless of if it was inconvenient for them.”

Beyond being provided an opportunity to practice their Spanish every day, participants in the homestay program were also able to experience complete immersion into Peruvian culture — eating breakfast, watching the news with their host families, and going on guided tours of famous sites — an experience near impossible to come by in the United States.

“I think [students] learned more than they even [expected]. Our tour guides [were] people who live and love their culture, and they love to share. So educationally, the history of it and seeing it, eating the food, it’s something that’s not really measurable. [They learned] life lessons a lot, I think, more than anything,” Rodriguez said.

Apart from Peru being Hayden’s native country, Peru was selected due to its diversity and variety of cultural sites for students to visit. In Lima, students toured La Plaza de Armas, a quintessential feature of Latin American city centers.

“In every Latin American country, you’re going to find plazas. It’s like [a] park ... And around the plaza, there are churches. There are historical places that people can visit, museums and things like that,” Rodriguez said.

In Cusco, students spent days in the Sacred Valley of the Incas, where they hiked the iconic Machu Picchu and toured the town of Ollantaytambo, a historical fortress of the Incas. They rode motorcycles 16,000 feet up Vinicunca, the Rainbow Mountain.

“You go there and you feel like you are in a different world. It was a very spiritual experience. And we all just started singing and dancing,” Rodriguez said.

This year, for the first time in the history of the trip, the students also visited the San José de Monterrico school in Lima, where they were welcomed with activities and celebrations. PHS students experienced life as a private school student in Peru, visiting classes and playing games alongside their Peruvian peers.

“When we left, they were all crying because they got so attached to the people that they stayed with,” said Hayden. “[It] was funny because the kids were chasing our bus as we were going to the airport.”

Reflecting on her decades of organizing these trips, Hayden emphasized the personal investment she puts into making the experience more memorable for her students.

“To me, it’s a labor of love,” said Hayden. “It always has been, and that’s why I put so much love and passion into my trips every year.”



PHS students and teachers take a picture at the Machu Picchu ruins. *photo courtesy: Juliet Roden*



From left to right: Luna Bar-Cohen ’25, Melody Strum ’25, Abigail Livingston ’25, Juliet Roden ’26, Josephine Vitaro ’26, Emily Walden ’26, Mariana Maldacena ’25, Nadia Mauger ’25, Maeve Motto ’25, Steven Cenci ’26, Lola Jimenez ’25, Maggie Tang ’25, Alisa Tsai ’26, Sra. Martha Hayden, Sra. Idania Rodriguez, Manuela Borato ’25, Mila Trkov ’27, Paulo Barbosa ’25, Juan Francisco Griffies-Benito ’25, Cooper Jacknow ’26, and Ethan Tauro ’26 take a picture while on a hike in Peru. *photo courtesy: Juliet Roden*

Tower Investigates: How does PHS schedule classes?

Leila Guitton, STAFF WRITER
Aarna Dharmavarapu and Yunsheng Xu,
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Even before the school year begins, frustration abounds over scheduling. Emails and students fly into the counseling office during the first few weeks of school, all scrambling to switch in and out of classes.

Student scheduling ensures that students have access to the courses they need for graduation, while maintaining balanced class sizes. An effective system helps in optimizing the use of school resources, aligning teacher availability with student needs, and accommodating individual student requests.

At PHS, it involves a wide range of staff, including the administrative team, which consists of the principal, assistant principals, and the counseling department.

The process begins with reviewing and modifying the previous year’s Program of Studies. The curriculum office, the School Board, Principal Cecilia Birge, and John McMichael, supervisor of the counseling department, collaborate on this task starting as early as October of the previous year.

“October is the time when we begin to review every single course and say: Is this outdated? Is there a new thing that we can add in? Do we need to hire a new

teacher? Do we have the expertise? Maybe some teachers have a certain passion that they want to develop in a certain course. So there’s a lot of reshuffling, refining and redesigning,” Birge said.

Afterward, beginning in February and March of the previous year, students and families submit their course requests. This data is collected and analyzed to determine the number of course sections needed.

At the end of April, the supervisors send the data to Birge and the assistant principals, who work to create all the students’ schedules. After students and parents finalize their requests in June, the counseling team enters the data into Powerschool’s scheduling algorithm throughout the summer, fitting students’ requests into the master schedule. For this year’s scheduling cycle, Assistant Principal Lauren Freedman served as the “master scheduler,” managing staff scheduling and assigning teachers to courses and classrooms.

Throughout these few months, while administrators work more on building a master schedule, counselors meet with students to help them make course requests for the next school year.

“We want to make sure that every kid makes informed decisions. We’re also tracking each student’s graduation progress and helping them think about post-high

school as well,” said counselor Meghan Brennan.

After schedules are finalized and released to students and families towards the end of August, the counselors revise any errors or course changes, beginning in the first week of school.

“We collect all the schedule change requests on a Google Form. We do that to address all requests in a fair and equitable manner,” Brennan said.

In the time between when schedules are released and the first day of school, scheduling changes are restricted exclusively to freshmen with scheduling errors. Then, in the first week of school, all other grade levels are also permitted to schedule changes in the case of errors.

“For the first few days of school, we don’t allow schedule changes unless there is an error. And there’s a few reasons for that, one of which is so that students will try out the class. A lot of times, students request a class change, they spend three days in the class, and then they realize they want to stick with it,” Brennan said.

Finally, during the second week of school, elective, course level, and free period change requests are granted. These are often more complex than finding a simple swap between periods through friends or scheduling tools such as Saturn, an application that allows

students to visualize their schedules.

“What Saturn doesn’t know is [there are class] caps. You might say, I just want to flip and move in, but what if they’re all filled to the brim?” McMichael said.

In addition, some course requests might be irreconcilable.

“You might request eight classes, but two of them are [what] we call singletons. There’s only one period of each and they’re at the same time. You can’t be in two places at once, so you’ll have a hole in your schedule and end up with a free,” McMichael said.

In order to allow for more scheduling flexibility this year, P.E. and science classes were uncoupled. Previously, the two classes were linked to allow for the P.E. class to be replaced by a free period and lab period once every schedule cycle.

“There were less issues this year because there [were] more variations that the computer could utilize,” Brennan said.

Brennan emphasizes the importance of prioritizing mental health, maintaining balance, and planning ahead while navigating this process.

“We also want to think about what [students] want to do post high school, so that they’re setting themselves up for success in taking classes that will help them reach those goals,” Brennan said.

Continued on Page Three

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

News & Features

Board of Education election **2**

Opinions

What this election means for PHS students **6**

Vanguard

Vanguard branches out: Trees **7**

Arts & Entertainment

Latin American culture and film **11**

Sports

The pressure to get recruited **14**

Meet the candidates: 2024 Princeton Public School Board of Education election

Aritra Ray, MULTIMEDIA EDITOR
Harry Dweck and Reed Sacks, STAFF WRITERS
Avantika Palayekar, CONTRIBUTING WRITER



Mara Franceschi

Mara Franceschi, the race's only incumbent, hopes to continue her work to ensure all students can reach their fullest potential in public education.

After receiving an MBA from Columbia, Franceschi has worked in finance for ten years. A mother of three with two children at PHS, she has been actively involved in the

"I want everybody to find joy in learning."

schools and town since her move to Princeton 14 years ago.

"In the last 14 years ... I've been deeply involved with the school ... I was the treasurer and president of the Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) at Johnson Park and then [the PTO Committee]. I've also been [an] assistant treasurer at the library," Franceschi said.

Franceschi plans to utilize her BOE experience to best support quality education in the school district.

"I do think that it's important to maintain some of the institutional knowledge and experience [of the Board]. I was surprised at how much there was to learn [after being elected], even though I spent a decade before that really involved with the schools ... It's quite different from just other nonprofit-kind of board experiences," Franceschi said.

Franceschi emphasized her focus on the district's budget. She aims to collaborate with other board members to ensure the district remains financially sound, particularly as the student population continues to grow.

"It's a very difficult fiscal environment with the inflation rate and ... costs that have just been going through the roof," Franceschi said.

Franceschi feels her mission, along with the rest of the BOE, is to solve these financial challenges so students and educators are able to focus more on education.

"My overarching reason for joining the board is that I am passionate about public school and public school education for all children, making sure that every child reaches their full potential ... It's not a sprint. It's a marathon. And I want everybody to find joy in learning," Franceschi said.

Ari Meisel is a business coach and active member of many organizations in Princeton, including the Princeton First Aid and Rescue Squad, the PMS PTO, and the Princeton Jewish Center. After graduating from The Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, Meisel worked in construction, but after a diagnosis with Crohn's disease, he was forced to develop a new living philosophy; he has since made these ideas the foundation of his own consulting agency.

"I did a TEDx talk on the entire experience [with Crohn's disease], and I've replicated my results with a whole bunch of other people ... Over the last 12 years, I've spoken on stages all over the world, consulted hundreds of different companies and individuals ... and published 12 books," Meisel said.

Meisel hopes to use his experience in the corporate and nonprofit world to address operational inefficiencies in the district.

"[In PPS] there are a lot of staff who are under-resourced, [such as] guidance counselors [with] a 125 student caseload each," said Meisel. "That's a New Jersey standard, sure, but there are ways that we could be supporting that with free tools and systems, processes that aren't necessarily in place."

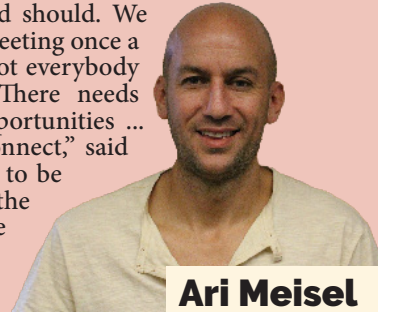
Meisel emphasized the value of transparency, especially following the dismissal of PHS principal Frank Chmiel and the resignation of superintendent Carol Kelly. He hopes that making the BOE more

accessible to community members will help mend a purported lack of trust in the board.

"One of the things I've tried to propose to the board is social media. The board doesn't use it, and the board should. We

have a public meeting once a month, [but] not everybody can do that. There needs to be more opportunities ... for people to connect," said Meisel.

"We need to be in a situation where the community trusts the board ... and [their] decisions."



Ari Meisel



Lisa Potter

After immigrating from Taiwan, Lisa Potter received an MBA from NYU Stern and a master's in Human Resources from Cornell and has since gained experience in human resources and operations. A mother of two with a junior currently at PHS, she has been involved with the Princeton Chinese Language School and the PHS

"I believe that my background being Asian is a strength."

Football and Cheerleading Booster Club since her move to Princeton 15 years ago.

"I believe that my background being Asian is a strength — Princeton itself is close to 20 percent Asian, and, to date, there has not been a board member who is Asian-American. I do believe in being an inspiration, hopefully, [and] a role model," Potter said.

The dismissal of former PHS principal Frank Chmiel initially drove Potter to join the board. Potter believes that her background in human resources would still be invaluable in helping fill other vacancies moving forward, including the position of superintendent.

Potter feels that careful planning during the hiring process can help solve some of the retention issues the district faces. She added that developing a sense of security among staff will allow them to voice their opinions and create a better learning environment for teachers and students alike.

She aims to be a candidate who has the humility to recognize such complexity and collaborate with all stakeholders to find the best solutions for Princeton's students and schools.

"I would encourage the voters to vote holistically ... Having that spectrum [of Board members] because they're going to bring a slightly different perspective and opinion [is] just going to make our decision making so much more holistic," Potter said.

Christopher Santarpio is the co-chair of the Community Park PTO. Santarpio received an MBA from Rutgers University and a Bachelor of Science degree from Villanova University. He moved with his husband from Cherry Hill to Princeton in 2020 after enrolling his son in kindergarten at Community Park and quickly became involved with the school.

"I'm very active in the PTO at Community Park Elementary," said Santarpio. "I started out as a room parent, then organized events such as 'Steam Day' for the entire school ... where the students go [to different rooms] to have a 15-20 minute conversation or presentation [with groups like] the Princeton [University] robotics club and the rocket club."

As an experienced PTO co-chair, Santarpio understands PPS's slate of challenges and opportunities.

To address these issues, he plans to implement a greater degree of collaboration with outside organizations like Sustainable Princeton.

"Princeton is such an amazing, special town [with] a wealth of organizations that are willing and want to help out," said Santarpio. "I think a lot of the challenges that the school district faces can tap into [them] for additional help and support."

As a parent, Santarpio has experienced communications issues firsthand. He plans to use his experience in supply chain operations to bridge communication gaps and ensure the district is running smoothly.

"I think an idea could be ... to create a liaison between the district and [its] third party service providers, and that includes after school with the

YWCA or the food services or any other outside vendors," Santarpio said.

However, before putting his plans in action, as a new board member, he wishes to first understand how the board currently operates.

"I think the first thing, if elected, is just [to] observe [the] proven method that [the Board has] found success in ... and identify those gaps [in the method] and improve them. And then that's when we could tap into the local organizations to see if they could [provide] that knowledge base [not] already in the district," Santarpio said.



Chris Santarpio



Erica Snyder

Director of Cherry Hill Nursery School and co-chair of Community Park Elementary's PTO, Erica Snyder is another first-time candidate for BOE. Snyder holds a bachelor's degree in education from DePaul University, a master's in education technology from East Carolina University, as well as a Certificate in eLearning from Texas A&M University. Having

"It's really important that you find someone who ... has a clear vision."

frequently moved due to her husband's army deployment, she wishes to utilize her experience teaching and working with administrators in multiple districts to help Princeton face its current challenges.

One of Snyder's main focuses is the search for a new permanent superintendent to replace Dr. Kathleen Foster, who has been interim superintendent since October 2023.

"I think it's really important that you find someone who wants to stay in the district and has a really clear vision on how to make changes and unite the district from pre-K all the way through 12[th grade]," Snyder said.

Additionally, Snyder plans to address a purported communication gap between the district and parents, particularly by making information about the PPS curriculum more available and facilitating contact between parents and relevant district officials.

"Sometimes it's difficult to really understand [the] scope and sequence of ... the middle school to high school pathway," Snyder said.

Snyder plans to better support students with knowledge gaps that put them below grade level, particularly black and brown students. She would work to create alternative post-secondary pathways to success for students whose plans do not immediately involve college.

Shenwei Zhao, a first-generation immigrant and IT professional, is running on a platform of openness and accountability. Zhao received a Bachelor of Business Administration degree from Shandong University, Master of Science degree from Ball State University, Zhao plans to use his backgrounds in both business and IT to help the board.

"I think there are some trust issues ... to be fixed I think the way [the BOE makes] decisions, and then the process they get input from the community, needs to be adjusted," Zhao said.

Zhao cited the abrupt dismissal of former PHS Principal Frank Chmiel as a reflection of a lack of understanding between administration and students.

"We had a good principal in the school," said Zhao. "Most people liked him, and nobody really knows what

he was punished for. The superintendent left, and most people don't know [why]."

Zhao believes that the diversity he would bring to the board would improve understanding between the board and Princeton community.

"I'm a first generation immigrant from China. The Asian population in the town and in school ... 20 percent or even higher in the school, and I believe there needs to be some representation," Zhao said. "Even though I don't really support identity politics ... I think there are some cultural values that need to be collected in the decision making for the board."

Most importantly, he hopes for increased communication about the student experience. To

facilitate this process, he encourages all PHS students to reach out to him.

"One thing that we're missing as candidates is [recognizing] what [students want] ... The most important thing is the educational goal," said Zhao. "I really want to hear from students. Regardless if I get elected or not, my message to everyone will be to go back, focus on what our kids need and provide the best environment."

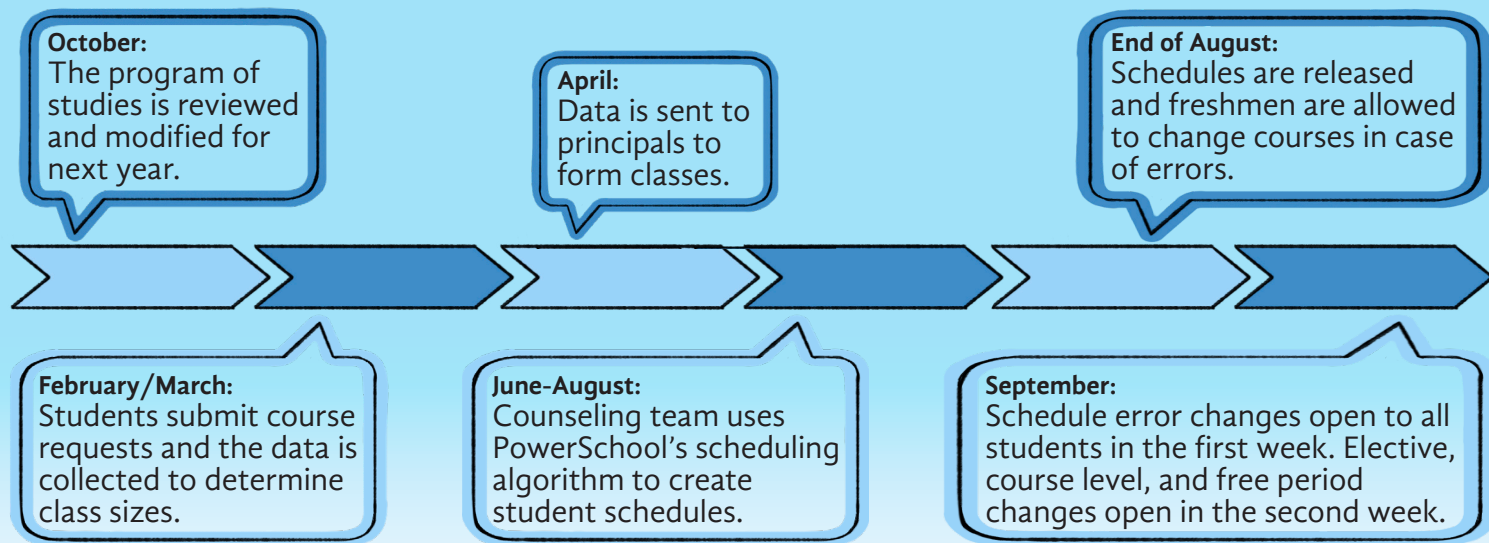
"I really want to hear from students."



photos: Emily Kim

Shenwei Zhao

PHS scheduling timeline



graphic: Katherine Chen

Tower Spotlight: new teachers

Mattias Blix, Daniel da Costa, and Emil Kapur,
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Lauren Fedorko



Fedorko introduces herself to her students on her first day at PHS.

An avid reader and poet for most of her life, Lauren Fedorko has taken the next step in her literary journey by joining the PHS English department this year. Fedorko, a former teacher at Rutgers University and North Hunterdon High School, will be teaching AP Language and Composition, English I, and English III at PHS, returning to the PPS district after almost a decade.

Believing in the reciprocal nature of teaching, Fedorko loves to learn from her students through classroom activities. She often incorporates aspects of history and art into class activities and lessons, encouraging her students to find unique ways to interact with literature.

"One of my most successful moments as an educator was getting all of my 85 AP literature students last year to genuinely love poetry. It got to the point where they were begging me to have a poetry festival at the end of the year. It was

just such a beautiful moment of student empowerment," Fedorko said.

With over a decade of teaching experience, Fedorko has taught various different classes in relation with the English language arts. At Rutgers, she taught a research course called Writing for Business and Profession, while at North Hunterdon she taught AP Literature and Composition, Creative Writing, and Public Speaking.

"I decided to teach because I really love poetry, and I feel like teaching literature is like helping students learn about becoming better people. They become more experienced with the world," Fedorko said.

In her free time, Fedorko writes and publishes her own poetry.

"I think poetry is the key to empathy. I'm really passionate about it and I think it's the key to being the best version of ourselves," Fedorko said.

Sarah Manto

This fall, the PHS science department welcomed Sarah Manto to teach Biology I and Biology I Accelerated, as well Anatomy and Physiology. Having just graduated from Seton Hall University with a Bachelor of Science in education this spring, Manto is beginning her first year as a teacher at PHS. While at Seton Hall, she completed four years of student teaching in various schools across the state, including in Livingston and Maplewood.

"I've always really liked teaching. I've been a tutor, [and] I've taught swimming for a really long time. I just really enjoy it. It's a passion [of mine]," said Manto. "I think to be a teacher you need to have that drive and a calling. I truly enjoy the process of seeing students succeed and getting the lightbulb moment."

In order to create a welcoming, immersive classroom, Manto makes an effort to customize each students' learning experience based on their strengths and struggles, as well as their feedback.

"I listen to my students, I want to hear their opinions... about what were learning and I change things based on how they think the class is going and how they felt [last] year went. In my class... it's about correcting your mistakes and not just moving on [to the next subject] so we do a lot of activities to learn what we may have done wrong on tests, assessments, or labs and it's always a continual process of learning," Manto said.

Since starting at PHS, Manto has described the student and faculty community at PHS as helpful, kind, and considerate, noting the support she's received as she begins her first school year as a full time teacher. She also stresses PHS's unique student body, underlining the dedication and passion she sees in her students.

Outside of the classroom, Manto enjoys ice skating, spending time with her dog, and swimming, which she hopes to coach here at PHS as well.



Manto presents class assignments to her Biology I Accelerated class.

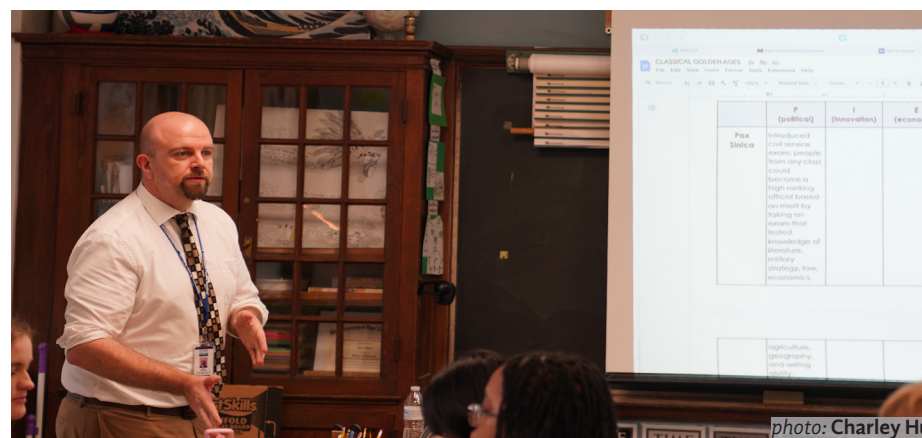
Robert Dutches

Robert Dutches, the newest addition to the Princeton High School social studies department, started working at PHS this year. Dutches teaches three different classes in the department: AP World History, World History, and United States History I.

Prior to joining PHS, Dutches taught history for eight years in various schools. He worked at Newark High School for five years and then spent a year at American History High School and another year at Marion P. Thomas High School. Last year, he worked at Roosevelt High School. While Dutches has spent the majority of his career teaching World History to ninth grade students, he is working on adapting his knowledge and experience to be able to effectively teach an 11th grade class instead. Dutches also has experience teaching AP U.S. Government and Politics, United States History II, and African American Studies.

One of the reasons Dutches chose to work at PHS was the strong community that it offers and vigorous learning environment.

"Not to disparage the places I [taught at], but it just seems like the students are much more involved, not just academically, but in other areas as well. I thought it



Dutches assigns classwork to his AP World History students.

would [be] really interesting to come to a place [where] students just have so much interest. It's almost intimidating because students are so proficient in so many things," Dutches said.

Not only does he find his students interesting to teach, but he appreciates what the school has to offer for teachers as well.

"The culture of the administration is much better. I'm coming from a place where there was a lot of micromanagement of teachers, and here the principal was

very much from the start saying I'm not going to micromanage you. So I like the autonomy, I [get]," Dutches said.

As a high school student, Dutches found his ninth grade World History teacher, who also ended up teaching his AP Government class his senior year, very inspiring. He appreciated what a good teacher he had, and wanted to do the same for other people. Dutches wanted to do his part in increasing college access in places that have traditionally not had a lot of academic success. He saw the

education gap in Newark and wanted to help. However, before starting his teaching career, Dutches finished his education, volunteered, and worked other jobs.

"As I was finishing my bachelor's degree, I did two terms of AmeriCorps service, which is the domestic Peace Corps for a couple of nonprofits. Then I went to grad school for African American Studies and became a paralegal for about three years," Dutches said.

However, Dutches knew from a young age that he wanted to be a teacher, but needed to take care of his son.

"When my son was born, I needed a job where I could work during the night and watch him during the day. [So], I worked at UPS and became a training supervisor there. Finally, I went back to school for teaching and became a paralegal again for about a year while I was getting my teaching degree."

Outside of school, Dutches takes care of his two young sons. Although he does not have much free time, Dutches enjoys reading history books, watching movies and shows, and writing. His favorite show is "Breaking Bad." As a self-proclaimed "history buff," he enjoys reading about African American history, which he went to graduate school for.

OPINIONS

Torn between worlds: multiracial identities

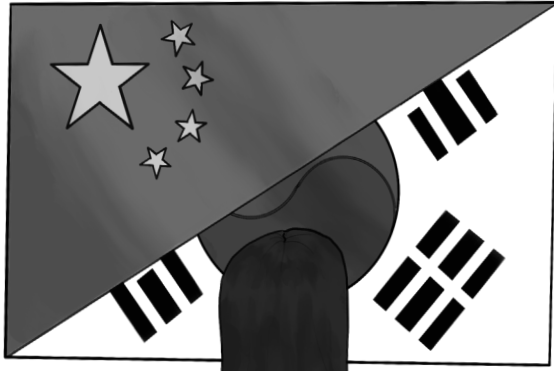
Stephanie Liao, STAFF WRITER

Growing up as an Asian-American, I've often been asked the age-old microaggressive question: "Where are you from?" When I answer that I was born in Manhattan, whoever's asking switches to a more targeted inquiry: "Where are your parents from?" I know what they really want is a clear answer about my ethnicity, so I cut to the chase.

"I'm half Chinese, half Korean."

Most times, this leaves them utterly perplexed.

Their confusion is based on the outdated preconception that a person can only be part of one race or one ethnic group. Despite the fact that the United States' population of multiethnic and multiracial individuals has been increasing in recent years, with the 2020 Census showing a 276 percent increase in people identifying as "two or more races" since 2019, this idea continues to persist in society. Personally, because my last name is identified as Chinese, people often



graphic: Angela Wu

assume that both my parents are Chinese. I often don't get to correct them, so they are baffled when I speak Korean or wear hanbok (traditional Korean clothing) at cultural events.

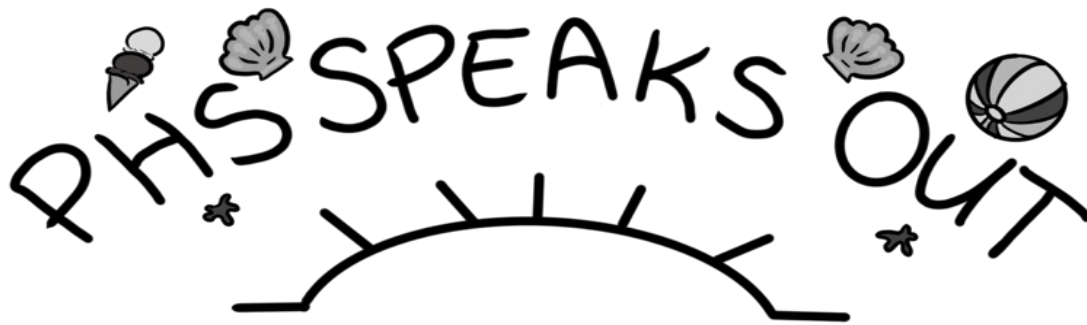
Similarly, in a 2015 study conducted by Pew Research Center, one in four mixed-race adults said people have often been confused by their racial background. Over time, these assumptions can erase the identities of individuals who belong to multiple groups. When people view you as solely one ethnicity or race, they ignore entire aspects of your identity, which pressures you to conform to their stereotypical expectations of your behavior. This is especially true if someone makes an offensive joke about a group they don't think you're part of. As a multiracial or multiethnic person, sometimes your only choice is to awkwardly laugh it off.

Unfortunately, even PHS, with its core values of diversity and inclusion, cultivates an

environment where this occurs. Throughout my time here, I have met many students who are victims of this narrow mentality and falsely assume my ethnicity.

This is an administrative issue as well. In 2023, an online survey was conducted regarding students' opinions on the school climate. This survey asked students to choose a single race from the following options: White, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Black or African American, Hispanic/Latinx, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, and Other. This forced multiracial students to make a choice: should they select the race whose culture they most strongly identify with? Or maybe they should silently resign to choosing "Other," because that is what they are to society — the center of a venn diagram that doesn't quite contain everything from the circles it's made up of.

I cannot speak for all multiethnic individuals, but I often feel inadequate — I'm neither Korean or Chinese exactly, but also not "All-American." As a result, I often feel as if I don't truly belong anywhere. Although I don't think this feeling will ever truly go away, I have found that meeting others who have similar backgrounds helps me feel validated. There is no instant way to broaden societal ideas surrounding multiethnic and multiracial individuals, but facilitating discussion and increasing awareness of this perspective can help people understand the complexity of racial identity. At PHS, it is about time that we adapt our way of thinking to America's ever-diverse multicultural melting pot.



What do you think was the song of the summer?

Tessa Silver and Chloe Zhao, OPINIONS CO-EDITORS

EMILY SUTTEMEIER '26
"HOT TO GO" BY CHAPPELL ROAN

"It's really fun and it's really catchy. I just have it bopping in my head all day."

DAISY PILLOW '28
"ESPRESSO" BY SABRINA CARPENTER

"I heard it everywhere, and on the radio ... Everyone knows it, it's a great song."

SHREYA GAEKWAD '25
"INTERNATIONAL LOVE" BY PITBULL

"It's very hyper and exciting. It makes me feel like I'm at the beach with my friends and I can just enjoy myself."

DEBDEEP SEN '26
"LAST FRIDAY NIGHT" BY KATY PERRY

"It reminds me of a really fun party and get's me in a good mood. Summer is supposed to be fun like that!"

graphics: Charley Hu
photos: Tessa Silver and Chloe Zhao

The pursuit of roundness

Chloe Zhao, OPINIONS CO-EDITOR
Harry Dweck, STAFF WRITER

At the Club Fair this October, we will be bombarded with hundreds of different clubs to join. Our parents, teachers, guidance counselors, and fellow students will tell us that the way to make ourselves more interesting is to join the perfect variety of these clubs, sports, and community service programs.

This process is deceptively complicated. Of course, we can't spend all day playing soccer or studying chemistry. That would be too narrow-minded, not well-rounded enough. However, if we join too many activities — a sport, a couple clubs, and volunteering — that's also not good enough. In that case, our efforts are said to lack focus and direction, and come off as half-hearted.

To "help" us navigate this process, incredibly prescriptive geometric analogies, like "spikey" or "T-shaped," have been developed. Ingenius Prep, a college admissions support group, has articles with titles as ridiculous as "Well-Rounded vs Pointed Students: Is It Better to be Egg-Shaped?"

Clichés are surprisingly accurate in describing the dilemma between doing too much and doing too little. There's the classic saying of being a "jack of all trades," which was intended as a compliment until it was combined with "... and master of none" in the late 1700s. Well-rounded people can both be praised as one "who wears many hats" and criticized for being "a mile wide and an inch deep."

When well-roundedness is defined in this way — solely by the assortment of someone's interests — the results are horribly superficial. A scientist who enjoys music is considered perfectly well rounded and interesting, but if they join a couple too many activities they are suddenly scattered. Actors who spend most of their time on the stage are shallow,

“There is little point in forcing someone who naturally enjoys something to spend less time on their passion.”

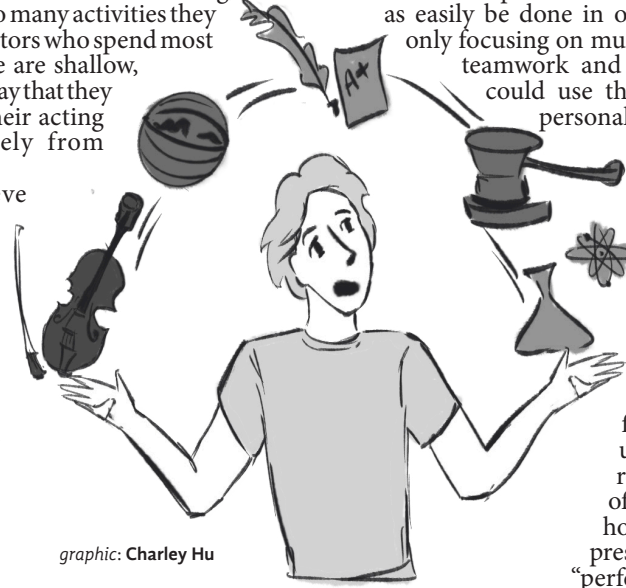
even if the way that they approach their acting varies widely from play to play. To achieve a more nuanced picture, we should adjust the standards of well-roundedness. Instead of a reflection of the types of activities we do, a true measure of sophistication would be a reflection of the way in which we approach them.

There is little point in forcing someone who naturally enjoys something to spend less time on their passion.

naturally enjoys something to spend less time on their passion and join activities they don't care for as much. Of course, entering new kinds of activities sometimes leads to exploration and self-discovery, but that can just as easily be done in one discipline as in many. Even by only focusing on music, a student at PHS could develop teamwork and leadership in band or orchestra, could use their creativity in discovering their personal interpretation, and could volunteer mentoring younger musicians.

Moreover, a student who does many things isn't necessarily developing unique perspectives. They could simply approach two different things they do in a very similar way.

It's certainly easier for high schoolers to let themselves be defined with labels such as "STEM" and "humanities." It's not complicated for ourselves, and easy for others to understand. But reframing "well-rounded" from a focus on a variety of activities we do to an emphasis on how we pursue them will release the pressure we feel to find some arbitrary "perfect" combination.



graphic: Charley Hu

Rising housing costs hurt New Jersey

Andrew Kuo, STAFF WRITER

Most students at PHS know that New Jersey is not an easy place to buy a home, but what they might not know is that expensive housing doesn't just make it harder to buy a house: it raises the costs of everything from insurance to ice cream. Affordable housing should be important to all of us, yet New Jersey's housing prices still continue to rise. To understand why we lack affordable housing, New Jersey has to examine its past.

About 60 years ago, Mount Laurel officials began demolishing the "substandard" homes of lower-income residents. In reply, the residents submitted a proposal to build affordable housing to replace the demolished homes. Unfortunately, an official shot the proposal down, responding: "If you people can't afford to live in our town, then you'll just have to leave."

The residents sued the township. Three state Supreme Court cases later, the New Jersey Supreme Court established that all New Jersey municipalities have an obligation under the New Jersey Constitution to provide low-income and moderate-income housing, and the Council on Affordable Housing (COAH) was created through the Fair Housing Act. Yet, years later, New Jersey home prices have risen to the point where the state has the ninth highest average home price in the entire country. To address this housing crisis, Governor Phil Murphy passed the bill known as A-40/S-50 this March. But how did we get to the point where a second bill is necessary?

Put simply, the Fair Housing Act became a joke. Every six years, the COAH underwent rounds of rulemaking, intended to update its formula to calculate township affordable housing obligations. However, due to incessant legal challenges, the COAH became unable to pass any reforms at all, which culminated in Governor Chris Christie attempting to abolish COAH. As a result, by 2015, the COAH was "declared moribund" by the New Jersey Supreme Court. Throughout this all, wealthy townships ignored the COAH by engaging in endless legal disputes and utilizing loopholes to shift their responsibilities to other towns.

This matters for everyone who lives in New Jersey. Fewer houses and higher demand lead to higher property values. As housing prices increase, so too do insurance premiums and property taxes. With people priced out of buying houses, landlords raise rents to take advantage

of increased demand for shorter-term housing. When a state becomes more expensive to live in, businesses raise prices to pay higher loan fees and rents. Finally, fewer people seek to migrate to expensive states, resulting in reduced commerce and tax revenue. A-40/S-50 aims to address these issues by replacing the COAH with a new framework to calculate township affordable housing requirements, as well as provide support for Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) programs. PILOT programs allow affordable housing to be constructed without putting the cost of construction on taxpayers by reducing taxes on developers and allowing the construction of new market-rate housing. PILOT programs are not perfect, since they don't provide funding to the school board. Yet not every housing development even utilizes PILOTs, and market-rate housing is still crucial to addressing the issue of housing supply.

Despite this, the primary reason that opponents of COAH cite is cost. According to Senator O'Scanlon, the bill "mandates levels of affordable housing that communities cannot sustain." Additionally, PILOT projects are profitable for developers. However, part of the reason developers have made so much money is because of lacking auditory standards, which resulted from a COAH paralyzed by constant lawsuits.

Without sufficient audits, developers were able to consistently exploit legal loopholes in their favor. For example, developers could put together the expenses of multiple projects to overstate expenses, thus lowering reported profits to underpay the city for taxes. This is an issue that A-40/S-50 aims to fix by standardizing the process of constructing affordable housing.

It's also hypocritical for opponents of A-40/S-50 to cite cost as an issue after spending millions in lawsuits

risks of crime, strained infrastructure, lowered property values, and changing community character. While many local officials have avoided making statements along these lines, it's difficult to avoid seeing signs of its influence. The arguments provided against affordable housing are flawed and simply can't explain the fifty years lawmakers have spent viciously fighting the results of Mount Laurel. However, countless studies have shown that those fears rarely come to pass. For example, a study conducted by Princeton University on Mount Laurel's affordable housing found that the town's crime rates, property values, and taxes were similar to the surrounding suburbs, while "the lives of the poor and working-class families who moved there transformed." Many neighbors were even unaware that affordable housing existed in that area. Despite this, the movement still has strong roots in Princeton itself.

In 2022, the Princeton Coalition for Responsible Development was formed to fight against an affordable housing development on the land of the Princeton Theological Seminary, on the grounds that it would increase traffic. PCRD founder Jo Butler later elaborated with the words, "every day people are at Einstein's house... then they want to know the way to Oppenheimer's house. It's a big draw and we're going to ruin it. So, does that make me a NIMBY? I guess."

Ruin it? How? Is Butler still terrified the development might look ugly, despite the project utilizing top-of-the-line materials to blend with the surrounding neighborhood?

Does Butler believe evil developers seek to bulldoze Einstein's house? Will increased traffic somehow injure Princeton's historical value? Or is Butler still afraid of the people who depend on affordable housing? Whatever the case, there's no adequate way to justify her statement. Though the group has made statements on seeking common ground, its actions directly contradict this. When they were told they couldn't sue Princeton's mayor over the housing plan, the group "refused to amend their case" without actually giving a reason why. Additionally, the group has taken issue with nearly every affordable housing development in Princeton and also attempted to halt construction of affordable housing that was agreed upon even before Princeton's housing plan was created.

The easiest way to take action? Simply learn more about affordable housing. Opponents to affordable housing often rely on vague fear-inducing statements to generate misconceptions. Students should confirm the validity of rumors before spreading them, and research the ways affordable housing has succeeded and failed. Students also have exclusive access to a crucial audience; their parents. Murphy's bill is New Jersey's second chance to address the cost of living, and families shouldn't let local officials use their taxpayer dollars to fight it. By simply engaging in dialogue, students can shine a spotlight on New Jersey's housing crisis.



graphic: Katherine Chen



Embark on an extraordinary journey with Princeton First Aid & Rescue Squad!

As a high school student, you have the power to save lives and serve our community as an EMT. Gain unparalleled experience, learn lifesaving skills, and join a team of heroes.

Your courage can make a difference.



Scan to get started or visit pfars.org/volunteer

2 MOUNT LUCAS ROAD, PRINCETON, NJ 08540





Safety at PHS starts with students

Editorial

On top of the frenzy of schedule changes, new teachers, and renovated spaces, the introduction of the school year has come with numerous new safety precautions. From stricter guidelines emphasizing the necessity of IDs to enter the building to the keycard scanners located by every bathroom door, students couldn't help but notice the drastic changes made to the safety measures as they walked in on the first few days of school. Yet despite the school's additional and persistent efforts to promote safety — which also included installing an abundance of new security cameras and interior doors — students at PHS have a history of skirting these rules and regulations. Some have failed and been repealed, such as the visibly worn lanyards, but others adamantly remain despite frequent infractions, such as opening the PAC doors to people outside. But despite the back and forth from the school administration and students on which measures are necessary and which are just inconvenient, ensuring the safety of the school and those in it is a two way process that requires both following and revising.

PHS has a uniquely flexible and lenient tolerance for student freedom — more so than most, if not all, other schools in the area. But staff and administration should communicate this privilege and comparative standard to the student body to ensure the understanding that these

policies aren't unusual or overly precautionary. Conversely, administration should further listen to student voices when designing these policies. The rules may be created with good intentions, but students are the ones who experience their impact on a daily basis. Constant keycard scanning and restrictions may feel intrusive or excessive, but involving students in the conversation can lead to more effective policies that are not only followed but respected, especially as students internalize the rationale behind them.

Students should follow these guidelines, however tedious they may seem, because they're ultimately designed to protect us from outside threats, especially as the nation experiences an increase in gun threats around school areas. In the aftermath of such an event, those who are fortunate to survive often describe a lingering fear, an urge to notice the closest exit, to get away from open windows, and a consuming paranoia. It's easy to dismiss these rules as inconvenient when there's no immediate threat, but safety measures are often most effective when they prevent a crisis before it occurs.

Too often, it isn't until after an act of violence or a significant breach in security that schools reconsider their protocols. After all, no one wants their school to be remembered for what could have been avoided.

What this election means for PHS

Iniya Karimanal and Aarna Dharmavapuru,
CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

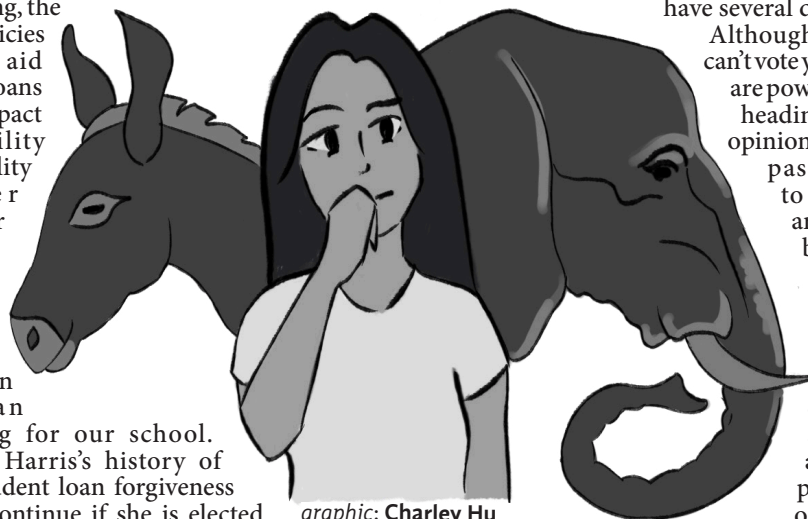
The election season has a tendency to contribute to our stress. Whether it be the Instagram comment sections littered with inflammatory comments, the outspoken family members who are suddenly political pundits, or the relentless news coverage dissecting each and every rally and debate, ideological friction emerges all around us. These constant reminders of political divisions often turn classrooms and dinner tables to battlegrounds of “us vs. them,” forcing people to vigorously attack and defend to protect their values — often closely tied to their candidate of choice. Clearly, Harris vs. Trump is the resounding and ever-present conflict that seemingly defines the current extremely polarized environment. The 2024 presidential race, with its focus on this political division, shows a concerning trend regarding the disintegration of professionalism.

Instead of engaging in essential debates about these policies, much of the conversation has been dominated by sensationalism and personal attacks. This shift away from professionalism and logical debate significantly undermines our ability to make informed decisions — ones based on policies of the candidates, not social media posts. Since the next administration's stance on vital issues like financial aid and student loans will have real consequences for us as students, it's critical to focus on these policy issues rather than getting caught up in all the drama online.

Kamala Harris and Donald Trump have each spoken considerably on their opposite educational policies. A Harris administration will entail substantially higher funding for public education, broader support for clean

energy education, and widespread expansion of financial aid. In contrast, Trump's advocacy of dismantling the Department of Education, promoting personal school choice, and relaxing environmental regulations would lead to substantial changes in educational standards and the overall allocation of resources. At a time when tuition costs are skyrocketing, the candidates' policies on financial aid and student loans will directly impact the accessibility and affordability of higher education for PHS students.

Given that PHS is a public school, a Harris administration would mean more funding for our school. Additionally, Harris's history of supporting student loan forgiveness would likely continue if she is elected and make potential student loans less worrisome for seniors in the midst of the college application process. A second Trump administration would mean less funding for PHS, or — judging by a previous vow to cut funding



graphic: Charley Hu

for schools with vaccine mandates — maybe even no funding at all, as our school district requires students to have several different vaccines.

Although most PHS students can't vote yet, that doesn't mean we are powerless. As young people heading into adulthood, our opinions are valued, and our passion has the ability to influence the world around us. Whether it's by speaking at district board meetings, knocking doors for a candidate, or bridging political gaps through open conversations, our age group plays a key role in shaping and depolarizing the political landscape of our country. Our voices matter, and our involvement can help bridge the gaps in this politically divided society, which helps contribute to a more inclusive and responsive environment for all.

The Tower

Princeton High School
151 Moore Street, Princeton, New Jersey

© 2024 Staff of the Tower

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

Mission Statement

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

Editorial Board

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

Letter and Submission Policy

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

The Tower Online

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

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

PREX

PRINCETON RECORD EXCHANGE

Vanguard branches out: *Trees*

Princeton's roots: the preservation and protection of local trees

Angela Chen and Reed Sacks, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Proudly self-described as “Princeton’s first and most whimsical nature preserve,” the Herrontown Woods Arboretum stands in stark contrast to the regimented consistency of Princeton’s archetypically suburban university-town structure. Rows of picturesque houses with pristine lawns surround a uniquely undomesticated refuge of ecological diversity, native plant species, enchanting trails, and a botanical garden (the Barden). Nestled within the diverse foliage lies the Veblen House, a 1920s prefabricated home formerly inhabited by mathematician Oswald Veblen, a key founder of the Institute for Advanced Studies, nicknamed the “woodchopping professor” for his habit of chopping wood to clear his mind. Today, however, the devoted Friends of Herrontown Woods (FOHW) maintain this house and the surrounding woodland’s trails and flora, including 57 distinct tree species.

Bordering the Autumn Hill Reservation, the 142-acre Herrontown Woods Arboretum is situated near the intersection of Snowden Lane and Herrontown Road. The preserve’s main access point is located just off Snowden Lane, equipped with a small parking lot and direct ingress to the Barden and trail network.

The parcels of land of the Herrontown Woods Preserve were acquired in the 1930s by Veblen and his wife, Elizabeth. In 1957, the couple donated 82 acres of this property to the Municipality of Princeton, forming Mercer County’s first nature preserve.

The FOHW was officially founded in 2013 by three passionate volunteers. The group’s president, Steve Hiltner, has spearheaded efforts to expand the preserve, develop the Barden, and engage the Princeton community.

“Working effectively and positively with the town is really important, since the town owns the property,” Hiltner said.

Since 2013, one of the organization’s main actions has been to clear overgrown trails and create space for native plants, particularly through the removal of invasive flora such as stiltgrass, mustard garlic, multiflora rose, wisteria, and wild privet.

“It’s important to pick your spots, and be strategic. Good timing — pulling invasive weeds before they go to seed — is really important for reducing the amount of work needed,” said Hiltner. “A few passionate volunteers who find satisfaction in pulling and cutting invasive species can make a big difference.”

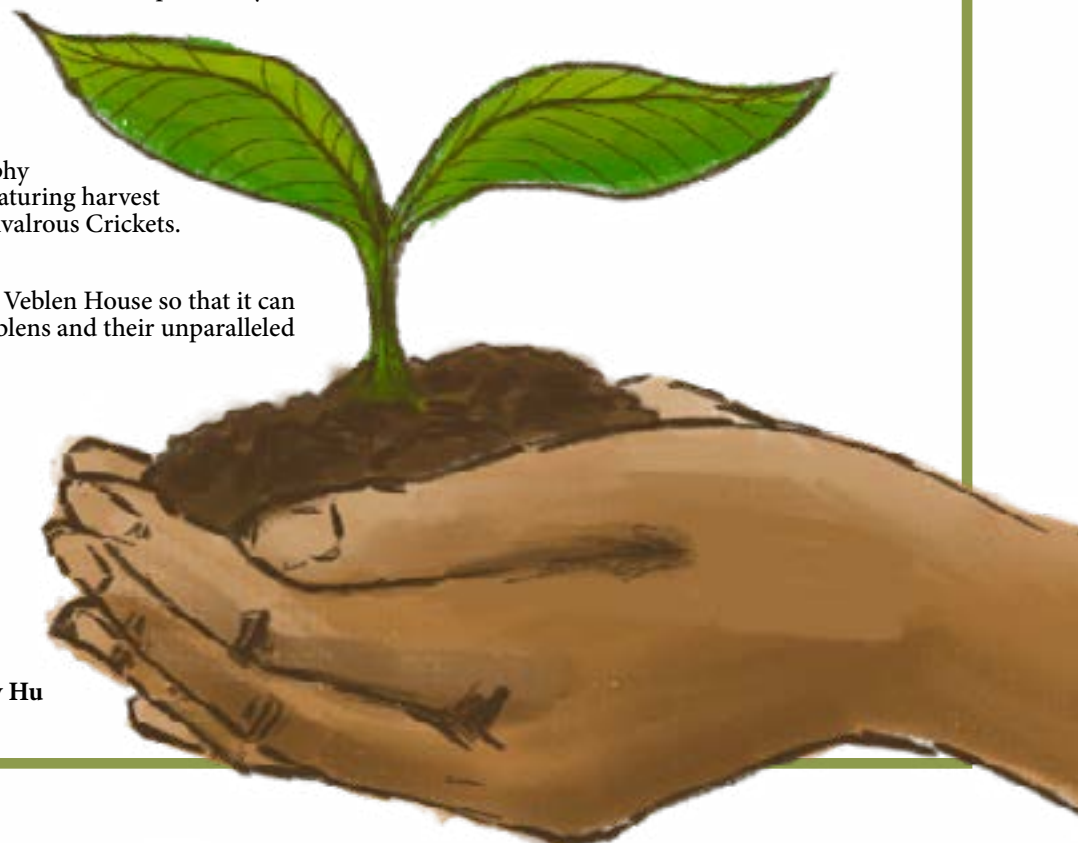
Pallavi Nuka, an enthusiastic local sustainability advocate and PHS parent, is the vice-president of the FOHW. Nuka highlighted an effort by the FOHW to catalog trees: 300 have been tagged so far, 50 of which are labeled with a QR code linked to a website with information about the particular type of tree. However, she is concerned about tree pests that threaten the well being of the Herrontown Woods ecosystem.

“One of the main issues is beech leaf disease, [which is] taking out many of the beeches. There’s a significant section of the woods that is essentially just a beech grove and, unfortunately, it looks like most of those beeches [will be lost] over the course of the next year,” said Nuka. “Another issue we’ve had in previous years is [the] Emerald Ash Borer, which has killed quite a number of ash trees ... it’s sad how these diseases just come through and ... wipe out entire species.”

The FOHW offers a wide range of educational activities and community outreach programs, such as a woodland photography contest, a class for “little gardeners,” and a fundraising event featuring harvest crafts, lantern lighting, and the acclaimed Celtic band, The Chivalrous Crickets.

Moving forward, the FOHW will continue their repair of the Veblen House so that it can house a nature center and showcase the unique story of the Veblens and their unparalleled nature preserve — a gift in perpetuity to Princeton.

graphics: Charley Hu



Artis-tree

Aarna Dharmavarapu and Finn Wedmid, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Tree art, for a variety of cultures, has been a vibrant way of expressing creativity and spirituality. From towering totem poles to intricate tree faces, the symbolic meaning of this art form extends beyond aesthetics. Historically, these living beings have served as a medium for artwork that represent life itself.

Tree faces aren't mere decorative pieces, but carry symbolic weight. For instance, in some Native American cultures, such as the Haida people of the Northwest Coast, tree carvings on totem poles are used to honor spirits and ancestors considered to be a connection between the physical and the divine. These totem poles are not only for artistic expression, but they highlight cultural narratives across various Indigenous societies. As a result, art found on trees have been thought to also mark burial areas. Likewise, Aboriginal Australians have created intricate tree

carvings that depict ancestral stories, blending art with sacred traditions.

In many Indigenous cultures, trees are viewed as living beings with spiritual connotations. Indigenous peoples still obtain resources from trees, but they do so knowing that it was only by the tree's generosity that they could harvest these resources.

In many Indigenous cultures, trees are living beings that link the physical and spirit world, serving as central figures in carvings. For the Maya people of Mesoamerica, the ceiba, a Mexican tree, is thought of as a being that communicated with both heaven and the world of the dead, uniting our universe. The ceiba appears on the most intricate stone carving found at Izapa — an archeological site in southern Mexico — and is believed to represent a religious narrative that has shaped many of their rituals and ceremonies.

Trees are also associated with a variety of spiritual systems and customs, including protection and knowledge, and also serve as symbols of life and growth. In some traditions, certain trees are believed to be home to spirits and deities, highlighting their importance in rituals and ceremonies. For the Yoruba people of West Africa, the iroko tree is seen as the "tree of life." They believe that the tree is inhabited by spirits, and their duty is to keep the iroko tree from falling beneath the earth's core.

While tree faces might appear as light-hearted garden decoration, they represent a rich picture of historical and spiritual significance. Rooted in ancient traditions, these carvings represent Indigenous cultural beliefs that view trees as sacred entities, symbolizing the value of life and the relationship between humans and nature.



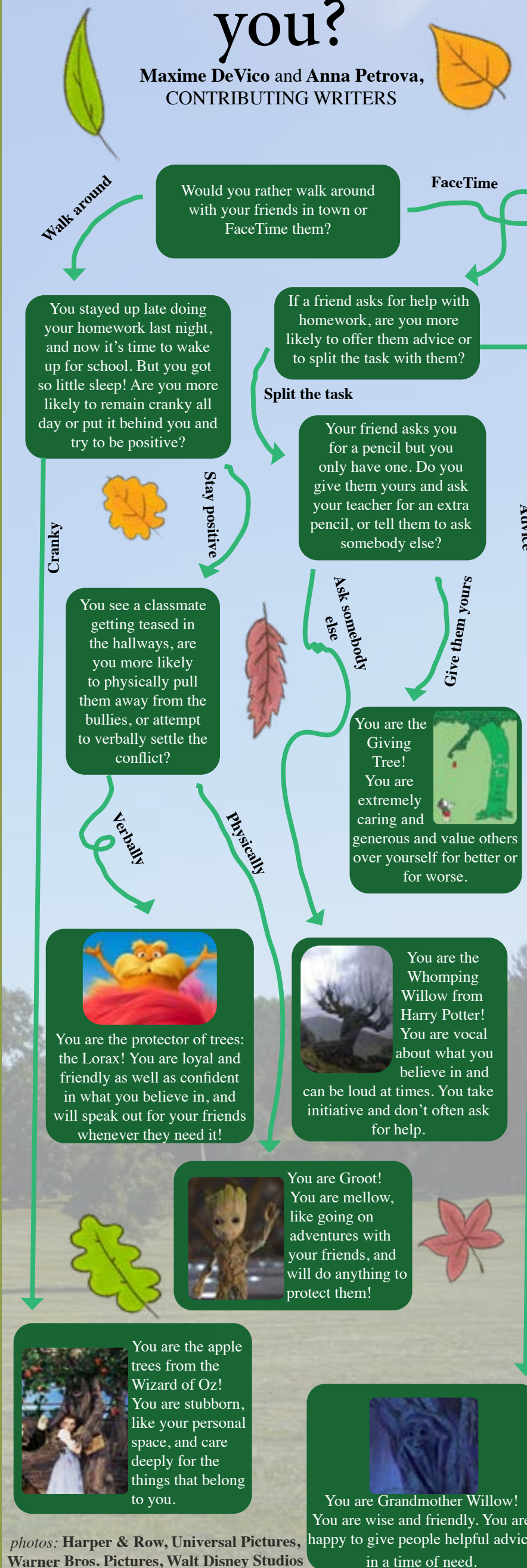
How to draw a tree

Charley Hu, VISUALS CO-EDITOR



Which pop culture tree are you?

Maxime DeVico and Anna Petrova, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS





photos: Charley Hu

From left to right: Cabaret performers Konrad Hedges '26, Serafina Joseph '26, and Peter Niforatos '25 rehearse for their performances.

Spectacle Theatre's Cabaret Night: a chance for student expression

Aarna Dharmavarapu and Yunsheng Xu, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

This year, on September 27, Spectacle Theatre's Cabaret Night at Princeton High School kicked off the academic year with a variety of performances. Held at the Black Box Theater, this annual event serves as a creative showcase for students to express their artistic talents. The event is not only a set of performances, but also a celebration of artistic expression and the PHS community spirit.

"[Cabaret Night] is just a way for us to start the year with a performance that gathers everyone together. The ticket sales will be a fundraiser for Spectacle Theatre," said Julianna Krawiecki, PHS's drama teacher. "[The fundraiser will] go towards the expenses throughout the year, [such as] helping pay for costumes, buying paint and lumber to build set pieces, or the rights to the shows that we do throughout the year."

Luke Gitterman '25, the House Manager and co-emcee for Cabaret Night, expressed his excitement for the evening. "We do this opening Cabaret Night every year, usually at the end of September. It's a fantastic way for everyone to come back and show off their talents, whether they're returning students or newcomers," Gitterman said.

Gitterman, along with Noa Zacks '25, the President of Spectacle Theatre, introduced each act during Cabaret Night, while keeping the audience engaged. Additionally, Gitterman's responsibilities included managing tickets and organizing the theater, while Zacks helped to coordinate the performance schedule to make the event transition smoothly.

Cabaret Night has become a cherished tradition at PHS, evolving over the years and becoming a highlight of PHS's arts calendar. This year's event featured a variety of

performances, including scenes, songs, and monologues, that highlight the hard work of the Spectacle Theatre.

Preparation for Cabaret Night began early in the school year. The performers started by choosing what they were going to present to the audience.

"The cabaret night is nice, because you get to pick your own material and really do what you want. If there's a song you've been yearning to sing or a monologue you've been learning to yearning to perform, Cabaret is your time to just do what you want, because you don't always get those opportunities," Zacks said.

"There were monologues and scenes and songs, and unlike the productions we do at the school, it's kind of like everybody brought their own little thing to the table," added Anna Kaufman '26.

After pieces were chosen, there was a long process of rehearsing and working with Krawiecki on refining their performances.

"I work with my voice teacher and my acting coach on choices both vocally and physically to really try to embody the character and immerse myself in the world because we don't have a set or costumes so we just need to make the world around us," Kaufman said.

Spectacle Theatre officers have the most work to do, because they handle all the logistics, while also running the lights and sound during the event.

"The officers advertise it to the community and offer the opportunity to more students. They help put together the repertoire, the accompaniment list, [they] schedule when people are going to come in and do a rehearsal, and design a poster and a program," Krawiecki said.

While the Spectacle Theatre's routine school productions have a lengthy audition process, Cabaret Night allows any student to perform, as long as it's related to theater.

"I really wanted to do a duet with my close friend. It's our junior year we only have one more chance after this cabaret," said Kaufman, who sang "In a Crowd of Thousands" from "Anastasia" with Konrad Hedges '26.

"A lot of it is just you do it with your friends, and it's a great way to build community and get to know people that you don't," added Zacks.

"It's a lot more laid back, and it really bridges this connection between the community, people that love theater, and the actors. All of the other shows [are] very organized; there's not a lot of connection with the audience other than the story that's being told. The audience gets to know you. You get to know your audience based [on] how they react," Zacks said.

During Cabaret Night, students also have more opportunities to demonstrate their leadership skills, instead of simply following a teacher's directions.

"For [other Spectacle Theatre productions], they're teacher-led. [However], for Cabaret Night, the club leaders lead the whole event," said Krawiecki. "I'm there to help them get from point A to the finish line, but it's overseen by the Spectacle Theater officers."

Konrad Hedges '26, a performer at Cabaret Night has expressed his appreciation for the event.

"[Cabaret Night] is nothing but support and love, and you get to share your talent and really just have fun in a group of people that will support and nurture the talent that you bring to the Cabaret," Hedges said.

Eva Zizak '25 explores her voice through multiple genres

Tessa Silver, OPINIONS CO-EDITOR

For Eva Zizak '25, music is like a second language. Growing up in a highly musical family — Zizak's father is a guitarist — she found joy in singing from an early age, often having jam out sessions with her dad. This passion has led to her involvement in numerous vocal groups at PHS. Her love for singing ensures it will remain a central part of her life long after graduation.

How have you been involved with music at PHS?

A lot, a little too much. Sometimes my mom is picking me up after 11 o'clock from school, and she's like, "So I think you sing too much," and I'm like, "Yep, probably." Sometimes I get a little sick of it, but in the end, it's what I like doing. I do choir; freshman year, I did Chorale, then Cantus, then PHS Choir since last year. I've been in Cloud Nine, an a capella group, since my sophomore year — this year, I'm music director — and I did Studio Vocals last year. This summer, I went on tour with PJO, the Philadelphia Jazz Orchestra as a vocalist, so I went to Italy.

How has being involved with so many different activities helped you develop as a singer?

Well, I think practice makes perfect, or almost perfect, for sure, because I think I've definitely improved in the last few years. Just last night, I was looking at videos from the beginning of our tour this summer, and videos at the end of the tour, and I was cringing at my first videos, because I was like, "Oh my god, I was so bad." The teachers here are so talented and so good at pushing you. This was my first year working with Mr. Bongiovi in Studio Vocals and in PJO, and even though he's not a vocalist, he still did a great job ... I also think, being in groups of new people that [I'm] not friends [with] gives me a chance to be around other people, and I meet so many people. In [Cloud Nine], I have 12 built-in friends, and [in] Studio Vocals, I got to know a bunch of people. So I feel like I just got to find my crowd and just improve as a singer.



photo: Emily Kim

What are your duties as music director for Cloud Nine?

There are a few things. It is a student group because we don't have an adult leading us, [so] there needs to be one person to [decide] if there's a decision that needs to be made. I pick the music; I arrange the music too. I really like the idea of everybody in the group arranging music; I know that's not something that all groups do. We have a couple people working on arrangements now. I'm arranging the music for the first concert. Organizing our meetings, and deciding what we do in each practice is the biggest [responsibility I have as music director].

What do you like about singing jazz specifically?

I think I've always kind of liked singing more jazzy songs, and I never really realized that until I was like "Oh I'm gonna audition for Studio Vocals," and then I was doing it and [realized] this is my favorite kind of music to sing. I think jazz is the easiest and the hardest [music to sing], because anything kind of goes. You just have fun, and that'll make you sound so much better, but I also think you have to adjust your voice a little bit, think about the lyrics more, [and] think about the song you're singing. What I like about [jazz] is that I sort of found my place with my voice because I just found that it fit my voice really well.

Why do you sing?

I think a lot of it stems from my upbringing. This is a conversation I've actually been having with my dad a lot because I'm doing college applications now, so I have a bunch of questions to answer; colleges want to know what I'm about. So me and my dad were talking about it, and he [asked], "Do you know why we sing? What's the point of it?" I [said], "To make people happy, to entertain." That's the point of singing. Obviously I [sing] for myself because I think it's fun, but I think part of the reason why I think it's so fun is because I love people that enjoy music; I think it's really cool to watch people having a good time.

Fall into autumn with this playlist

Gabby Kaputa, STAFF WRITER

Phineas McCulloch, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

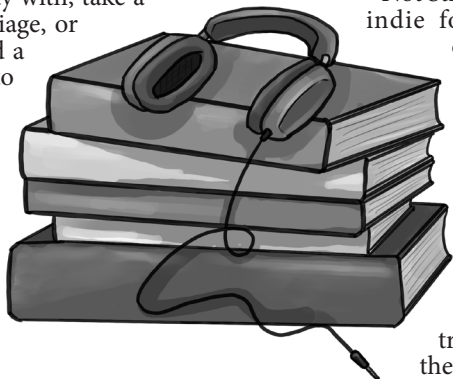
As the summer season comes to a close and fall begins, students often find themselves thrust from the carefree warm summer days into colder damp fall evenings. To help transition to these colder quiet days we have created the perfect moody fall playlist to study with, take a walk with while admiring the fall foliage, or snuggle up to with a warm drink and a good book. Scan the QR code below to get the full playlist.

“august” by Taylor Swift

The eighth track on Taylor Swift's eighth studio album, “folklore,” “august” has become one of my favorite fall songs to put on as we enter the new season. The song sends me back to the nostalgia of summer: watching the sunset, driving around, getting ice cream with friends, or sitting by the campfire. The song is filled with contrast, as it has a relatively fast paced rhythm, accompanied by Swift's soothing vocals and instrumental track. It is also sequential to the album's love triangle trilogy. My favorite line from the song is, “Remember when I pulled up and said, ‘Get in the car’ / And then canceled my plans just in case you'd call? / Back when I was livin’ for the hope of it all, for the hope of it all,” which contributes to the song's intended meaning, as it reflects on a characterized summer fling that couldn't be further developed. This sentiment is also reflected in the other songs in the trilogy, “cardigan” and “betty,” and further adds to the album's concept as fictional, as opposed to Swift's autobiographical style seen prior. Whether you're a “Swiftie” or not, this song will transport you into a euphoric daydream walk along the shore.

“Open Season” by High Highs

“Open Season” is the title track from Australian indie rock band High Highs' album “Open Season,” released in 2013. When I hear this song, I picture myself winding down after a long school day, and watching the leaves fall from my window, due to the acoustic strumming in the instrumental track. The song is slow and simple, but it holds a powerful meaning underneath its soft, acoustic, and composed structure. The song “Open Season” portrays a person letting go of their resentful feelings that are holding them back in life. The lyrics “get on your knees in the fire / you can leave it all in your mind” advise the audience to take control of their thoughts and face their fears. I'd



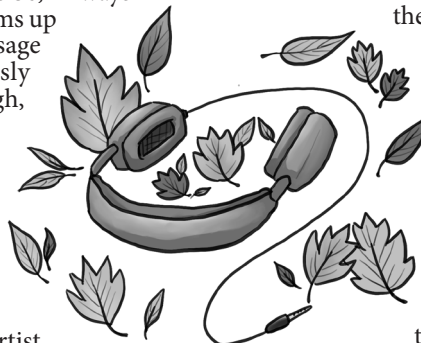
recommend “Open Season” if you want to listen to a laid-back song this fall.

“Not Strong Enough” by boygenius

“Not Strong Enough” is a song by American indie folk rock supergroup boygenius, consisting of artists Phoebe Bridgers, Julien Baker, and Lucy Dacus. “Not Strong Enough” is the sixth track on boygenius's debut studio album, “the record,” released a year ago. This song, which layers a composition of indie and rock throughout, perfectly encapsulates traveling and observing the fall scenery. The song demonstrates the evolution of finding yourself and your true identity, which is reflected through the undertones of vulnerability in the lyrics. My favorite line would have to be, “Always an angel, never a god,” because it sums up the song as a whole, with the message pertaining to women continuously feeling like they are not good enough, by being dehumanized as angels collated to men as gods. The song features a beautiful vocal blend between the three musicians and is accompanied by a music video exploring the group's friendship.

“Maine” by Noah Kahan

“Maine” is a song by indie rock artist Noah Kahan on his EP “Cape Elizabeth.” The song has recently been rerecorded on Kahan's new “Live from Fenway Park” album with new instruments and vocals that bring the song to a new level. “Maine” is a song about looking back on simple times in life and reflecting on one's personal growth through time. Kahan perfectly depicts the feeling of being in love with places and people, and how it feels to miss them as one grows up and moves away, leaving their memories behind. In the lyrics, “used to sing along to church bells on Sundays, can you even hear them from the subway now,” he recalls how everything in his life — including the sounds — has changed. The song has such a beautiful melody that reminds me of the music that plays at the end of a rom-com. This is the perfect song to save for one of the last warm days of



summer when you're sitting by the water and just enjoying the scenery.

“Second Chances” by Gregory Alan Isakov

“Second Chances” is a song by Gregory Alan Isakov on his album “The Weatherman.” “Second Chances” brings me such nostalgia of childhood memories and happiness. The song is relaxed and smooth but with powerful vocals and lyrics. The best part of the song is the chorus, where Isakov sings, “If it weren't for second chances we'd all be alone.” I feel that this line so powerfully portrays the ups and downs of a relationship, and really prompts a moment of reflection for how far we've come as individuals. This is a feel good song that makes me feel so calm and centered. Anytime I listen to it, I feel like I'm the main character in a Greta Gerwig movie because the style is very similar to the outros of her films.

“For Emma” by Bon Iver

“For Emma” by Bon Iver is an upbeat song that captures the vibe of warmer fall days when the trees are fully orange. The song is on Bon Iver's EP “For Emma, Forever Ago” and centers around a failed relationship with a past partner; while the relationship had gone well in the beginning, it was time for it to end and for the former partner to “go find another lover.” The song is classic Bon Iver with beautiful vocals and instrumentals that create a sense of peaceful solitude. If you want to listen to calm background music while studying or reading a book, this is the perfect song for you.

graphics: Angela Wu



Lights, camera, cultura: Latin American culture in film

“The Golden Dream”

Joy Chen, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

In a world flooded with headlines about immigration, it's easy to feel distant from the real human stories — stories of immigrants' resilience, sacrifice, and lost innocence. “The Golden Dream,” or in Spanish, “La Jaula de Oro,” reveals the raw and untold struggles of young Latino migrants risking everything for a chance at freedom. Directed by Diego Quemada-Díez, this film portrays the journey of four teenage migrants forced to grow up too quickly as they confront the harsh realities of adulthood.

The story follows Sara, Samuel, Juan, and Chaukas as they immigrate from Guatemala to Los Angeles in search of a better life. This “road-movie” shows their nights atop trains; their move from the city to the countryside; and their search for jobs, food, and shelter along the way. Though there is little dialogue, the film captures every emotion — from the pain of losing a friend, to the adrenaline in an escape, and the excitement of a new beginning.

Despite the harshness of their journey, the innocence of their youth remains. In particular, after losing his shoes on the road, Juan steals a pair of boots with lightning patterns across the sides, bragging about how cool they look. We catch the silhouette of these boots as they cross the border, as Juan runs away from gunshots, and through many sleepless nights on the train. Although they are still very young, these teenagers are forced to

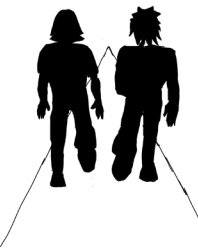
fend for themselves. However, no matter how alone they once were, they find home in each other.

The film depicts the beauty of friendship as the characters build relationships that go beyond race and language. For example, Chaukas is described as “Indian” throughout the film, although he's actually Native American, and speaks a language the other three don't understand. Regardless of this barrier, they teach him Spanish words, defend him in front of authorities, and in the face of danger, Juan uses all his savings as ransom to rescue Chaukas.

What makes “The Golden Dream” truly stand out is how it borderlines a documentary. According to The Guardian in 2014, Quemada-Díez conducted over 600 interviews across a decade and drew from these experiences to portray realistic narratives. Even after watching this movie, the impact of these authentic stories lingers, leaving viewers with a haunting question: Have the characters truly found the better life they desperately sought for?

For teenagers like me, this film serves as a reminder of the opportunities we've been granted. I recommend “The Golden Dream” not only for its beautiful cinematography and narrative, but also for the film's ability to shed light on the raw experiences of immigrants. As we celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month, this film reminds us of the resilience of those who dared to dream for a better future.

THE
GOLDEN
DREAM



“Selena”

Jane Hu, STAFF WRITER

In a time when representation for Hispanic-Americans was severely lacking in the music industry, Selena Quintanilla Pérez broke barriers by becoming one of the most celebrated Tejano music singers of the 1990s, both in the United States and Mexico. Released on March 21, 1997, “Selena” is a biographical drama movie directed by Gregory Nava and starring Jennifer Lopez. The film illustrates the life of Selena Quintanilla Pérez from the beginning of her music journey to her tragic assassination in 1995.

The movie begins with Selena singing “Bidi Bidi Bom Bom” at the Houston Astrodome in Texas on February 26, 1995. Shortly after, the narrator shifts back to 1977, when Selena's father first introduced her to music and dreamed of creating a band with his children. The shifts back and forth help to illustrate how different moments in her childhood built up to her future success.

Despite two decades separating her dad's first attempts at forming a band and Selena's last performance, Selena's passion for music was always formidable. As time progressed and Selena grew up, her love for music thrived. When asked if she enjoyed singing in front of crowds, Selena didn't hesitate to say, “I can feel them when I sing.” Soon enough, her success took off, and she began to perform in front of larger crowds.

The movie illustrates how despite her immense achievements in the music industry, Selena also faced obstacles that

many people of color can resonate with. In one scene, Selena and her sister are shopping at a higher-end fashion store, hoping to buy a dress for Selena. However, while asking the sales associate for help, Selena is immediately shut down by the worker who blatantly discriminates against her, exclaiming that she “doesn't think [Selena] is interested in that one... because that dress is \$800.” Portraying the challenges that not only Selena, but many people of color experience makes the movie so much more realistic and relatable to the audience.

Despite these discouraging moments, Selena's career still continued at full throttle. When Selena's fame grew, it began to expand beyond music, including the formation of a Selena fan club as well as the opening of two boutiques. However, unfortunately, with just a few more performances,

the movie reaches the end: Selena's death. As a movie fanatic, I found “Selena” to be one of the best biographical movies I have ever watched. Although I was initially unfamiliar with who Selena was, I enjoyed watching the movie because of its heartwarming portrayal of her life and the bittersweet emotions the movie evoked. As a pioneer for Tejano representation in the music industry, Selena had an immense impact on the American and Mexican communities. It was unfortunate for her life to end at such a young age, but her legacy as “Queen of Tejano music” (as many dubbed her), is still remembered by many today.



graphics: Avantika Palayekar

TOWER MULTIMEDIA



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



PAPERCASTS
The Tower. Out Loud.



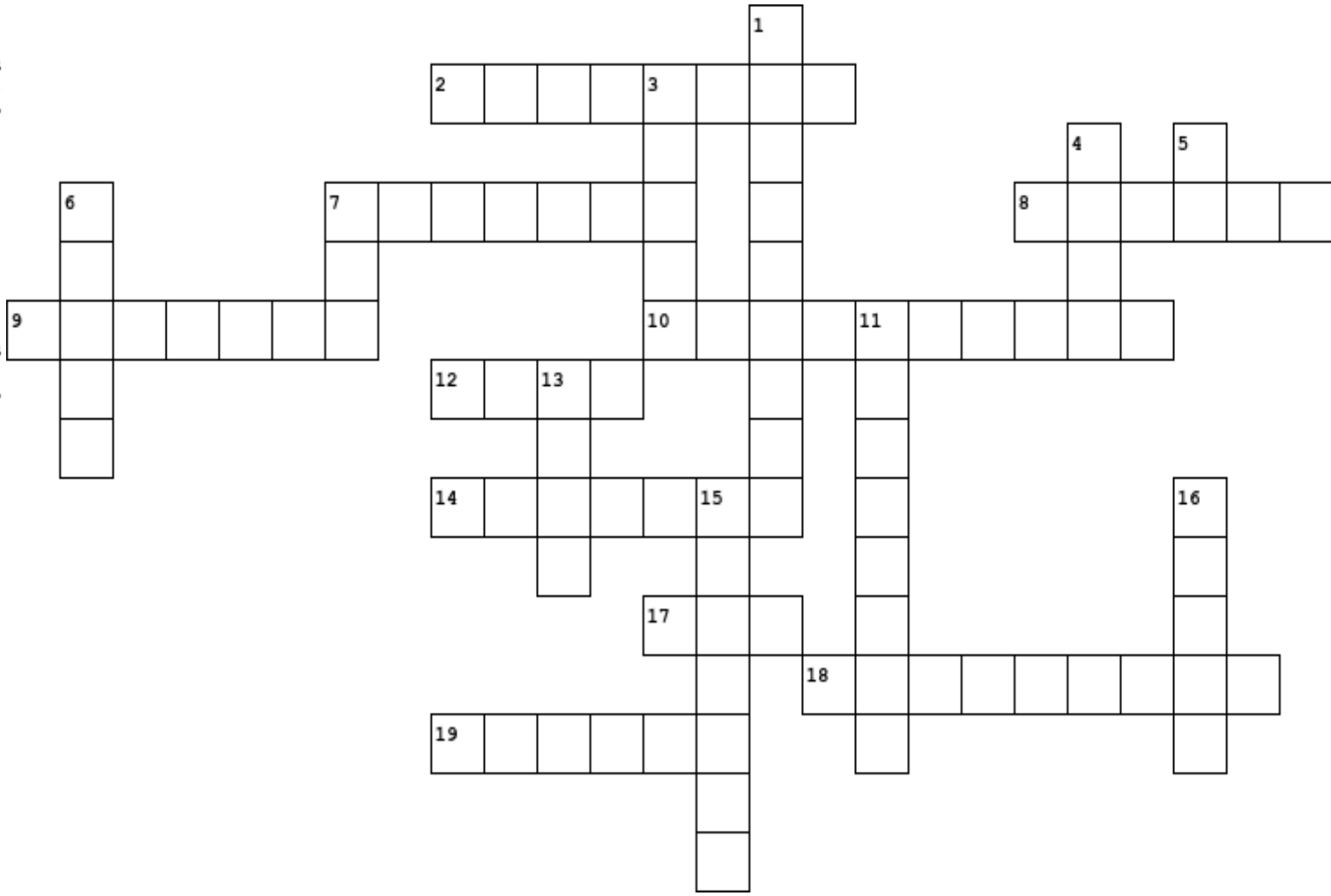
TOWER SHORTS
Multimedia... bite sized!



PHS TALKS
Long-form interviews

Back-to-school crossword

Angela Chen, CONTRIBUTING WRITER



Across

- 2. What to get when back to school shopping
- 7. An uncarved jack o'lantern
- 8. "Weather's getting ____!"
- 9. What geese and monarch butterflies do
- 10. Friday night lights
- 12. Signals the start and end of each class
- 14. Sweater ____
- 17. Large yellow vehicle
- 18. October 31
- 19. Official name for fall

Down

- 1. The month referenced in the lyrics, "21st night of _"
- 3. Time between 4th and 5th period
- 4. Maize, aka
- 5. PHS daily necessity
- 6. Cinnamon, for example
- 7. Dessert made with filling such as apple, pumpkin, and cherry
- 11. A clothing item and title of a Taylor Swift song
- 13. What changes color during the fall
- 15. An event when the sun is exactly above the equator
- 16. Apple drink

graphics: Charley Hu

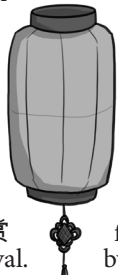
When we harvest on the 9th full moon

Rebecca Zhang, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

graphics: Angela Wu

I don't notice much about the full moon anymore. Does it still shine as bright? Does its ringing white light still seem surreal in the lonely, dark blue sky? Do the whispers of a rabbit, making the elixir of immortality on the moon, still reverberate as the graceful shadow of a woman flies by — perhaps to meet with her lover? I still wonder about it all, but everything has changed. I have forgotten that special taste of mooncakes and that mystery of the story of "Change Flying to the Moon." I can't exactly recall those moments during the Mid-Autumn Festival when everyone was there, sitting at a table full of my favorite foods, vibrantly laughing and talking.

When I can't remember, I go back to a time when little me was holding my first mooncake, thinking I was having a second birthday. The flowery mooncake was filled with salted egg yolk and red bean paste. It was so pretty I didn't dare eat it, and I thought I'd never see a more beautiful birthday cake. As my twin sister and I sat around the table full of different mooncakes, gazing up at the big, round moon, our mom told us for the first time, "宝贝儿，这是中秋节。过这个节日的时候，我们吃月饼，我们赏月，我们团圆" (Baby, this is the Mid-Autumn Festival.



During this holiday, we eat mooncakes, we admire the moon, and we reunite).

A 3,000 year-old tradition, with an ancient and misty origin, the Mid-Autumn Festival is one of the most important holidays to people of Chinese descent. Eating mooncakes and gazing up at the full moon is our way of praying for a good harvest.

Romantically speaking, it is also a celebration of the reunion of the archer Hou Yi and his wife, the moon goddess Change.

The legend tells that after being awarded with the elixir of immortality for saving the citizens by shooting down nine of the ten suns, Hou Yi gives the precious liquid to his wife Change for safekeeping. Yet one day, Change accidentally swallows the elixir of immortality as she tries to protect it from a thief. The power of the elixir causes her mortal body to become so light that she floats up to the moon and becomes the moon goddess. She is thus separated from Hou Yi — immortal, but solitary. Heartbroken by Change's departure, Hou Yi lays her favorite fruits



and cakes as offerings, hoping to show how deeply he misses her. Touched by their true love, the Mother of the Moon grants them a yearly reunion on the full moon of the eighth lunar month.

This celebration is not only a time to honor a long-standing story, but also an opportunity to make amends and to create new memories. I used to question why times like this mattered and why it is important to value family.

Now I understand: one day, when you want to remember something precious but discover that you have forgotten it, you will search desperately through the dark corners of your mind. Maybe distance or time caused the forgetfulness. In the end, you will simply wish you'd appreciated the good moments more.

I often wonder why we choose to approach such a reflective holiday so lavishly and sincerely, as when we eat a specific cake and choose to be with family. It is because in the end, we all remember the love shown to us through the things people did for us, the lengths they went to — not for their wrongs or mistakes — just like how Hou Yi will always be there for Change during the Mid-Autumn Festival.

MADE FRESH BY HAND IN-HOUSE DAILY

WHOLE EARTH DELI IS

100%

vegetarian



360 NASSAU ST. • PRINCETON • WHOLEEARTHCENTER.COM

NATURAL FOODS GROCERY • SINCE 1970

SPORTS

The pressure to get recruited

Dester Selby-Salazar, SPORTS CO-EDITOR

As the fall semester gets into full swing, seniors are beginning to narrow down their college decisions, arrange trips to campuses, and polish their applications. For student athletes looking to be recruited for colleges, however, this process has been underway for months or even years.

The collegiate recruitment process can mean different things to different players: some players aspire to play in the highest division possible for a chance to play professionally, while others see the scholarship money to a prestigious university as the main reason to play another four years. Either way, the college recruitment process is a high-stakes environment.

Lois Matsukawa '25 decided that applying to an elite institution that also allowed her to continue to play volleyball was the right choice for her. In doing so, she was able to verbally commit to Swarthmore in the fall.

"My club coaches really helped me, because we have recruiting coordinators at our clubs. I got a giant list of [Division III] schools, because I knew that I didn't want to go [Division I]," said Matsukawa. "I wanted to make sure that I had a good academic school to go to."

Even though Matsukawa opted to play Division III instead of Division I, there is still a great attention of detail to her performance. With millions of dollars in scholarship money on the line, recruitment coaches must be thorough in their assessment of players to ensure they are making the best decision for the college. In this case, it means raising the bar for expectations.

"I reached out to [recruiters in sophomore year], went to a lot of their camps, and that's how I got to play in front of them," said Matsukawa. "Even at these college camps, you get feedback from the actual college coaches, which is really important because that's what they're looking for in their recruits."

Walter Gumbinger '25 has verbally committed to play Division III in golf at Dickinson College. Like Matsukawa, Gumbinger began his recruitment process by sending emails to college recruitment coaches and seeing who would reply.

Gumbinger stressed the importance of maintaining relationships with the coaches.

"Once you get the first email, you keep the coaches updated with your scores. For some coaches, I got on the phone, met the coaches, and you are invited to campus," Gumbinger said.

Gumbinger admits that the pressure to perform at a higher level can be difficult, so he has been finding ways to minimize that stress. One way in which he has reduced his stress is by going to visit a sports psychologist that can help redirect his way of thinking about the game.

"We learn different ways to alleviate stress and to try and focus on something that's not golf, especially when I'm not hitting the ball," said Gumbinger. "It's about learning to focus when you are actually hitting the shots, and then being able to get your mind off of it."

Although Gumbinger was able to get better control of the mental side of his game, some issues were still hard to control. For example, the vast amount of competition meant that Gumbinger was indecisive in even attempting to be recruited and meant that he got his name out to the coaches later than he would have wanted. For aspiring collegiate athletes, Gumbinger has some words of advice.

"I would say to get your name out there as early as possible," said Gumbinger. "I wouldn't say to commit too early to a school unless it's really your dream school, just because there's a lot of time; you still have your junior year to really get better and grow so maybe a better opportunity will come."

For Matsukawa, she found that the pressure came not only from the volleyball court, but in the classroom as well. In order to be recruited to Swarthmore, she had to balance her athletic success and high grades.

"Getting help from my teachers if I was struggling in a class was really helpful," said Matsukawa. "And then athletically, my coaches were always open to me coming in early to get extra reps just to become a stronger player."

In fact, the pressure was so intense at one point that Matsukawa had to take a brief period of time to reflect and have

her own realization: she understood that the sport itself was never more important than her mental or physical health and wellbeing.

"I think the biggest thing is to ask for help, whether it's your parents, your coaches, or teachers, just to balance everything out," said Matsukawa. "[Taking] a break from your sport ... [and discovering] other activities and hobbies that you find interesting outside of your sport is really important."

David Brophy '25 is a senior who is currently in the process of looking to be recruited to a college for swimming. Brophy shares a similar story with Gumbinger and Matsukawa in that he began with reaching out to coaches through email, and felt pressure from the whole system.

"I had one of the bigger national meets this past summer in Virginia, and I had to drive all the way down there, and there were a lot of coaches which led to excess pressure," said Brophy. "I think that added an element of, 'You need to do well or else maybe you won't go to a good college.'"

For Brophy, the best way to get over the feeling of excess pressure is to continue to play the sport and make sure that you're always having a good time doing it, which ultimately results in success in the big moments.

"I just try to stick to what I know," said Brophy. "Practicing is always really fun. Once you get to the meet, you need to be able to trust yourself and what you've been working on."

Though parts of the recruitment process have been stressful to Gumbinger, he feels that the recruitment system is ultimately set up to give athletes the best chances of success.

"I think it's a great process, because even though somebody may have better stats than you, if the coaches don't like who the player is, they won't take them," said Gumbinger. "That leaves spots open for other players who maybe aren't as good, but will be a better benefit to the team through their locker room ability or overall support for the team."

Though both Matsukawa and Gumbinger have faced adversity in their athletic recruitment process, they are ultimately excited to continue their athletics at distinguished colleges, and think that prospective athletes shouldn't fear when beginning to compete in the college recruitment process. At the end of the day, the recruitment process is supposed to be a system which athletes can look back on fondly as they seek to take their sport to the next level.



graphic: Johanna Chen

Why doesn't PHS have a boys volleyball team?

Claire Yang, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The Boys Volleyball Club operates with over 30 committed members, but that leaves many wondering: Why don't they have an official team? The answer is more complex than it seems; it's a time consuming process involving many moving factors.

Most teams start off as a booster club, a platform used to highlight participation and raise funds. The girls volleyball coach Patricia Manhart has been with the girls team ever since its transition from a club to an official team in 2013.

"The Board of Education said that the girls had to start as a [club] program to show and ... prove that there was interest," said Manhart. "When I was first hired, I heard from the athletic director at the time that there was interest."

At the beginning of the club's creation, players were requested to pay a certain fee to cover the costs of transportation, uniforms and equipment. After the club demonstrated sufficient participation, the Board of Education began covering the team's costs over the course of three years: a lengthy step by step integration of the club into the athletic program.

Athletics take up a significant portion of the high school's budget, with nearly \$1.7 million spent on school-sponsored athletic instruction from 2023-2024 to support 30 teams. The influence of booster clubs is significant, as they help signal to the Board of Education whether a team merits allocation in the budget. As the principal of Princeton High School, Cecilia Birge oversees all facets of the budget for the high school alone.

"It's the principal who makes the recommendation to the superintendent. The superintendent has the final

say, then she presents it to the school board. The school board votes for the total school budget," Birge said.

As one of the founding members of the PHS Boys Volleyball Club, Kaden Li '26 has worked for the past two years trying to get an official team approved. The club has accumulated new members each year, showcasing a rising interest for the sport in PHS.

"We got in contact with Mr. Dzbenski, the sports director. I think it's been a funding issue," said Li. "It seems like there's a good amount of people who are interested, have the participation, but can't get the funding."

While funding has long posed challenges for athletics, it's far from the only obstacle standing in the way. Title IX, a congressional law passed in 1972, prohibits sex-based discrimination in any school, ensuring an equal number of boys and girls sports teams. Almost every sport at this school has both a girls and boys team, except for football and field hockey. Brian Dzbenski, the athletics director for Princeton Public Schools, compares the system to a series of checks and balances, explaining that whenever a boys team is added, a girls team must also be added in order to maintain balance.

"If we do create a [boys] volleyball team, we're going to have that imbalance ... we have to do an assessment of all our sports and look at the enrollment numbers," said Dzbenski. "We have to take a look and possibly add another girls team."

Not only does the athletic program have to take into account the balance between teams, but they also need

to weigh the financial burden of this rule, which requires covering the costs of equipment, coaches, and referees for two teams rather than just one. Adding two teams places a considerable strain on the budget, leading to a shift in funding allocation.

"The district allocates a certain amount of funding to fund coaches to coach those teams. When you take a look at the breakdown, all the girls programs and all the boys programs we have, we have an equal number of employee coaches for female sports as we do for male sports," said Dzbenski. "The financial stressor is placed on the district for adding ... another two coaches' salaries."

Additionally, the costs associated with equipment, transportation, and referees present significant challenges that the district might struggle to manage. Given the high school's limited budget, adding another team would likely create enough financial strain that could impact academics. Funding the new teams

would require a budget reshuffle, pulling resources from other areas - a process involving the entire high school.

"Every academic area has to balance things, so that's where it becomes a daunting task of competing priorities, because we have so many deserving students on so many programs," Dzbenski said.

Unless the circumstances allow it right away, the creation of an official boys volleyball team will likely take a long time to become part of the PHS athletic program. However, with the recent progress of the Boys Volleyball Club and the growing attention the sport has garnered, the prospect of establishing an official boys' team at PHS is increasingly within reach.

Nearly \$1.7 million [was] spent on school-sponsored athletic instruction from 2023-2024.

Whenever a boys team is added, a girls team must be added.



graphic: Emily Kim

Self-defense and martial arts kick up a storm

Asya Morozov, SPORTS CO-EDITOR

Many are interested in martial arts for self-defense, while others are interested for their physical and mental benefits associated with them. Marginalized groups such as women, people of color, and LGBTQ+ people feel the greatest pressure to protect themselves and therefore to learn self-defense and other such skills. However, United States gyms and dojos are not always the most welcoming. With that in mind, is it worth it to learn martial arts?

According to Psychology Today, many people do martial arts for their physical and mental benefits, as they help build strength and flexibility while also instilling important life lessons about discipline, confidence, and responsibility.

Taekwondo practitioner Noah Lee '27 agrees, emphasizing that martial arts are especially good for building mental strength.

"[Taekwondo is] definitely useful in terms of feeling safer and more confident about yourself. [Martial arts is] definitely something that can boost your confidence, make you stand up straighter," Lee said.

On the other side of the coin, bring more positives to light, fellow taekwondo player Paula Kutin '27 highlights the physical benefits of martial arts.

"I'm learning how to defend myself quickly; my reaction speed is up, and [I'm less afraid]," Kutin said.

Kutin also touches on martial arts' usefulness in self defense, adding that even the basics of martial arts can be helpful in bad situations.

"If someone were to attack me and I were to get into a good sparring stance, my hands are at the ready, even just being prepared might scare off someone," Kutin said.

Although martial arts have many proven benefits, gyms and dojos, especially in the United States, have historically not been welcoming to many demographics. According to a 2022 report by Gymdesk, about 73 percent of martial arts practitioners are straight, white men. This

environment can discourage marginalized groups like women, people of color, and LGBTQ+ people from practicing martial arts.

Thus, many marginalized people who want to learn martial arts end up turning to self-defense groups. Although lacking the historical prestige of martial arts, self-defense classes can teach similar physical and mental skills, from attacks and deflections to mental preparation and awareness in dangerous situations.

One such group at PHS is the Sexual Assault Awareness and Prevention Club (SAAP). Although SAAP is mostly focused on spreading awareness about assault, the club is currently developing more interactive programs, namely a self defense class. SAAP co-leader Maya Hagt '25, who is a

former martial artist, believes that self-defense classes are crucial in assault awareness and prevention.

"I've actually attended self-defense classes and I think they are really excellent because they show you how to utilize your surroundings, yourself, and anything you have with you in the case of a surprise attack," said Hagt. "I think it's a really excellent way for you to be better prepared if the worst does happen."

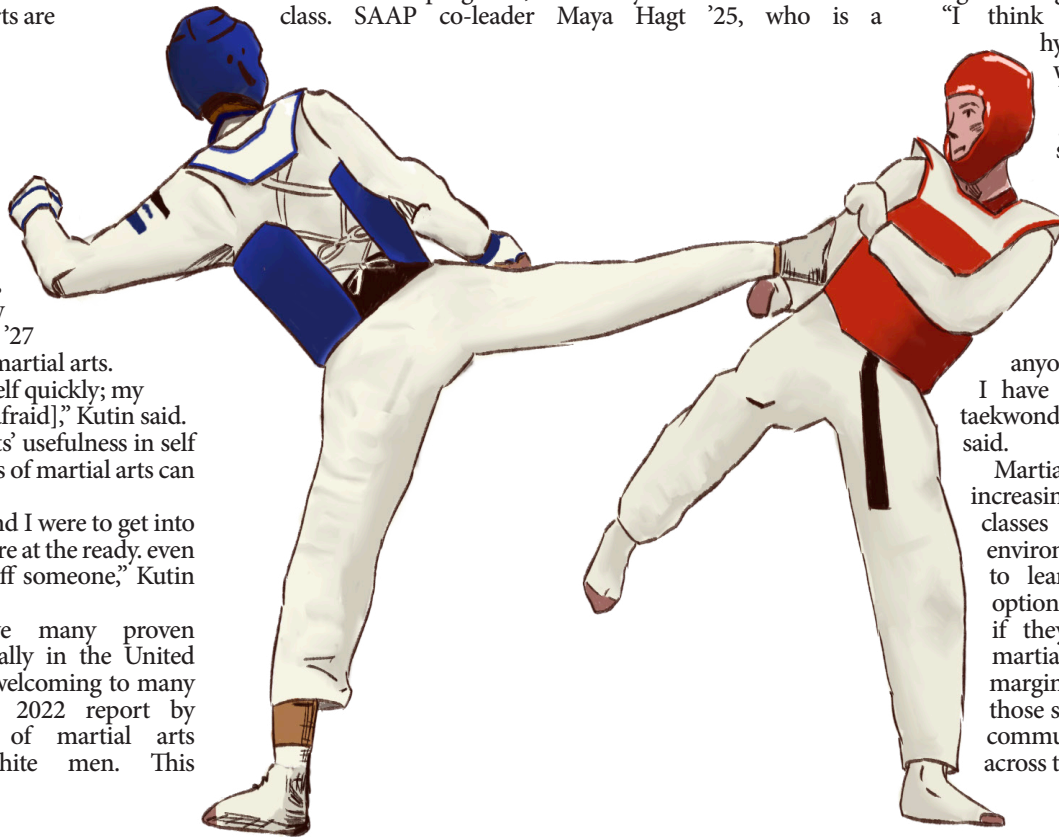
Though Hagt points out that self-defense classes are a great tool for people in groups at higher risk of assault to try, she also acknowledges the fact that martial arts can be a very tough space to enter, especially for members of marginalized groups.

"I think that, because [martial arts are] so hypermasculine, it's important for women to be in these spaces, but it shouldn't be a burden on women [or other vulnerable groups] to stand up for themselves in those spaces," Hagt said.

Fortunately, it seems as though martial arts spaces in the United States are slowly but surely becoming more diverse and accepting, something Kutin says she has observed.

"[My dojang] is diverse; it lets anyone in ... I have friends there who are five; I have friends there who are 50. [In terms of] taekwondo masters, there are ladies and guys," Kutin said.

Martial arts gyms and dojos are also increasingly including special self-defense classes as parts of their program to create an environment where people are encouraged to learn how to defend themselves, with the option to learn other aspects of martial arts if they want to. These kinds of places make martial arts gyms more welcoming to marginalized groups who are looking to learn those skills, inviting diversity and building stronger communities — a trend that is likely to continue across the United States.



graphic: Charley Hu

QUAD EDUCATION

15+ Years of Experience

96% Acceptance Rate

99th Percentile Tutors

\$23M+ Scholarship Awards

Your Trusted Partner In College Admissions

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

Book A Free Consultation!

www.quadeducationgroup.com



Athletes of the Month

Ava Tabear't 25

Katie Qin, SPORTS CO-EDITOR

The opposing team passes the soccer ball forward, putting pressure on the defense, but Ava Tabear't 25 is undeterred. As the striker moves in, Tabear't finds a gap between the player and the ball and rushes to redirect it. In one sliding motion, Tabear't kicks the ball away from her opponent and towards her teammate.

Despite her current skills and dedication as a player, Tabear't actually didn't aspire to become a soccer player, at least not at first. "I tried in first grade, and I really hated it," said Tabear't. "I thought: 'I'm bad at this. I don't want to do it every Saturday morning.'"

But she was soon drawn into the pervasiveness of soccer, delighted by the idea that almost anyone could play the sport. By fourth grade, Tabear't was already on a local team, and by ninth grade was playing a key defensive role in the girls varsity soccer team's deep run in the state tournament.

"We went to the state final. That's the furthest that this team has ever gone. And so for a freshman to have such a key role ... that is really huge, and really speaks to her maturity and her soccer skills," said PHS girls soccer Head Coach Meghan Brennan.

However, Tabear't has had her fair share of challenges. Even though soccer is a universal sport, becoming a part of the PHS soccer community was very intimidating at first.

"Freshman year, I had a hard time opening up to people because I was a freshman on the team," said Tabear't. "I didn't really know anyone, so it was hard for me to make friends at first. And when you're not talking to many people, it's hard to know how you're doing."

With that experience in mind, Tabear't has tried to help other players, who, like her, might have had a tough time integrating into the community.

"I try to bring everybody together because I know what it feels like to not feel as included, so I really want to make sure that that's not the case for anyone," Tabear't said.

Tabear't's leadership goes beyond the sport itself, though. She often does tasks that may be tedious to others, like cleaning up after practice or getting water for the team — an integral part of her character that makes her stand out on and off the field.

"She has always brought to the team a positive environment and a warm presence.

In addition ... she has always helped keep our back line intact and consistently helped control the gameplay," teammate Robyn Watchel '25 said.

She takes inspiration from the professionals, such as the U.S. women's national soccer team, who have shaped the sport to be more fair and inclusive.

"They're pretty incredible. They made a big difference politically: equal pay and equal rights," Tabear't said.

Now, in her fourth and final year at PHS, Tabear't is a co-captain and continues to be a starting player on the team. She reflects on the skills she gained throughout the years: from beginning as a freshman playing with unfamiliar players, to making split-second decisions to defend the goal during states.

"Patience and confidence are your two biggest allies," said Tabear't. "Everybody has bad days — you have to be okay with that. For soccer especially, if you make a decision about something, you need to commit to it"



Travis Petrone '25

Kaelan Patel, STAFF WRITER
Gabe Andrade, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Travis Petrone '25 takes the snap and drops back on the defense's 45-yard line, fakes the handoff to his running back, and scans the field for open receivers. As the defense starts to close in, time is running out. Right as the linebacker rushes in, he spots a teammate in between two defenders, and places a pass that connects for a 41-yard touchdown to give the Tigers the lead.

Starting from flag football in seventh grade, Petrone was a wide receiver on the junior varsity team his freshman year, and became varsity team's quarterback the next year. When asked about his transition to quarterback, he attributed it to his grit.

"I wanted to be a leader ... As a quarterback, I analyze a lot — reading defenses, seeing what other teams do, and what their strengths and weaknesses are," Petrone said.

Petrone saw a huge improvement for Princeton's football team last season, and despite the tough loss against Allentown, the Tigers showed some potential of what this team could achieve. One of the highlights on the team was when Petrone scored a rushing touchdown and a pick-six. An athlete on both sides of the ball, he contributes to the football team as both a quarterback and a strong safety.

Petrone has shown steady improvement these last two seasons with the starting quarterback job, and he's looking to end on a high note this season. He believes the team has what it takes to become division champs this season.

"My goal for this season is to become division champs and to have a good season with my guys and our family that we created," Petrone said.

As a senior, Petrone is expected to take on a bigger leadership role within the football program. He is hoping to become someone that his teammates can rely on and learn from.

"Travis is a leader by example. He's shown up every day," said Sean Wilton '25, Petrone's teammate. "He watches the film, puts in the work, he's there every practice, and he shows everybody the type of work that the team needs to put in. He changes the mindset and shows us what we need to be doing."

Petrone also plays basketball in the winter and baseball in the spring for PHS, so his schedule is often filled with tryouts, practices, and tournaments along with his homework, quizzes, and tests. As a student-athlete, there are days where going home sounds better than going to practice.

"I just buckle down on academics. Academics always come first," said Petrone. "Three sports can be difficult sometimes, but I've made it work over the last couple of years."

Petrone admits that it's not an easy lifestyle to juggle, but he feels that he can continue to balance his student athlete life in the future. Following high school, Petrone looks to continue playing sports in college.

"I would love to play football in college at a small school somewhere, but if that's not in the works, it's not, but I definitely strive to play college sports," Petrone said.

Although he looks forward to continuing his football career in college, Petrone is focusing with the current task at hand. The Tigers can still turn this season around, and with Petrone spearheading the offense, you can't count them out.



photos: Emily Kim

HOAGIE

HAVEN

Serving Princeton for 50 years!
242 Nassau St, Princeton NJ