

The Tower

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PHS tech department distributes new MacBooks, with new restrictions, to students

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The PHS technology department made significant changes for the 2025–2026 school year, including issuing new MacBooks for all students and with them, a ban on several popular sites like ChatGPT.

Towards the end of last school year, students returned their old MacBooks and chargers. Then, in August, students had to schedule an appointment in the afternoon to pick up their new device, the 2022 MacBook Air. PPS Chief Technology Officer Todd MacDonald explained that this cycle occurs every few years.

“The devices have significant battery deterioration [over time which is] the major issue. [And] as you can expect, students do beat up the devices over time. These devices ... require a lot of maintenance as battery life diminishes [and] it [eventually] becomes a situation where it’s a lot easier for us to replace the whole fleet [of MacBooks] than support one type of device over time,” said MacDonald.

The old MacBooks were sold to a third-party vendor, and the tech department used money acquired from that sale to buy the new devices. However, because the Apple brand is costly, the district had little flexibility in which model they could buy. In part to account for the cost of the MacBooks, the technology department switched device managers from a relatively expensive program called Jamf to a less costly manager called Mosyle.

Mosyle gives the technology team a better view of what sites are being accessed, and through this, they can decide which sites can be whitelisted for students to view. However, as MacBook distribution has only recently been finalized, the technology team has not had the opportunity to begin adjusting the filtering system of the device manager.

“[PHS students] may have experienced that they feel like the devices are locked down more. It’s not necessarily true. There’s a new filter in place, and some filters have different categories ... It hasn’t been tweaked yet based on what’s being requested. If students are requesting access [to a website] ... they should let us know because we review that [request] with the administration, with the curriculum office, and we’re in the business of trying to make learning accessible,” said MacDonald.

PPS has, however, decided to implement Mosyle’s academic dishonesty restrictions, resulting in many AI or AI-related sites being banned, including ChatGPT. Assistant Principal Rashone Johnson said that the ban is a result of complaints and conversations among teachers, administrators, and the Board of Education.

“We want you to be able to think critically. We want you to know how to do the proper research to be able to support whatever it is that you’re writing about or your opinion on something. [And] we want those thoughts to come from you,” said Johnson.

However, not all students are in complete agreement with the decision.

“I think [the new system] is a net positive in the sense of security, but it can also ... be used in an oppressive way. [Though] banning ChatGPT does stop students from using generative AI for school assignments, [it] also ... cuts off students’ capabilities for more creative uses of AI, similarly to how stopping students from using a calculator [in] math class just leaves them not being able to understand the full function of a calculator,” said Shriram Joshi ’28.

The PHS administration has installed AI usage posters specifying different levels of acceptable AI use, ranging from “none” to “AI-generated with editing,” in many classrooms, with the vast majority of teachers enforcing the



photo: Katherine Chen

Agatha Patten ’27 and Benji Caswell Klein ’27 work on their computers during Tiger Time.

“none” category. They administration created the posters based on feedback from teachers on AI usage by students.

“It gives us a common language that helps teachers discuss what level of AI is acceptable in their class, and it allows students to also think about how they’re using AI, whether they’re using it as a tool to supplement and enhance what they’re doing, or they’re using it as a crutch,” said U.S. history teacher Dr. Rick Miller.

Anna Soriano currently has her English I and English III students write essays in class to prevent the usage of AI, though she does acknowledge the power of the new technology.

“We use all sorts of assistive technology to help us throughout the day. I think that we need to prepare students for what’s coming, and they’re going to walk into a world where AI is everywhere,” said Soriano.

PHS students campaign for 16 and 17 year olds to vote in school board elections

Angela Chen, NEWS & FEATURES CO-EDITOR
Emil Kapur and Asma Frough, STAFF WRITERS

Decades after the 26th Amendment lowered the voting age to 18, a new generation of activists are raising a familiar question: should 16 and 17 year olds be allowed to vote? At PHS, Carina He ’26 is answering this question by starting a chapter of the national Vote16 campaign. Vote16 is a national organization that, for over a decade, has worked to expand voting rights to 16 and 17 year olds in Board of Education elections at local, statewide, and national levels. The campaign has seen success in 12 cities across the United States, most recently in Newark, New Jersey. Through her club, Youth Civic Leaders of America (YCLA), He has partnered with co-leader Ash Nieman ’26 to promote Vote16 and increase civic engagement in the Princeton community.

The Vote16 initiative argues that since students at age 16 and 17 years olds begin to take on more adult responsibilities — such as working a job and driving — they should also be granted the right to vote in local elections. This is especially relevant in Board of Education elections, since the decisions made by the Board primarily impact students.

“The Board of Education is [like] the government to the students, [so] students [will be] able to understand how to vote in this ... more controlled environment ... rather than just going straight into voting when they’re 18 years old in a presidential election where the entire country [is] voting — [so] they’re able to see civics education take form in their local area,” said He.

He and Nieman have also cited voting in school board elections as a beneficial way for young people to apply their knowledge of civics education outside the classroom.

“[At PHS] we have this baseline of education about U.S. history and our teachers stress how important voting is as a democratic right. It’s not like we don’t know anything about voting, but [when you] start that process younger ... [you’re] much more likely to turn out for state elections [and] representative elections,” said Nieman.

According to Tufts University’s Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning & Engagement, a non-partisan research organization focused on youth civic engagement, young voter turnout dropped from over 50 percent during the 2020 presidential election to 42 percent in the 2024 election. The top reasons for youth who had not registered to vote were disinterest in the



photo courtesy: Carina He

Princeton Youth Civic Leaders members, led by Carina He ’26 and Ash Nieman ’26, join other chapters of the statewide Vote16 at the Trenton State House in June 2025.

election, lack of time, and absence of knowledge about registration deadlines.

“Generally voter turnout is still not that great, especially in school board elections, the turnout is only like 10 percent — which is terrible. And since we’re in such a dire political climate right now, it’s very important that we teach the people who will be voting in the next presidential election [or] the Senate election ... We have to teach them the habit of voting, how important it is, how to vote, [and] how to register vote,” said Nieman.

YCLA has been working with several members of the PPS Board of Education and Brian McDonald, a Princeton town councilman, to propose Vote16. On September 8, YCLA spoke with the entire Princeton Town Council to introduce the initiative. Though the initiative received positive feedback from the Town Council, concerns have been raised over the rollout of the initiative.

“The other opposition we’ve seen comes down to money ... The ballot for the school board is the same ballot as the [ballot] for a state election. So in order for [students] to vote ... new ballots have to be printed that only have school board members,” said Nieman.

The Council also expressed concerns regarding the maturity of 16–17 year olds and their eligibility to vote in

school board elections. Unless the bill is passed through state legislation, legal barriers make it harder for 16 year olds from being given the right to vote in Princeton.

Unlike Newark, where Vote16 was successfully enacted, Princeton is not a Faulkner Act community. The Faulkner Act, which is also known as the Optional Municipality Charter Law, grants municipalities the right to choose their own form of government and gives a significant degree of power to the locality. Therefore, in order to get the Municipality of Princeton to pass Vote16’s proposal, YCLA has to overcome more legal hurdles than they would have had to in a municipality operating under the Faulkner Act.

Despite this, several members of the Board of Education and the Town Council have expressed support for Vote16, believing it would be beneficial for the youth to express what they care about.

“Youth are the most invested demographic in [the] sort of the issues that I think local government needs to be taking the most decisive action on, like climate change and active transportation ... I think those are issues that are the most important issues for society as a whole, but older voters don’t always get it. That’s why I think it’s positive for society to have, for the community as a whole, to have youth engagement,” said Cohen.

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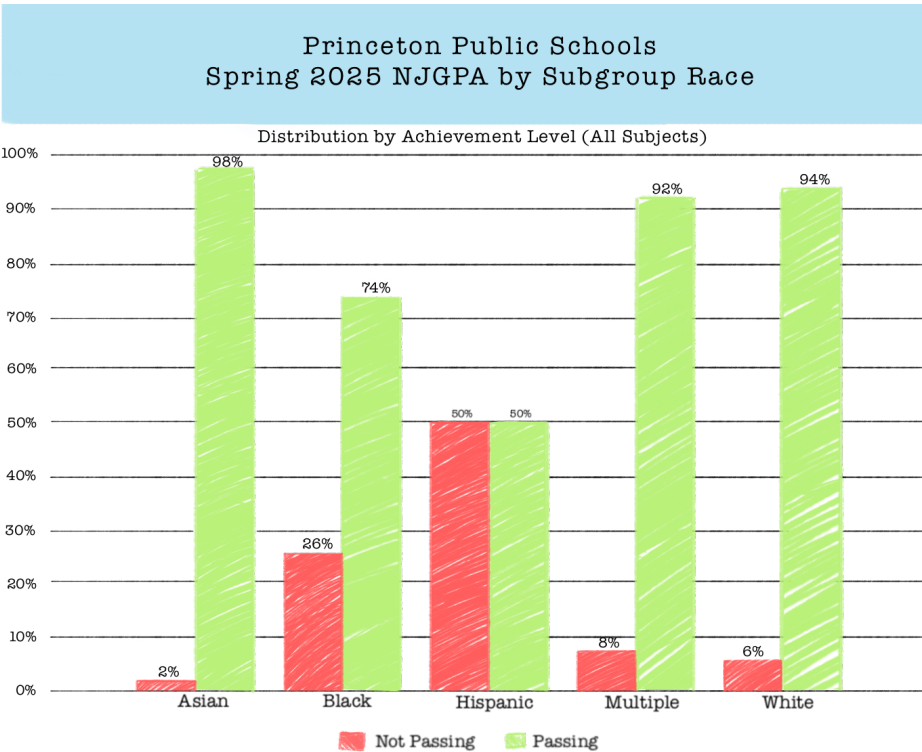
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The achievement gap at PHS

Joy Chen, MULTIMEDIA CO-EDITOR
Tyler Fiorentino and Joshua Huang, STAFF WRITERS



NJGPA passing versus not passing rates for different races at PHS.

On August 21, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction Kimberly Tew released the results of PHS’s New Jersey Graduation Proficiency Assessment (NJGPA), which revealed disparities in pass rates between Asian, White, Black and Hispanic students. The NJGPA is a graduation requirement administered annually to 11th graders, though alternatives exist if a student does not pass the test.

Though PHS has been known for its testing disparities since at least 2005, when it was the subject of a New York Times article titled “The Achievement Gap in Elite High Schools,” district officials, teachers, and students say they aren’t giving up.

This summer, the Princeton Board of Education approved a five-member Affirmative Action team tasked with updating the Comprehensive Equity Plan, a two-part document mandated by the state law that outlines the district’s plan to combat

inequalities within the education system, including achievement gaps.

“The work never ends; we have to explore and dive into data all the time. The data should help us make decisions about [whether] there are more programming or services that we can provide, and ... when we provide it. I think one of the foundational pieces of all of this work is building relationships with our students and with our families. [And] the more we know about our students, the more we can ... excite them in their learning,” said Angela Siso Stentz, Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources and a member of the district’s Affirmative Action team.

The 2025 NJGPA data showed that 74 percent of Black students and 50 percent of Hispanic students at PHS met the graduation requirements — compared to Asian, White, and students of other ethnicities having a 92 percent pass rate

or higher. The report did not detail the NJGPA scores by income level. However, one of the priorities for Dr. Andrea Dinan, the director of the IDEAS center, is for all students to be able to access free, high-quality tutoring — a service that can be unaffordable for many families.

“We’re working with the Pace Center [for Civic Engagement] at Princeton University, and we’re going to have five to seven tutors from Princeton University on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday,” said Dinan. “They’re going to provide SAT [and] ACT help and AP prep, and we’re going to target lower-resourced families, but it will be open to everyone. I think that’s one of the ways that it really works well — if it’s open to everyone, but we make sure that ... lower income students ... know about the opportunities.”

In solving an issue as complex as the achievement gap, teachers are playing a role in changing the culture within the classroom. PHS Social Studies teacher Dr. Katie Dineen is an advocate for an educational philosophy known as the Universal Design for Learning (UDL). First designed in the 1990s based on research in neuroscience, UDL advocates for a curriculum in which students are provided with multiple ways to acquire information and multiple ways to demonstrate what they know. Dineen is also working to make her classroom more culturally inclusive.

“You know, regardless of where [students] come from, and especially with AP [World History] being such a transitory and international community, there’s so many

opportunities for students to bring their own family’s artifacts into the classroom, or their family’s perspectives or speakers,” said Dineen. “I think I [have] created a place for each student to feel as though their story and their origin are important enough to be centered in that curriculum.”

Furthermore, many clubs at PHS are also working on fostering a supportive community among underprivileged students. This includes Generation 1, a club focused on helping students who would be the first generation within their family to pursue higher education.

“I know from my personal experience, my mom didn’t get to pursue a further education, [so] I struggled a lot trying to figure out resources for SATs or college [applications] or just finding things in general to help me throughout my school journey,” said Aimy Solares-Zacarias ’26, who serves as the co-president of Generation 1. “Our main goal is to just help provide those resources for kids who are [first-generation students] on their pathway to [higher education].”

Solares-Zacarias recalls a period of academic isolation within her own journey where she was afraid to ask for help. Today, she encourages her fellow students to follow a path similar to her own by contacting Generation 1 to find a community of academic support.

“If anyone is reading [this] and they’re a [first-generation] student, I want them to be able to reach out to us because I know it’s not embarrassing or a weakness to want to ask for help,” said Solares-Zacarias.

Comparison to State Average

State Performance*			PPS*		
	Not Graduation Ready	Graduation Ready		Not Graduation Ready	Graduation Ready
Math	42%	58%	Math	16%	84%
ELA	19%	81%	ELA	8%	92%

*Numbers are rounded

graphics: Katherine Chen

PHS administration envisions “Deep Learning” for upcoming school year

Daniel Gu, STAFF WRITER
Fangwu Yu, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

As a new school year begins at PHS, the school administration is taking a different approach to the education system. Dubbed “Deep Learning” by Principal Cecilia Birge, the plan aims to bring a different perspective of what it means to learn at PHS.

The backbone of this approach consists of the changes to the bell schedule. At the end of each typical Tuesday and Wednesday (B2 and B3 days, respectively), the administration has added a flexible learning lab time dedicated to getting school-related tasks done. This change also shortens the previously 90-minute instructional blocks to help take pressure off of students.

The root of these changes lies in a Grawemeyer Award-winning book, “In Search of Deeper Learning: The Quest to Remake the American High School” by Jal Mehta and Sarah Fine. Assistant Principal Lauren Freedman notes the recurring themes of the book and relates it to the changes made to the bell schedule.

“One of the things that kept popping up is that a lot of students learn through their own self-exploration and doing things that they love, and it’s not necessarily sitting in your class,” said Freedman. “It’s through going and meeting with your clubs and learning to work with one another and things like that actually help people grow more than necessarily just sitting in the classroom.”

Newly elected PPS Superintendent, Dr. Michael LaSusa, seconds the need for self-



Chemistry teacher Janine Giamanco assists Alex Paul ‘27 in making up classwork during newly instituted Flex learning times.

sufficient growth outside the classroom. LaSusa hopes that PHS will provide and encourage an environment where students can learn to think critically and contribute to a wide variety of environments — whether it be in the workplace, civic life, or family life.

“I think we’re living in a very polarized society right now — not just in the United

States, but all over the world — and it’s incredibly important that students develop a capacity to listen to people who might not share their exact viewpoint, and engage meaningfully in conversation and dialogue with diverse people [who have] diverse perspectives,” said LaSusa. “We want to try to provide everyone with experiences that create balance and perspective and

appreciation for others, and, of course, a knowledge base and a skill set that prepares them to do whatever it is they want to do once they leave.”

The administration hopes that these changes will be used responsibly and to the fullest extent by the students. However, if modifications are needed, surveys and opinions from the students will be taken into account for the future. Birge expresses her satisfaction for the bell schedule change, but recognizes that the effectiveness will depend on students.

“I genuinely think that we reached a sweet spot after so many revisions. But having said that ... the Tuesday flexible learning time was designed with a lot of intention for targeted support. If students abuse it, then we’re placing that burden for teachers to teach more in the instructional blocks [of this] bell schedule,” said Birge.

The PHS administration credits the development of the new schedule that fits deeper learning to the feedback provided by both students and teachers at the end of last year.

“Trust me, we read every single thing that students present to us. We may or may not be able to modify the schedule or our approach for all kinds of reasons, but we do read everything. We really value everything you present to us. We think it through and we try our best to incorporate it so those surveys are important,” said Birge.



NJ Civic Information Consortium awards The Tower grant for newsroom upgrades

This September, The Tower was awarded a grant of \$13,700 for technology upgrades, new camera equipment, as well as to increase diversity and equity in the newsroom.

NJ Civic Information Consortium, a part of the Council of New Jersey Grantmakers, is a nonprofit organization that funds newsrooms across the state, helping improve the quality of civic information in communities. To date, the Consortium has invested more than \$10 million in local news across the state, supporting nearly 75 newsrooms in 19 of New Jersey’s 21 counties.

Whitney Davidson-Hinz



Davidson-Hinz teaches her AP World class how to do stimulus questions.

Whitney Davidson-Hinz has wanted to teach history since high school, crediting one of her own teachers as the inspiration behind her choice of career.

“[She] changed my life and really inspired me ... I decided I wanted to do for others what she had done for me ... I had originally thought about history as a collection of facts and dates, and [my teacher] encouraged me to think about it as a discipline, the craft of a historian [as well as] a contested narrative that people fight over,” said Davidson-Hinz.

Over her past 20 years as a teacher, Davidson-Hinz has applied her craft across the country in places as wide-ranging as California, Iowa, and New York. However, she sees the Princeton community as uniquely encouraging towards developing meaningful connections between teachers and students.

“In speaking with many, many people in this community, I got the sense that this was a place that had a lot of shared values with me in terms of my own approach to teaching ... on day one, emphasizing the importance of developing relationships with kids and keeping that central to my work was very inspiring, and you don’t always hear that,” said Davidson-Hinz.

This year, Davidson-Hinz will be teaching U.S. History I and AP U.S. History. In the classroom, she strives to encourage open discussion and careful source analysis, emphasizing the role history class plays in developing essential life skills.

“The skills we are reinforcing in history are critical toward any number of aspects of living a good life ... that would include the development of critical thinking skills, our media landscape [being] saturated with AI as well as misinformation ... you need to be able to distinguish between what’s accurate and what’s inaccurate. I think history [also] teaches empathy as we learn about other ways of life ... it gives you a way to think about why things are the way they are today,” said Davidson-Hinz.

Davidson-Hinz is also a singer-songwriter, and enjoys performing her original compositions at Open Mic nights. She also frequently visits national parks with her family and loves collecting stamps at each one for her national park passport.

PHS new teacher profiles

Daniel da Costa and Andrew Kuo, STAFF WRITERS
Elena Pavicevic, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Prutha Patel

As a self-described adventurer and thrill-seeker, Prutha Patel’s newest adventure brings her from Minnesota to PHS’s math department to teach Geometry and Pre-Calculus Accelerated. Patel joins PHS after two years of teaching at Albert Lea Area schools in Albert Lea, Minnesota, where she served as both a technology teacher and robotics coach.

“Two years ago, I was a first-year teacher and I accepted a role [to] teach technology instead of math. I really enjoyed teaching technology, [and] I was also teaching designing, robotics, 3D designing, [and] Python,” said Patel. “My students were very interested in robotics, [so] I decided to start a club and coach them [for robotics competitions].”

Growing up, Patel was inspired to become a teacher by her father, who was an educator himself. However, as an undergraduate at the University of Minnesota, Patel decided to pursue computer engineering — but later realized that path was not for her.

“I did take some computer classes in college, but I ended up liking the math part of computer science and not the computer part of it. So that’s why I decided to just major in math and become a teacher,” said Patel.

Although Patel chose to teach at PHS for its learning environment, she also recognizes a certain competition between students that was not particularly evident at her former school.

“For students [at PHS], they are constantly looking for that competition. I think that’s the mindset that they have: ‘Oh, if my friend took Accelerated Geometry, I have to take that as well,’” said Patel. “Everyone’s different, and just because your friend is ahead doesn’t mean that ... you have to [be] as well.”

Thus, Patel hopes to create a more collaborative and engaging environment in her classes.

“Oftentimes, it is working with someone and not having to submit any formal paper. Instead, [students are] working with someone on a board where ... you just have to write an answer. So [students are] freely thinking — and whatever is in their mind, they’re writing it down. It just helps them look at math in a different perspective.”



Patel assists Jaylah Wu ’29 with her Pre-Calculus Accelerated class practice.

Jessica Zhang



Zhang helps Markintosh Barthelemy ’29 with negative space drawings in Studio Art I.

Jessica Zhang, PHS’s newest art teacher, says she could have predicted half of her title — “teacher” — ever since she was a kid.

“I always knew that I was going to be a teacher because my parents always said that I was very bossy growing up,” said Zhang.

However, the “art” part would have come as a surprise to a younger Zhang.

“I was really bad at [art] when I was a kid — it was something that was forced onto me, so I never really liked it. But then I had some really good teachers in high school that really helped nurture my creative expression, and that’s where that passion came,” said Zhang.

This year, Zhang will be teaching four sections of Studio Art I, the introductory visual arts course at PHS which is the prerequisite for all other classes in the program. For her, one of the main attractions of PHS was its strong art program.

“I was very impressed [by] the Numina Gallery and I was very inspired and ... very motivated to work here,” said Zhang. “I get to develop a lot of one-on-one relationships with students [and] we do deeper engagement with the work rather than the fast pace of elementary school.”

Zhang is a recent graduate of The College of New Jersey and was previously an elementary school teacher in the South Brunswick school district. For her, the switch, while noticeable, has been worth it.

“I [taught] in elementary school before this, [and] it’s very different. I really like [PHS] so far because I get to develop a lot of one-on-one relationships with students, [and] we do deeper engagement with the work rather than like the fast pace of elementary school,” said Zhang.

In her free time, Zhang hopes to continue her various hobbies, both artistic — stained glass, working with yarn and fabric — and not, like cooking and long walks in the park. However, her biggest passion is her students.

“[I’m] passionate about seeing students’ confidence as they become more familiar and they develop skills in art,” said Zhang. “I would say [it’s] always [about] the connections that I get to make with students.” grow ... [it’s] always [about] the connections that I get to make with students.”

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OPINIONS

Substitutes deserve our respect

Fangwu Yu, STAFF WRITER
Alexander Gu, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

It's the first period of the day, and you sit in the classroom, waiting for your teacher to arrive. The door swings open, and a substitute teacher enters instead. Some students turn to each other and start whispering, while others outright disregard the substitute's attempts to regain control of the classroom.

Although it might seem like just another class, the way students treat substitutes and TAs matters. These staff members take their time to keep the class flowing and



support students when they need help, often with little recognition. Respecting substitutes and TAs keeps the classroom organized, helps everyone stay focused, and ensures that learning runs smoothly.

The roles of substitutes, teacher assistants, and student teachers are to serve as support, whether by assisting the lead teacher with a lesson or being an additional source of guidance for students. Albert Arwas, a veteran PHS substitute teacher, is familiar with the importance of this position.

“A substitute teacher, in my opinion, ought to be the alter ego. In other words, an extension of the teacher,” said Arwas. “I have my way of interpreting exactly what the teacher wants me to do, and I carry it out. I walk around and make sure that people work and so on. If someone is not doing any work, I sort of say, well, is there a problem? Basically, to make sure that the class runs smoothly in the absence of the teacher.”

While substitutes focus on keeping order in the classroom, TAs and student teachers take their role a step further. Besides passing out papers and taking attendance, they work and learn under the guidance of a more experienced teacher to complete their secondary education training. Eric Soltys, a new student teacher at PHS, assists with a genetics elective as well as two accelerated and AP

biology courses. As a senior at The College of New Jersey, he continues to train to become a full-time teacher while already taking on classroom duties.

“A lot of students expect [a] substitute to come in and know all the answers and be perfectly confident and secure, but they might still be confused about ... classroom routines. It's perfectly okay for a [student teacher] or a substitute to come in and learn to adapt to a classroom experience,” said Soltys.

These jobs that substitutes and TAs hold may seem simple. Still, they face a variety of challenges daily that make their job much tougher than students might realize. Specifically, Farzana Ahmad, a substitute teacher at PHS, has experienced a variety of issues during her time in the classroom.

“Sometimes if students don't have anything to do, or if they don't want to complete their work ... then they would just ... not listen,” said Ahmad. “They'd be throwing papers and talking out loud ... sometimes I've seen that they would video record what other students are doing.”

Substitutes and TAs may not be present every day, but they play a vital role in facilitating our education. We as students must work to treat these individuals with the appreciation they deserve, and in doing so, make the classroom a better learning environment for everyone.

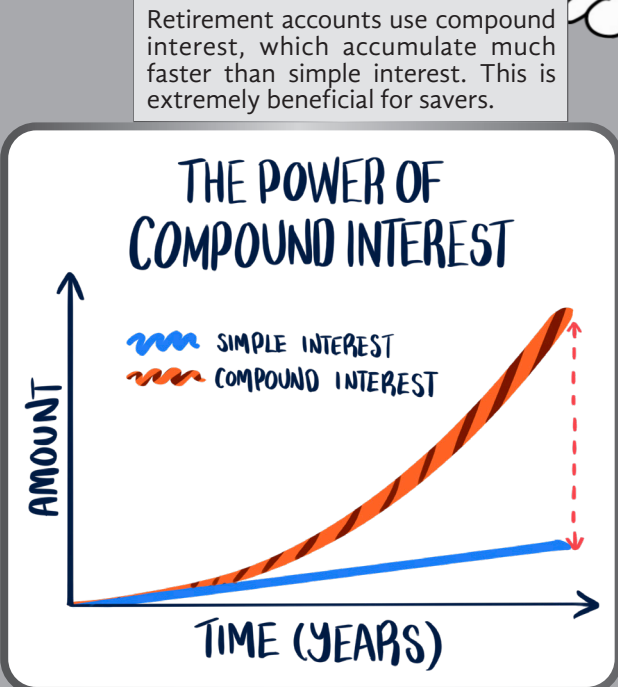
Save now, spend later

Stephanie Liao and Chloe Zhao, OPINIONS CO-EDITORS

According to a 2024 survey from the Bank of America, only one in five members of Gen Z deposit funds to a retirement account.

This phenomenon isn't ungrounded. After all, retirement appears a lifetime away for most teenagers. However, starting to think about long-term uses for your money now can mean gaining hundreds of thousands of dollars in interest later on. Additionally, building good saving habits can also help with more short term milestones, like your first downpayment for a house or car. Although saving for retirement seems intimidating at first, more of PHS's employed students should begin.

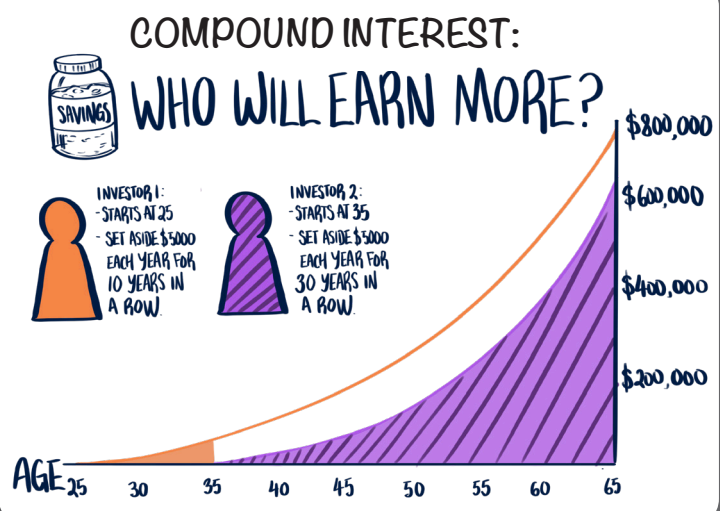
To get started, the Roth IRA is a well-suited account to the interests of students. Roth IRAs are individual retirement accounts allowing for monthly contributions of up to \$7,000 a year. This account's advantage is that contributions can be withdrawn at any time with no tax or penalties, creating a compromise between saving and spending.



Starting to save for retirement is imperative. Even beginning a few years earlier can save you hundreds of thousands of dollars down the line!

- If you are interested in setting up a Youth Roth IRA, here are the steps you and your parent/guardian can take:
1. To have a Roth IRA account, you must earn taxable income. For your income to qualify as taxable, it needs to come from formal employment via a W2 part-time job or self-employment that is registered at the IRS.
 2. Work with your parent/guardian to open an account at a bank or a brokerage firm. The account should be a custodial IRA in your name, with your parent as the custodian.
 3. Decide how much of your paycheck you want to contribute each year, and which stocks you'd like to invest in. Parents can also deposit money as long as it doesn't exceed your income and stays below the \$7,000 yearly limit.

Of course, Roth IRAs are just one of the many options available for students to think about! Please remember to do your own research and talk to an adult about what may be suitable for your particular needs. Regardless of the method you choose, starting to save some of your hard-earned money now can help boost you toward financial stability later in life.



graphics: Charley Hu and Mason Charles

CHEERS

STUFF WE LIKE

STUFF WE DON'T

JEERS

- ARIANA GRANDE'S tour
- SWEDISH candy
- SIX SEVEN
- Facial SPRAY
- TAMARIND JUICE
- THE SUMMER I TURNED PRETTY MOVIE

- Slimy SOUP
- Computer RESTRICTIONS
- TWO TIER mirror glaze cacao cake with RASPBERRY COULIS
- CRUSHED CHIPS
- COLD MORNINGS
- Charger THIEVES

In search of third spaces

Rohan Srivastava, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Some of the most important subjects in life are those that cannot be learned in solitude or taught in school. Whether those are skills learned through experience or lessons realized through failure, as students, we ought to have a place to explore these ideas. Instead of relying on a home or school setting to facilitate this growth, we should seek a “third space” — a public area where individuals can interact and build a sense of community. The way to cultivate such a space is to ensure that everyone is welcome there and that there are no serious responsibilities. Busy PHS students often neglect to venture into environments besides home and school, but seeking out third spaces is highly beneficial for their own well-being and overall social health.

PHS’s academic culture is very competitive, and third spaces may feel like a waste of time unless it’s for meeting up to do work. However, these places act as buffers against burnout and isolation. Many libraries now incorporate creative “stress-buster” zones — think therapy dogs, board games, and “Secrets Walls” where anxious students can share confessions anonymously and connect through shared vulnerability.

Indeed, studies have shown that attendance at third spaces provide academic benefits too. For example, a study in 2011 by Anton Havnes, a professor specialized in education, found that the likelihood of college enrollment increased by 7% when students took advantage of these spaces. He reasoned that this increase was due to more people being taught about the importance of college having spoken to people they otherwise would not have. A survey from the NIH conducted shortly after the rise of Covid found that people reported levels of reduced well-being because they could not access their third spaces, proving that these spaces are essential for success.



The Hinds Plaza provides an accessible third space.

But even without these benefits, students should value and protect third spaces. School often forces students to be constantly productive without room for breaks, and this stress carries over into late-night studying sessions at home. Third spaces allow for us to slow down and have fun; it is just an added benefit that enjoying ourselves is academically beneficial.



photos: Yeseong Na

Local parks, like Barbara Smoyer, offer a shaded area to unwind.


Given all of these upsides, where are these places? Established third spaces have a few characteristics: it should be welcoming to all and easily accessible, it shouldn’t require work or commitment to participate in, and finally, it should be focused on human connection. They outline the key social functions these spaces serve — not just physically, but emotionally and culturally. His framework helps us understand why these spaces matter so deeply in building community, well-being, and belonging. Though the internet wasn’t prevalent when third spaces were first devised, these places can be online too. Consider using these places to take a break and take comfort in knowing that work is still being done; learning is most efficient when it is wanted.

One of Princeton’s most attractive third spaces for students is the Princeton Public Library. Whether you’re meeting with friends to study or just to have fun, it serves as a place for socialization and connection. The Teen Center frequently offers Take & Make crafts to help destress, and the third floor has a collection of different games to play with friends. In addition to serving as just a free-form space, the library often hosts events open to the public. Princeton also offers many cafés and boba shops with space that students can take advantage of, such as Small World Coffee and Junbi. No matter how busy life seems to get, we should always carve out time to find a third space and experience connection.

PHS SPEAKS OUT


WHAT IS YOUR OPINION ON THE ONLINE DISCOURSE ABOUT SYDNEY SWEENEY’S AMERICAN EAGLE JEANS AD AND KATSEYE’S GAP JEANS AD?

Stephanie Liao and Chloe Zhao, OPINIONS CO-EDITORS




“CLEARLY WHEN THEY WERE DESIGNING THE AD IT MIGHT SEEM LIKE A COOL THING ON THE DRAWING BOARD, BUT ...YOU CAN KIND OF INTERPRET IT IN A VERY CONTROVERSIAL WAY. THEY SHOULD’VE BEEN A LITTLE MORE SENSITIVE.”

-LILLY LUDEWIG '26




“THE SYDNEY SWEENEY AD PERPETUATED THIS IDEA [THAT] SOME PEOPLE HAVE BETTER GENES THAN OTHERS. AND I FEEL LIKE THE KATSEYE [AD] WAS A GOOD RESPONSE... IT JUST SHOWED THAT...WE’RE ALL PEOPLE IN AMERICA WHO SHOULD BE REPRESENTED.”

-AARAV UPADHYAY '27



“I THINK THAT THE SYDNEY SWEENEY AD...SHOWED HOW THE CREATIVE CHOICE BY THE PEOPLE MADE THERE BE A BIGGER DEBATE ABOUT THE AD. I THINK THE FOCUS ON ONE BEAUTY IDEAL...DIDN’T REALLY HELP THE AD.”

-ANAYA SINHA '28



“I THINK ON A SURFACE LEVEL, IT’S JUST A REALLY FUN...BACK AND FORTH KIND OF COMPETITION BETWEEN TWO COMPANIES, AND I THINK IT’S REALLY FUN TO SEE HOW TWO BIG FASHION COMPANIES...USE DIFFERENT CREATIVE WAYS TO ADVERTISE THEMSELVES.”

-REBECCA ZHANG '26

photos: Stephanie Liao and Chloe Zhao



MONTHLY PROJECTS



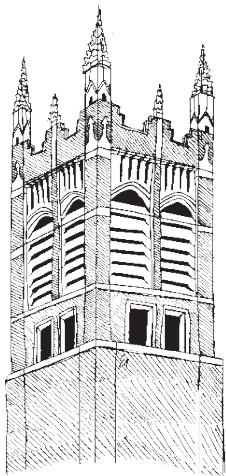
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The perils of unopposed elections

Editorial

Princeton is no stranger to unopposed elections. On the ballot this coming November, there will be two unopposed positions for the Princeton Council, and three unopposed seats on the PPS Board of Education. During PHS’s own election for student body council earlier this month, the seats for both student body vice president and secretary were unopposed. This is hardly a new phenomenon.

For the past five years, numerous Princeton municipal leaders have won primary and general elections uncontested. The same can be said of many PHS student council positions for upperclassmen: every single student council candidate for the class of 2026 ran unopposed. This concerning trend of candidates being elected through no-contest undermines the health of democracy.

Recent changes in student council policies only exacerbate these concerns: starting from the 2026–27 school year, only students who have previously served on student council may run for student body positions and as school board liaison. The result? A reduction of an already shrinking field of candidates.

When voters lose the opportunity to choose between candidates, they often become apathetic, causing the trend to continue into future elections. According to data gathered by Survey and Ballot Systems in 2024, there is a 39 percent decrease in voter turnout in non-competitive elections. This is reflected in PHS Student Council elections, where voter turnout averaged 62.4 percent in campaigns where all races have more than two candidates but dropped to 24.6 percent in years with only one candidate.

In Princeton municipality elections, voter turnout was 57.66 percent, placing it second to last place among Mercer county municipalities — and voter turnout has been on the decline since 2016. Officials have placed emphasis on measures to increase voter turnout, yet the fundamental root cause of voter hesitancy remains the same: a lack of choices at the ballot box.

Indeed, this disillusionment in the electoral process can be seen at the school level, too. Freshman year student council races often feature a wide range of hopefuls, each vying for a position they see as prestigious and meaningful in the school community. Yet just one year later, the number

of candidates running in sophomore year races drops 61 percent, going from about 4.16 candidates per race freshman year to just 1.75. When students realize that these positions can’t truly bring change, they may no longer be eager to spend time, energy, and effort to run for them.

Participation in school elections has been found to predict civic engagement in adulthood, with students who vote or run feeling more prepared to engage in the same processes as adults. This means that disengagement from elections at a student level can lead to decreased political engagement through both running and voting in future democratic processes.

Breaking the cycle of apathy, beginning at the local level, is critical. The municipality makes decisions daily on many of the most important policies that directly impact our lives. As just one instance, approving new high-density housing projects is not a decision handed down from Washington, but rather taken on 400 Witherspoon St.

To address these challenges, it is time we revitalize what it means to win one of these positions. Whether it be at the school or municipal level, these positions can hold real value and change-making power. The real question is, of course, why has the ambition to serve in these roles vanished? The answer lies in the idea that these roles are perceived as lacking any real agency: student council positions simply serve to plan prom and town council members just rubber stamp predetermined policies.

So to the community, we say this: come together and unite behind new ideas: rally for fresh faces that break the status quo. Pool your minds — and funds — together, and perhaps you will see someone on the town council that truly represents you and advances the values that you care about.

To be clear, the current candidates don’t present any inherent flaws. But the mere fact that they have run unopposed for several election cycles sets the scene for deep-seated voter apathy.

When local governing bodies seldom have to step out of their comfort zone and truly connect with the community, the quality of our candidates falls short of what this town deserves. Without facing pressure to compete against opponents, winning candidates have the privilege of assuming positions with subpar effort, without the need to bring concrete policies to the table.

1 TO WIN



graphic: Katherine Chen

Note: Opinions Co-Editor Stephanie Liao and Multimedia Co-Editor Aarna Vachhrajani are PHS ’27 Student Council President and PHS Student Body Treasurer, respectively, and recuse themselves from any involvement in this editorial.

Technology restrictions hinder learning

Aryan Singla and Asha Nag, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

The start of the new school year has brought many changes to Princeton High School: new teachers, new schedules, new facilities, and — most noticeably — new school-issued MacBook. On paper, the laptops are a clear upgrade: faster, sleeker, and more powerful. But beneath that polish, many students have run into something less exciting: a wall of restrictions.

Last year’s devices allowed students a degree of flexibility across multiple apps. Students once had access to Adobe Creative Cloud — tools like Photoshop, Illustrator, Premiere Pro, and InDesign — which were heavily used by visual arts elective classes, as well as various clubs like Yearbook.

When access to key academic or creative tools is blocked, not every student has a clear or immediate path forward — especially those who may not know how to navigate the tech support process. That gap points to a deeper equity issue of technological fluency — an issue that our tech department should work to solve, potentially by hosting assemblies to instruct students.

Still, Dean Diana Lygas believes that the district is moving in the right direction.

“There is certainly a balance that comes into play. [Unfortunately], that sometimes means blocking access to

certain content that might be non-educational, disruptive, or inappropriate,” said Lygas. “But I love that our students have the benefit of receiving a school-issued computer as nice as a MacBook. It offers so much power and creativity in what students can use it for.”

However, students such as Adam Kaplan ’27 argue that the benefits of the investment by the school are significantly cut short through device restrictions.

“If you’re giving us computers this good, we should be doing something with them, considering [the district] just spent hundreds of dollars per student getting us these crazy computers,” said Kaplan.

The abruptness of the technology changes have wreaked havoc on the workflow of not just students but also teachers as they have lost access to classroom technology. Printers, document cameras, and DVD players — each pieces of technology that had previously been integral parts of the way some teachers have conducted classes — have disappeared without explanation or forewarning.

“Our old dock cameras are gone. Our DVD players are gone ... they’ve just ceased to exist ... they [are] no longer here in any of the rooms. [The] new technology sounds great. However, it doesn’t allow us to teach the same materials that we used to,” said English teacher Anna Soriano.

Restrictions on technology, while well-intentioned, are detrimental largely for the same reasons that

We implore administration to keep the first part of our school’s motto at the top of their mind: learn to live.

The Tower

Princeton High School

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Mission Statement

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

Editorial Board

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

Letter and Submission Policy

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

The Tower Online

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

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

Democracy works. But it’s not a passive form of government — it works only when people are active in it. From the forums in Ancient Greece to the record electoral participation in India in its recent elections, it is up to us — we the people — to fulfill our duty to create a more perfect union by demanding a choice worth voting for, and ceasing support for a coronation of the unopposed.



photo: Charley Hu

A restricted message from Mosyle appears when students attempt to access certain websites helicopter parenting creates ineffective adults. We implore administration to keep the first part of our school’s motto at the top of their mind: learn to live. It means — in today’s day and age — learning to live not just with technology but learning to use it appropriately and wield it as a tool. And that is not possible without being transparent with and taking feedback from teachers and students — the people who are most affected by technology changes.

Vanguard Presents:

PAPER

Paper use at PHS

Claire Sek, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Saanvi Shekatkar, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

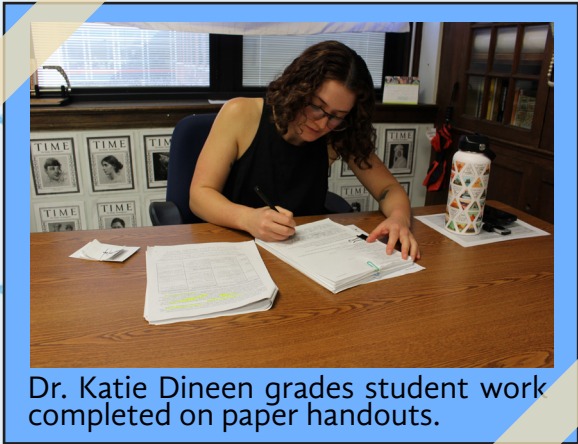
How do teachers use paper in class?

“I print out all the handouts in my unit — around 5-10 pages double sided — so my students can take notes on paper.”

- English teacher Scott Cameron

“I use about 300 pages per student each year. They get about five packets — one for each unit — in place of a textbook. Tests and quizzes are also on paper.”

- History teacher Dr. Katie Dineen

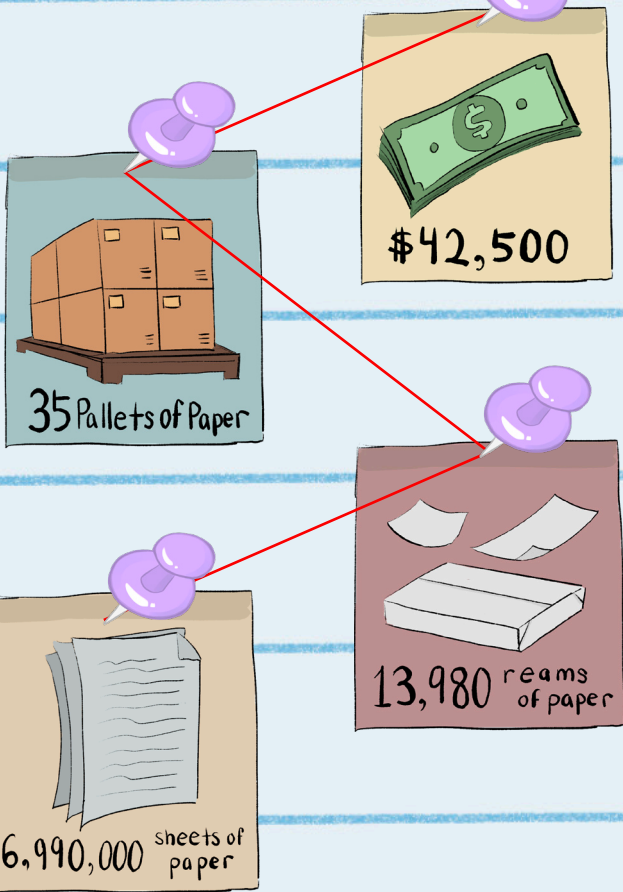


Dr. Katie Dineen grades student work completed on paper handouts.

Would going paperless save the school money, or would it cost more?

While extremely unlikely, going paperless would save the school a lot of money. To begin with, the \$42,500 spent yearly on paper itself could be put toward other motives. On top of that, this would allow the district to save extra money previously spent on materials such as ink, printing equipment, and mailing fees.

How much money is spent on paper yearly throughout the district?



The decline of paper use at PHS

Throughout recent years, Princeton Public Schools have been steadily implementing technology in the classroom. Largely jumpstarted with virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic, the district has continued its initiative to reinforce technology-supported learning. Teachers have largely switched many assignments from paper handouts to online modules through the Canvas platform.

The district has further carried out its one-to-one student device program with the distribution of new MacBooks this year at the high school. The continuation of the digitization of learning materials has resulted in less need for paper in classrooms – but that trend may be coming to an end.

With AI becoming a further concern in classrooms, teachers may soon be switching back to traditional paper and pencil as an easy method to minimize AI use.

“I do think you’re going to see a shift to more pencil and paper [because] in May, when you sit for your AP tests, you will [most often] have to be able generate and write without the use of AI,” said history teacher David Roberts.

“I tend to lose my notes a lot, and when the school year is over, especially for subjects that carry over, like Chem or Calc, I look back on the notes a lot, so [a tablet is] more convenient for me.”

- Cynthia Shi '26



“[A tablet] takes up less resources and I don’t have to lug around a bunch of papers. If I make a mistake, I can undo, move stuff around without having to erase ... if you want to save trees, use an iPad if you can.”

- Akshaj Sama '26



“I prefer taking paper notes because I find that I retain information better when I’m writing it down ... and it’s helpful because I don’t need to buy an iPad ... it [also] shows that I’m not using any outside help.”

- Emma Dweck '27



Printer paper recently dropped off at PHS for copy machines across the building.

graphics: Emily Kim

photos: Katherine Chen and Emily Kim

Paper through the ages

Vanessa He and Anaya Sinha, CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

Ancient Egypt (3000 B.C.)

Ancient Egyptians used papyrus, harvested from reeds along the Nile, to create paper-like material. The pith was stripped and laid in layers, and then glued together with the natural sap. It was one of the earliest writing surfaces and was used for keeping records, administration, and literature. These thin sheets were able to carry the words of merchants, pharaohs, and storytellers.

China (105 A.D.)

The paper that we are familiar with today was invented by Cai Lun during the Han Dynasty, which was composed of mulberry bark, hemp, and rags macerated and dried. The mass production of paper allowed for widespread literacy and documentation, making it accessible and practical for many in China.

Islamic Golden Age (8th–11th centuries)

The Battle of Talas, fought between the Chinese and Arabs, revealed the secret of papermaking to the Islamic world. This led to a revolution of knowledge: it promoted the trade economy and flourished in literature, philosophy, and record-keeping.

Europe (13th–15th centuries)

Paper finally arrived in Europe through trade and exchange. Paper mills flourished and replaced costly parchment. The movable-type printing press, invented by Johannes Gutenberg from the 1450s transformed paper into the foundation of mass communication.

Modern Era (19th century–today)

Industrial papermaking from wood pulp has made paper widely available for everyone, especially due to low manufacturing costs. Paper is the foundation of almost everything we use, including books, newspapers, bags, currency, packaging. It facilitates our education, creativity, and communication. However, paper use has significantly declined since the 2000s, due to increased digitalization.

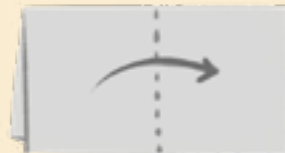
Origami hat trick

Emily Kim, VISUALS CO-EDITOR

1. Fold your paper in half.



2. Fold in half again, then unfold.



3. Fold inwards to the crease line.



4. Flip the paper over, repeat on the other side.



5. Fold the stabilizing flap upwards.



6. Flip the paper over, repeat on the other side.

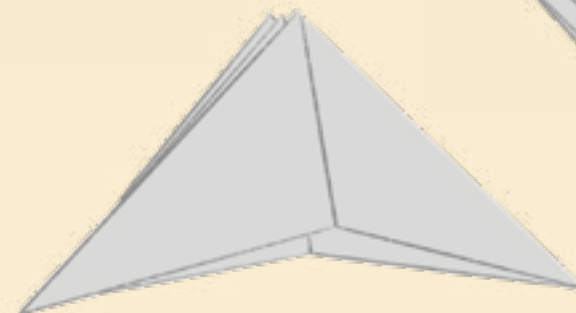


(b)

8. Fold (a) to (b). Flip the paper over, repeat on the other side.



(a)



You're done!

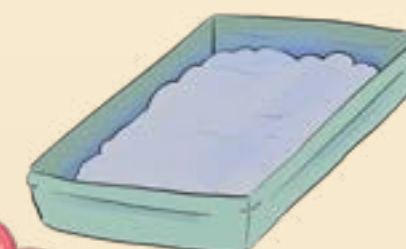
Do-it-yourself: paper

Maxime DeVico, STAFF WRITER

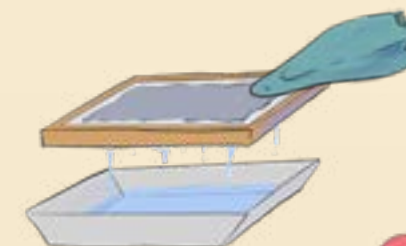
Step 1: Grab sheets of scrap paper and rip it into small pieces. Then, soak these pieces in water for one to two hours. Make sure to use enough water to completely submerge every piece of paper. Blend the mixture until smooth.



Step 2: Grab a shallow tub, fill it with water, and then add the mixture gradually and stir. Make sure that there are no big chunks of paper remaining.



Step 3: Take a screen (window screen or anything with a fine grid) and submerge it into the mixture. Raise it up and out of the tub, allowing a layer of pulp to form. Use a towel to gently press down on the screen and absorb any excess water.



Step 4: Gently begin to unroll your paper and remove it from your screen. If the paper doesn't come out easily, it might still be too wet. In this case, repeat step 3. Once your paper is removed, place it on an absorbent towel and allow it to air dry.



graphics:
Emily Kim

From pages to pixels

Aritra Ray, MANAGING EDITOR

Nishika Singh, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

You sit down and open your computer, log into Bluebook, and get ready to stare at a computer screen for the next two, three, maybe four hours. It wasn't always like this. For nearly 100 years, starting in 1926, the SAT has been a paper-and-pencil ritual as a Standard Aptitude Test to students across the country. The Digital SAT has only become the norm starting in March 2024 and the move to digital AP exams is still an ongoing process, with 16 exams becoming fully digital just last year.

The transition from paper to screens in education was accelerated by the pandemic. This year, the NJ Department of Education announced it would be field testing an adaptive version of the New Jersey Graduation Proficiency Assessment.

While these changes have been widely lauded by students and teachers alike, some have been quick to point out drawbacks to a digital medium. For one, a 2025 Oxford Learning study found that reading comprehension is stronger for physical books than to screens — and that reading on a screen can lead readers to skim and often miss key details. This outcome could be extremely detrimental for test-takers on standardized tests, which often emphasize close reading and recalling minute details.



The physical test booklet was also a workspace. Students were taught to mark it up, underlining key parts of a passage, crossing out incorrect answers, or writing down formulas and calculations directly next to a question, making it easier to spot silly mistakes. While markup tools do exist on digital assessments, they are often more time-consuming and less intuitive to use.

Digital assessments have been long heralded for their ability to deliver results with less test questions due to their adaptive nature. While shorter test times are undoubtedly a benefit, digital

test-taking can exacerbate inequalities and hurt low-income students without access to stable internet connectivity or a computer at home. Lack of access means that these students may not be familiarized with the digital testing format or have experience in a similar environment. This digital divide, therefore, systematically creates an uneven playing field for students based on socioeconomic status.

The issue of access also extends beyond homes. Schools may lack the necessary infrastructure to support a seamless transition to all-digital testing, including a sufficient number of functional computers or a strong enough Wi-Fi network for a large mass of students testing simultaneously. This often leads to technical difficulties, frequently evident even at PHS, that interrupt testing, adding more stress and frustration to both students and educators.

The transition to digital mediums is seen by many as inevitable, especially in an increasingly fast-paced 21st-century world. However, this format is much less tested than paper, which has stood strong over centuries of use. So while the era of paper & pencil learning may be in its waning stages, the benefits of this tangible medium prove that paper never folds.

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Two clubs using music to serve their community

Asma Frough, STAFF WRITER
Samantha Henderson, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

The Harmony Project

The Harmony Project is a testament to the transformative power of music, fostering artistic skills of students while simultaneously spreading joy to elders at senior care centers. The project is also part of the community service program, allowing students to earn hours while enjoying music.

“We’re all really passionate about music and performing. It’s really nice to see the people who live at the senior centers and [how] their faces light up,” said co-president Sarah Chen ’26.

The project is mainly student-operated, with orchestra director Robert Loughran being the advisor. The students reach out to the care centers and set times for their performances.

“[The club] is mainly led by myself, my co-leader Sarah Chen, and our officer Ash Nieman, though the club itself is supervised by the orchestra teacher ... we often invite other PHS musicians groups, such as acapella groups to perform as well,” said co-president Daniel Haiduc ’26.

Through the project, the students are able to make connections not only with each other but the people at the center.

“Last year, in the spring, we hosted Cat’s Meow as well as Cloud Nine, which the seniors at the senior center really enjoyed,” said Haiduc.

The project currently consists of 10 people, including a guitarist, singers, pianists, a violinist, a cellist, and flautists.

“We are trying to incorporate some chamber music, which is where you play with people of different instruments and you play pieces together,” said Chen. “So if we were to do something like that, we would probably want to hear people’s musical levels, to be able to pair them together.”

The goal of the project is to share their passion for music and give back to their community in a fun and joyful way.

They meet each Friday to discuss their plans for the performance that takes place on Sunday. All students are encouraged to join, and anyone interested should contact Chen or Haiduc.



photo courtesy: Daniel Haiduc
Sarah Chen ’26 plays the piano at the Carnegie Post Acute Care Center for the senior citizens.

Music Mentoring

If you’ve ever seen a group of elementary schoolers with instruments filing into the PAC after school, they’re probably a part of the Music Mentoring program. This long-standing community service club connects fourth and fifth grade students from PPS elementary schools who are beginners at an instrument with high school mentors. Each mentor works with a small group of kids who all play the same instrument. A typical lesson is 40 to 45 minutes long and consists of each mentor instructing the kids, helping them with musical assignments from school, and, ideally, getting to work with each kid one on one.

“I like whenever you can actually help one of the kids and you notice a difference that you can tell comes from your teaching. It’s a really cool experience. You help someone and you know that,” said co-leader Julian Suozzo ’26.

Both Suozzo and co-leader Seigo Iwata ’26 joined Music Mentoring as elementary school students and became mentors themselves once they reached high school.

The leaders agree that the program has stayed true to its original purpose.

“It’s been providing an opportunity to both students and also, sophomores and juniors at the high school,” said Iwata. “It gives high schoolers a teaching opportunity — learning how to coach kids, to deal with younger kids. And then the kids learn from older and more experienced people.”

This year, Iwata and Suozzo hope to expand the program by getting more high school mentors involved. As more elementary schoolers have joined the program in recent years, finding enough qualified mentors has become an issue.

“There was one point where I was alone with, like, eight kids. It was terrible. I could not get to each one individually,” said Iwata.

Music Mentoring is open to all students who play an instrument and would like to help elementary schoolers develop their musical skills. Interested students should contact Joe Bongiovi, one of the band directors as well as the club’s staff advisor, or either Suozzo or Iwata.



photo courtesy: Aritra Ray
Kaitlyn Bian ’26 teaches 4th grade students “Somewhere Over the Rainbow” for their spring concert.

A guide to arts-related community service programs

Yunsheng Xu, STAFF WRITER



photos: Katherine Chen
Top: Avish Vispute ’27 and Lucy Wang ’27 run the stand of the School Beautification club at the community service fair. Bottom: Vanessa He ’27 and Kenzie Miller ’27 talk to a student about the Arts Council club.

With the start of another school year, yet another group of sophomores are looking for ways to fulfill their community service hour requirement. Many community services programs are offered at Princeton High School, focusing on topics such as tutoring, health, and the environment. However, there are also a variety of arts community service programs at PHS.

The Arts Council club provides an opportunity for students to work together on projects such as decorations for the school and cards for senior centers or hospitals. For example, during the winter, the club puts up snowflakes to heighten the festivities.

In addition, the club also collaborates with the Arts Council of Princeton by volunteering at events and camps that the council hosts.

“During camps ... we assist with cleaning, with [art] skills, and just talking with the children. Children as young as kindergarten all the way through middle school [come to

the camp], and our goal is just to spread art [to them]. A lot of the people that are in the club are interested in art, and we want to give back to the community,” said Vanessa He ’27, one of the leaders of the Arts Council club.

While the Arts Council club focuses on giving back to the community, it also brings together community at PHS.

“While we [work together], people are also talking. And I think that’s also another way for people to connect with peers, not just the whole community itself,” said He.

Another arts community service at PHS is School Beautification. A newly-formed club, their goal is to improve the appearance of PHS to create a more welcoming environment for both students and teachers.

“Art creates a welcoming environment because ... abstract shapes and colors usually inspire creativity among people and individuals. Seeing art every day makes the space look less monotone and [industrial-like]. Instead, the more creative, welcoming environment would help students be more productive,” said co-leader Lucy Wang ’27.

The club also hopes to expand the scope of their projects in the future.

“I also hope that in the spring we are able to collaborate with some other community service organizations to hopefully plant flowers, or [install] plant pots inside the school,” said Wang.

The service project Make Your Mark has a different approach to helping the community. Focusing on creating crafts such as jewelry and clay keychains, the program donates all the handmade crafts back to the Rise organization.

Rise, a nonprofit social support project based in central New Jersey, helps the community through food pantries, thrift stores, and educational programs. In addition to making crafts, the club also organizes volunteering and crafts events for the community.

“We plan to bring arts and crafts opportunities to our community through hosting crafting events at Princeton Public Library,” said Jessica Zhang ’26, a co-leader of Make Your Mark. “We [also] organize volunteering opportunities at [Rise’s thrift store], helping to work and manage the store.”

While the main purpose of each community service project is to give back to the community, members also find themselves connecting and bonding with each other and the community.

Student artist of the month: Sylvia Schreiber '26

Tessa Silver, ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT CO-EDITOR

As a child, Sylvia Schreiber '26 would sit at the dining room table for hours, happily doodling with crayons. Though she's transitioned from crayons to watercolor and gouache, the importance of art in her life has stayed the same. In her time at PHS, her illustration work has included t-shirts, programs, and this year's school-issued planner. She's currently compiling pieces for her portfolio as part of applications to art school, where she hopes to further expand her artistic abilities, preparing her to eventually work as an artist professionally.

What childhood experiences shaped you as an artist?

I remember when I was little my mom would put me to bed and then I'd get up and turn my light on and start drawing — I was trying to copy the cover of one of my picture books because I loved it so much. And then my mom would come and be like, "Sylvia, go to bed." Picture books really inspired me to create art when I was younger.

What are you drawn to depicting in your art?

Anything in the natural world is my go-to. I like things with patterns, so obviously nature has a lot of patterns, but also architecture ... I like to push myself to draw new things a lot of times, but I would say nature is a big one ... I feel like the repetitive motion of drawing the same thing over and over again is definitely calming.

What mediums do you work with?

I work in 2D mostly; that's what I'm most comfortable in. But within that, I do a lot of stuff. Drawing, painting, and printmaking are the three that I do the most. I love watercolor.

Are there any mediums that you're experimenting with right now?

I'm trying to do more printmaking. I really like printmaking. I've been doing some classes at the Arts Council on linocut and stuff like that, and I think why I like it kind of



Sylvia Schreiber '26 sketches to plan out a print for her art school portfolio.

ties back to the patterns — you can print it over and over again. And I just like the look of print making, so I'm trying to do more of that right now in my portfolio and just also for fun.

What are some of your inspirations and influences?

My sister, just her being in art school and all of her friends, I follow them all on Instagram and I get to see all of their amazing work and sometimes I'll take an idea from there ... Having my sister in art school is really cool to see, because it's, like, whoa, that could be where I am in a couple years. Barbara de Lorenzo, she works at the Arts Council ... She illustrates children's books, and she mostly works in watercolor, so she's helped me a lot with my watercolor abilities. When I paint with watercolor, I'm channeling Barbara DiLorenzo. She's definitely helped me grow as an artist.

What's your artistic process?

I have a sketchbook at home that's really just whatever comes out ... A lot of times, when I'm feeling like I want to do something art-related, I'll just sit down with that and just write or draw, or do whatever is inspiring me at the moment; I'll try to get it down on paper ... So then when I know what I'm going to do for my project, it comes with some trial and error ... So I do a lot of practice sketching. And then I'll try to see if I have materials at home or if I need to get some from the Arts Council ... You just have to start and challenges always arise ... It's kind of inevitable that at some point, you're going to be like, this is terrible. But more times than not, it's not terrible and you just need to work through it.

What goals do you have for yourself in your art in the future?

I want to get into an art college and I want to just enjoy that to the best of my ability without having to think too much about what exactly I'm going to do with art after college. I just want to really explore my own style and develop my own style as an artist ... Even as art becomes my work, I also want to just keep enjoying it.

Student artist of the month: Andrew Kim '26

Jane Hu, STAFF WRITER

Even with a busy schedule, Andrew Kim '26 always finds a way to pursue his passion: singing. Kim began to sing at the age of 10, and ever since, music has shaped who he is. Through years of choir and singing with his acapella group, Around 8, as well as Studio Vocals, he has grown and discovered a supportive community, helping him find his voice. He plans to carry his passion with him to college, where he hopes to join an acapella group.

How did you start singing?

I started singing in elementary school. It was a requirement for Community Park. At first I didn't really think much of it. It was more like my parents told me to do music, and so I did it. But then going to high school, this is where Mr. Metallo opened my eyes to singing. I had so much fun freshman year. And that's when I started doing more singing.

Do you have any favorite songs? If so, what are they?

We had a song for Studio Vocals. It was called "I'm Gonna Live Until I Die." Even though I just sang the bass part, like the supporting track, it was so much fun, and I had an amazing time.

Who is your favorite artist?

Right now, I'd say Grant Perez. I really enjoy his music when I'm studying. It has a nice, relaxing vibe.

What is your favorite genre of music? Why?

To sing, I'd say jazz. I think it suits my vocal range, so it sounds better. I [also] listen to jazz, but when I'm doing work or exercising, I like to listen to pop.

What is your favorite memory of being in the PHS Choir?

My favorite memory is definitely going on the trip to Italy. We got to perform at many Gothic buildings. It was so cool to sing with the university students. It was really cool to embrace the culture.



Andrew Kim '26 sings "Back to Black" by Amy Winehouse, one of the songs in Around 8's repertoire.

What is has your experience in Around 8 been? When did you join? What inspired you to join? What is your role?

I joined sophomore year. My sister recommended it to me because she thought I'd enjoy it, and I really do enjoy it. This year I'm going to be the music director, so I'll be leading the group. Usually we have two hour rehearsals twice a week. We will start off with getting to know each other and catching up, then we do vocal warm ups, and then, we get into practicing our songs. We have our back to school performance on September 25, so we're formulating the songs we want to choose. We usually choose by voting, so each member gets to vote on songs they like after hearing them.

How do you balance school and music?

It's important to be punctual because when you have a lot on your mind, you can't really focus on one thing since your mind gets dragged around. Speaking from my sophomore and freshman year experience, managing school and choir was not that big of a burden, especially because I didn't take that many APs. Junior year was when it really started kicking in, so I struggled a little bit.

Any advice you would give to younger singers?

I think [you] should just try it out and see how you like it. I think for singing, as long as you like it, you can be good at it. I remember in freshman year, I really didn't think I was adamant auditioning for Around 8 because I knew that there were so many more talented singers compared to me, but I'm glad I took that risk. And so I think for younger singers, you should definitely take that risk, and have a little faith in yourself.

Will you continue to sing after you graduate?

I would definitely continue to sing after graduating. I have a lot of interest in college acapella groups because they're pretty cool. I might try that out. But other than that, I'm not sure if I'll really pursue a career in music, although I really enjoy it. I think it's more of a hobby than a career.

PREX
PRINCETON RECORD EXCHANGE

Autumn-themed word search

Chloe Lam, ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT CO-EDITOR

graphic: Charley Hu



- Chestnut
Oak
Sweater
Cider
- Maple
Breezy
Cranberry
Quilt
- Autumn
Harvest
Foliage
Acorn
- Nutmeg
Leaves
Crimson
September

“The Paper:” a successful spinoff

Maeve Walsh, STAFF WRITER



How many of us have watched “The Office” too many times to count? For anyone looking for something new, we now have “The Paper,” a spinoff about a failing newspaper in Ohio struggling to reestablish itself. Through 10 episodes, each 30 minutes in length, the volunteer journalists working for the new and improved Toledo Truth Teller encounter new experiences and are filmed along the way.

So, how are “The Paper” and “The Office” related, and how do they compare? Well, their connection is shown in the pilot episode with the return of Oscar Martinez, a former employee at Dunder Mifflin, the setting of “The Office,” now working as head accountant for The Truth Teller. Throughout the series, there are various easter eggs and references to the show’s predecessor. However, you don’t need to be a die-hard “The Office” fan to enjoy its satiric and mockumentary-style comedy.

In terms of style, “The Paper” has used “The Office” as a template, taking inspiration from the familiar confessional sequences, shaky footage, and reaction shots. In relation to characters, there aren’t any striking parallels. Like the first season of “The Office,” everything is fresh, the actors are developing their characters, the writers are testing the waters, and the show is discovering its true purpose. Since it’s already been renewed for a second season, I think we will see growth on all fronts.

The show not only hooked me because of its resemblance to “The Office,” but as a writer myself, I was intrigued by how Hollywood would portray journalism. The characters know they live in a pretty ordinary place, but in everyday events, they find the story and make those events interesting to their readers. A great example is how two of the main characters, Ned and Mare, go mattress shopping and uncover the layers of deception involved in unfair pricing. Pulling together a cohesive story from only bits and pieces is a skill that, like them, I hope to master. Overall, the realities of journalism shown in this series is something I deeply appreciate and admire.

However, what doesn’t need refining is the comedy. For me, one of the funniest characters on the show is Esmeralda Grand, a wacky Italian woman played by Sabrina Impacciatore. Her accent on certain words and the drama that she brings to every situation is hilarious. Whether it’s the sarcastic comments, the pranks, or the cringe-worthy moments, “The Paper” never fails to make me laugh. Often I find myself looking forward to the time in my day where I can relax on my couch and watch an episode or two and decompress.



graphics: Charley Hu

“KPop Demon Hunters” slays

Claire Yang, STAFF WRITER



A K-pop girl group fighting a hot demon boy band for the fate of the world? When I first heard the premise of “KPop Demon Hunters” from my sister, I laughed it off. After much insistence, I reluctantly sat down and watched what would become the cultural phenomenon of the summer. But it wasn’t just a stroke of luck that the movie was such a massive hit. For me, the true magic of the movie wasn’t its punchy animation or catchy songs, but its incorporation of Korean culture.

My reluctance came from a disappointing experience with another animated movie released over the summer, “Elio”: just another generic plot and recycled animation style.

However, “KPop Demon Hunters” pulled me in because it went beyond using Korean culture as just another trendy aesthetic. Director Maggie Kang’s nine years of research is evident throughout the movie, referencing Korean mythology as well as lesser-known Korean dishes. For example, protagonists Rumi, Mira, and Zoey, collectively known as Huntr/x, try to save the world from demons by sealing them through the “Honmoon” with their songs. The idea was taken from Korean muldang dancers, women who perform protective rituals. Even Derpy and Sussie, the internet-famous tiger and magpie duo, were designed after minhwa, Korean folk art.

The highlight of the entire movie for me came towards the end. The Saja Boys, an all-demon boy band and nemesis of Huntr/x, perform their chart topping song “Your Idol.” After my sister and I had managed to stop singing along, I noticed their outfits, traditional Korean clothes called hanbok. All of them even wore the traditional hats (gat), a detail my mother was all too happy to point out.

Even songs from Huntr/x and the Saja Boys — fictional groups — topped the Spotify charts, surpassing very popular groups like BLACKPINK and BTS. But the movie’s ultimate success is the buzz surrounding what I consider the movie’s best song: “Golden,” which is now being considered for Best Original Song for next year’s Oscars.

I still believe one of the main reasons behind the popularity of “KPop Demon Hunters” is because of how well it knew its audience. The movie tapped into a pre-existing interest towards K-pop and Korean culture, fueling its popularity globally. Nowadays, animation studios are finding it harder to come up with original ideas that still grab the audience’s interest. But as “KPop Demon Hunters” has shown, true connection isn’t found in generic plots, but in the heart of a cultural moment.



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SPORTS

PHS football team success continues

Kaelan Patel, SPORTS CO-EDITOR
Luna Xu, CONTRIBUTING WRITER



The Tigers enter the field as they prepare to take on Lawrence High School in their season opener.

Last year, the PHS boys football team made its first playoff appearance since the 2014–2015 season, defying expectations and starting a new trend. The team now has had back-to-back winning seasons for the first time since the 2008–2009 and 2009–2010 seasons, while starting with wins over Lawrence and Allentown this year.

A big part of the team’s achievements stems from the leadership of Head Coach Charles Gallagher. When he first started with the team 13 years ago, the Tigers were 0 and 10, but they bounced back the next year with a winning 8 and 2 season. According to Gallagher, the biggest strength this team has compared to earlier years is greater participation and quality of athletes.

“You’re going to be a strong football team if you have numbers. It just so happens that we’ve had some really great athletes over the past couple of years — not to say that we haven’t had really good athletes prior — but I think we just have more of them,” said Gallagher.

The squad has 75 players consistently coming to practice, which is significantly more than in prior years, where the average has been around 50 players.

“Nobody’s taking off, which is awesome. No one has quit. Everybody’s sticking in. Everybody’s having fun. Everybody’s getting an opportunity to play,” said Gallagher.



photos: Rohan Viswanathan

The PHS boys football team celebrates after their 20-7 victory over Lawrence High School.

While a strong senior class is key for any high school football team, this year’s group of players draws its strength from all grades. Under the leadership of captains Ellington Hinds ’26 and Carmine Carusone ’26, the team is working together to maximize their potential.

“Once we make the playoffs, we have a goal to make the playoffs again, so that overall just focuses the team even more,” said Hinds. “Even though we made the playoffs last year, it’s a new team, so there’s struggles that we have to go through.”

As the starting quarterback, Quinton deFaria ’28 understands the amount of hard work that is necessary to achieve their goal.

“[Our goal is] just to be 1–0 at the end of every week. That’s our saying. And to achieve [this], we just [have] to continue to work hard. We’ve been doing great in the summer. We’ve been lifting, we’ve been practicing, and [staying] humble,” said deFaria.”

As the Tigers prepare for the Homecoming game and the rest of the season, they aren’t showing any signs of stopping.

“[We have to] just continue what we’ve been doing,” said deFaria. “It’s obviously working out well for us, but we can’t take our foot off the gas just because we [started] 2 and 0. [We have to] just keep going.”

James Smirk: Cross Country Coach of the Year

Katie Qin, SPORTS CO-EDITOR



photo: Claire Yang

James Smirk explains the plans for the run and goals for the week.

How did you get into coaching cross country?

Yeah, a little bit of a funny story, I was teaching here and I was actually coaching the ultimate [frisbee] team as a club sport, and [cross country] had an opening, and the athletic director at the time, John Curtis, had employed my wife as a soccer coach here. And [he] was like, “I heard you ran cross country.” And I was like, “that’s true,” [so he said] “I’ve got a job for you.” And that’s how I started. So that was 21 years ago.

What is training like, typically?

It’s really dependent on the number of years the runner has been running, how fast they are and their biological age, so it’s a kind of broad range. For some kids, it’s as little as a mile or two, and then a lot of strength and conditioning all the way up to some kids are going. [On] some days, long runs are 12 [to] 13 miles. And then there’s different types of workouts that go on in there as well ... they’re very individualized. And we actually empower our athletes to make positive decisions in our training. So we give them the framework, and then we expect them to grow into making decisions about how to maximize that training.

How has your coaching philosophy changed over time?

I think initially, when I started coaching, philosophically, I was very traditional ... We got to go into these things with the intent of very specific outcomes. And it was very top-down, and that was kind of classic for the type of coaching that I received growing up and over time, what I realized is that developing leaders yields positive results, and so we shifted pretty heavily towards this idea that we can do this high quality training and work, but really empower our athletes and have them become self-aware and self-deciding about their own. And so we really have moved towards that idea that we talk about things on our team, about the value of the work we’re doing right versus the time that we ran.

Have you helped create any rituals or traditions that the team currently has?

We have two kinds of long standing traditions. We’ve got Tiger Tough, [which was] created by Coach Godudo, who is an assistant coach of mine. We have a meeting on

Fridays ... You just stand up when you feel that you want to speak on behalf of someone and tell us why you think they are Tiger Tough, why they exemplify the goals of the team ... When you are Tiger Tough, you get a stuffed tiger, and it is passed from [each] Tiger Tough person every week ... you’re requested to carry the tiger everywhere you go, so he comes with you to class. The other tradition is runner of the week, and this one much the same way we talk about each other, but it’s more focused on performance, and at the end of that, we have a prize box of things that people have donated to the program ... [these traditions are] really meant to celebrate our successes above and beyond.

How has the sport of cross country training changed over the years? And how are you adapting?

Well, we’ve got the sport has gotten much faster ... Training wise, we’ve made some adjustments. We spend a lot more time improving overall athleticism, because we find when we do that our athletes are able to stay healthy. And really, we focus a lot on that process and that concept. What hasn’t changed is we believe in our athletes for the time they’re with us ... Some of our athletes run for me three seasons a year, [for all] four years, and you spend all that time providing them the support and opportunity that we can ... We have some seniors who are really finally ready to kind of compete at a higher level [but you] wouldn’t necessarily identify that kid the first day [of practice]. And that process has been long and arduous and meaningful, and because of that, I’m incredibly proud of them and that journey, and I think that’s really one of the core things about our team that’s unique.

During matches, are there any strategies like that you would fall back to?

Other than being faster than the other team? We firmly believe that what we do in practice should be simulating what we’re doing. Kind of, one of our core ones is how we approach racing on hills. We use what’s called the three P’s, which is press, pass, and punish. So when we run hills, our goal is not necessarily to run faster than someone on the hill, but it’s to force them into a decision. So we like to get close enough to them that they either decide they want to run faster than they want to or run slower than they want to, and then based on their decision, we then react ... A lot of our race strategies are built around that idea ... Probably the biggest strategy we employ is athletes make decisions every single day when they train. So we expect when the guns go off, for them to make decisions. We preach that from day one, the only bad decision is indecision.

What has been, or have been, your proudest moments of this season?

I’m really proud of the fact that our athletes are willing to risk for themselves, but also for each other. You see our veterans going and, you know, chat up a kid who’s maybe five weeks into their running career, and say, “Hey, I saw you doing this, let me talk to you about this, or let me show you a different way.” Just having the courage as a teammate to say this person is valued because they’re part of our program and I’m going to invest in them ... Race results, scores, winning championships, those things are all end products, [but also] good community, good coaching, good athletes, effort and commitment. We’re proud for [the results], but it’s really more that we’re proud about the process.

What is your attitude in the face of adversity?

So probably one of the things that makes our group unique is [we] actually embrace adversity and conflict. We believe that, if you want to be great, you have to be willing to have positive conflict with the people around you ... Everybody has challenges. Maybe they aren’t bringing their truest self to that moment, sour positive conflict is about trying to find that ... The reality is, it’s never perfect. Of course, it’s too soft, it might be raining, it’s too hot, it’s too cold, the wind is too windy, whatever. There’s a lot of things outside of our control, and we get pretty comfortable with that idea. We really do focus on things that we have control over, which is our own decision making, in our own performance.

PHS coaches reach 200 career wins

Kaelan Patel, SPORTS CO-EDITOR
Michael Yang, CONTRIBUTING WRITER

Patricia Manhart: volleyball

How did you help create the current team's culture?

I feel like the culture is driven a lot by the girls and their work ethic and their passion for the sport. So there's really not much I have to do on my side. These girls are all extremely competitive, and they support one another, and they are coming out of winning two state championships back to back. So that's the very high bar that they set for themselves. So as far as culture, I just have to be there to make sure that that keeps going. But I think the girls really bring a lot of that on their own.

How do you support the players, both in the sport and emotionally?

I think frequent check-ins with everybody is always really important ... it's easy in the beginning of the season for things to be going really well when school hasn't started yet ... When school starts, I know it's a lot of a commitment, because we might miss for an early dismissal, and if you fall behind, that can be really stressful. So I try to just always listen to my players, get a sense of how they're doing, what they need, [and make sure they] focus on academics first, because it's important that they're students before athletes.

What's your attitude in the face of adversity?

Just to always believe in the team — we know which teams are going to push us to play hard and which teams are going to be a good match. You know, we faced adversity this past weekend when we didn't win a tournament that we had won last year, and the attitude is to learn from it. The good news is that it's a tournament. It doesn't go towards our record, it doesn't go towards playoffs or anything, but it's a good reminder [that] we're not [infallible]. We have things that we could work on. It's still early, and so take any adversity and use it as a way to get better from it moving forward.



Patricia Manhart shakes hands with Camila Barbosa '27 as they celebrate their 200th win.

Heather Serverson: field hockey

What strategies help you win consistently?

I think the best strategy is to be adaptable, because if you do the same thing with every team, you're not gonna get the same result. So we really have to read the group that we're with, find the way that they fit together best [and] really work on making sure that everyone's getting along in the program. I think the standards of bonding and being kind to each other [is] really something that's definitely moving through since I've been here, and it's really paid off.

What has remained constant throughout your coaching journey?

I mean, we're consistently one of the best programs in the area. That's really, unfortunately, one of the few consistencies that we've had because of a lot of coach turnover. We have some variables where we don't really get to practice on the turf very much. We have to practice on that alternative surface, as we call it. But I think the more challenges that you learn to navigate, the better off you are in game situations because things aren't going to be perfect. So having an imperfect experience outside of a game really contributes to success inside of a game.

How have you had to change and adapt over your time coaching?

I've just learned to ride the wave and deal with it, because in one way or another, things will get handled, you'll adapt, you'll find a way through. If you stay calm, poised, and persistent, I tell the girls when they go out into the field, too. So I think that by modeling that myself, I think that's really been something that I've passed down through the program over the years, through the players. And hopefully they've taken that with them into their adult lives now, too.



Heather Serverson points out improvements to make to technique before their home game against Lawrence High School the following day.

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I & YOU

The Musical

Athletes of the Month

Carmine Carusone '26: football

Claire Yang, SPORTS CO-EDITOR
Jackson Zwick, STAFF WRITER



photo: Jasur Agzamov

Carusone reflects on his last football season as varsity captain after finishing a game against Ewing High School.

The whistle goes off and the ball is immediately snapped and handed off to Carmine Carusone '26. He sprints past defenders and breaks tackles on his way to scoring a pivotal touchdown for the Tigers. A couple seconds later, he jogs back out to kick the extra point, which he drills right between the two uprights.

Carusone grew up playing football with his brothers and friends — instilling an early connection to the sport. However, he initially played both soccer and lacrosse in his freshman year before making the switch to join the football team.

“Once I started the workouts in the summer and I got to see the kind of bonds that you create, and what it’s like to actually put the pads on, [it was] something that I knew I couldn’t get away from,” said Carusone.

When he first started on the team, Carusone played as a cornerback and kicker. This didn’t stop him from achieving division honors in just his sophomore year, being named First Team Defense for his position as cornerback by the West Jersey Football League. The organization chooses division all-stars each year, the best in their respective positions, in collaboration with league coaches in all 17 divisions.

Head Coach Charles Gallagher has been leading the PHS boys football team for over 10 years. When he first met Carusone, Gallagher knew he would be a great asset to the team.

“We saw he was an athlete. He was tough, he was fast, and he was smart,” said Gallagher. “He was a great kid, and we’d like to think that we built our program around good kids.”

In a recent game against Lawrence, Carusone played a pivotal role defending his position as running back against the opponents.

“I remember he had like a 60 yard run against Lawrence where he ran through like, two, three guys,” said teammate Julian Frevert '27. “And then, [it] took like five guys to bring him down.”

The following season, Carusone got his first snaps at the running back position, recording 651 yards on 130 attempts and five touchdowns. That season, the Tigers would go 5–5, winning the Valley Division title, and competing in the playoffs for the first time in 10 years. Additionally, Carusone was named First Team All Offense, this time for his position at running back in the Valley Division, for his contributions.

Now, as a senior, Carusone is co-captain of the team. However, Gallagher says leadership is something that comes to him naturally and has been present in him for years, along with the characteristics that make up an excellent football player.

“He’s become a great leader for our program,” said Gallagher. “He plays three different positions, some of the hardest positions. Being running back, corner back, and also being our full-time kicker, as punter, [means] he doesn’t come off the field.”

In addition to playing such a pivotal role in the team, Carusone shoulders heavy responsibilities like school and academics. During the summer, the team completes workouts in preparation for the season. It doesn’t stop there though; the team has practice six days a week throughout the school year.

“When school starts, I try to keep my mind on my scores as much as I can throughout the school day,” said Carusone. “Then as soon as football comes, my mind just completely shifts. I’m focused, ready to learn about the team that we’re playing against or new plays that we’re putting in.

Stepping into his leadership role, Carusone assists teammates in the weight room, a pivotal part of offseason training for every member on the team. In the weight room, he can be found leading teammates in exercises and providing support for everyone to get the most out of their workout.

“He’s [the] kind of guy you want to get behind and follow,” said teammate Julian Frevert '27. “He’s one of our strongest guys and a really good example to have for younger guys on the team and people my age.”

Even through tough moments such as losing the homecoming game in Carusone’s sophomore year, he took it as a chance to redirect his energy towards improvement.

“So when big losses like that happen, we try to just keep the team together and uplift everybody so that when the next big game comes, we’re ready to go,” said Carusone.

For his final season, Carusone hopes to lead the team to another great season and victory at the homecoming game. While still going through the recruitment process, he has stacked an impressive resume from his time on the team and left a legacy that won’t be forgotten.

“The best part about football is, for me, is ... what it’s like to be a part of a team. When you’re part of a team, you’re like a family, and [it’s] like a culture that no one else has, except for your team,” said Carusone. “When I step on that field, I know that I have my teammates’ [backs] and I know that they have my back.”



photo: Rohan Viswanathan



photo: Rohan Viswanathan

Carusone evades defenders in a winning game against Lawrence.

Naomi Lygas '26: volleyball

Michael Yang, CONTRIBUTING WRITER



photo: Charley Hu

After nearly eight years of playing volleyball, Lygas looks forward to playing beach volleyball at Tulane University.

Seeing the ball fly through the air, Naomi Lygas '26 runs up, plants her feet, and jumps up to spike it. Whipping her arm forward, she hits the it between the opposing player’s arms, watching as it flies through the air and bounces off the ground with a loud thump.

In fifth grade, Lygas was given the opportunity to play either field hockey, softball, or volleyball. She tried volleyball out first and fell in love with it. Role models like American beach volleyball player Taylor Crabb and her mom encouraged her to keep developing her skillset in the sport.

“My mom is one of my biggest role models. Whether it’s in sports or not, I feel like her work ethic translates really well over to sports. So I like to try to replicate that,” said Lygas.

For Lygas, volleyball is a year-round commitment. Not only is she a member of the PHS girls volleyball team, but she also plays for the beach volleyball club Stars and Stripes. Lygas’s dedication to the sport has earned her and her team numerous awards: last year, Lygas played a crucial role in the PHS team’s run to win the NJSIAA Group 3 Championship, recording 60 kills in the tournament alone from her position as outside hitter. Additionally, Lygas also won the 2024–25 Gatorade New Jersey Volleyball Player of the Year title.

“Gatorade Player of the Year was something I had been working towards for a while, and to actually see the results of my hard work was super amazing,” said Lygas.

Despite spending much of her time on volleyball, Lygas is still able to find a balance between her academics and athletics.

“[It’s] hard, especially when traveling for tournaments, but I always try to get my work done,” said Lygas. “It comes down to having some late nights doing work, or early mornings waking up to do it, but I get it done as much as possible, because I value school as much as sports.”

The constant pressure to become a better player takes its toll even on the best of players, something that Lygas also struggled with at one point in her volleyball journey.

“I was at this level where I didn’t feel like I was getting better. And one of my biggest things is that I want to get better, and always see myself having that constant improvement,” said Lygas. “So it was kind of hard to just tell myself that even one percent every day is still an improvement, [but] once I put that mindset in my head, I haven’t felt that way since.”

Lygas’s passion for the sport and her hard work have made her a leader on the team, immediately catching the attention of PHS girls volleyball Head Coach Patricia Manhart.

“She is such a hard-working, driven athlete. You don’t get as good as Naomi is without putting the work in. So knowing how dedicated she is, those are all things that make her the outstanding athlete that she is, that she’s just always training, always pushing herself to get better,” said Manhart. “And I think that really also then motivates her teammates too, to make sure that we are strong all around because it is a team sport.”

Lygas’s well-rounded skillset and abilities have also stood out to her teammates, making her a respected and well-valued member of the team.

“Passing is one of the largest skills in volleyball,” said Kaelin Bobetich '26. “She’s probably our strongest passer at the moment ... and that’s just one of the most important parts about a game, because if you’re an outside hitter, you have to be able to pass really well and hit really well, and she’s put in that position because she can do those things really well.”

This year will be Lygas’s seventh year playing volleyball and fifth playing beach volleyball. Through her many years on the team, she has grown both mentally and in her game to be more versatile and adaptable. After being recruited at the end of her sophomore year, she plans to continue playing beach volleyball at Tulane University.

“Adaptability is huge, especially in beach volleyball, which is what I am going to play in college. Whether it’s the wind, the sun, or if the other team is serving to you every single time, you have to learn to adapt,” said Lygas.

After becoming the captain of the team this year, Lygas hopes to continue acting as the role model for her teammates that she had when she was a freshman.

“Coming in as a freshman, I was a little scared,” said Lygas. “Some of the senior captains that year were some of my biggest role models in high school. And now the leadership role is definitely more prevalent...but I always try to be a good leader by leading by example.”



photo courtesy: Eddie Chen

Lygas prepares to spike the ball in the game against Princeton Day.



photo courtesy: Eddie Chen

Lygas plays as the outside hitter, front-row and back-row position.