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Middle school principal announces retirement

Staff, students reflect on Maino's lasting impact

By Stella Straub
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

After an 18-year career in education, middle school principal Joanne Maino announced her retirement from the school in the first week of January.

She said she began her career in 2007 as a fifth-grade student teacher at Essex Elementary. She then moved to a long-term substitute position in the second grade at EES, followed by a position as a sixth-grade English and history teacher at the same school, she said.

When the districts merged in 2009, Maino remained in her position as an English teacher and moved to the middle school, which had added the sixth grade.

In 2014, Maino became assistant principal at O'Maley Innovation Middle School in Gloucester. In 2016, she returned to MERMS as principal.

Middle school dean of students Joe Janack said he would describe Maino as "one of the kindest, most caring, and most genu-

ine people in the world."

"She cares so much about kids and the school and doing the right thing, and that is something admirable that you cannot teach," he said.

Janack said having Maino's support as he moved to an administrative position after teaching band gave him confidence because he respected her decisions and opinions greatly.

He said Maino brings an infectious positive energy and dedication to the school.

"I think that [her energy] has been ingrained in everyone so much that even when she's gone, we'll still be here because of the solid foundation that she has set and the impacts that she's had. She's had ripple effects that go throughout the building and the district," Janack said.

He said Maino has a great impact on those she interacts with.

"Two summers ago, I met up with a former student of mine, and we were just chatting about something when she brought up something she learned with Ms. Maino in English class, unprovoked. That something stuck with her from 10 years later," he said.

Seventh-grade English teacher Vidula Plante said Maino is an



STELLA STRAUB PHOTO

Middle school principal Joanne Maino has announced that she will be retiring from the school. Over her 18 years working in schools, colleagues say Maino has impacted and supported students and families. In her retirement, she plans to spend more time doing hobbies such as gardening.

extremely empathetic person who is incredibly accessible.

"The first year I taught MSA (Middle School Academy), we had some kids write a Spaulding Grant, and it was on the front page of the Gloucester news.

NBC News came to do an interview, and they called me, and I said, 'I can't talk to you. I have to vet it.' I let Ms. Maino know, and within an hour, she had contacted the parents of the kids, talked to the superintendent, gotten the

'okay,' and NBC News was in," she said.

Maino said community has been one of the defining themes from her time at the school.

"The teachers and staff at [the
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NHS hosts second blood drive, works with Red Cross

Student, faculty, community donors report smooth donation process

By Isabelle Donnellan Valade
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Raising 30 units of blood, the National Honor Society (NHS) worked together with the Red Cross to run a spring blood drive for students, faculty, and families on March 13, senior NHS officer Fiona Flynn said.

"We had a bit of a smaller turnout than the first drive, but I think there was a lot of interest and a lot of first-time donors, which is always really good. We collected 30 units of blood [and] everyone seemed to have a pretty positive experience," she said.

Flynn said despite the lower participation, the current and future NHS officers are planning to get more donations for next



ISABELLE DONNELLAN VALADE PHOTO

Junior Caitlin McLaughlin donated blood at the NHS blood drive with the Red Cross on March 13. 30 units of blood were donated.

year's drives.

"At the first drive ... a lot of people wanted to sign up and we just didn't have enough space. But this drive we had less interest but more space. So we're working with [next year's] NHS officers to brainstorm ways to get

people interested," she said.

While the blood drive was not as successful as they had hoped, NHS adviser John Herrick said this was partly due to a scheduling error.

"We found out after that there was another blood drive in Man-

chester the day after ours. So I think we had some adults in the community who were already signed up for the other blood drive so they couldn't donate to ours," he said.

Despite this setback, Herrick said the day went well and the Red Cross phlebotomists did great.

"They were professional, and they did an amazing job there. There was no wait time, and the system from signing in, to [the] questionnaire, to blood donation, and finally to recovery went very smoothly. And it took less than an hour from start to finish back in," he said.

Junior Caitlin McLaughlin donated blood and said her experience went well.

"My experience was good. The people drawing blood were really nice ... they were all great

and made sure I was okay before I left," she said.

She said blood drives are beneficial for the community.

"I feel like [blood drives] bring us all together and ... allow people to give back to the community," McLaughlin said.

World language teacher Robert Bilsbury, who donated blood, said simply hosting a blood drive is an amazing achievement but

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Students attend variety of International Week presentations

Presenters share adventures, volunteer work

By Annie Pinkin
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Presenters from the school and community shared their international travel experiences during this year's International Week from March 12-14. The presentations covered Costa Rica, Israel, France, Philippines, Spain, Portugal, Turkey, Grenada, Germany, and Japan.

In a proclamation issued by Massachusetts Governor Maura Healy, this year marks the 68th anniversary of National Foreign Language Week.

According to the official website of the Alpha Mu Gamma (AMG) sorority, National Foreign Language Week was created in 1957 by national AMG president Eloise Therese.

Language department chair

Michelle Magana said that International Week benefits students by expanding on their in-class lessons.

"It's not just learning a language isolated in one space, but understanding that language can take you to a lot of different places around the world," she said.

Magana has organized International Week for 16 years. The middle and high schools host presentations in the auditorium for three days during language classes, Magana said.

Presentations show a variety of places to travel, sophomore Charlie Athanas said. "Last year there were a bunch of presentations with people who studied abroad, and that was really cool to me," he said.

This year, presenters traveled abroad for vacation, school trips, and while serving in the military, French teacher Caroline Coshow said.

"[Marine veteran David Nicastro] traveled to 22 countries in total and started to be in the military when he was 17," she said.

Other presentations included the French program's trip to



ANNIE PINKIN PHOTO

Essex resident Natasha Taylor, who was born and raised in Grenada, displayed a picture of St. George's University in True Blue, Grenada during the school's annual International Week.

France last year, Brenda Tharp and Noreen Forbes's 129-mile hike of the "Camino de Santiago," and Natasha Taylor's experience growing up in Grenada.

The variety of presentations throughout International Week increases students' interest in travel, Athanas said.

"I think students gain a more diverse knowledge of other cultures and experiences that people can have in other countries," he said.

Before viewing a presentation about Afghanistan in a past International Week, Magana said that

she knew little to nothing about the country.

"I got to learn a lot about the religion, culture, and traditions from Afghanistan which was really interesting to see," Magana said.

The speakers for this particular presentation traveled as volunteers, as did many other past presenters, she said. "Those are the really interesting presentations because you see the outreach that goes from people in our community to places around the world," Magana said.

Coshow said she believes that

the experiences of volunteering should be celebrated with the whole school.

"I think having an assembly to see somebody who had a mission somewhere would be a very nice add to International Week," she said.

Coshow said International Week should extend to the elementary schools as well due to its excellent benefits for students and community members alike.

"We need to open peoples' minds to see that there's life outside of Manchester's border," she said.

School Committee votes on FY26 budget, approves use of school's reserves

Towns set to vote on budget in April, May

By Whitney Turner
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

At their latest meeting on March 18, the School Committee voted to move forward with the FY26 Modified Carry Forward Level Services Budget, superintendent Pam Beaudoin said.

Beaudoin said the budget includes cuts and redistributions. The district's facilities position would be reduced, and teaching positions would be redistributed to other schools within the district.

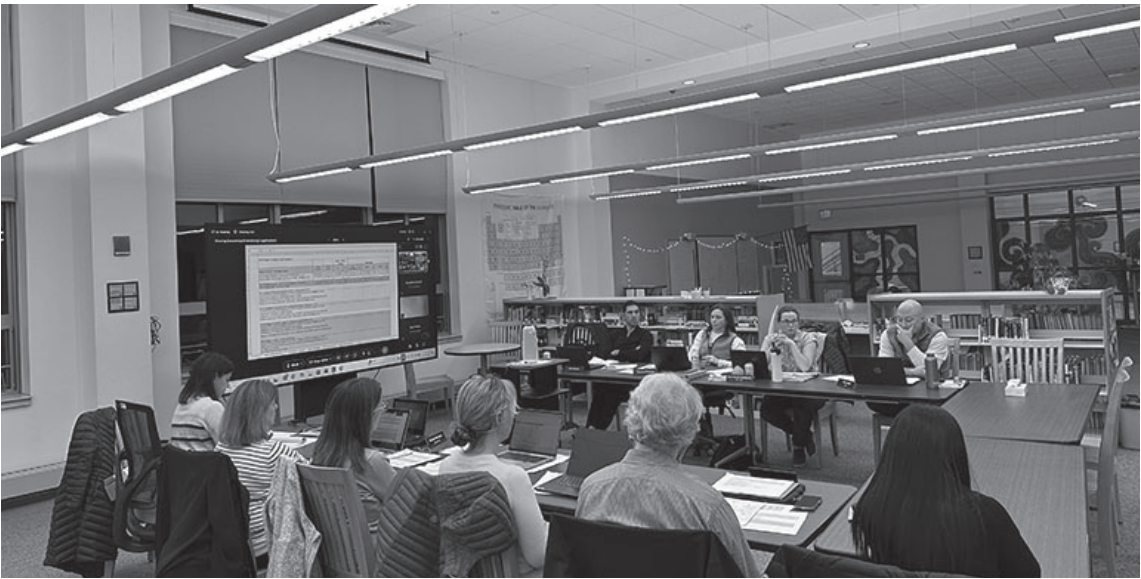
At the high school level, principal Julie Sgroi said multiple positions would be relocated.

"We have a math retirement, so they would reallocate that teaching position to Memorial to help offset the rising elementary school class sizes, and they would also reallocate a World Language teacher to the middle school to bring back sixth grade World Language," she said.

The district hopes to align the middle and high schools on a unified schedule, Beaudoin said.

"If we at least get times to line up so we can share staff, then no one has to be redirected specifically to one [school] or the other and can be shared between the two [schools]," she said.

If the schedules do not become aligned, a full World Language position will be relocated from the high school to the middle



STELLA STRAUB PHOTO

The School Committee voted to use the FY2026 Modified Carry Forward Level Services Budget.

school.

Sgroi said that the school may need to hire an additional math teacher as well. This would involve reducing a staff member elsewhere in the school.

Beaudoin said the selected budget preserved a separate middle school principal position, instead of combining the roles of the high school and middle school principals.

"People felt very, very strongly about keeping the principal," she said.

Ultimately, this budget choice led to the use of additional reserve funding, Beaudoin said.

"It didn't change the bottom line for the towns, but it preserved the position, as long as the budget passes, for at least another year, so we can take a better look at it," she said.

Beaudoin said ideally, she would have proposed the all-in budget, which did not use reserves and maintained all positions.

However, the town of Manchester planned to print its town budget on March 19, the day following the School Committee meeting. She said this lack of time influenced the decision to move forward with this budget.

School Committee vice chair Kate Koch-Sundquist said the committee voted for this budget because it avoided programming cuts that a budget increase of 2.5% would require.

Additionally, without the use of reserves, she said, the total increase of the budget would have been above 10%.

"We felt like those two extremes on either end were not

feasible for the programming reasons on one end and then for the financial impact on the other end," Koch-Sundquist said.

The next steps are for the towns of Manchester and Essex to vote to approve the spending required for this budget, Beaudoin said.

Manchester likely will not require an override to pay their portion of the budget, but Essex will likely need to pass an override for approximately \$800,000, Beaudoin said.

She said Manchester will decide at their town meeting on April 28, and at Essex's May 5 town meeting, they will need to acquire a two-thirds vote of support for a ballot initiative to vote on the override. This ballot vote would take place on May 12.

"On May 13, we'll know whether it's passed or not, ... so

assuming everything works out the way we want it to, and it passes, then we're done," Beaudoin said.

However, she said, if the budget does not pass in either town, the budget will need to be re-evaluated by the School Committee.

If the budget they send back to the towns is not approved through additional town meetings, then the School Committee would call a super town meeting between both towns, where a majority vote would decide the budget, Koch-Sundquist said.

Beaudoin said that if the towns do not pass the initial budget, the district will likely need to cut \$2 million from the budget.

Sgroi said she doesn't want the student experience to be affected by changes in the budget, but if the district needs to make a \$2 million cut, it would affect high school services.

"Those [cuts] could be significant, and it would impact the experience that the students are going to get," she said.

In the meantime, Beaudoin said she is working with principals to define what a cut of this size would mean for the district as well as spreading the word about potential effects for staff and programs.

Koch-Sundquist said that it is very important for high school students who are 18 years old to ensure that they are using their voices and participating in upcoming town meetings and ballot initiatives that will impact their school's future.

Ten DECA students qualify for international competition

Compete in team, individual categories at state competition

By Hannah Davis
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Sixty-one students from Manchester-Essex competed at the Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA) state competition in Boston with seven students moving on to the International Career Development Conference (ICDC) in Orlando, Florida in April.

The state competition lasted from Feb. 27 through March 1.

Seniors Charlotte Crocker and Ella Arntsen are among the ten students moving on to ICDC. They competed in the Innovation Plan category.

“For our project, we created a product, which we called the Care Collar. And it was kind of like an Apple Watch for dogs, and it had an app,” Crocker said.

The collar monitors the health and well-being of dogs while also using artificial intelligence to organize and analyze the data for the dog’s owner. The information is then made available to the owner on the app that connects with the collar.

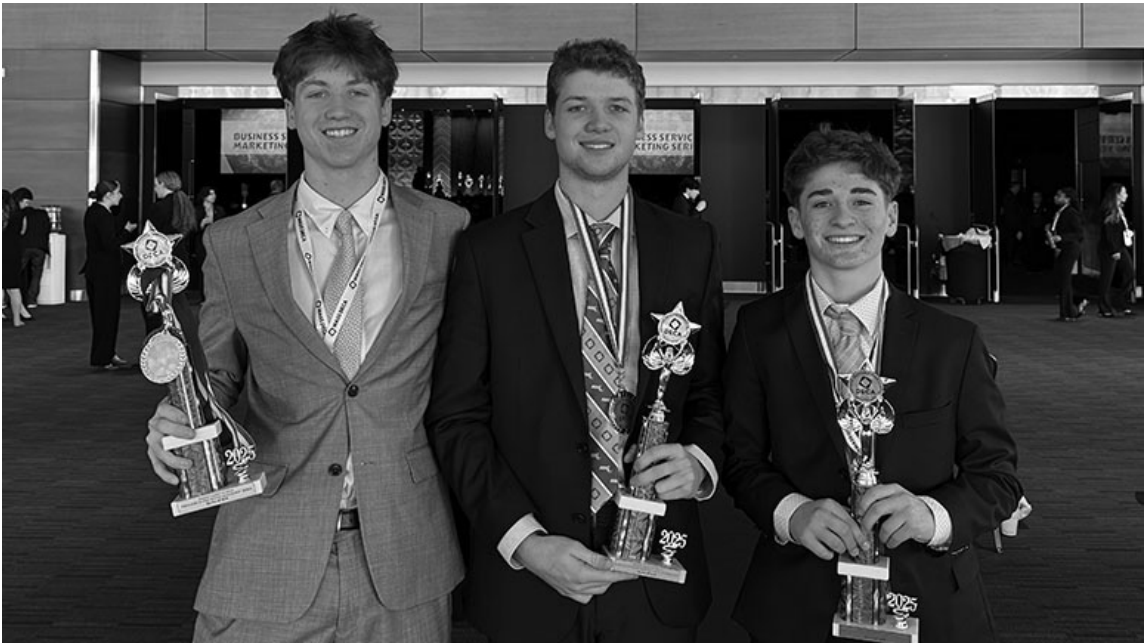
She said she is proud of her and Arntsen’s accomplishments at the competition.

“I wasn’t expecting to do that well, and it was good to have some recognition because we put in a lot of work into our project,” Crocker said.

Seniors Leigha Akerley, Talya Erdogan, and Rachel Gallant also qualified for ICDC, Akerley and Erdogan in

Buying and Merchandising Team Decision Making, and Gallant in Principles of Hospitality and Tourism.

Juniors Connor Dickson, Jack McCavanagh and Jake Zschau also qualified for ICDC, Dickson for Restaurant and Food Service Management and McCavanagh



SUMMER DEMEO PHOTO

At the DECA state competition, juniors Connor Dickson, Jake Zschau, and Jack McCavanagh qualified for the International Career Development Conference (ICDC) with seven other students.

and Zschau in Sports and Entertainment Marketing Team Decision Making.

Sophomores Alex Hatfield and Ben Rubens also qualified as a team for ICDC in Financial Services Team Decision Making.

Senior DECA Officer Liv Kent said she is proud of how supportive the students were during the competition.

“Everyone enjoys being together and is really happy for other people. Even if you don’t make it to the next level it’s fun knowing that there’s people from our school that are going to be representing our chapter at the international level,” she said.

DECA adviser Barrett Alston said he is very proud of the students who competed, especially

their ability to perform well in stressful situations.

“It’s just such a highly competitive event with really high-pressure situations. It’s definitely a level up from Districts in terms of the intensity and the caliber of competition,” he said.

Alston said he is looking forward to guiding students through future DECA competitions.

Peer mentors organize letter writing for Week of Gratitude

By Whitney Turner
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Continuing their annual tradition, the peer mentors club organized the school’s Week of Gratitude during the week of Feb. 10, club adviser David Conwell said.

He said the Week of Gratitude has been a tradition for roughly 10 years and was started by former director of school counseling Beverly Low.

“Initially, the goal was to thank teachers for writing letters of recommendation, and over time, as peer mentors started to take it and run with it more ... it started to just be an acknowledgment of anybody around here that has done something nice or shows up to work with a smile on their



COURTESY OF GILLIAN POLK

During Week of Gratitude, the Soundwaves sang “Can’t Take My Eyes Off You” by Frankie Valli to school counseling department administrative assistant Laurie Carlson to express thanks to her.

face,” Conwell said.

Peer mentors coordinator senior Maggie Light said that during the Week of Gratitude, anyone can write letters to someone in the school community to thank them for what they have done. Peer mentors are then responsible for delivering the notes to the intended recipients.

She said the tradition is a chance for everyone to boost each other up, especially during the long winter months.

“I think it’s just a really nice surprise to get a note from someone that’s personal and says thank you for everything that you’ve done for me,” Light said.

This year, the peer mentors

created an additional station in the learning commons for students to write cards, Conwell said.

“We had a station in the counseling office and in the learning commons to just try to encourage people to do it, and they don’t have to be a peer mentor,” he said.

Light said that since the club has grown in membership, delivering the letters was easier this year.

She also said that many people wrote letters this year.

“There were more than I expected, which was a nice surprise,” Light said.

School counseling department administrative assistant Laurie Carlson said that on Feb. 11, the Soundwaves sang to the counseling department as part of the Week of Gratitude.

Carlson said school counselor Gillian Polk arranged the surprise performance with choral director

Ben Icenogle.

The Soundwaves sang “Can’t Take My Eyes Off You” by Frankie Valli, she said.

“It is one of my all-time favorite songs ... That was the most beautiful rendition of that song ... I have a new favorite version,” Carlson said.

She said the performance made her emotional.

“I was so overwhelmed that they would do that; I couldn’t believe that they did that. And they were just so wonderful ... it was so generous

of them ... they really were so lovely,” Carlson said.

In her 34 years working at the school, she said she has enjoyed supporting the Soundwaves.

“It’s something I will never forget. I will remember the rest of my life, it was so special, and I would love them to come back again,” Carlson said.

‘They were just so wonderful ... it was so generous of them.’

- LAURIE CARLSON

CONTINUATIONS

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school] are such good people. They care about what they do, and they care a lot about the kids ... It’s almost like we’re family here,” she said.

Maino said that she has enjoyed being able to support students and families during her time at the school.

“As [an English] teacher and then moving into this role, that impact [on children and their families] has grown. So, rather than a class of 85 or 100 students, I now have, in a sense, a class of close to 300 students and their families ...

I enjoy working with parents who may be struggling somewhat and need guidance, supporting them and putting their mind at ease,” she said.

Maino said that after she retires, she is looking forward to taking a year to “just be,” as someone who has been working since she was 15 years old.

“I love working with horses and gardening, and I do some beekeeping, so I plan to just get into that a little bit and really refine myself,” she said.

Eighth-grader Annabelle Kerivan said Maino is a very caring, conscientious principal.

“I was an ADL peer leader, and so I interacted with her over that.

She’ll just like, see me in the hall, and she’ll talk to me about my schoolwork. If I’m in the office finishing a test, she’ll talk to me, and she’ll be nice,” she said.

High school principal Julie Sgroi said Maino was incredibly helpful to her when she first came to the school.

“She’s helped me immensely in how to find my way in the community, how to work with the community, how to work best with teachers. I don’t know what I’m going to do without her,” Sgroi said.

Essex Elementary Principal Kimberly Provost said Maino was a “wonderful mentor” to her as she began her role as a school

leader

“She was always my number one cheerleader and was very trusting of everything that I did. We just had a really great working relationship,” she said.

Provost said Maino is “one of the most collaborative, inspirational, dedicated principals” that she has had the opportunity to work with.

“There were so many things that she did to really bring the fun back to the middle school, whether it was the March Madness games or lip sync videos,” she said.

Provost said Maino will leave a legacy in the middle school that will last for a very long time.

NHS BLOOD DRIVE CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

suggested that there could be more communication for the next drive to attract more volunteers.

“I never want to be critical of a blood drive because they are awesome ... I feel like we should talk it up a little bit more before it gets here ... and explain why it’s important to give blood,” he said.

Flynn said the blood drive was a way for people who donated to connect to their community.

“Providing people with opportunities to contribute to their community ... is just a good way to help people to give back in a really meaningful way that helps save people’s lives,” she said.

Boston rapper Akrobatik performs at school wide assembly

Members of SCAR organize event for Black History Month

By Stella Straub
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Boston-area rapper Akrobatik, who is also a professor at the University of Massachusetts Boston and a consultant for Self-Evident Education, visited the school to share his message on activism, life, and gratitude, said SCAR (Student Coalition Against Racism) adviser Allison Krause. Akrobatik came on Feb. 5 to kick off Black History Month and engage the school community with SCAR’s work, Krause said. SCAR first met Akrobatik two years ago when he was a speaker at a conference called the Con-

nections Conference, she said. Krause said SCAR then applied for a grant through the Hooper Fund to raise funds to bring Akrobatik to the school. Senior SCAR leader Jenelle Ford said she was inspired by Akrobatik when she first attended his workshop on hip-hop education at the Connections Conference. “He is from the Boston area and grew up there, and his story was just very relatable. Like, he attended a private school with all white kids, and I just felt like I understood a little bit, as we are a predominantly white school,” she said. Ford said she felt students would listen to his message because he was from the area and because he was delivering it through the medium of rap. She said that despite the student body being primarily progressive and respectful, she felt Akrobatik’s message was important for the school to hear.

‘We are just, sort of, trying to teach ... that the world is vaster than our little bubble.’

-JENELLE FORD



COURTESY OF ANDREW LUCAS

Boston rapper Akrobatik engages students with hip-hop and rap and teaches about identity and the importance of education. His visit, planned by SCAR, celebrated Black History Month.

“We are just, sort of, trying to teach everyone, sort of what’s okay, what’s not okay, and that the world is vaster than our little bubble,” Ford said. Senior SCAR leader Henry Stevens said the club has also been hosting open houses during Black History Month.

“Every Friday, we open up our meetings. We really try and invite peers that don’t really know what we’re doing or what SCAR is about. We’ve had different members of the club do presentations on different events and different people in history he said.

Krause said that in the future, SCAR is working to establish a stronger presence in the school year-round, not just during Black History Month. She said the club is looking for more opportunities for connection and outreach within broader communities.

Creative writing students win horror short story contest

By Riley McKinnon
INDEPENDENT STAFF

Three freshmen won a flash fiction contest called Fright Club and will have their work featured in the anthology “The Witching Hour.” Anna Garth, Madison Holsomback, and Saskia Kuehnemund decided to enter after being introduced to the contest by their Creative Writing teacher, Allison Krause. Krause said the challenge was to write a scary story in one hundred words or fewer. “The Witching Hour” will be available online nationwide, with the publication set to come out this spring. Krause said she was contacted on a mailing list about the contest and thought it would be a

great opportunity for her Creative Writing students to submit work, especially after recently having lessons about flash fiction. Upon finding out that the girls won, Krause said she was excited and proud but not surprised, as she knew they had a good chance of winning. Garth, Holsomback, and Kuehnemund said they were equally thrilled to hear of their success as each one of them contributed their own unique piece to the contest. Garth’s short story, “Nightmare,” was a nightmare tale that took inspiration from Frankenstein and the Sci-Fi genre. She said her writing support comes from people in her life, like her friends, the first ones she told after winning the contest. In Holsomback’s story, “Something



RILEY MCKINNON PHOTO

Freshmen Anna Garth, Saskia Kuehnemund, and Madison Holsomback learned about the Fright Club contest in their creative writing class.

that Happened in the Woods,” the main character is running from an unknown monster which she believes she has encountered before. Holsomback said she first began writing in middle school. “I just like being able to create worlds and stories. It’s some-

thing fun to do,” she said. Kuehnemund submitted a piece called “Waves,” a murder mystery written in a poetic form. She said her main inspiration came from a book she had read called “They Wish They Were Us.” Kuehnemund said she began

writing in elementary school but became more passionate when she joined the Journalism Club and the Writers Guild in middle school. The three writers show their enthusiasm for their work through their performance in school. “They were always engaged in class. They were always thoughtful in what they were writing. They took advantage of opportunities to exercise their creativity and have fun with writing,” Krause said. Garth and Holsomback have also set up a Writer’s Guild Club for those interested in this subject but unable to take Creative Writing, Krause said. Krause acknowledges the student’s hard work. “They truly are talented, and they should continue to pursue writing just for fun in their lives but also continue to submit for opportunities for publication. It’s a great sign that they are on the right track,” she said.

Interactive sessions provide teachers with strategies

By Sabine Cooper
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

District faculty gathered for a professional development day designed to turn education theory into real classroom practice, said director of curriculum and instructional technology Heather Leonard. She said that the professional day on March 17 featured interactive sessions, a student panel, and a learning showcase, all designed to provide teachers with hands-on strategies for improving student engagement and success.

The day began with a student panel, a decision Leonard said was intentional. The panel, facilitated by Spanish teacher, Robert Bilsbury, featured high school students sharing their personal experiences in the district from elementary to high school. They discussed moments that had the biggest impact on their learning, Leonard said. Sophomore Will Athanas said he participated in the panel and shared his experiences to help offer teachers insight into what works in the classroom and what doesn’t. “[The panel] really helped to show teachers how good teachers and positive experiences can affect us and what a legacy they can leave on students they had years ago,” he said.

Following the panel, teachers attended two select sessions of their choice. The sessions covered a range of topics, including student mental health, using artificial intelligence in education, and integrating improv and theatre games into lessons, Leonard said. School counselor Gillain Polk, a member of the professional development committee, said that faculty members appreciated the variety of options available. “Some of the workshops were really informative; others were fun and interesting even if they didn’t directly relate to every

teacher’s subject, but overall, people seemed to feel it was a good use of their time,” she said. In the afternoon, educators took part in a learning showcase, where local organizations, student groups, and educational partners provided resources and collaborative opportunities, Leonard said. The showcase aimed to help teachers bridge the gap between professional development concepts and real-world applications, she said. Local organizations and student groups, such as the Gender-Sexuality Alliance (GSA), participated in the showcase,

which she said allowed teachers to learn about student-led initiatives outside the classroom. “Our student groups are putting learning into action every day. This was a chance to highlight how they’re applying their education to real-world issues and to build connections between teachers and student organizations,” Leonard said. In the future, whether through similar professional development structures or new approaches, Leonard said the goal remains the same: ensuring educators feel prepared to put learning into action in ways that benefit students. “We’re always looking for ways to improve. But if we keep centering student voices and giving teachers strategies, then I think we’re on the right track,” she said.

‘Our student groups are putting learning in action every day.’

- HEATHER LEONARD

Student Speak - What is your favorite elective?



Luke Holmes, senior:
“My favorite elective that I have taken in high school is AP Gov. It was my favorite because of how interesting it was and [because] ... I had a lot of my friends in the class ... It taught me about even the lowest levels of government, like even how a town runs, so now I recognize what’s going on around me, which holds a ton of value.”



Henry Stevens, senior:
“My favorite elective I’ve taken in high school has been Photo II with [photo teacher] Mr. Lucas ... It made me start to see my surroundings differently when thinking about photography, [and] I think it’s a great alternative for kids who are into the arts but maybe not the classic studio art direction.”



Lily Oliver, junior:
“My favorite elective I’ve taken in high school is probably sociology ... because it’s so fun; it’s really interesting. It has a good workload, [and social studies teacher] Ms. Donnelly is a good teacher ... It teaches [students] all about society and why things are the way that they are.”

Tess Carpenter, senior:
“My favorite elective that I have taken throughout high school would have to be Biotech ... After having [science and math department chair] Ms. Umile as my freshman year [biology] teacher, I knew I wanted to take another class with her. It was a great class to continue learning more in-depth concepts of biology and lab skills.”



Miles Takayesu, sophomore:
“Definitely studio art. I think it was my favorite because of the kids [in my class]. They were so fun to be with, and the way the class was structured really helped make a sense of community between all of us ... [Studio art] is great for both improving art skills, but also with giving any artistic kid a base and a feeling of being a well-established artist.”

Emilia Kirkpatrick, senior:
“My favorite elective that I have taken is biotechnology, which is very hands-on and lab-based. [Science and math department chair] Ms. Umile is an amazing teacher, and her passion for science really comes out in the class. The class allowed me to try something new, and I was able to learn that I love biotechnology and want to pursue it when I am in college.”



Senior Green Team members work to install EV chargers

Apply for grants to fund infrastructure

By Sam Heanue
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Seniors Ian Campbell and Cole Cote have begun applying for grants to install electric vehicle (EV) charging stations in the faculty parking lot.

The installation of EV chargers would require an initial investment of roughly \$14,000 per unit, along with maintenance fees, Campbell said.

“We’d like to install four units in the faculty parking lot, and each of those would serve two spots. When we did the projected revenue,

we accounted for use of only five since one legally must be a handicapped spot,” he said.

Campbell said projected revenue for the school over a 15-year period is over \$100,000, and initial costs can be covered through outside grants.

“We’ve mainly looked at two grants that we plan on applying to, MassEVIP and National

GRID, which would cover the purchase of the units and the infrastructure,” Cote said.

The two received permission to apply for these grants following approval of the project by the School Committee, he said.

Cote said they presented to the School Committee on Tuesday, March 4, and they

emphasized faculty interest in the project.

“When we started doing this

‘We sent out a survey to the faculty, just to see if they would go to good use, and we saw that a much larger chunk of the faculty either drives an EV or plans to in the next three years.’

-COLE COTE



SAM HEANUE PHOTO

Green Team seniors Cole Cote and Ian Campbell present their proposal to install four electric vehicle charging stations in the faculty parking lot to the School Committee on Tuesday, March 4.

back in November, we sent out a survey to the faculty, just to see if they would go to good use, and we saw that a much larger chunk of the faculty either drives an EV or plans to in the next three years,” Campbell said.

He said the need for EV chargers indicates profitability for the school. The two hope 40%

of the revenue for the school can be given to the Green Team to support future environmental initiatives, with the rest going to facilities and maintenance.

“Because so many people have demonstrated an interest in ... EV chargers, we hope we can profit quickly and make money for the Green Team,” Cote said.

The two students hope to support future initiatives because there has been a decline in environmentally conscious projects in recent years, he said

Campbell said he and Cote hope the project will inspire future students to pursue environmentally friendly initiatives that will benefit the community.

Changes surround MCAS as graduation requirement

By Bissy Mitrano
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Massachusetts recently voted that students would no longer be required by the state to pass the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) in order to graduate. This decision is now up to individual schools.

Debra Isensee, the head of the English department, said students in Manchester-Essex still need to take and pass the MCAS as a graduation requirement this year.

The MCAS provides a stan-

dard that is able to measure not only students’ abilities but to establish a baseline for student learning, Isensee said.

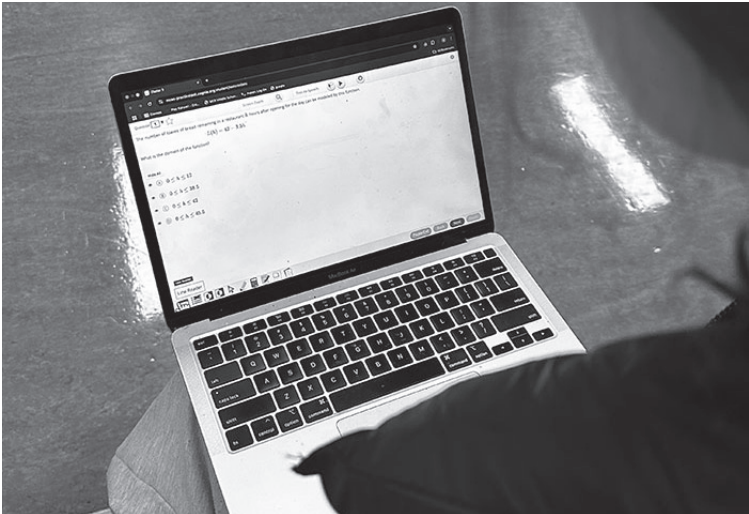
“I think standards are important. Very important ... [they help with] the conversation on what standards we want all students to have,” she said.

Principal Julie Sgroi said the current Program of Studies indicates that students must pass the MCAS exam in order to graduate.

“It says successful completion of all areas of competency examinations ... so because it says successful completion, that makes pass-

‘There is the worry, what is this going to mean for our data, if it is not something students are taking as seriously?’

-JULIE SGROI



BISSY MITRANO PHOTO

A student practices for the MCAS test. Schools must decide whether or not passing the MCAS will be a graduation requirement.

ing MCAS a requirement at MERHS,” Sgroi said.

The School Committee already voted on the language used in this year’s Program of Studies and would need to vote again to change it, she said.

The MCAS has benefits for students and provides schools

with data and rankings, Sgroi said.

“There is the worry, what is this going to mean for our data, if it is not something students are taking as seriously? Is it going to skew our data? Then we don’t have anything else to measure,” she said.

Sgroi said that principals have met to address the questions surrounding the MCAS.

“Every principal meeting I go to, they’re like, ‘What are we doing? What are we doing for anyone who needs to retake [the test]?’ ... but everyone in the district was kind of left scrambling,” she said.

Junior Brynn Duffy said passing the MCAS should not be a requirement for graduation.

“You can’t even study for the MCAS, so if you don’t pass it, the test should not be held against you. It definitely should not determine whether you graduate or not,” Duffy said.

Junior Ellie Morgan also believes the MCAS should not be a requirement to pass for graduation.

“I do not think students should need to pass the MCAS to graduate because some students struggle with test taking, so I think it is a little unfair,” Morgan said.

Sophomore launches historical magazine

By Sabine Cooper
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Sophomore Tyler Cummins launched “The Past is Present,” a new historical literary magazine aimed at combining creative expression and a love for history, he said.

The magazine, which debuted digitally on March 3, features student essays, poetry, artwork, and other creative works that explore historical themes, he said. In total, the magazine consists of 33 pages and was emailed to students to read.

Cummins, who has always had a passion for history, said he came up with the idea for the

magazine during his freshman year.

“I wanted to create something where students could share their connection with the past,” Cummins said.

After discussing the concept with his history teacher, John Mullady, Cummins began collecting submissions from his peers, he said.

The project gained momentum this fall, and the magazine received over 20 submissions from students in various grades, Cummins said.

The submissions to the maga-

zine reflect a wide variety of creative works in which students drew upon personal or familial experiences to create submissions,

Mullady said.

“It’s incredible to see how personally connected students are to history,” he said.

The opportunity to submit work to the magazine allowed students to express a new side of themselves that they otherwise could not in their day-to-day, Mullady said.

For example, sophomore Sadie Rich said she contributed a piece

on the origins of fairy tales, a topic that she was excited to be able to share about.

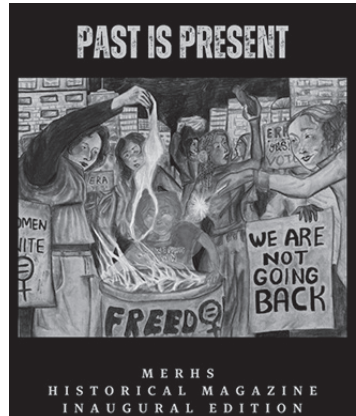
“As someone who is interested in history outside of school, it was cool to have a place to submit something I’m passionate about,” she said.

Looking ahead, Cummins said he hopes the magazine will continue to grow and publish more issues.

“I’d love to see this project continue in the future and maybe even turn into a club where students can collaborate,” he said.

Mullady, who has observed Cummins’ dedication to the project, said he sees a bright future for the magazine under Cummins’ leadership.

“[Tyler] is one of the most enthusiastic students I’ve ever



COURTESY OF TYLER CUMMINS

The first issue of sophomore Tyler Cummins’ new historical magazine received 20 submissions from various students across several grades.

had, he is just so dedicated and focused on [the magazine],” he said.

Interact Club raises \$6,000 in Polar Plunge for Polio

New group works with Rotary Club International in Manchester

By Summer Demeo
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

After attending an informational meeting in December with the Rotary Club, seniors Ella Arntsen and Henry Swerdloff decided to start a chapter of Interact at the high school, Arntsen said. Interact is a student service club that is sponsored by Rotary Club International. Club adviser John Herrick said the Rotary Club is a service organization that has a chapter in Manchester.

“The Rotary Club in town is a group of adults that fundraise and volunteer for some amazing organizations, and it’s basically all about philanthropy,” he said. Herrick said the Rotary Club meets two mornings a month and one evening a month. He is hoping to have Interact align their meetings with the Rotary Club’s meeting once they get more students involved. The Rotary Club’s goal with Interact is to offer more opportunities for community service to students and to help



COURTESY OF KEN RIEHL

Community members, Manchester-Essex students, and Manchester-Essex graduates run out of the ocean after completing the Polar Plunge for Polio. The new Interact Club raised \$1,000, which the Rotary Club then doubled, and the Bill Gates Foundation tripled.

‘I know a lot of students that are interested in community service and do it outside of school, and I know a lot of people who are interested but don’t have the right resources.’

- ELLA ARNTSEN

them give back to the community, Herrick said. While the club has not held an official meeting yet, they had their first fundraiser on Feb. 15, Arntsen said. The fundraiser, the Polar Plunge for Polio at Singing Beach, raised \$6,000 to provide resources to countries that are still working on eradicating polio, she said.

She said they used a website similar to GoFundMe where people could pay \$25 to nominate someone to do the plunge or \$50 to get out of the plunge after being nominated. “We raised \$1,000, but the Rotary Club matched it, so all together, [Manchester-Essex] raised \$2,000, and whatever amount [we] raise is then tripled by the Bill Gates Foundation,” Arntsen said. Arntsen said the Polar Plunge helped them garner interest in the club. She hopes they will also gain interest from underclassmen looking for community service hours, she said. Arntsen said she and Swerdloff just created a Google Class-

room for students and plan to host an interest meeting next week to help brainstorm the group’s next service project. “After that, we’re looking to hand the reins down to someone else, some underclassmen, so that they can take over. We’re planning on sort of leaving it up to the student body and letting people decide what they want to do,” she said. Swerdloff said once he and Arntsen expressed interest in Interact, they met with local Rotary Club advisers Craig Swerdloff and Jen Doane to discuss fundraising efforts. “Once Ella and I got started in saying that we wanted to be part of the club, we had a

meeting with some representatives of the Rotary Club, and we brainstormed different ideas. The Polar Plunge was me and Ella’s idea,” he said. Arntsen said she and Swerdloff wanted to start an Interact chapter here because they were interested in providing students with different opportunities to participate in to gain community service. “It’s something that I’m surprised we haven’t had. I know a lot of students that are interested in community service and do it outside of school, and I know a lot of people who are interested but don’t have the right resources or know how to get involved,” she said.

Students in Once Upon A Crime elective attend FBI Academy course

Spend day in Boston, participate in hands-on lessons and lectures

By Alessia Omari
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Three students from the Once Upon a Crime class attended an FBI Academy course in Boston, English teacher Debra Isensee said. Juniors Zac Carvalho and Chloe Psalidas, and senior Brooke Doyon attended the academy over February break. This opportunity was presented to students after FBI agent Alethea Harris, a friend of English teacher Allison Krause, spoke to the class and informed them about the FBI Academy course, Isensee said. Harris explained that a variety of professions can work for the FBI, she said.



GETARCHIVE.NET

Juniors Zac Carvalho and Chloe Psalidas, and senior Brooke Doyon attended an FBI Academy Course. Their day was spent learning different aspects of the FBI not covered in the Once Upon a Crime class, such as how many different professions make up the FBI.



ALESSIA OMARI PHOTOS

‘You don’t have to become a cop and then an agent. They hire from all walks of life.’

- DEBRA ISENSEE

“You don’t have to become a cop and then an agent. They hire from all walks of life,” she said. The academy offered students an opportunity to learn about topics not covered in the Once Upon a Crime course, she said. “They learned about Cyber-crime; they learned about riots

and got to wear tactical gear,” Isensee said. Carvalho said to attend the academy, he and his peers had to fill out a long and complex application. “You had to be recommended by a Once Upon a Crime teacher. Then we had to fill out a form with our personal information on it; then I had to write a 750-word long essay,” he said. Carvalho said that the academy consisted of lectures and hands-on activities. “Different presenters talked about what they do for a job ...

We learned about different parts of the FBI, such as the WMDD, the FBI federal agency for weapons of mass destruction,” he said. Doyon said the course began early in the morning and covered a wide variety of FBI-related jobs and roles, with around 100 other students from other schools attending the program. “We got there at like 8:30, and were brought to what basically felt like a huge classroom ... Each presentation [we saw] was about a different kind of job; computer and technology, social media management, the people

who comfort and communicate with families, etcetera,” she said. She said there were moments when the course required students to engage in hands-on activity. “We got to climb into a seat truck, practice what to do in a shooting, and [learn] how to put on a tourniquet,” she said. Doyon said she gained valuable knowledge from the program. “I left there knowing a good handful of all the jobs in the FBI besides just being an agent,” she said.

STAFF EDITORIAL

Administration must communicate effectively on parking rules

Student parking has caused problems this year, resulting in both faculty and student annoyance.

Despite juniors being unable to park on campus, they were parking in spots that were not designated as parking areas by the school.

Students were parking around the edge of the teacher lot along the curb, blocking the fire hydrant and the donation bins and making it difficult for teachers to enter and exit their parking lot.

The most egregious violation was when students began parking in the district office lot, even taking Superintendent Pam Beaudoin’s parking spot.

Staff members have also been the victim of several car accidents that eventually led to administration involvement, science teacher Kristin Umile said.

School resource Officer Andrea Locke, dean of students Elisabeth Drinkwater and principal Julie Sgroi have been working together to discourage students from parking in the teacher parking lot, Locke said.

Although Locke said the administration had cones placed around the parking lot to discourage students from parallel parking on the curb, many students ignored or moved the cones.

Senior Isabelle Donnellan Valade was stuck behind a student who was trying to parallel park

in a non-designated spot right next to the fire hydrant.

“When they first set up the cones along the side of the faculty parking lot, I came in, and the person in front of me got out of her car, was blocking the entire way up to the student parking lot, and moved a cone so that she could park her car where the cones had been set up in front of the fire hydrant,” she said.

Administrative assistant Mary Lumsden said 74 spots were available in the student lot; all were distributed to seniors. Unlike in previous years, there were no extra spots for juniors, which has led to more students parking in non-designated spots on campus.

In visits to junior and senior classes, the administration encouraged students to park in other spots off campus, at the Brook Street parking lot and the spots across from the Memorial Elementary School.

“It’s always been allowed that students could use Brook Street Playground parking spots and the 10 or so spots across from the Memorial School. So it’s now just being strongly advised that those are where the students are supposed to be parking,” Locke said.

Despite the administration encouraging students to park off campus, students without parking passes began to park in the



HANNAH DAVIS PHOTO

Students parked along the student lot’s edge after being discouraged from parking in the teacher lot.

roundabout in the student lot.

Allowing students to park in non-designated spots on school grounds is unfair for seniors who have earned the privilege of parking on campus and have paid \$100 for their parking spot.

Senior Caroline Willwerth complained to the administration about how it is unfair that seniors had to pay for their parking spots while other students have been able to park on school grounds for free.

“[The administration] has been bending over backwards to help the underclassmen when it’s supposed to be a senior privilege ... Also last year people who didn’t have parking spots found ways to park legally,” she said.

Unfortunately, the administration was not always communicating consistently with the student body. When Sgroi and Drinkwater visited junior and senior classes, they suggested that they could use the school van to transport students from the Brook Street parking lot to school. Their suggestion created confusion among students, some of whom believed they were joking and some who thought there would be a shuttle service.

Sgroi said she wanted to prioritize school accessibility over enforcing parking rules.

“Part of the reason why we overlooked a lot of the parking issues was because I understand that students are trying to come

to school. It seems counterintuitive for me to have a policy or change things so that now students are late,” Sgroi said.

However, there are several options other than driving for students to get to school on time in the morning. Older students can drive those younger than them, students can walk or ride their bike.

The bus is free for students who live more than 1.5 miles away from the school, operations administration assistant Aaron Millman said.

The administration must effectively communicate with students and enforce rules that ensure safety and fairness on school grounds.

Teens can improve attention spans by lessening media consumption, focusing on meaningful content

By Alessia Omari
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Gen Z has a tendency to consume large amounts of media, something that must be lessened in order to implement positive lifestyle changes in younger generations.

According to the 2024 New York Post article “Generation Scroll: Gen Z spends a quarter of their day consuming content,” over 2,000 Gen Z respondents to a study reported consuming up to seven hours of content per day.

Teens are also reported to feel as if they consume too much media content, with the aver-



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Gen Z’s rapid consumption of media can harm their ability to pay attention, leading to long-term issues in school and the workplace.

age respondent reporting that they feel guilty up to 3.1 times a month due to their media consumption habits.

Corporations intentionally tar-

get media towards Zoomers in an attempt to increase consumption.

In Aubrey Smith’s 2024 article “How Gen Z uses social media and what that means for

brands” for Sprout Social, social media consultant Casey Lewis discusses the corporate motive in targeting certain forms of media toward Gen Z.

“Any brand not actively trying to reach Gen Z and Gen Alpha is doing themselves a disservice ... They are our future consumers, so you need to have them in mind,” he said.

With so much media being created with the intention of grabbing Gen Z’s attention, younger generations are constantly bombarded and overwhelmed by forms of entertainment.

Constant media consumption also has negative implications for the attention spans of younger generations.

In the Center for Humane Technology’s article “Extractive technology is damaging our at-

tention and mental health,” social media has played a large role in declining attention spans.

According to the article, “Rapidly changing content and constant interruptions reduce our capacity to pay attention; we become used to quick sound bites and short videos.”

Gen Z’s attention span will only continue to worsen, leading to issues in school and problems with paying attention later into adulthood.

Younger people can avoid these consequences by limiting the time they spend online by using applications such as Screen Time. Programs such as these function to limit the amount of time that users spend on their devices, decreasing the amount of media consumption that younger generations engage in per day.

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

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.

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
Hannah Davis
Isabelle Donnellan Valade
Bissy Mitrano

Sports Editor
Sam Heanue

Arts Editors
Charlie Baker
Sabine Cooper
Annie Pinkin

Staff
Riley McKinnon

AI in education

Is Artificial Intelligence beneficial for learning?

Pro
Bissy Mitrano

Artificial intelligence (AI) is beneficial because it helps to create an interactive and personalized academic environment for students, serving as a powerful tool to support student learning and make education more efficient for the future.

According to the Washington State University article, “Benefits of AI,” AI platforms like ChatGPT can function to personalize learning for each student, teaching students content based off their individual studying needs.

“AI, like ChatGPT, can serve as an intelligent tutor ... It can assist learning new concepts, exploring topics, revising content, and even practicing problem-solving skills,” the article said.

AI platforms like ChatGPT may contain errors, such as unreliable quotes and made up sources, so it is important to verify information. However, ChatGPT is not meant to replace student learning, but rather to strengthen it through further explaining processes across all subjects.

The software provides students with practice quizzes to prepare for their exams and different ways to study interactively. AI programs are capable of remembering past conversations and lessons. This allows the software to give students personalized advice on how they can improve upon whatever subject that they’re studying.

The typical classroom environment is not beneficial for all students; however, AI uses adaptive learning as a solution to this problem. Adaptive learning is tailored learning to meet the needs of each student. It is difficult for one teacher to change instruction for each student to fit their needs, but AI can.

According to Owoc, Sawicka, and Weichbroth’s article, “Artificial Intelligence Technologies in Education: Benefits, Challenges, and Strategies of Implementation,” the traditional classroom “continues to be very much one-size-fits-all, on the contrary, AI powered adaptive learning systems are designed to optimize learning efficiency.”

Given differences in learning capabilities, not all students should be expected to learn within a standard learning environment. Students who have learning disabilities can benefit from the high adaptability and responsiveness of ChatGPT, which provides immediate support.

According to the 2023 Educational Renaissance article, “AI tools, such as ChatGPT, play a role in reshaping autonomy for students with disabilities by eliminating obstacles to the flow of information in a manner that mimics human interaction.”

Everyday technological advancements are “paving the way for more enriched and comprehensive learning and teaching experience,” the article said.

As technology continues to reshape the real world, schools must integrate AI as a powerful learning tool to equip students with the skills and knowledge needed for the future. Technology will only continue to progress, so it only makes sense that students utilize said technology to improve their learning experiences.

Con
Sabine Cooper

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is not beneficial for learning and should not be used in schools.

While AI tools offer convenience, they ultimately hinder students’ ability to develop critical thinking, problem-solving, and independent learning skills.

One major concern with AI in education is its potential to diminish students’ ability to think critically, causing students to rely on AI for answers. According to a 2023 study by Zion Krullaars, “The over-reliance on AI dialogue systems might diminish students’ drive and commitment to learning, as they might lean too heavily on these systems for answers instead of actively participating in the learning experience.”

Additionally, the use of AI can lead to academic dishonesty. Many AI platforms generate answers that students can submit as their own work. Unbeknownst to the student, the AI-generated answer is likely plagiarized from online source material.

According to a 2024 article for K-12 Dive by Anna Merod, “Student discipline rates stemming from suspected plagiarism due to use of generative AI [have increased] from 48% to 64% between the 2022-23 and 2023-24 school year.”

Beyond ethical concerns, AI does not provide the same level of personalized feedback as human instructors. Education relies on meaningful feedback and interactions between students and teachers, where teachers can offer tailored and personalized guidance.

AI doesn’t understand students’ individual needs and thought processes, making it an inadequate substitute for real educators.

Subsequently, because AI is trained on data created by humans, it reflects human biases, according to a 2024 article by Alyson Klein in Education Week.

This bias can be seen in a 2024 study by Punya Mishra, where they gave AI two identical papers, one that mentioned studying with rap music to enhance focus and the other essay that mentioned classical music to enhance focus.

The study found that the AI tool gave a lower grade to the paper that mentioned rap music, indicating that AI programs do exhibit biases in the answers that they provide to students.

Moreover, constant AI assistance may result in students developing poor time management and research skills. Adolescents may begin to rely on Artificial Intelligence to quickly provide answers to their assignments.

Some argue that AI can be beneficial when used responsibly, such as for grammar checks or providing study aids. However, these advantages do not outweigh the risks associated with AI dependence. Long-term AI use in learning will only hurt students’ study habits and performance.

To ensure that students are truly prepared for college as well as future work environments, AI should not be used for learning. Instead, good academic habits like studying, critical thinking, and independent problem-solving should be reinforced in learning environments.



AUGUST CAPOTOSTO ILLUSTRATION

High schools must implement mandatory classes on climate

By Gwendolyn Berger
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

States should require students to take a class on sustainability and the environment in high school due to the disastrous effects of climate change.

Climate change has been a prevalent issue in world politics since the 1980s. The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) reported that 2024 was the warmest year on record.

Global temperatures were 2.30 degrees Fahrenheit above the average temperature before global industrialization, reports NASA in the 2025 article “Temperatures Rising: NASA confirms 2024 Warmest Year on Record.”

This has had devastating effects on the environment, spe-

cies, and humans worldwide.

In 2022, the US alone experienced 18 separate climate-related weather disasters that cost over \$1 billion, wrote Adam B. Smith Climate.gov in his 2023 article, “2022 U.S. billion-dollar weather and climate disasters in historical context.”

Other alarming events like wildfires, droughts, and storms have also increased. There have been an increasing number of wildfires: 8.9 million acres of land burned in the US in 2024 alone, according to a 2025 Statistica graph titled “Acres burned by wildfires in the United States from 1983 to 2024.”

Global climate change threatens people’s livelihoods, biodiversity, and world harmony. It is an issue of the utmost im-

portance. Refusing to acknowledge climate change will only be detrimental.

According to “American Teen’s Knowledge of Climate Change” by the Yale Project, fewer than 1 in 5 teenagers say that they are “well informed” about the climate and the different causes, consequences, or solutions to global warming.

This lack of education demonstrates a massive flaw in modern-day school curriculums. If the world wants to solve climate change, there needs to be aggressive change. The nation does itself a disservice by failing to educate the generation responsible for addressing this problem and the generation that will bear the brunt of the consequences.

Ultimately, the world needs to unite to change its systems and start caring for the planet that has given humans life. The nation can start doing that by ensuring



ROBERT S. DONOVAN/HHSPAWPRINT.ORG

Only about 25% of adolescents feel as if their schools have informed them on the causes of climate change, such as pollution.

its citizens are knowledgeable and well-equipped to dismantle and rebuild systems that are failing the planet.

The first step in doing so is requiring sustainability classes in high schools. This will help younger generations learn to live sustainably, begin searching

for and implementing solutions at an earlier age, and work to fight climate fearmongering and misinformation.

Climate change is an urgent problem that needs to be addressed, but it should be through education and collaboration instead of ignorance.

Boys’ basketball falls to Lynn Vocational in round of 16

By Augie Capotosto
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Boys’ basketball ended their season as Cape Ann League Baker champions, with an over-all record of 15-5, as the No. 9 seed in the MIAA Division IV Tournament.

The Hornets fell to Lynn Vocational Technical High School in the round of 16 with a final score of 59-49.

Coach Tim St. Laurent said it was an incredibly close back-and-forth game, with a pivotal final turnover in the fourth quarter.

“At the end of the day, Lynn Tech had a little more energy than we did and pulled away,” he said.

Junior captain Jake Zschau said that despite their loss in the tournament, the team still enjoyed playing their final game together.

“Our students really showed up, and with such a loud, crazy environment, it was a lot of fun,” he said.

St. Laurent said that throughout the season, the team has improved as a whole.

“At the beginning of the year, we were a young team with individuals playing different roles, and they had to work hard

to learn how to play together as a team,” he said.

St. Laurent said the team is losing two strong seniors this year, both of whom served as captains.

“For our two leaders, Milo Zeltzer and Ben Jacobsen, their basketball career has come to an end, which is never easy for high school athletes,” he said.

Jacobsen said that winning CAL champions for the third consecutive year helped bring the



COURTESY OF MILO ZELTZER

Senior captain Milo Zeltzer charges past a Lynnfield player in an offensive drive. The Hornets overtook the Pioneers in the third quarter to win 41-38 on Jan. 15 during an early season game.

team together.

“I’ve loved this team and its environment these past four years, and I know the team is going to be amazing next year,” he said.

St. Laurent said that with a predominantly younger group

of players, the team expects to improve next year.

“This season we were establishing all of our protocols; with that foundation, we’re excited to build up from here,” he said.

St. Laurent said with this being his eighth year coaching at

Manchester Essex, this season has been a significant one in his career.

“This has been one of the most rewarding seasons I’ve had considering how much we had to give and what we achieved,” he said.

Student dancers prepare for competition season, Nationals

By Summer Demeo
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

After starting practices in September, many students who dance outside of school have recently begun their competition season, senior Leigha Akerley said.

Akerley, who has been dancing since she was 3, currently dances at Mariana’s Dancing Studio in Ipswich.

Senior Jenelle Ford also dances at Mariana’s Dancing Studio. She said she has been dancing since she was 2.

Both Akerley and Ford said they compete in and practice many styles of dance.

Ford said their studio is participating in four team competitions this season and will compete in the Starquest World Final competition in Hershey, Pennsylvania, in July.



COURTESY OF LEIGHA AKERLEY

Senior Leigha Akerley competes for Mariana’s Dancing Studio at the 24 Seven Dance Convention in February in Manchester, NH.

Akerley said dance is a large time commitment throughout the year and each week. She starts in September and practices up until

Nationals in July, only taking a few weeks off throughout.

“It’s five days a week, and usually it’s from 4 to around 9 ...

you don’t have a lot of time after school at all, and it’s every day, but you get used to it,” she said.

Senior Alice Moody said she has a similar year-round time commitment while dancing at Liza Indiciani Studio of Dance in Beverly. She has also been dancing since she was 3 and participates in multiple dance styles, she said.

Moody said her studio has six competitions in a season and attends the American Dance Awards National Championship in Providence, Rhode Island every other year.

Moody also dances in a group at her studio with seniors Skyler Hough, Emily Woodman, and Maria Rising; and junior Lila Brady, she said

Brady, who has also been dancing since she was 3, said this season she has two solo dances, six group dances, and one large

group production.

She said her studio competes in ballet, tap, lyrical, contemporary, and jazz dances, her favorite style being jazz.

“It’s just upbeat, fun. It’s a wide range of different styles within the genre, so you could do like pop or musical theater, more stuff like that,” Brady said.

Ford said her favorite thing about dance is how it helps her express her emotions.

“It’s always served as an outlet for me ... it’s helped me express myself in ways that words can’t. It’s just a really special sport,” she said.

Moody said she enjoys the community that dance has given her.

“My favorite thing is my dance team –all of us are so close, and we all get along really well– and our community we’ve built,” she said.

Junior rower competes in Gordon College program

By Riley McKinnon
INDEPENDENT STAFF

Junior Violet Jakes has pursued her athletic journey outside of school through her experience rowing for Gordon College, she said.

Jakes said she began rowing competitively as a bow, the rower closest to the forward section of the boat, the summer before her freshman year.

She had taken an interest in rowing and was encouraged to start by several parents at a basketball game she attended, she said.

Jakes said she has been row-

ing for three years in a constant seasonal routine. Fall is meant for regattas, practicing and conditioning; winter is an indoor season which has made her opt to do CrossFit this year; spring begins the regattas again; and the summer is the busiest season for traveling to regattas, practicing, and competing.

Jakes said that when it came to the differences between participating in a sport outside of school instead of inside, the downside is a lack of school spirit.

“No one drops off treats for us here, but I feel like it’s easier to make friends ... it’s kind of

a fresh start ... you get to know these people. You spend a lot of time with them because you’re doing club sports and traveling more,” she said.

Jakes said that the physical activity is very healthy, the friends she has made are excellent, and the experience looks impressive from a college standpoint.

Conversely, Jakes said that rowing can also be very athletically challenging.

“It depends on what you are looking for. If you want a more traditional sports experience, then just do it in school. But, if you really want to be good at your sport, then do it outside of school. Especially if your school’s team is not as talented,” she said.

Jakes said she looks forward to rowing in college. Some schools

she is looking at include Colgate, Franklin, Marshall, Sacred Heart, and Highpoint, most of which offer the ability to row D1.

Although she does not plan on rowing professionally, Jakes said that when reflecting on her experience with the sport, she believes she will appreciate rowing for her teammates, the exercise, and how fun learning it has been for her.

Her teammate, senior Emory Allen, a student at Ipswich High School, also bows for Gordon College after four years of exclusively rowing as a sport. She has committed to Santa Clara University for their D1 rowing team.

Allen said that the two met when Jakes first began rowing, “She was very tall, and she was just so nice and quiet at first

... but then she started talking, and she’s just so funny and very quick to learn,” Allen said.

She said that when the two went to Nationals in Ohio, they spent two days in a van to get there, which is what sparked their friendship. Allen said that Jakes is incredibly hardworking, helpful, supportive, and loving of her team, pushing her teammates to do their best in the sport

“I definitely think our friendship, and also with the rest of the team, has helped improve my rowing,” she said.

Allen said that as Jakes goes towards her future with rowing in college, to make sure that she is excited to be on a team that has nice teammates and not just go to a college because of its name. Overall, Allen said, “Just make sure you’re happy.”

Drama club performs ‘Advice for Astronauts’ at Dramafest

Students receive All-Star awards, club doesn’t move on

By Charlie Baker
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Members of the Drama Club performed “Advice for Astronauts” during the Massachusetts High School Drama Festival, with multiple Manchester-Essex students receiving All-Star awards.

The competition took place on March 1 at Saugus High School. The drama club did not move on to the next round.

Senior Hannah Davis said that in Dramafest, a panel of judges select half of the shows to move on.

Eight schools were originally selected to perform, but only six ultimately competed, and judges decided only three would move

on. All-Star awards were given to seniors Josh Cohen and Jordan Varghese for excellence in acting and to Davis and sophomore Simone Argento for set design, Cohen said.

Cohen, Omari, and Davis all highlighted how new directors Sophie Collins and Anya Saben created a positive atmosphere and offered feedback.

“Advice for Astronauts” was written by Walt McGough, a playwright from Boston. Senior Alessia Omari, who played Kai, said the script gave the ac-

tors room to develop their characters and let their own personalities shine through.

“What was nice was that this was a play where the script gave you

a lot of leeway to act ... I knew that my character was a very anxious character, and I was able to build off of that and give my

‘I feel like this cast has come to feel like a family to everyone, which is just really special.’

- JOSH COHEN



COURTESY OF NICHOLAS HALEY

Members of the drama club display their choreography during a performance of Walt McGough’s play “Advice for Astronauts.” The club competed against five other teams in this year’s Dramafest.

own kind of creative spin to it,” said Omari

Acting is only one component of the judging process, and a core parameter of Dramafest is each show having five minutes to load on and load off the entire set, Davis said. This requires

practice, planning and measurement of the stage beforehand.

Even though the runtime of each performance is capped at 40 minutes, Davis said the Drama Club was at the event for 12-14 hours.

Although the show wasn’t

picked to move on, Cohen said it’s been his most fulfilling Dramafest experience.

“Everyone has really connected and bonded. I feel like this cast has come to feel like a family to everyone, which is just really special,” he said.

Evening of Jazz performance showcases six songs from middle, high school jazz bands

Incorporates improvised solos from students

By Annie Pinkin
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Band teacher Harry Wagg conducted his first Evening of Jazz performance. The show included six songs played by the middle and high school jazz bands.

The performance was held at six p.m. on March 13.

Wagg said this year is his seventh year teaching high school band, his first at the high school.

Both jazz bands meet outside of school, he said. High school jazz band is a 2.5-credit course that practices two hours a week, and middle school jazz band is an optional elective that meets one hour a week, Wagg said.

While meeting outside of

school isn’t ideal for some students, the experience is worthwhile, junior Nate Clements said.

“[After school practices] didn’t appeal to me at first, but if you can manage your time well it works nicely,” he said.

Clements plays percussion, which includes various instruments like the vibraphone he played during “Pink Panther Theme,” by Henry Mancini, he said.

The band also played “Strasbourg / St. Denis” by Roy Hargrove, “Mo’ Better Blues” by Terence Blanchard, and “Milestones” by Miles Davis, Wagg said.

He said that choosing songs is a joint effort between him and the students.

“It’s their band. I’m here to help facilitate it but it’s their band,” Wagg said,

A unique aspect of jazz band

is the opportunity for improvised solos, he said.

“Improvising, to me, is one of the huge benefits of jazz and probably one of the more cognitively challenging things that I think any student can do,” Wagg said.

Using the notes and structure of each song, students create their solos on the spot, he said. “What you’re essentially doing is using that knowledge to tell your own story that fits in line with the story the song tells,” Wagg said.

Junior Luke Chrzanowski kept these strategies in mind while performing his saxophone solos in “Mo’ Better Blues” and “Strasbourg / St. Denis.”

“A lot of it is the melody of the song we’re playing, the idea of it, and the feeling. Some of it is also just what happens to come out of the instrument each time,”



ANNIE PINKIN PHOTO

Band teacher Harry Wagg directs members of the high school jazz band during their Evening of Jazz performance.

he said.

While attendance was low, sophomore Cate Vendt said she enjoyed the show.

“It was very good; it was a strong performance. It was fun, and the music was very interesting,” she said.

However, the nine-member band performed without their trumpet player, sophomore Peter Langendorf, whose finger was broken, Clements said.

“[Jazz band] has helped us learn to be prepared for the unexpected,” he said.

Childish Gambino’s fifth studio album falls short of expectations

By Sam Heanue
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Donald Glover’s (Childish Gambino) latest album, “Bando Stone and The New World,” met with both critical acclaim and rejection from fans.

Released in July 2024, the album represents a significant step in the artist’s stylistic development through its experimental blend of genres and influences.

Critics praised the record’s innovation and ambition. A review for Atwood Magazine argued the album’s witty and clever lyrics displayed Glover’s growth as an artist.

This review commended the



CHILDISHGAMBINO.COM

Artist Donald Glover (Childish Gambino) released his fifth studio album “Bando Stone and the The New World” in July 2024.

album for its expansion on the artist’s previous musical styles and incorporation of new sounds, describing it as his “most far-reaching musical project to date.”

However, some reviews argue that the album’s ambition led to a

lack of cohesion. These reviews look at the wildly different rhythms and melodies from track to track.

No Frills Reviews described the album as “confusing, messy, and occasionally very good,” sug-

gesting that Glover overextended himself and failed to create a sense of unity between multiple genres.

Though the album lacks cohesion, with many songs feeling out of place, standout tracks allow it to retain commercial success, debuting at No. 15 on the Billboard Top 200.

Among the most popular songs, “Lithonia,” “Real Love,” and “In The Night,” have achieved commercial success, with “Lithonia” reaching No. 68 on the Billboard Hot 100.

This success is likely due to the intricate blend of R&B influences that Glover is known for.

“In The Night,” is notable for its features by artists Jorja Smith and Amaarae, creating a smooth and satisfying blend of their vocals and rhythms.

The success of these specific tracks, however, speaks to the commercial failure of the new project

as a whole, as the most successful tracks of the album were reminiscent of his previous work.

Fan reactions to the album have been mixed. Though some appreciate the creative risks that Glover took by attempting to expand on his trademark genre-blending style, others see “Bando Stone and the New World” as a disappointment.

Fans who criticize the project see it as Glover trying too hard to develop his style.

This is an understandable complaint, given that Glover has stated that he will continue to create more experimental music to push musical boundaries, leading to inevitable failures.

Despite criticisms, “Bando Stone and the New World” represents a step forward in Glover’s career as an artist through its unique sound and expansion of previous work.

‘We Live In Time’ gives authentic look into complex relationship

Film co-stars

Florence Pugh,
Andrew Garfield

By Isabelle Donnellan Valade
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Starring Florence Pugh and Andrew Garfield, “We Live In Time” is an honest and compelling look into the relationship between two individuals navigating the complexities of love, career, loss, and personal growth.

The film, released on Oct. 18, 2024, was directed by John Crowley.

The plot delves deeply into vulnerability between partners, showing how relationships evolve as new challenges arise.

The unique non-linear narrative moves between the beginning, the middle, and the end of their relationship, allowing

the viewer to learn each stage of their growth together.

Pugh plays Almut Brühl, an aspiring chef and restaurant owner when their relationship begins and a successful business owner and esteemed chef by the end of the film.

Garfield plays Tobias Durand, a recent divorcee when he is first introduced to Almut.

The viewer is able to reflect on the beginning of Almut’s and Tobias’s relationship and its effect on the end, but it does take

a moment to distinguish between each stage of their life, which can bring some confusion.

The actors’ chemistry makes the film feel more intimate,

adding authenticity to their on-screen connection and the vulnerability that both characters must display.

Early in their relationship,

Almut and Tobias wonder if they can build a future together even though their interests don’t align. As the film progresses, the viewer sees that they have overcome these obstacles and have started a life together.

The screenplay balances tender moments with raw, unfiltered conversations, showcasing the real-life intricacies of modern relationships.

A difficult truth is introduced to the viewer through snapshots of their past, and as the plot slowly comes together, the movie presents the messiness of life’s unpredictability and teaches the viewer how to keep loving someone facing instability and pain.

The film’s minimalist approach to storytelling enhances its sincerity, as many of the scenes and moments between the couple and those around them are simple and feel easy to connect to.

The cinematography complements this theme, with muted tones emphasizing the emotional



A24FILMS.COM

“We Live in Time,” starring Florence Pugh and Andrew Garfield, was released on Oct. 18, 2024 and focuses on honest relationships.

weight of each moment.

While the difficulties of their relationship are not always pretty, and the film is not resolved, it

paints a realistic portrait of love’s beauty and challenges and captures the complexities of human connection.

Taku Sushi reopens in bigger space

By August Capotosto
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Nestled in the core of downtown Beverly, Taku Sushi offers an array of Japanese fusion dishes.

Located at 211 Rantoul St., Taku Sushi recently changed locations from 214 Rantoul St., transitioning into a larger space.

The restaurant’s interior offers half a dozen sit-down tables and booth seating options.

Between the kitchen and the seating area are two bars. While one is a traditional bar that focuses on serving beverages, the other specializes in the preparation and service of sushi.

The restaurant has a wide selection of menu options but



AUGUST CAPOTOSTO PHOTO

Taku Sushi offers a wide variety of quality Japanese fusion dishes. The restaurant recently relocated to 211 Rantoul St. in Beverly.

is particularly known for its seafood dishes.

Customers can enjoy maki-mono rolls, ranging from \$6 to \$16, with specialty rolls ranging from \$15 to \$21.

Since the restaurant sources

high-quality ingredients, especially fish and seafood, prices are steeper than other local sushi restaurants.

A particularly delicious dish on the menu is the handroll, cone-shaped sushi that is tra-

ditionally referred to as temaki, which consumers can order with a wide selection of ingredients. Ranging from \$7 to \$14, options include spicy salmon, avocado cucumber, shrimp, unagi, mango, and spicy scallop.

For consumers adverse to fish dishes, the restaurant also offers a variety of meat-focused options.

This includes entrees such as chicken or beef yaki udon (\$17), chicken teriyaki (\$20), beef teriyaki (\$29), and chicken or tonkatsu (\$19).

Though the menu also features vegetarian options, these dishes are primarily appetizers. Other than typical salads, the store also offers shishito peppers (\$9.50), edamame (\$7), miso soup (\$4.50), kinoko soup (\$9), and vegetable tempura (\$12).

Though the newly opened larger venue allows for more customers, the new space lacks the cozy charm of its original location.

The previous location featured fewer tables and a darker wood theme, incorporating a variety of cultural tapestries and decorations that allowed for a more intimate environment.

Though the newly opened larger venue allows for more customers, the new space lacks the cozy charm of its original location.

Despite the distracting addition of two more televisions in the new space, the restaurant carried over a treasured tradition: the consistent showing of Bob Ross episodes.

These endearing charms paired with consistent high-quality dishes have earned the restaurant a collection of regulars and encouraged an influx of new customers.

Mexican restaurant Amigo’s offers lively dining experience

By Gwendolyn Berger
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Although Amigo’s is one of the many restaurants tucked near the entrance of Northshore Mall in Peabody, it is certainly one of the stand-outs.

Located at 210 Andover St., Amigo’s is a Mexican kitchen that serves an array of delicious food and drinks.

At first glance, the store seems a bit imposing. The excessively high and intimidating door opens up to a huge restaurant, often filled to the brim with laughing people, creating a loud, lively atmosphere.

The decorations follow a red-orange-yellow color scheme, contributing to the Southern, relaxed atmosphere.

TVs are scattered around the

restaurant, simultaneously creating a sports bar feel.

The menu is quite varied, containing Starters (\$8.25 to \$22), Soups (\$6.25 to \$26.75), Salads (\$15 to \$16), Specials (\$22 to \$52), Fajitas (\$17.75 to \$23.25), Quesadillas (\$12.50 to \$14.75), Chimichangas (\$17 to \$18.75), Burritos (\$16 to \$18.25), and Tacos (\$15.50 to \$18.75).

Among those options, there are a few remarkable dishes: the Surf & Turf Potato, a baked potato loaded with shrimp, steak, cheese, and bacon (\$17.75); the Sopa Del Mar, a savory seafood soup cooked in a tomato broth (\$26.75); the Taco Salad (\$16); the Veggie Chimi, a mix of sauteed vegetables and cheese topped with crema fresca and a green tomatillo sauce (\$17), and the Lebamex Falafel Tacos

(\$17.25).

Amigo’s also has many special deals and events to entertain customers. Every Monday from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m., the restaurant hosts Good Thomas’s Musical Bingo.

Every Tuesday, the restaurant has a buy-one-get-one-half-off deal for Tacos. Thursdays are for Friendly Feud Trivia from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m.

These events are fun ways to keep customers engaged and looking forward to every dinner. The Bingo and Trivia also add to the friendly atmosphere that Amigo’s maintains.

Amigo’s only has six options for dessert, which is a bit strange considering their extensive list of entrees and appetizers. The options are Churros (\$10.99), Flan (\$6.99), Fried Ice Cream (\$9.50),



GWENDOLYN BERGER PHOTO

Amigo’s, located in Peabody, offers a wide array of delicious Mexican food. The restaurant boasts a lively, loud atmosphere.

a Kids’ Sundae (\$4.25), and a Tres Leches Cake (\$9.25).

The service is excellent, and the food is delicious. The portion sizes are quite large, so the customer may have to take home the rest of

their food. Unfortunately, Amigo’s utilizes Styrofoam boxes, which are very environmentally unfriendly.

Other than that, Amigo’s is an enjoyable dining experience.