

the INDEPENDENT

Volume XXXI Number 6

Manchester Essex Regional High School 36 Lincoln Street Manchester, MA 01944

April 14, 2025

STEAM showcase fosters community involvement

Local organizations, students share their interests, passions

By Bissy Mitrano
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

For the third annual science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics (STEAM) showcase, the local business community joined students and teachers to present a wide range of topics at 62 booths.

The STEAM showcase was held on Thursday, March 27 in the school cafeteria and gymnasium. The showcase consisted of

musical performances, a food truck from Butter "Ur" Biscuit, face painting, and bag designing, department head of science and mathematics Kristin Umile said.

"The STEAM showcase is an opportunity for students, businesses, parents, and any members

of the community that want to get involved in STEAM," she said.

Umile said that this event is a chance for students and corporations to come together, showcase their work, and advance in their field or course of studies.

Elementary school students and other departments, such as the Intensive Reading and Learning (IRL) program from the middle school, were integrated at this event, she said.

'The STEAM showcase is an opportunity for students, businesses, parents, and any members of the community that want to get involved in STEAM.'

- KRISTIN UMILE

Junior Emma Brown said that she and junior Bissy Mitrano helped encourage groups to participate in the showcase by presenting to local elementary and middle school faculty members.

"Thanks to the DECA students for taking on the challenge of trying to get more of the community involved ... and having a greater representation of students, [which] encouraged more participation," Umile said.



BISSY MITRANO PHOTOS



MARY BUCKLEY-HARMON PHOTO

Local businesses, organizations, and students presented at the STEAM showcase. Cell Signaling Technology donated \$10,000 to help make the showcase possible for the school and community.

Cell Signaling Technology of Danvers gave a \$10,000 grant to support the STEAM showcase, Umile said.

Krystyna Hincman, the Director of Social Responsibility and Anthropology, and Alexis Sorensen, Antibody Application Specialist at Cell Signaling Technology, said they met Umile at their education and science grant program and now work closely

with her.

Cell Signaling Technology produces antibodies "to decode conversations between cells ... the more antibodies we have, the easier it is for us to understand what's happening in the body," Hincman said.

Michael Christopher Laure, a presenter at the showcase and member of the community, said he and his wife first started a sci-

ence fair 15 years ago at Essex Elementary School. This year, he had a booth at the STEAM showcase that converted white light into colorful prisms.

"I started the science fair [in the Essex Elementary school] about 15 years ago, and it carried on for a few years. I've been here since day one," Laure said.

Demi Fox and Kate Swails

STEAM SHOWCASE, page 3

School Committee reviews possible budget cuts, impact on school

Community speaks in public comment against proposed budget reductions

By Whitney Turner
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

While awaiting the results of the Manchester and Essex town votes regarding the district budget, Superintendent Pam Beaudoin presented the MERSD FY26 Contingency Plan to the School Committee at their meeting on April 1.

If the proposed FY26 Modified Carry Forward Level Services Budget passed by the School Committee on March 18 fails to pass at either the April 28 Manchester town meeting or the May 5 Essex town meeting and May 12 Essex ballot vote, the district may need to cut roughly \$2 million.

At the start of the meeting, stu-



STELLA STRAUB PHOTO

Superintendent Pam Beaudoin presents the MERSD FY26 Contingency Plan, which includes about \$2 million in reductions. The cuts would impact teachers, class sizes, athletics, and more.

dents, teachers, parents, and community members made public comments.

Students, including seniors Josh Cohen and Harper Jay, spoke individually about the education the district has provided

them with and the teachers who have impacted them. They also highlighted the discussions and tensions that have arisen among students regarding the budget.

Community members urged their neighbors to vote for the

tax override necessary to fund the school budget, underscoring their beliefs that action is needed.

Beaudoin referred to the possible budget reductions as having "broad, long-term, and systemic" impacts on the district's operations and capacity. She emphasized that she did not think the cuts were beneficial to the school environment.

Across grade levels, class sizes would increase, fewer courses would be offered, student support services would be reduced, and new fees for programs such as music and athletics would present barriers to families.

Over 22 full-time employee positions would be reduced, impacting the workload of remaining staff.

The School Committee scheduled a tentative meeting for May 13, in the event that the proposed budget fails to pass in both towns. They are also scheduled to meet on May 20.

Among the proposed cuts are

the following:

-3.5 high school teachers (World Language, English, Social Studies, Art), reducing 17.5 course sections, increases class sizes

-1 high school BRIDGE counselor, reducing individualized support

-Middle school principal position, combining the middle and high school principal positions

-1 middle school health/wellness teacher, reducing health/wellness class time, increases class sizes

-1 middle school academy teacher, eliminating middle school academy, increasing class sizes, distributing students to remaining grade-level teachers, reduces academic support across subjects

-Middle school Chromebooks (FY27), families must lease Chromebooks

-1 Memorial School classroom, increasing class sizes, potential

BUDGET CUTS, page 3

News

Features

Opinion

Arts

Lumsden's retirement
- page 2

Prom preview
- page 4

Sugar warning labels
- page 7

Spring concert
- page 11

Administrative assistant Lumsden to retire after 27.5 years

Colleagues reflect on legacy of kindness, dedication

By Summer Demeo
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

After 27 and a half years working at the school, administrative assistant Mary Lumsden said she plans to retire at the end of the year.

Lumsden said she first began working part-time at the high school when her children were in elementary school. She then began working full-time in

2009 when the new middle-high school building was constructed.

Lumsden said her favorite parts of working here have been the people and being able to help everyone.

"Being a part of the community and not really having to promote the school or sell the school [has had the biggest impact on me]. The school does that on its own, but being proud and being part of that environment is very worthwhile and very memorable," she said.

Spanish teacher Robert Bilsbury, who began teaching at the

school in 1998, said he will greatly miss Lumsden and the energy she brings to the school.

"For me, she's the kind, greeting face [for] anyone that has any contact with our school ... She's just super selfless, makes everyone feel comfortable. She's kind. She's professional, classy," he said.

Bilsbury said Lumsden cares about every student and teacher in the building.

"She knows what's happening with everyone, and she's right there in your corner, cheering you on through the good times and helping you with things that are difficult," he said.

'Mrs. Lumsden is the heart and soul of the office and the heart and soul of the school.'

- JULIE SGROI

Senior Ella Arntsen said Lumsden has always been a calming and welcoming presence for her.

"She's sort of like a safe person for me at school. If I'm ever feeling anxious or something, I know I can go talk to her [and] get my mind off things," she said.

Principal Julie Sgroi said Lumsden is critical to planning events and managing day-to-day activities.

"Mrs. Lumsden is the heart and soul of the office and the heart and soul of the school," she said.

Sgroi said Lumsden played an important role in welcoming her to the school and helping her get



SUMMER DEMEO PHOTO

Mary Lumsden, the administrative assistant at the high school, will retire at the end of the year.

to know the community when she began her job as principal in 2023.

She said one of her favorite memories with Lumsden was on her first day, when Lumsden drove her through town to help her learn about the area.

"I remember driving in the car with her and thinking that I was so lucky to be working with such a caring person and for such a caring community," Sgroi said.

Math and science department chair Kristin Umile said Lumsden is reliable, and she helps the school run smoothly each day.

"Every day, Mrs. Lumsden is a part of my day ... she's just always readily available to help with whatever it is that I need her

to help me with," she said.

Umile also said Lumsden is very interested in everything happening in the school, like science, and cares about teachers' and students' personal lives.

Sophomore Anne Stevens said Lumsden is always interested in what she's doing in theater and is very supportive. She also said she likes that Lumsden does her best to get to know every single student.

"I think that's really sweet because a lot of teachers, if they're not your teacher, you don't really get to know them. But I feel like I've gotten to know her," Stevens said.

Lumsden said she will miss the camaraderie of the school and be-

ing around people every day, but she and her husband are both active in the town community.

She is excited to spend more time with her children and grandchildren over the summer and to travel with her husband, she said.

English teacher Allison Krause said she has known Lumsden her whole life because she grew up in Manchester, and Lumsden is a good friend of her family.

She said Lumsden is always a comforting presence and an important figure to both students and faculty.

"She has this way of just making you feel like everything's going to be all right," Krause said.

Math teacher announces retirement after 32 years of teaching

Plans to spend more time with family

By Stella Straub
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

After a 32-year long career in education, math teacher Rick Brown will retire at the end of the year, he said.

Brown said he began teaching at Swampscott High School right after he graduated from Boston College, where he double majored in math and secondary education.

"I was a first-year teacher, teaching five different classes in two different rooms, including chemistry, so my first year was just trial by fire," he said.

While at Swampscott, Brown obtained a master's in mathematics for educators from Worcester Polytechnic Institute, he said.

After teaching at Swampscott, Brown taught at Lincoln-Sudbury High School where he worked in a department of 20, he said.

Brown said he was able to benefit from a variety of perspectives on effective lesson design during his time there.

Brown has spent 20 years teaching at MERHS.

He said the most rewarding part of his teaching career has been interacting with students.

"Just watching everybody grow and mature and kind of discover their inner mathematicians



STELLA STRAUB PHOTO

Math teacher Rick Brown plans to retire this year after teaching at the high school for 20 years.

has been probably the most rewarding part," Brown said.

He said some of his favorite experiences have been with students who have persevered through struggle.

"Seeing kids be grateful for what they've learned and grateful for the setbacks that we've gotten through together ... that's not just math; that's a life lesson that they'll take throughout everything they do," Brown said.

The best compliment he could receive would be for a student to say he was fair but challenging, he said.

This year, Brown has made enjoying his day teaching students his priority when coming to school, he said

"When you suddenly are coming in and saying, 'Today is my last March 28 as a teacher,' or 'This is the last time I'm going to teach matched pairs to a class,' it gives you a little bit of an extra boost," he said.

Brown said that he sees his retirement as a "second lifetime."

"How do I want to spend my second lifetime? I don't know yet, and I'm fine with that," he said.

Brown would like to play tennis again and spend more time with his family. He also may look into participating in musical theater and doing community service tutoring students in disadvantaged communities, he said.

"Teaching will always be part

of my life. It's part of my essence. I knew I wanted to be a teacher since fourth grade. I'm grateful that I always knew what I wanted to do," he said.

Brown said he wanted to emphasize how grateful he is to the senior class for making his last two years "so meaningful."

After COVID, feeling the sense of connection and appreciation with the classes he has taught has been "the greatest gift," he said.

Senior Alexis Garfield was a student in Brown's geometry class as a sophomore and is currently enrolled in his Quantitative Reasoning class.

She said Brown cares about his students and emphasizes learning

over grades.

"He pushes you to do your best, and you want to make him proud of you," Garfield said.

Former computer science teacher Steven Cogger said that he deeply respects Brown and that he always looked up to his teaching style, which he witnessed when Brown moved down to his room to teach when standardized testing was going on upstairs.

Math teacher Courtney Brown (no relation to Rick Brown) said she has known Brown since 2017 and that he has consistently been "a great friend and mentor" to her throughout her teaching career.

"Mr. Brown has impeccable fashion sense. He is wise. He is willing to go above and beyond for his colleagues and his students; he has incredible attention to detail and thoughtfulness," she said.

Courtney Brown said that Brown has had an "outstanding career" and deserves to be sent off with "so much love and praise."

"Mr. Brown has a reputation for upholding high expectations, and in that same breath, would go to the ends of the earth to help a student," she said.

She added that Brown always responds thoughtfully and brings an important empathetic perspective to problems that arise in the school.

"We're going to miss him like crazy here. His wit, wisdom, and compassion," she said.

Two seniors attend Student Government Day at State House

Debate, vote on bill, learn about state legislature

By Summer Demeo
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Seniors Henry Stevens and Aisling Twombly visited the State House for Student Government Day on April 4, where students

from public high schools across the state acted as different members of the state government, debating and voting on a bill, Stevens said.

Stevens, who was assigned the role of representative, gave a speech supporting his stance on a bill that would limit phone and device usage in school and social media usage for minors. He then voted with the rest of the students on the bill, he said.

This bill is currently going through the Massachusetts Senate, he said.

"I got to speak on the bill,

which was really fun. You get to go up to the front and make your case, so I had that written out. At the end, you get to vote on the bill for real by pressing a little 'yea' or 'nay' button on your desk," Stevens said.

Twombly said she was an alternate, which meant that she did not get to participate as much during the day, but she could still do most of the activities and vote on the bill like Stevens.

She said prior to the event, social studies department chair Lauren DuBois sent out an email asking if students were interested in participating and then sent out a form for students

to vote on who they thought should attend the event. Twombly and Stevens were then selected.

Twombly said she enjoyed learning more about how the state government works and witnessing the process of voting on and debating a bill.

"I liked being able to meet a bunch of different people and to

'I got to speak on the bill, which was really fun. You get to go up to the front and make your case.'

- HENRY STEVENS



COURTESY OF HENRY STEVENS

Seniors Henry Stevens and Aisling Twombly visited the Massachusetts State House in Boston on April 4 to attend Student Government Day with social studies department chair Lauren DuBois.

see people from around the state coming to one place and working together as if we were a working government," she said.

DuBois, who chaperoned the trip, said she hopes to continue attending the event in future years, as long as students want to participate. She also said it was interesting to hear arguments for and

against the bill from students.

"They brought up things that I hadn't even considered on the issue. I'm curious to see what the Senate does," she said.

DuBois said she liked hearing the perspectives of students from different places. She thought it was valuable for students to meet people from across the state.

"It's an authentic experience. You're hearing from kids from different parts of the state and different types of kids with different backgrounds than we have. All in all, it's a good experience to see what the government is doing but also just to have interactions with kids from different parts," she said.

Seniors look forward to Senior Week activities, events

By Annie Pinkin
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Senior Week will include both old and new traditions to celebrate the graduating class.

"The goal is to just make sure that we have a week that is fully able to celebrate everyone's time here and serve as a kind of awesome final memory of our time in high school," senior class adviser Barrett Alston said.

Following the prom at Willowdale Estate on Thursday, May 29, Senior Week will kick off with the longstanding tradition of the Senior Dinner at the Chowder House at Tuck's Point on Sunday, June 1, he said.

"A lot of [the events] are either



@MERHS2024/INSTAGRAM

Seniors from the Class of 2024 began their Senior Week last year with the Senior Dinner at the Chowder House at Tuck's Point. Seniors this year will continue the longstanding tradition.

tradition or what other classes have done," senior class vice president Summer Demeo said.

The class of 2025 will also continue the tradition of attending a Red Sox game on Monday, June 2, against the Los Angeles An-

gels.

This is the only event that is not school-sponsored, with students paying \$31 for their ticket, Demeo said.

The highly anticipated whitewater rafting trip to the Forks,

Maine, will be on Tuesday and Wednesday of Senior Week, senior class president Jack Cummins said.

"I'm probably most looking forward to the whitewater rafting. I think it'll be a very cool experience," he said.

Thursday and Friday will wrap up Senior Week with baccalaureate and graduation, Alston said.

In order to make Senior Week happen, students, teachers, and the community worked together, he said.

"All this stuff

only works because the teachers are chaperoning it, so we're all kind of rowing the boat together," Alston said.

The week is funded through fundraisers, dues, and the Senior Auction that was held in November by parents of the senior class,

Demeo said.

"I think we got around \$22,000 to \$25,000 from the Senior Auction, which is definitely our biggest fundraiser," she said.

The class officers also communicated with their classmates to ensure a fun and inclusive final week of activities, Cummins said.

'Finding something that everybody's really excited about is really important.'

- JACK CUMMINS

"Finding something that everybody's really excited about is really important," he said.

Although Senior Week can be emotional, it is an enjoyable celebration of

the class's years together, Demeo said.

"It's a little bittersweet because it's also the end of high school, but I'm also excited to do all the Senior Week events, graduate, and move on to the next phase of life," she said.

CONTINUATIONS

STEAM SHOWCASE

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) said they have had a booth for the last two years at the event.

"We are a federal agency, and NOAA as a whole does all kinds of things from satellites up in space to robots and ships in the ocean," Fox said.

NOAA works to remove different types of trash and debris from the ocean, she said.

Swails said she hopes NOAA will return to the showcase next year.

Fifth-grader Henry Turner said

his favorite part of the event was learning about everyone's interests.

"It's pretty cool ... I want to come back to the showcase [next year]," Turner said.

Umile said the event went very well and that she would not make any major changes.

"From the feedback I've gotten, people felt it was very well organized and there were enough activities for all age groups to participate in," Umile said.

BUDGET CUTS

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

enrollment difficulties

-1 Essex Elementary School classroom, causing possibly multi-grade classrooms, reducing

space for new enrollments

-Reduction of elementary school exploratory teachers (PE, Music), reducing PE to once per week, forcing chorus and band activities to take place outside of school and making them be stipend-based

-Elementary school early release every Wednesday which will be necessary to accommodate for staff reductions

-1 bus route, consolidating Manchester bus routes into one, increasing travel time

-0.5 School Resource Officer, reduced to part time

-Athletic fee increase, eliminating middle school teams, increasing user fees by 8% and adding uniform fees



BISSY MITRANO PHOTO

Middle School Principal Joanne Maino presented about beekeeping at the STEAM showcase. She displayed a beehive.

Prom will return to Willowdale Estate for another year

Class organizers look forward to prom in May

By Riley McKinnon
INDEPENDENT STAFF

Organizers have worked to finalize the details for the prom, which will be held for the second time at the Willowdale Estate in Topsfield this year.

The event will take place from 6 p.m. to 10 p.m. on May 29, senior class adviser Barrett Alston said. "One reason I really like this place is that it has a big outdoor space that

we cover with a tent ... you only really need to go inside to use the restroom or get food," Alston said. "From a venue standpoint, it's basically perfect," he said.

The planning of prom started

at the end of last school year when class advisers and officers began to look for venues by calling different facilities and planning in-person tours, said Alston.

The final venue is chosen by which one can be the best fit for potential weather conditions and the size of the group, Alston said. Class advisers and class officers usually split the responsibilities, such as finding decorations, booking the DJ, and coordinating with the planners at the venue, he said.

When it comes to financial specifics and payment transactions, the adult advisers typically handle the majority of the task,

said senior class president Jack Cummins. On the planning committee, the officers reach out to students with unpaid dues or fees, figure out class preferences for the event, and communicate

'We've spent a lot of time having fundraisers, and I think it will be a nice, final experience.'

-JACK CUMMINS



DARLENE FOLEY/FLICKR.COM

Willowdale Estate in Topsfield will once again host the junior and senior prom on May 29. The venue was chosen by the senior class officers based on the capacity and potential weather conditions.

information back to the student body, he said.

"It's very akin to the process you would have for a wedding," Alston said.

This year, junior class adviser Alicen Shaw has stepped in as a co-adviser for prom to assist Alston and gain experience as a

senior class adviser during the latter part of the school year as other events like Senior Week draw near.

"It's an exciting time for all juniors and seniors to be thinking about this time of year, especially coming out of a very long winter when February and March kind

of seem to drag on," she said.

Cummins is excited to see the results of the class's work.

"It's stressful to try and make sure that everything goes smoothly," he said. "We've spent a lot of time having fundraisers, and I think it will be a nice, final experience for our class."

Science Team places fourth in league after final competition

By Hannah Davis
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

After their final meet on April 8, the Science Team finished their season and placed fourth overall in their league, senior Stella Straub said.

The meet on April 8 differed from past competitions because students from each competing school were mixed up and competed against each other, Straub said.

At their last regular competition on March 11, the team came in second place overall after competing in three separate events: researching invasive species, rocket building, and identifying science fiction movies, Straub said.

Senior Nick Brown said the team's success has been in part because of their adviser, science teacher Kristin Umile.

"I think a lot of credit has to go to Ms. Umile. She's great, and she's been running this program for a while. She does a really good job keeping everyone very organized," he said.

Umile said the team's ability to work together has led to their success this year.

"The collaboration that we have as a team is very important, and they're all willing to choose a topic that they feel most confident in and switch things up at the last minute if they think that it's going to be more beneficial," she said.

The new underclassmen have



HANNAH DAVIS PHOTO

Senior Stella Straub and sophomore Peter Langendorf practice science Pictionary for their final math meet on April 8.

also been putting in a lot of work to build their skills, which has helped the team's winning season and will continue to in the future, Straub said.

"I think we also have a good group of incoming underclass-

men that have joined this year that have been overfilling our team registrations, which has been good," she said.

Straub said the Science Team has been a great way for her to expand her science knowledge

beyond the classroom.

"Science team is a good way to learn about topics that you maybe wouldn't learn about in school or kind of really delve deep into topics that you might not have otherwise thought about," she said.

Brown said he has gained important knowledge and leadership skills through Science Team.

"I think just being able to lead something and learn leadership traits, that's something that transferred over to almost anything," Brown said.

For next year, Campbell said she is looking forward to learning more about various science topics and meeting others who are also interested in science.

"It's a really fun experience with the people, and everyone's so nice on the team. I'm looking forward to going to the meets, because those are always fun to go to," Campbell said.

Math Team attends States, competes in small school division

By Gwendolyn Berger
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Six Math Team students competed at States at Winchester High School but did not qualify for the New England meet, said Math Team adviser Lauren Woodcock.

Senior Sam Heanue said that, in addition to himself, the competitors were seniors Charlie Langendorf and Jack Cummins and sophomores Peter Langendorf, Dodge Roberts, and Tyler Cummins. The tournament took place on March 27, he said.

Heanue said the team had



SAM HEANUE PHOTO

Three sophomores and three seniors on the Math Team competed at the state math meet hosted by Winchester High School.

to qualify for the States' small school division, which they accomplished after a sufficient performance at a play-off meet on March 6.

"We qualified [for the play-off meet] because we had performed particularly well, especially for small schools, throughout the year," he said.

The goal was to qualify for the New England meet from States, which did not occur, Heanue said.

He said he joined the Math Team when he was a sophomore and finds Math Team fun, interactive, and useful.

"[Math Team] gives you more insight into what you're doing

in a math class ... doing tons of practice with numbers translates well into high-level math courses like calculus or statistics," Heanue said.

Math Team president, Jack Cummins, said he was very proud of the team's performance this year.

"We were undefeated this season until the final meet ... It was a great season, and we were very excited to qualify again for States," he said.

Woodcock said that the team was disappointed in the outcome, but it was still a good experience.

"We did not do as well as we hoped or as well as last year, so it was a nice learning experience,"

she said.

Woodcock said she thinks advising both the Debate Team and Math Team contributed to the results at States.

"After taking on Debate, Math Team did not get my full, attention that they deserve," she said.

Next year, she will not coach the Debate Team in an effort to refocus on the Math Team and its performance. Since the team's season is over, they plan to

focus on recruiting now, Woodcock said.

"We're going to lose a lot of great mathletes, so we need to spread the word that this is what the cool kids do on Thursdays," she said.

'We were undefeated this season until the final meet ... It was a great season, and we were very excited.'

-JACK CUMMINS

SCAR attends Connections Conference at Clark University

Hopes to implement new events in school

By Isabelle Donnellan Valade
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

The Student Coalition Against Racism (SCAR) attended the Connections Conference, which taught students from across New England about various social issues, English teacher Allison Krause said.

“It’s an annual event that brings together schools from all across Massachusetts and beyond,

where we learn about social justice and connect with students who share similar passions to make the world better,” she said.

SCAR attended the conference on March 7 at Clark University and has been going to the conference since 2019, Krause said.

“Every year when we come back from the Connections Conference, ...we feel re-energized

about the importance of the work that we can do here,” she said.

Senior Jenelle Ford said a presentation that remained with her was one regarding sharing different cultures.

“A school presented about this event called Flag Day, where they had hundreds of kids with different flags, representing their different cultures. They show traditional dances or songs,” she said.

The day is an opportunity for students to share their connection with a country, Krause said.

“Students are invited to share a country that they feel a specific connection to, for any reason. It could be someplace they’ve traveled to where they felt really inspired ... or it could be a part of their heritage,” she said.

Ford and Krause said they hope to partner with the world language department to include an event similar to Flag Day in

International Week next year.

“We think it could just be a really great way to bring attention to some of the diversity that might exist here at Manchester-Essex, as it’s not always the most visible, but we can highlight the diversity that exists in terms of where people have lived or experiences they’ve had,” Krause said.

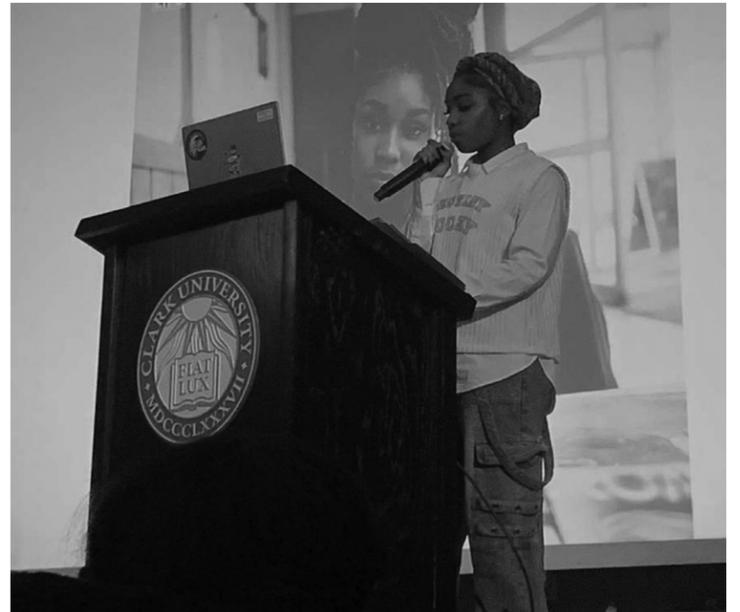
Senior Lily Stefanovich said she and the other students played Bingo to form connections.

“We begin the day, and they give us cards, and we have to, for example, find someone that likes the color red who you didn’t know before,” she said.

After learning about microaggressions at the conference, SCAR also presented at the Student Coalition for Equity (SAFE) freshman workshop, Ford said.

She described microaggressions as actions or remarks that may seem small but have an impact not perceivable by outsiders.

“[Microaggressions] are so prevalent in our school, and I’ve always known what microaggressions were, but I didn’t really know how to describe them or



COURTESY OF HENRY STEVENS

Motivational speaker Nay Speaks delivers a presentation and brief rap addressing her experience with chronic illness at the Connections Conference at Clark University on March 7.

educate others on them. So I feel like after learning at the conference, I was able to really articulate exactly what it is and help our community more,” Ford said.

Stefanovich said she recommends the conference to every-

one. “I think anyone should go because I truly believe there’s a workshop for anyone ... I just think that people who are interested should go because they can learn so much,” she said.

Robotics Team competes in two tournaments

By Charlie Baker
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

After competing in two tournaments with their robot C Monster, the Robotics Team did not qualify for the next round, senior Cole Cote said.

The competitions took place on March 7 at Revere High School and March 21 at the University of New Hampshire.

To move on, a team must finish in the top 96 of 1,000 to 2,000 competing schools in New England, sophomore Peter Langendorf said. Last year, the team



COURTESY OF KEVIN HINES

The Robotics Team steers their robot, C Monster, at Revere High School on March 7 for the first of the team’s two tournaments.

placed 116th.

The team now has two former students who serve as mentors and are the only adults involved: Kevin Hines and Sam Karlberg.

Both mentors were part of the 2017 team that made it to the

world championship in St. Louis, Hines said.

“I think 2017 teachings definitely still have an impact on the team now and inform what we should prioritize in their strategy or what we’re going for,” he said.

Teachers, students prepare for digital, hybrid AP exams

By Whitney Turner
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

As the school’s first set of digital Advanced Placement (AP) exams draw near, beginning on May 5, teachers have been determining how best to prepare students for the new format, math teacher Alicen Shaw said.

Students will take their digital AP exams using Bluebook, the College Board’s testing platform, which is also used for the SAT and PSAT.

Shaw teaches AP Calculus AB, which will have a hybrid exam in May, she said.

“The [Free Response Question] (FRQ) portion will be in this hybrid format of having the questions be digital, and then students will be writing their answer on answer booklets,” Shaw said.

The multiple choice section of the exam will be digital, she said.

Shaw said that so far, she has not done a lot of preparation with her class for the digital exam since she knows many students are already familiar with online exams from taking other standardized tests.

However, she said she plans to do more practice with students in the coming weeks.

“I do have plans to start incorporating AP Classroom a little bit more than I have in years past, just to get that digital platform familiarity,” Shaw said.

She said she is still unclear on how the digital exam may be different from years past.

“It’s been kind of difficult, at least for me, to really figure out how best to change my preparation, mainly because so many new things are coming out from the College Board,” Shaw said.

She said she anticipates that some changes, such as students not being able to move freely between FRQ questions and reread their prompts, may be difficult.

Social studies teacher Jessica Tran, who teaches AP Psychol-

ogy, said the exam will be fully digital this year for the first time.

She said she still has students practice handwriting.

“To a large extent, we have focused on our traditional pen and paper way of doing things because the research shows that that is a superior way for students to process information,” Tran said.

She said she has found it challenging to work around certain digital tools not being available for practice.

“What I did want students to have practice with is the annotating and note-taking tools in AP Classroom, and those didn’t become available until the early part of 2025, so we’ve added that in once they became available,” Tran said.

English teacher Elizabeth Edgerton, who teaches AP English Language and Composition, said the exam is also fully digital.

She said her preparation has also largely focused on handwritten writing, but she has added digital practices for students.

“I had them download the Bluebook app, and they can click around on that and see what it’s like to use those tools,” Edgerton said.

She said that her students have been receptive to the new format of the exam.

“They’ve never taken the paper version, but they see the advantage of when you type an essay, you are able to edit and move it around a little bit, and when you’re handwriting it, you’re pretty much stuck with what you have on the page,” Edgerton said.

Senior Charlie Langendorf, who takes AP Calculus AB, AP Spanish Literature, AP Government and Politics, and AP Computer Science, said he sees the benefit of digital exams for cours-

es that involve writing but also sees the challenges they bring.

“For ones like Spanish Lit, where I actually read a bunch and I have to underline stuff and read it a bunch of times, I feel like it’s harder on the computer,” he said.

Senior Brigid Carovillano, who takes AP Calculus AB, AP Psychology, AP Government and Politics, and AP English Literature and Composition, said she hasn’t noticed a large difference in the way her teachers are preparing her for the digital exams.

She said that it will be helpful to type, since she is able to type faster than handwrite, but she doesn’t know how to prepare for her calculus exam, for example.

“It’s something that’s kind of hard to prepare for ... So I’m a little apprehensive of that,” Carovillano said.

Tran said that she hopes there are no technological issues on exam days.

“Technology is a blessing and a curse, and let’s just hope that everything runs smoothly on both sides on the day of,” she said.

‘What I did want students to have practice with is the annotating and note-taking tools in AP Classroom.’

-JESSICA TRAN

Hornets: Who, What, Wear?

By Annie Pinkin,
Independent Editor



JUNIOR

Elsa Healey

“Thrifting can help you find a lot of things that you might not always see.”



SENIOR

Oliver Rodi

“I like to put clothes together that don’t normally go together.”



JUNIOR

Lila Brady

“My sister is a big influence of mine. She lived in Miami, so she was always wearing cool outfits, and it inspired me that there’s a whole other world of fashion.”



SENIOR

Henry Stevens

“I’m a big fan of sneakers. I have a lot of pairs of shoes that are just mainly a pop of color in my outfits.”



SENIOR

Jenelle Ford

“My favorite piece of clothing is this pair of black H&M Divided jeans, and they’re the perfect mix of baggy and low rise but not uncomfy.”



JUNIOR

Arielle Stafford

“I look for things that are in my color palette, like pink, white, and sometimes black.”

STAFF EDITORIAL

Having a job in high school is beneficial for teenagers

Having a job in high school provides students with invaluable life skills and experiences that prepare them for the realities of adulthood.

Balancing school, homework, family, extracurricular activities, and a job fosters responsibility and time management, which benefits students in the long run.

One of the most significant advantages of having a job in high school is learning accountability. A job requires students to show up on time, complete assigned tasks, and manage their own money. These habits instill a sense of discipline that will carry on into other areas of their lives.

Time management will also develop through work, and students will be forced to prioritize tasks efficiently to ensure they succeed in the roles they take on, whether they be school, sport, club, or work-related.

This experience will lead to better management of busy schedules in college and throughout the rest of their adult lives.

Although students falling behind in school due to overcommitment to their job could create an issue, many students see only

the benefits of working.

In The New York Times article, “What Students Are Saying About Having a Part-Time Job While in School,” several students responded to the question, “Should All High School Students Have Part-Time Jobs?”

Many students described the benefits of working, saying that it taught them more skills than can be learned in a class, such as patience, communication skills, money management, and responsibility, which outweigh the possible negatives of working.

“[Having a job] promotes a work ethic that will influence high school students to create a well-balanced schedule, and they will understand the importance of a work ethic,” said Sierra from Marine Science Magnet High School of Southeastern Connecticut. said.

Gaining work experience early on will also offer an advantage when building a student’s resume. A student showing that they have work experience demonstrates their work ethic and reliability as an employee.

Along with this, students will create connections from a younger age that can assist them with



DAISY DAISY/ISTOCK PHOTO

Students develop work ethic, accountability, and money management skills when holding a job.

opportunities in the future. If a student maintains a job throughout high school and even into college, employers, coworkers, and even customers can help that student with future job prospects and recommendations.

These relationships being fostered from a young age will offer both guidance and assist a student with understanding social dynamics and ways to progress in their position.

A student will also learn financial responsibility if they begin to handle their own money from a younger age. Through experience, they will learn the importance of budgeting, saving, and making informed spending decisions, which will contribute to long-term financial and general independence as they transition into adulthood.

Earning money through their own efforts fosters pride and

motivation, reinforcing from a young age the value of hard work. This sense of achievement will lead to higher confidence and a strong work ethic.

Working in high school offers numerous benefits that extend beyond just earning money for money’s sake. It shapes students into responsible, organized, and capable individuals who are better prepared for their future careers and personal lives.

Foods containing high amounts of sugar should contain warning labels disclosing harmful effects

By **Bissy Mitrano**
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Whether it’s candy from a vending machine, soda at lunch, or Red Bull energy drinks, sugary foods are everywhere, and people often consume them without thinking twice. Sugary foods need to come with warning labels like alcohol, marijuana, or tobacco products.

Sugar isn’t just unhealthy—it’s addictive, and it can lead to serious health problems. There’s a difference between enjoying a treat in moderation and consuming hidden sugars daily without knowing the risks. Warning labels are necessary to communicate these risks.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) article, “Get the Facts: Sugar-Sweetened Beverages and Consumption,” sugar consump-

tion is tied to rising rates of obesity, heart disease, and type 2 diabetes.

Most teens consume more added sugar than is recommended for an entire day, often before lunch. The recommended daily intake for sugar is 12% of a person’s calorie intake, including natural sugar in fruits. Some of the most popular drinks and snacks sold to kids contain more than double the daily recommended amount of added sugar.

According to a 2023 article titled, “High Added Sugars Intake among US Adults: Characteristics, Eating Occasions, and Top Sources, 2015–2018” by Seung Hee Lee, high consumers [of sugar] were consuming more than 15 percent of daily calories from added sugars alone. This is nearly double what experts consider safe.

This may include Crumbl

Cookie with up to 100 grams of sugar per cookie, which is twice the recommended amount of daily sugar intake for a 2,000-calorie diet.

Students also consume Dunkin’ Donuts coffee daily. According to Dunkin’ Donuts’ nutrition guide, one large pistachio iced coffee is 50 grams of sugar. A large, flavored iced coffee has four pumps of syrup, each containing about 13 grams of sugar. That goes for all flavors like caramel, vanilla, and hazelnut.

Middle and high school nurse, Elizabeth Keane sent out an email on April 4, reminding students of the risks with energy drinks.

“We are seeing students drinking these beverages at school and have concerns related to potential physical and mental health complications of such use,” Keane’s email said.

Sugar Content
Cinnamon Toast Crunch (1 cup) - 12 grams
Red Bull (1 can) - 37 grams
Dunkin Donuts Caramel Latte (Medium) - 24 grams
Acai bowl - 70 grams
Sprite (21 fl oz) - 44 grams
Fruit Roll-Up - 7 grams
Starbucks Refresher (Medium) - 21 grams

Jessica Miller, a health writer for the 2024 Addiction Help article, “Sugar Addiction,” wrote “Consuming sugar affects the brain’s reward system and dopamine receptors, which leads to cravings and compulsive behavior.”

Eating high amounts of sugar can lead to addiction and anxiety because of an increase in insulin and dopamine levels, causing the body to overwork, Miller said.

“The brain’s reward center releases the feel-good chemical dopamine, a hormone that’s closely tied to addiction,” she said.

Cigarettes and alcohol come

with bold, visible warning labels, yet a single bottle of Coca-Cola with 52 grams of sugar has no warning label. Often consumed in one sitting, sugary drinks cause similar long-term damage to the body but do not come with a single cautionary word.

Warning labels are not about eliminating sugar entirely. They are about education and transparency. A simple warning label stating, “High sugar content. Consumption linked to increased risk of diabetes and heart disease” would empower people to make more informed choices about the food they consume.

Faculty Adviser
Mary Buckley-Harmon

Editors-in-chief
Stella Straub
Whitney Turner

Managing Editor
Summer Demeo

News Editors
Gwen Berger
Summer Demeo

Opinion Editor
Alessia Omari

the
INDEPENDENT

Manchester-Essex Regional High School
36 Lincoln St, Manchester MA 01944
978-526-4412 newspaper@mersd.org
online at <https://www.mersd.org/domain/702>
Instagram: @merhs_independent

Features Editors
August Capotosto
Annie Pinkin
Charlie Baker
Bissy Mitrano

Sports Editor
Sam Heanue
Isabelle Donnellan Valade

Arts Editors
Sabine Cooper
Hannah Davis

Staff
Riley McKinnon

The Independent is published monthly throughout the school year. It is a product of the Manchester-Essex Regional High School Journalism class.

We welcome letters to the editor from MERHS students, faculty, and community members.

All submissions must be signed. The Independent reserves the right not to print letters and to edit the content for clarity and length. While letters can be critical of an individual’s actions, they cannot slander or libel.

The staff editorial may be considered the opinion of the staff of The Independent.

By-line opinions are written by individual staff members and should not be considered representative of the entire staff.

The Independent staff hopes that all Manchester and Essex citizens will take advantage of this forum. The paper is meant to serve the school community, and we are open to suggestions to help it better serve its purposes.

Science education

Should courses be taught in a different order?

Pro

Sabine Cooper

High school science classes should be taught in the order of physics, chemistry, and then biology to support the logical progression of scientific understanding.

One major concern with the traditional sequence of biology, chemistry, and then physics is that it does not align with the foundational concepts that students need for deeper comprehension of each topic.

Physics lays the groundwork for chemistry, which provides the necessary knowledge for understanding biology.

According to the article “The Future of High School STEM Classes” written for Activate Learning, “Students tackle biology without the foundational chemical principles that underpin biological processes or explore chemical reactions without understanding the physical laws governing these reactions.”

Additionally, teaching physics first helps students develop stronger problem-solving skills. Physics is rooted in mathematical reasoning with a heavy emphasis on algebra concepts that can be strengthened by a physics class, according to an article by Joe Hartley, “Rethinking the high-school science curriculum.”

“Students get continuous practice in both classes at basic algebraic principles and manipulation ... and by using real world examples in the physics course, algebra becomes far less abstract than it appears in most algebra books,” Hartley said.

Though students would need to have taken or be concurrently enrolled in an algebra course, the mathematical skills required for an introductory physics course do not need to stray past Algebra I to be beneficial.

If students take biology first, they miss the opportunity to build these skills and master them before tackling more complex scientific concepts.

Furthermore, the biology-first model often results in students memorizing facts rather than developing a deep understanding of the underlying scientific principles, according to the article “Rethinking science education” by Rebecca Tarnopol for the Michigan Daily Times

If students are introduced to biology without understanding these foundational sciences, they are forced to rely on memorization rather than true comprehension.

Some argue that biology should be taught first because it is relatable, but this does not justify a curriculum that lacks logical progression. Science education in high school should build from fundamental principles to more complex systems, ensuring that students develop strong critical thinking skills.

To foster a more comprehensive scientific education, high schools should adopt a physics-chemistry-biology sequence. This would improve conceptual understanding, enhance problem-solving abilities, and better prepare students for future studies.

Con

Bissy Mitrano

Science courses must continue to be taught in the order of biology, chemistry, and physics to provide high school students with the most comprehensive knowledge of scientific concepts.

The sequence for the science courses is aligned with the math curriculum. More advanced math courses such as Algebra 2, calculus, and statistics, which are taken later in high school, are necessary to understand physics.

According to the 2025 ArXiv article by Patrick Thompson, “Physics is the science of change, quantified by an abundance of different physical quantities. Calculus describes how they are related to each other and creates a structure for new ones to emerge. The two disciplines are inseparable,” Thompson said.

Calculus is not required in classes such as biology, and traditionally, biology is taught first as a foundational course.

By following this order, students are better prepared for the challenges presented in physics, making it more appropriate as the final science course in high school.

The study of biology is considered a qualitative science because it requires conceptual knowledge and memorization. Physics is a quantitative science that requires math processes. Chemistry is a mix of the two sciences and acts as a bridge between biology and physics.

Math courses must correspond to science courses as they are interrelated disciplines.

High schools typically do not require a physics course but do require a biology class. Students who are less interested in math courses are still required to take a science course, while leaving out the complex math involved in physics.

The ninth-grade MCAS is also something to consider.

According to the 2007 iBerkshires article, “84 percent of the 20,734 students who took the biology test [passed] ... 79 percent of the 16,007 students who took the introductory physics test [passed].”

This means more students took the biology MCAS and passed at a younger age, meaning biology is taught more effectively in the first year of high school.

Physics teacher Joshua Wladkowski said, “A con of teaching physics first in freshman year would be the level of math you need because you typically need an Algebra 2 background.” This sequence may also cause physics teachers to be stressed because it is they must fill in the math gap.

“If [a student] does not have that background, then I am essentially a physics teacher teaching two classes. I’m teaching part of Algebra II and physics, so it can be overwhelming,” Wladkowski said.

Introducing physics later in the high school curriculum allows students to build mathematical skills and maturity, facilitating a comprehensive learning experience.



AUGUST CAPOTOSTO ILLUSTRATION

More high schools should implement U block models

By **Charlie Baker**
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

U Block is extremely beneficial for students, and more schools should have a similar block in their schedule.

While most schools have a homeroom, study hall, or other type of work block, our high school’s U block format is a better option because it allows students more freedom.

In most U blocks, the time belongs completely to the students, as long as they are quiet. This allows all students to do what works best for them at that moment.

For students who struggle to sit silently in a desk all day and need to socialize, U block is the perfect time to unwind. For stu-

dents who need quiet time alone to focus, it’s the perfect time to study.

Students can also walk down to the cafeteria to get breakfast, something they otherwise wouldn’t have time to do.

U block also encourages students to meet and communicate with teachers by giving them designated time to do so without staying after school; therefore, students get the help they need and stay on top of work.

The time is also useful for extracurricular activities. Band and chorus practice during U block, and Spanish Club meets as well. It’s also the perfect time for journalism students to conduct interviews.

Without U block, these activities would take place after

school, reducing time for sports, homework, and relaxation.

Another great thing about U block is that students don’t have anything they’re required to do. If they would rather relax than do work they can, and that’s not necessarily a bad thing.

To an outside observer, a lot of students might be chatting with friends or using their phones instead of being productive, but that observer might underestimate just how important a short break can be. For many people, having the option to disconnect from their work and the stress of school for a short 50 minutes is as valuable as the work time.

Flexibility makes U block special and beneficial for students.

Some other districts already use the U block model, and others are interested in switching to it. On Feb. 28, teachers from Lynnfield came to talk with



CHARLIE BAKER PHOTO

Principal Julie Sgroi (right) met with Lynnfield High School teachers Adam Dell’Aria and Leane Manderson, who visited the school to observe U block, a flexible study time for students.

teachers and administrators at the school and observe U block in action.

What they saw was invaluable

time for students to do what they need to do, and that’s why Lynnfield and other schools should adopt U block.

BOYS' LACROSSE

Coach: Wyatt Chittick
Captains: Seniors Jarrett Croft, Hayden Spencer; juniors Charlie Thurlow, Connor Dickson
Record last year: 14-4
Current record: 3-1
Goals: Be competitive throughout the season, win the Cape Ann League title
Rivals: Ipswich, Hamilton-Wenham, Lynnfield, Triton
Impact players: Seniors Jarrett Croft, Hayden Spencer; juniors Connor Dickson, Jack McCavanagh, Charlie Thurlow, Luke Renzi.
Coach's quote: "It's been fun getting to compete with this group of people."
 - Wyatt Chittick
Captain's quote: "We have some new guys, so we're still fitting everything into place, but the chemistry is there. We've known each other for a long time, and we've played with each other for a long time." - Hayden Spencer



Jarrett Croft



Hayden Spencer



Connor Dickson



Charlie Thurlow

GIRLS' LACROSSE

Coach: Nan Gorton
Captains: Seniors Brigid Carovillano, Charlotte Crocker, Sylvie McCavanagh
Record last year: 12-4
Current record: 3-3
Goals: Alleviate stress and make the team a freeing space
Rivals: Ipswich
Impact players: Seniors Brigid Carovillano, Charlotte Crocker, Sylvie McCavanagh, Maggie Light, Aisling Twombly; junior Abby Kent.
Coach's quote: "I want to alleviate [the] pressure, and I don't mean to lower any standard. I just want to recognize how grateful we are for the process of working together, working hard, and having fun." - Nan Gorton
Captain's quote: "I'm excited to play, and it's nice to get this final wrap-up at the high school level before moving on." - Brigid Carovillano



Brigid Carovillano



Charlotte Crocker



Sylvie McCavanagh

Congrats to Brigid Carovillano for being named the 63rd Salem News Student Athlete of the Year!

BASEBALL

Coach: James Weed
Captains: Seniors Nick Brown, Satchel Rubin
Record last year: 4-3
Current record: 1-2
Goals: Beat Triton, win state championship
Rivals: Hamilton-Wenham, Triton, Georgetown
Impact players: Seniors Nick Brown, Satchel Rubin; juniors Adam MacLeod, Parker Woodman; sophomores Connor St. Laurent; freshmen Mikey Harris Jr., Kevin Heim.
Coach's quote: "These guys care about each other, and ... they bring people together from the community to support the team. At our first game they brought a bunch of guys in to cheer us on, which was great for the team morale." - Kevin Winship
Captain's quote: "With the way these younger boys have been playing, you'd think they were all juniors or seniors with years of experience, and that's really something to think about." - Nick Brown



Nick Brown



Satchel Rubin

SOFTBALL

Coach: Frank Sarro
Captains: Juniors Anna Gardner, Penelope Riggs, Abby Aiello
Record last year: 8-13
Current record: 3-1
Goals: Become Cape Ann League champions and go further in the state tournament than last year
Rival: Ipswich, Amesbury, Pentucket, Newburyport
Impact players: Juniors Lucy Parmalee, Cami Friedrich; sophomore Katie Crompton; freshman Aliyah Doyon
Coach's quote: "The team really came out ready to go, and I feel like there's been a palpable enthusiasm this year." - Frank Sarro
Captain's quote: "We've become the upperclassmen on the team who can guide the incoming players, which I think has built a really good dynamic." - Penelope Riggs



Anna Gardner



Penelope Riggs



Abby Aiello

BOYS' TENNIS

Coach: Robert Bilsbury

Captains: Seniors Jack Cummins, Charlie Langendorf, Finn Birkeland, Jack Lawler.

Record last year: 14-8

Current Record: 5-0

Rivals: Lynnfield, Pioneer Valley Chinese Immersion School, Cohasset

Goals: Win the state championship, stay focused, practice hard

Impact Players: Seniors Charlie Langendorf, Finn Birkeland, Jack Lawler; junior Alex Montaresi.

Coach's quote: "Our league is super tough, which makes us more prepared to handle adversity in the state tournament, too."

-Robert Bilsbury

Captain's quote: "We have a good team again, but we have to make sure that we stay focused and practice hard."

-Charlie Langendorf



Jack Cummins



Finn Birkeland



Charlie Langendorf



Jack Lawler

GIRLS' TENNIS

Coach: Barrett Alston

Captains: Senior Nina Zalosh, junior Grace Scarbrough.

Record last year: 16-6

Current record: 2-1

Rivals: Hamilton-Wenham, Lynnfield

Goals: Win the Cape Ann League, go far in the state tournament, have intense practices

Impact players: Seniors Nina Zalosh, Libby Lawler, Ella Arntsen; junior Scarbrough; sophomores Aurora Lenehan, Sarah Cort; freshman Maeve McArdle.

Coach's quote: "We have an awesome core returning from last year, and across the board, we have a deep, athletic lineup."

-Barrett Alston

Captain's quote: "We all like to hang out and chat and get to know each other first before we go play because we're all one big team when it comes down to the score." -Grace Scarbrough



Nina Zalosh



Grace Scarbrough

OUTDOOR TRACK

Coach: David Coleman

Captains: Seniors Megan Hurd, Henry Stevens.

Record last year: Boys' - 4-5, Girls' - 5-4

Current record: Boys' - 1-1, Girls' - 2-0

Rivals: Swampscott, Danvers

Goals: Win the Lynch Division, create closer team culture

Impact players: Seniors Megan Hurd, Henry Stevens.

Coach's quote: "First meet out, we had five individual girls and two individual boys qualify for States, and the girls got their 4x200 in as well. It was an excellent start to what should be a long road through the champion meets." -David Coleman

Captain's quote: "We have so much potential this year, and we can really do well if we kind of just all come together and set goals as a team." -Megan Hurd



Megan Hurd



Henry Stevens

SAILING

Coach: Anthony Leggett

Captains: Senior Cole Cote, sophomore Nicholas Bock.

Record last year: 6-8

Current record: 0-1

Rival: Ipswich

Goals: Dominate B-Division, regain place in A-Division

Impact players: Senior Cole Cote; sophomores Nicholas Bock, Grey Brooks.

Coach's quote: "We have a young team, with only one senior and no juniors. However, the sophomores have sailed together for three years, and I expect them to improve dramatically on last year's record" -Anthony Leggett

Captain's quote: "I think we could be really good this year. We have more people than ever and have more experience." -Nicholas Bock



Cole Cote



Nicholas Bock

Spring concert features band, chorus, SoundWaves, jazz band

Students perform songs in different languages

By Alessia Omari
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Members of the concert band, jazz band, chorus, and SoundWaves performed in the annual spring concert after months of preparation, band director Harry Wagg and chorus director Ben Icenogle said.

The concert, which took place on April 10, featured performances from a variety of students involved in the music department, Icenogle said.

The chorus performed multiple songs in different languages, such as the Swahili song “Baba Yetu” by Christopher Tin, he said.

Icenogle said he was impressed by the speed in which the chorus and the SoundWaves were able to learn their arrangements.

“[The chorus] did a lot of difficult stuff, and SoundWaves did six songs including a five-song mashup—that’s nuts,” he said.

The concert band experimented with complex yet accessible pieces such as “Flamingo Road” by Steve Hodges, Wagg said.

“I wanted to do something that was upbeat, fun, energetic but possibly accessible to 8th-grade students if they wanted to try it,” he said.

Wagg said the concert band also performed a “James Bond” mashup, and a piece titled “Seal Lullaby,” which featured performances from the high school chorus.

“[Seal Lullaby] has six very very different parts moving at once, so out of all the pieces, I

‘[The chorus] did a lot of difficult stuff, and SoundWaves did six songs including a five-song mashup—that’s nuts.’

- BEN ICENOGLLE



ALESSIA OMARI PHOTO

Members of the concert choir perform “Hawaiian Roller Coaster Ride” from the feature film “Lilo and Stitch” at the annual Spring Concert on April 10, directed by music teacher Ben Icenogle.

think that’s the most challenging one,” he said.

Sophomore Bella Hilton said that the process of learning each new piece for the performance was challenging yet engaging.

“We played through each piece section by section and

eventually got it to all flow together over time,” she said. “It was super satisfying, and I’m happy to see that our hard work paid off.”

Wagg said he was extremely impressed with his students’ performances during this year’s

spring concert.

“It’s one of those things where you never know when the best performance is going to be ... it’s almost never the concert, but I felt that tonight was the best version that we’d done for a lot of those pieces.”

Singer-songwriter Lucy Dacus releases fourth album with new, more intimate sound

Dacus sings about personal life, experiences

By Hannah Davis
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Singer-songwriter Lucy Dacus’s fourth studio album, “Forever Is A Feeling,” with poetic lyricism and vivid descriptions, is her best yet.

The album differs from her previous album, “Home Video,” which mainly reflects on her childhood and growing up.

“Forever Is A Feeling” focuses on Dacus’s life touring with boygenius and her relationship with bandmate Julien Baker.

Before the album’s release on March 28, Dacus released four singles: “Ankles,” “Limerence,” “Best Guess,” and “Talk.” The

singles indicated the album’s unique sound that differed from Dacus’s previous three albums.

“Forever Is A Feeling” featured a slightly quieter sound than Dacus’s usual upbeat indie rock. The album’s strings and acoustic guitar make the songs more personal, adding to the album as a whole.

“Modigliani,” “Lost Time,” and “Most Wanted Man” stood out for their impressive lyricism and imagery, which conveyed Dacus’s emotions and feelings.

On “Modigliani,” Dacus sings to her boygenius bandmate and fellow singer-songwriter Phoebe Bridgers about missing her while she is on tour.

“Trying to fall asleep, back flat on the floor / While you were eating continental breakfast in Singapore / You make me homesick for places I’ve never been before

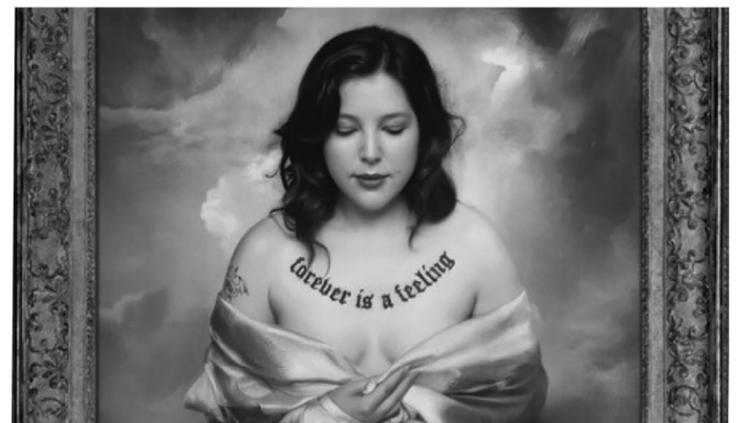
/ How’d you do that? / How’s tomorrow so far?” Dacus sings.

Before the release of “Forever Is A Feeling,” Dacus confirmed her relationship with Baker, who is the subject of many songs on the album, including “Lost Time,” which is written for Baker and expertly expresses Dacus’s feelings for her and their relationship.

“But I love you, and every day / That I knew and didn’t say / Is lost time / Now I’m knocking down your door / ‘Cause I’m trying to make up for / Lost time,” she sings.

Along with conveying emotions, Dacus also describes various scenes in “Most Wanted Man,” which brings her lyrics to life.

“\$700 dollar room still drinking coffee from the Keurig / We’re soaking up the luxuries on someone else’s dime / Living the



LUCYDACUS.US

“Forever Is A Feeling,” by singer-songwriter Lucy Dacus, presents a quieter sound than her previous indie rock and pop albums.

dream before we fully pass our prime,” she sings.

Later in the song, she sings, “Sitting on the kitchen counter / Counting bug bites on your thighs / Just another Southern summer,” further displaying her songwriting skills.

The album’s backing vocals by Bridgers and Baker stand out and add depth and complexity to Dacus’s songwriting.

“Forever Is A Feeling” displays Dacus’s talent as both a singer and songwriter through her lyrics and vivid descriptions.

Netflix original series ‘The Residence’ features political mystery, birding

By August Capotosto
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

“The Residence,” an intriguing and complex Netflix original-series released March 20, 2025, is a must-watch for those captivated by crime fiction.

The show is an eccentric whodunit murder mystery, set in the modern-day White House, that follows the lives and stories of the building’s staff.

The narrative is led by Detective Cordelia Cupp (Uzo Aduba), an unpredictable genius tasked with discovering who murdered the White House’s chief of staff, A.B. Wynter (Giancarlo Esposito).



NETFLIX.COM

Detective Cordelia Cupp (Uzo Aduba) is an intelligent detective in Netflix’s new series “The Residence” set at the White House.

Set in the aftermath of a chaotic state dinner, the plot develops when 157 suspects are locked in the building until morning for questioning and to preserve as much evidence as possible.

Each episode typically focuses

on a different staff member, with each piece of given information eventually combining into a bigger picture in the final episode

Detective Cupp keeps her theories under wraps, even from her professional partner Edwin Park

(Randall Park). Due to this secrecy, the viewers learn the course of events along with the supporting cast.

In the series, Cupp is an avid bird watcher who compares the social interpersonal relationships of humans to the dynamics and characteristics of birds in nature.

Paired with unique, cinematographically shot sequences, these monologues help incorporate a distinct Wes Anderson feel.

The sheer scale of the grounds, consisting of 132 rooms on 18 acres of land, creates endless possibilities for the place and time of death and escape routes.

Though new as a series, this detective story is inspired by Kate Anderson Brower’s book “The Residence: Inside the Private World of the White House.”

‘The show is an eccentric whodunit murder mystery, set in the modern-day White House, that follows the lives and stories of the building’s staff.’

Netflix released the show in an eight-part series, with episodes shifting between the past and present as Detective Cupp assembles testimonies from potential suspects

and witnesses. Each episode is about 50 minutes long, making it immersive enough to not lose interest in one sitting.

Due to language, sex, violence, alcohol, and smoking, the series is rated TV-MA.

Junior wins Best in School art award for her piece ‘Farewell’

Feels encouraged by school, teachers

By Gwendolyn Berger
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Junior Augie Capotosto won the Best in School award for the 2025 Congressional Art Competition at Montserrat College of Art for her mixed-media piece, “Farewell.”

Capotosto said that she won out of the six people who submitted work for the art and photography classes at the school.

“I submitted this piece that I did around the end of last year ... It’s a remix artwork of “The Kiss” by Gustav Klimt,” she said.

Capotosto said “Farewell” was created from a class assignment where students took a famous artist’s piece and remixed it, adding either an environmental or humanitarian spin on it. She focused on disease and the idea of having to let go of some-

one, she said.

“It was probably one of my favorite pieces that I’ve done in a long time ... I used gouache, a water-soluble paint, alongside other mixed media like origami paper,” Capotosto said.

She said the artwork took about three days to complete.

“I did a lot of it during a power outage, which was great. I was sitting by candlelight, trying to paint this piece,” Capotosto said.

She said she felt honored to receive this award, especially because art can be very subjective.

Capotosto said she appreciated the encouragement that she has received from the school.

“I’ve gotten emails from faculty that I don’t talk to congratulating me ... so that’s been really special to have that aspect of Manchester Essex coming together to support the arts,” she said.

Sophomore Miles Takayesu, a classmate of Capotosto, said he’s known Capotosto for as long as he can remember.

“Our older brothers were best friends growing up ... every time we hung out, at least one of us would have paper, so we would always be drawing,” he said.

Takayesu was enrolled in the Studio Art class where Capotosto created “Farewell.” He said he was present throughout her whole process and was very impressed.

“Her dedication to the art she makes is insane. It’s the most dedication I’ve ever seen anyone put into any one thing,” Takayesu said.

Art teacher Tamera Burns said each high school was allowed to submit artwork from six students.

In addition to Capotosto, the school submitted three pieces from the photography classes, which were created by seniors Stella Straub and Gwen Berger and junior Zac Carvalho.

The other two pieces from the art classes were created by senior Henry Swerdloff and sophomore Elsa Ballock, Burns said.

She said she was very happy for Capotosto.

“She has been an incredibly hard worker since freshman year ... She’s really put in supreme effort,” Burns said.



AUGIE CAPOTOSTO PHOTO

Junior Augie Capotosto’s mixed-media piece “Farewell” took three days to complete and was painted during a power outage.

Laughing Gull Café reopens post renovations

By Sam Heanue
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Located in the center of Manchester, at 4 Summer St., Laughing Gull Café is a community favorite for breakfast, coffee, and sweet treats.

In February, flood damage led to renovations that forced the café to close for three weeks. The closure saw interior design improvements, such as the introduction of a wall between the dining area and the kitchen.

These improvements provide more seating and a less cramped environment, allowing diners to enjoy their food without worrying about the long lines displacing them.



SAM HEANUE PHOTO

Laughing Gull Café makes inside improvements like more seating and better flow while maintaining its signature cozy atmosphere.

A major improvement resulting from the renovations is the change in register location. Previously, diners were forced to order around the kitchen corner, which is not visible from the

door. They are now able to see the register right when they walk in.

Though many of the café’s menu items are baked in-house, they also offer a variety of

products from local vendors, such as Jim’s Bagels of Gloucester and Atomic Coffee Roasters of Beverly.

The Laughing Gull serves Atomic coffee at a very reasonable price (\$3.00 - \$3.75), especially when compared to the Atomic

Café, which charges nearly twice that much. The reasonable price of coffee is one of Laughing Gull’s biggest draws. The café matches other local coffee prices such as Dunkin’ (\$2.55 - \$3.29), and simultaneously supports local businesses.

In addition to serving food, the Laughing Gull functions as a gal-

lery for local art, which can be purchased in-store.

An important draw of the Laughing Gull is its welcoming nature and positive environment for students.

The cozy and comfortable ambiance provided by the café

These improvements provide more seating and a less cramped environment, allowing diners to enjoy their food without worrying about the long lines displacing them.

gives students the perfect place to do homework, study, or meet after school.

With new improvements made by recent renovations, the Laughing Gull Café is once again open for

community members to enjoy a delicious, reasonably priced cup of coffee made by local brewers with food purchased from vendors in the community.

‘Never Let Me Go’ explores themes of friendship, fate

By Sabine Cooper
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Kazuo Ishiguro explores themes of fate, free will, and what it truly means to be human in his chilling and dystopian 2005 fiction novel “Never Let Me Go.”

Ishiguro takes readers on a haunting journey through the lives of three students at Hailsham, a seemingly idyllic English boarding school that harbors a chilling secret about its true purpose.

The story follows Kathy H., the novel’s narrator, as she reflects on her childhood alongside her closest friends, Ruth and Tommy. As they grow up, their friendships evolve through jeal-

ousy, love, and quiet betrayals, all under the shadow of an unspoken reality.

“Never Let Me Go” seamlessly blends elements of dystopian fiction with deeply personal storytelling, weaving a narrative that slowly unravels the unsettling truth behind Kathy, Ruth, and Tommy’s existence.

Through Kathy’s narration, the novel gradually reveals the unsettling reality of the students’ fate, making the reader complicit in uncovering the truth alongside her.

Ishiguro does this by carefully crafting an atmosphere of eerie normalcy, where the students of Hailsham are sheltered yet subtly conditioned to accept their roles

in society without question.

The novel’s emotional weight is built by Kathy’s quiet observations as she recalls the past with a mix of nostalgia and unease.

The prose is deceptively simple yet deeply affecting, which draws readers into a world that mirrors our own but operates under grim, unspoken rules.

The novel’s drawn-out revelation, delivered in Ishiguro’s restrained style, stays with the reader long after the final page.

While “Never Let Me Go” maintains a gentle, melancholic tone, its underlying horror is undeniable. Ishiguro offers no grand twists or dramatic confrontations; instead, the novel’s power lies in its quiet acceptance of the

inevitable.

Though its pacing may feel unhurried at times as Ishiguro frequently delves deeply into intricate details, the novel remains a heart-breaking and thought-provoking read.

These moments, seemingly trivial, are imbued with deep significance, precisely because the characters’ lives are so controlled.

The 2010 film adaptation of Ishiguro’s novel, directed by Mark Romanek and starring Carey Mulligan, Keira Knightley, and Andrew Garfield, is faithful but lacks the subtlety that the novel offers and focuses more on the characters’ romantic development.

With its unforgettable characters, understated prose, and deep themes, “Never Let Me Go” leaves a lasting impression and prompts



SABINE COOPER PHOTO

Kazuo Ishiguro’s 2005 novel quietly explores humanity in a haunting dystopian world.

readers to question the fragility of identity, memory, and the meaning of life itself.