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Social studies department wins costume competition

Students cast their votes on best staff Halloween costumes

By Hannah Davis
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Dressing up as Andy's Toys from Disney's "Toy Story," the social studies department won this year's teacher Halloween costume competition. After viewing photos of each group's costume, students voted for the winning department via a Google Form.

Math teacher Lauren Woodcock, who dressed as Australian Olympic breakdancer Rachael Louise Gunn, who goes by "Raygun," earned second place.

"It was an amazing summer watching the Olympics, and I was truly inspired that I could be a better dancer than Raygun," she said.

Woodcock said she hopes the competition will inspire students to have fun during Halloween.

"I think having fun and being

silly brings the community together," Woodcock said.

The English department won third-place dressed as a murder of crows, playing on the definition of a group of crows.

They wore black feathers and held props such as a bloody shovel, a frying pan, and a bottle of poison.

English teacher Angie Rice said she loves the creativity the competition brings to the school community.

"I just think it's fun, and it's a way for us to sort of do something together. It's creative and...We can be together," Rice said.

Senior Nick Brown said he enjoys seeing teachers dress up every year.

"We see teachers in a professional life like pretty much every other day of the year. So seeing teachers dress up, it's just fun, and it's kind of unexpected," Brown said.

Sophomore Rory Gerhardt said she thinks the history department's costume was the best and loves seeing the teachers' cos-



COURTESY OF JENNIFER MICHAUD

The various school departments dressed as Andy's Toys from "Toy Story," a murder of crows, Australian Olympic breakdancer Raygun, haunted house characters, and the Pokemon Gengar.

tumes each year.

"I think my favorite part of the competition would be that it's

funny," Gerhardt said.

Social studies teacher Abigail Donnelly said the competition

makes the school environment enjoyable for students.

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School wins MIAA District 5 Sportsmanship Award for first time

Recognized for play, warm hospitality

By Summer Demeo
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

After working to create a positive, welcoming environment at athletic events, the school was recognized for its efforts when it received the MIAA District 5 Sportsmanship Award, athletic director Cameron Molinare said.

She said every school in District 5, which is made up of the Cape Ann League, the Northeastern Conference, the Commonwealth Athletic Conference, and the Greater Boston League, votes for the award.

Molinare said she was notified that the school received the award on Oct. 18 and was officially given the award at the MIAA Sportsmanship Summit at Gillette Stadium on Nov. 7.

In the past few years, the athletic department has improved its sportsmanship efforts, but the award came as a pleasant surprise, she said.

"I think it speaks to the students and coaches that we have on the field more than anything else. [The students] on the field



COURTESY OF CAMERON MOLINARE

Fall sport senior captains Megan Hurd, Ella Arntsen, Jarrett Croft, Cian Brennock, Sammy Bothwell, Brigid Carovillano, Summer Demeo, and Whitney Turner traveled to Gillette Stadium to receive the sportsmanship award on Nov. 7.

embody the characteristics of good sportsmanship. [They] play with integrity," Molinare said.

She said the school has created a welcoming environment for visiting teams, which includes the bonds student-athletes create with players from other schools.

"We're just good people, and we treat each other with respect. We compete hard, but then all things aside, [everyone is] chatting it up at the end of the game," Molinare said. Girls' basketball coach and social studies depart-

ment chair Lauren DuBois said Molinare has had a big impact on improving the athletic department and promoting sportsmanship.

"Cami's done a tremendous job leading the athletic department and bringing us forward, so I think she has a big role in [winning this award]," she said.

DuBois said the students create a positive community by supporting each other, being respectful, and having fun.

"We have great students who

love sports, love playing, love watching, and have shown up for each other ... so it's pretty cool that we have been recognized for that spirit," she said.

Boys' soccer and tennis coach and Spanish teacher Robbie Bilsbury said he emphasizes good sportsmanship on both his teams, especially when they play intense opponents.

He said the school environment also plays an important role in the way student-athletes interact with other teams and each other.

"I feel like our school is a pretty special place in terms of the character of the kids. There's a lot of kind energy in our school, and it's just good to see that recognized," Bilsbury said.

Junior Penelope Riggs, who

plays field hockey, basketball, and softball, said respect and positivity towards officials and opponents have been emphasized on all of her teams.

'I think it speaks to the students and coaches that we have on the field more than anything else. [The students] on the field embody the characteristics of good sportsmanship. [They] play with integrity.'

- CAMERON MOLINARE

"We're always cheering for teammates but not negatively at the other team. Even parents and spectators are super respectful of the other team while still being positive and supportive of our team in all games I've played in and been to," she said.

Molinare said that she has focused in the past few years on limiting negative chants from spectators and setting clear expectations for Manchester-Essex fan and player behavior.

She said she wants opponents to have fun when they play

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Debate team receives \$2,000 grant from Spaulding Education Fund

Team hopes to attend more meets, make money for transportation

By Charlie Baker
INDEPENDENT STAFF

After receiving a \$2,000 grant from the Spaulding Education Fund, the Debate team will be able to attend more tournaments, senior Debate co-president Stella Straub said.

“[Senior] Gwen [Berger] and I co-wrote the grant, and [Debate coach] Ms. Woodcock reviewed the grant before we submitted it. Gwen handled most of the financial part of the grant, and I wrote the proposal itself and wrote a lot about how our work

with the Debate team tied into the Vision of the Graduate,” she said.

Spaulding approved the 10-page document, and the team received the full amount they asked for, Straub said. Co-president Berger said the money was needed to cover the costs of transportation, overnight lodging, learning resources, and tournament entry fees.

She said the team’s new coach, math teacher Lauren Woodcock, is also in charge of the Math Team, which meets at the same time as Debate.

“I run back and forth the entire time,” said Woodcock, who added that another struggle for her is

being brand new to Debate.

“I’ve never done it before, so I’m figuring it out as I go,” she said.

That isn’t the only change to the program, Berger said. For the first time, the program is open to seventh- and eighth-graders, she said.

“We have five eighth-graders on the team who are very enthusiastic and excited to be there, which is awesome. The only difficulty we’ve run into is that there’s a considerably more limited selection of Debate tournaments that middle schoolers can compete in,” Straub said.

Woodcock said the team has competed in one tournament, the annual MSDL Novice Tournament that gave

new debaters a chance to practice against fellow rookies on Oct. 19 in Westwood, Massachusetts.

The team’s only members who aren’t novices are Straub and Berger, Straub said.

Berger said the team ran into a bus issue at that tournament.

“We finished earlier than expected, so at about noon we asked Ms. Woodcock to text Salter Transportation and tell them to come at 1 p.m. They didn’t respond, so we had to wait until 4, when the meet was supposed to end. Four p.m. came around, and then 5, and then 6. We ended up waiting outside for 5 hours,” Berger said.

Spaulding approved the 10-page document, and the team received the full amount they asked for.



STELLA STRAUB PHOTO

Senior Debate co-president Gwen Berger and freshman Debate member Rosie Renehan sell baked goods to raise extra funds for the team. The stand was located at Masconomo Park in Manchester.

The team has five more tournaments on the schedule, not including the state tournament, which individuals or teams can qualify for through their performance in any tournament, Straub said.

The team also has two state tournament slots for debate members who didn’t qualify through tournament performances, she said.

The team made one more change, allowing Debate members to compete in speech events

where participants write a speech and then deliver it to a panel of judges instead of arguing head to head, Straub said.

In the past, the team has primarily competed in the Public Forum section of debate, she said.

Berger said she thinks the program is really important because debate is a helpful life skill and provides the members of the team the opportunity to learn about current events, persuasive arguments, and learning to examine both sides.

“Debate has taught me a lot. Speaking, reading and writing skills ... to think critically, interpret critically... to be in control of what you’re saying when your emotions are running high,” she said.

Straub said the team’s next tournament is scheduled to be the online Dempsey-Cronin Invitational, where both middle and high school students can participate. The tournament will take place from Nov. 23-24, said Straub.

School administrators participate in district-wide teacher evaluation training, seek to align language

Look to encourage, support teachers with useful feedback

By Whitney Turner
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

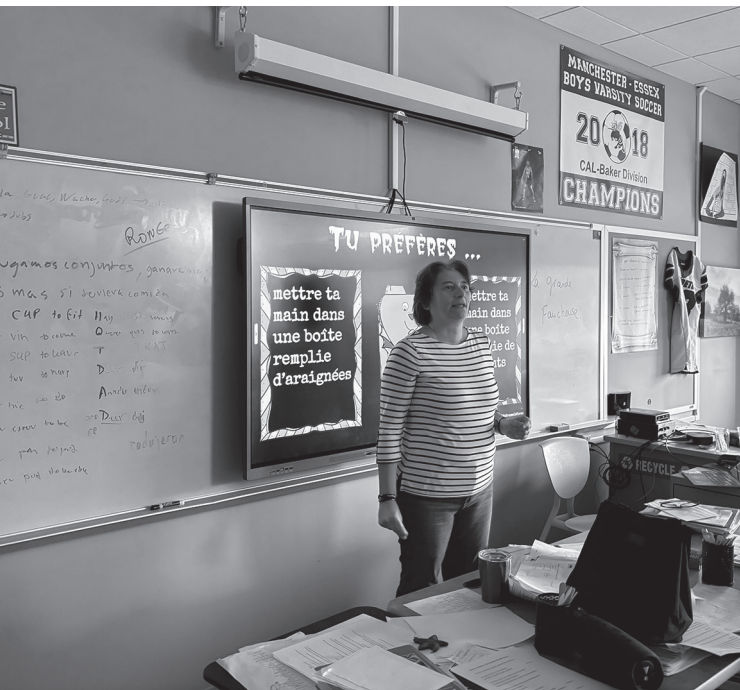
In order to align their process for teacher evaluation, school administrators across the district are engaging in training by a professional development organization called Research for Better Teaching (RBT), Dean of Students Elisabeth Drinkwater said.

She said that the role of school administrators is to observe teachers and student learning and conduct relevant evaluations.

Since many of the district administrators are relatively new to their positions, the purpose of the training is to ensure that everyone is conducting teacher evaluations in a similar manner, Drinkwater said.

“All of the district administration from elementary through high school, the principals, deans of students, curriculum director, superintendent, director of student services ... are doing this training,” she said.

Principal Julie Sgroi said the



WHITNEY TURNER PHOTO

Administrators recently participated in a teacher evaluation training to standardize feedback for teachers like French teacher Caroline Coshow, who conducted a “Would You Rather” activity with her French class.

training involves aligning the purpose of evaluations and the language that is used during evaluations among administrators to promote a unified report.

“The hope of this training is for the administrators to collaborate and to get on the same page on what evaluation looks

like for teachers and how we can use teacher evaluation as a tool for driving their instruction forward,” she said.

The format of the RBT training is very similar to a workshop, Sgroi said. After visiting classrooms, administrators share their observations and the language

they would use to describe them, she said.

“We have someone [from RBT] who comes to see us, ... and we’ve been able to go into classrooms and then debrief together and talk,” Sgroi said.

She said she underwent similar training at schools she worked at previously.

“What I like about this training is that it helps me frame what I’m seeing in the classroom in a way that is effective for teachers,” Sgroi said.

Drinkwater said one way that teacher evaluations are important is that they allow her to observe if students are improving in areas outlined by the School Improvement Plan.

“If I’m one of the leaders of this school, I want to be able to talk about what students are doing here in the school,” she said.

Social studies department chair Lauren DuBois said that she is familiar with the teacher evaluation process, since she has been a teacher at the high school for 20 years and a department chair for 10 years.

She hopes that evaluations are

seen as an opportunity to showcase what teachers are adding to the school and to share helpful teaching strategies.

“If a lesson or strategy goes great, how can we highlight that and use it as an example for new teachers or for all teachers, because we’re all ... always looking to improve,” Du-

‘I want to be able to talk about what students are doing here in the school.’

-ELISABETH DRINKWATER

Bois said.

Drinkwater said teachers who are new to the district need to be evaluated more often than others to provide extra support and feedback.

Although teachers in their fourth year and beyond at the district are only required to be evaluated on a two-year cycle, Drinkwater tries to visit classrooms more frequently so she stays connected with the classrooms, she said.

“I like to go into a classroom at least once a school year, but I feel like that’s a minimum,” Drinkwater said.

Sgroi said the administrators have already met twice this year for RBT training sessions, which will continue throughout the rest of the year.

Model UN visits United Nations, gains real-world insights

Students interact with UN expert

By Bissy Mitrano
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Ten students and two teachers from the Model UN (United Nations) Club visited the UN Headquarters in New York City to see firsthand how major global decisions are made.

Senior President Charlie Langendorf said the group traveled on a bus to New York City on October 14. The trip offered a unique opportunity to see the UN in action and experience the environment where international policies are shaped, he said.

“Touring the UN Headquarters, seeing the committee rooms in session, and exploring spaces where real decisions happen helped us understand the organization on a new level,” Langendorf said.

The Model UN Club allows

students to participate in a United Nations simulation, where students act as different countries and attempt to solve a problem that is an active issue in the UN.

“We had our first simulation about climate change, and it was fun, but I was not sure how accurate it was, and there was limited information online ... so I talked to the other officers and thought

[the trip to the UN] would be a way to make it more accurate,” Langendorf said.

History teacher and chaperone Jennifer Michaud said this is the

second year the Model UN club has been active.

“The Model UN club is new ... and being able to go down [to the UN] and see how the UN actually functions is instrumental for them and how they prepare for their simulations and potential competitions,” Michaud said.

Langendorf said they spent nearly six hours in New York, which included guided tours of the UN headquarters, time to ex-



COURTESY OF EMMA BROWN
The model UN Club, with chaperone and social studies teacher Jennifer Michaud and social studies chair and model UN adviser Lauren DuBois, toured the UN headquarters in New York.

plore, and a session with a global communication expert, Vincenzo Pugliese, who discussed career paths and current global issues.

“My favorite part of the trip was talking to the expert. He talked about how to get jobs and careers in the UN, which I am really interested in personally,” he said.

Club adviser and social studies department chair Lauren DuBois said the club was able to make this experience possible through a grant from the Spaulding Education Fund, which helped pay for transportation, tour tickets, and the discussion with an expert.

Langendorf said the grant was for \$5,000.

Junior Emma Brown said she was surprised by the scale and diversity of the UN.

“You can’t imagine how big it is until you’re there. There are all these chambers and council rooms,” Brown said.

She said she appreciated seeing the multilingual environment in action and noted that representatives bring their own translators if they don’t speak English or French.

“Our guide, Hasim, from Uzbekistan, would casually switch

languages as he passed by the staff, which I found fascinating,” Brown said.

Michaud said the UN staff was extremely impressed by the students who asked questions during the discussion with the expert and said they sounded like a college-level UN club.

“The questions the students were asking were personally blowing my mind. They had a lot of thought behind them ... so as a teacher, it makes me feel great to go out into the world and have people recognize how awesome our students are,” she said.

DESE holds AI listening session

By Sabine Cooper
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

As technology rapidly advances and Artificial Intelligence (AI) usage increases, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) is working to create guidelines for AI usage in schools, said director of curriculum and instructional technology Heather Leonard.

She said DESE put together an AI Task Force this summer to answer the question: How is AI impacting our classrooms right now, and what role should it play?

But a clean-cut answer to this question does not exist, Leonard said, because AI is appearing in places throughout students’ everyday lives that they are not even aware of, like when using Google Docs, Classroom, or even Spotify.

She said that in an attempt to further connect with students and understand the deep roots of this issue, DESE worked with Tara Natrass, who has a doctorate in K-12 Educational Leadership and Policy, to facilitate learning in an instructional setting.

Natrass’s listening session



COURTESY OF HEATHER LEONARD
Sophomores in Mary Buckley-Harmon’s English class discuss the history and usage of AI in a Zoom with Dr. Tara Natrass.

took place over Zoom in English teacher Mary Buckley-Harmon’s sophomore English class.

“Dr. Natrass led this listening session with students, and she did it with students across the state, in different grade levels and in different districts,” Leonard said.

Throughout the session, Natrass informed students about the history of AI and led them in a discussion about the role it should play in schools and education settings, she said.

Sophomore Conrad Garfield said the session was informative and allowed him to ask meaningful questions about AI usage.

“I felt like my opinion was valued, and we were given a space to be honest and open,” he said.

One in-depth discussion the class had during the session was about apps like Photomath that

use AI to solve math problems.

Garfield said the discussion seemed to be the most engaging to students because it brought attention to both sides of the argument about whether AI is beneficial for developing a deeper understanding of certain subjects, like math.

“We talked about how we frequently use the apps to help solve math problems, and it was interesting to have a talk about if it could be used more effectively,” he said.

Garfield said one message the students took away from the DESE talk was that AI is not always accurate, meaning that AI can be beneficial, but only in some circumstances.

Overall, DESE hopes to give school districts state guidelines on how to make AI policies by

getting the students’ perspectives on AI usage through this DESE listening session, Leonard said.

Currently, 26 states have released state guidelines for policies; however, the priorities have varied. In some, they have focused on AI usage in classrooms, while others have talked about how to teach about AI, she said.

At the high school, no explicit policy on AI has been released, nor is one expected in the foreseeable future, Principal Julie Sgroi said.

“Making a policy seems silly because once you make that policy, it’s going to almost be obsolete because everything is changing so quickly,” she said.

While no concrete policy exists now, there could potentially be one after the DESE Task Force has collaborated with educators to set guidelines, Sgroi said.

Questions about how to handle students using AI is a heavy subject, especially amid an ongoing court case in Hingham surround-

ing appropriate punishments for AI usage, she said.

In this case, a 17-year-old student was caught using AI for the research portion of a history paper. The student was given a

detention, kept off the National Honor Society, and given a zero on that portion of the project, according to the NBC article “Hingham parents sue school district over child’s AI usage” by Alysha Palumbo and Bianca Beltrán.

When deciding an appropriate way to discipline students for using AI, Sgroi

has turned to the academic integrity policy, which has expanded language for the 2024-2025 school year to encompass AI usage.

“Instead of just being punitive, our expectation of students is that they follow assignment guidelines. If the teacher is saying AI is not acceptable to use for this project, and it’s determined that AI was used, that’s not academic integrity,” she said.

CONTINUATIONS

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“We like promoting this culture of fun and joy, at Manchester Es-

sex. I think we like helping students to see the fun side of being in school and all being together,” she said.

Donnelly said the costume competition is very unique and

different from other high schools.

“I don’t know how many high schools have this kind of connection with faculty and students having fun together,” she said.

SPORTSMANSHIP AWARD

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1
to have fun when they play Manchester-Essex teams, regardless of if they emerge victorious or experience a defeat.

“We want them to have a great,

healthy, competitive atmosphere when they’re here. We want them to leave [saying], ‘Oh that was a competitive and fun environment. I want to come back and play them again,’” Molinare said.

Social studies, English teachers compete in half marathon

Build on past running experience, support each other

By Alessia Omari
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Social studies department chair Lauren DuBois and English teacher Mary Buckley-Harmon participated in the Harborside Half Marathon in Newburyport, along with former high school athletic trainer Jill Levine.

The 13.1 mile race, which took place on November 10, started in Newburyport, went over the highway into West Newbury, and ended at Cashman Park in downtown Newburyport, Buckley-Harmon said.

Approximately 2,000 other runners participated in the event, which included a 5K race, she said.

DuBois, who has completed seven half marathons, said she wanted to challenge herself by running in this event, which she ran 10 years ago.

“I have done this race before, and I wanted something to work towards,” DuBois said.

Buckley-Harmon ran her first half marathon, The Ipswich Ale Half, in April.

After DuBois asked her to run the Harborside Half, Buckley-

Harmon decided to join her, hoping to improve on her previous race time.

“Lauren always makes me laugh and calms me down, so I was looking forward to running with her,” she said.

Buckley-Harmon said she was encouraged to try running her first half marathon by math and science department chair Kristin Umile.

“When she told me I should try doing a half, I said there was no way my body could do that.

‘I was really happy to take on a challenge and improve.’

-MARY BUCKLEY-HARMON



COURTESY OF STEVE HARMON

Social studies department chair Lauren DuBois, English teacher Mary Buckley-Harmon, and former athletic trainer Jill Levine all completed the Harborside Half Marathon on Nov. 10.

She told me, ‘Your body can do anything if you train for it,’ so I researched some training plans and decided to try it.”

DuBois also prepared for the race by following a training schedule.

“I tried to have long runs on the weekend, as well as increas-

ing my mileage until I got as close as I could to the 13,” she said.

Buckley-Harmon said she finished this race 20 minutes faster than her first race in April.

“Running does not come naturally for me, so I was really happy to take on a challenge and

improve,” she said.

Senior Charlie Langendorf said he’s impressed by DuBois and Buckley-Harmon’s dedication to running a half marathon.

“I really admire the amount of effort the two of them probably put into preparing for this,” he said.

Government, history classes study presidential election

By Whitney Turner
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Leading up to the 2024 presidential election, social studies teachers Jennifer Michaud and Abigail Donnelly led in-class discussions about the electoral process, they both said.

Additionally, many 18-year-old students voted in the election, senior Eoin Doyle said.

Michaud said that in her AP US Government and Politics class, she rearranged the order of the units so that the topics would align with events in the presidential election process.

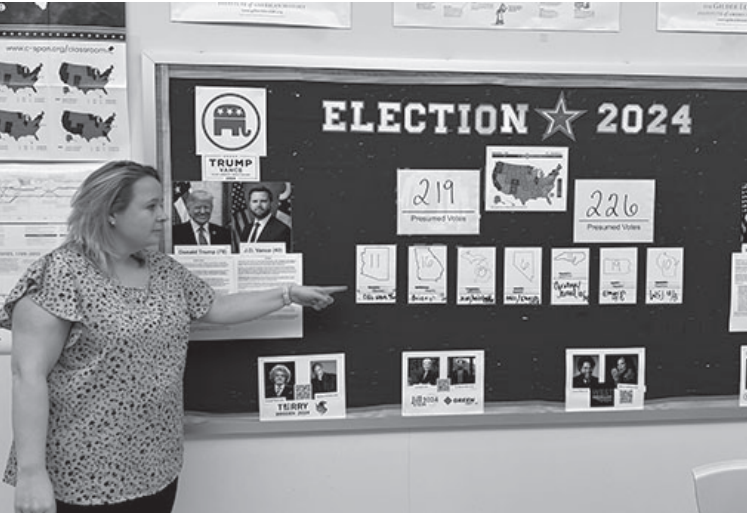
“In our first unit, we talked about opinion polling, and so we’ve been able to track the polling in the swing states now that we understand how these polls are conducted, and specifi-

cally the margin of error, so we can read these polls in the correct way,” she said.

Other topics the class covered in the months leading up to the election were structural barriers to voting, early voting processes in different states, and key elements of liberal and conservative political ideology, Michaud said.

Donnelly said she gave students in all of her classes an optional assignment to watch an episode of PBS’s “Frontline” that discussed the Democratic and Republican vice presidential candidates, Tim Walz and JD Vance.

In the days before the election, students in Donnelly’s US History II class watched a different episode of “Frontline” that focused on the Democratic presidential nominee, Kamala Harris, and the Republican presidential nominee,



WHITNEY TURNER PHOTO

Social studies teacher Jennifer Michaud points to her election board, which she used to track the presidential election and teach students.

Donald Trump, she said. Trump is now the president-elect.

Michaud said she believes the purpose of AP Gov is to teach students about how the government works in America, which will allow them to engage in the democratic process.

“It’s very important to un-

derstand how the system works. I honestly believe that AP US Government and Politics is the most practical AP class in the entire school,” she said.

Donnelly said she felt it was important to discuss the election in class because of its impact on students’ lives.

“It’s really important for students in a democracy to understand their power and to understand the challenges that we face, as well as the opportunities,” she said.

In order to keep conversations around the election process school-appropriate, Michaud said she tries to set a positive example for students.

“I think being a role model and being very careful about not sharing my political opinion is extremely helpful,” she said.

Doyle said his teachers did not teach about the election process, but he heard many peers discussing their plans to vote.

“I definitely talk to my peers about it ... I went with five people, and we voted,” he said.

Senior Maddie O’Grady said that, as a woman, she felt it was especially important to vote.

“I voted because I think it’s your civic duty to go and vote and express your opinions,” she said.

Hooper Fund grants \$2,000 to Math Team

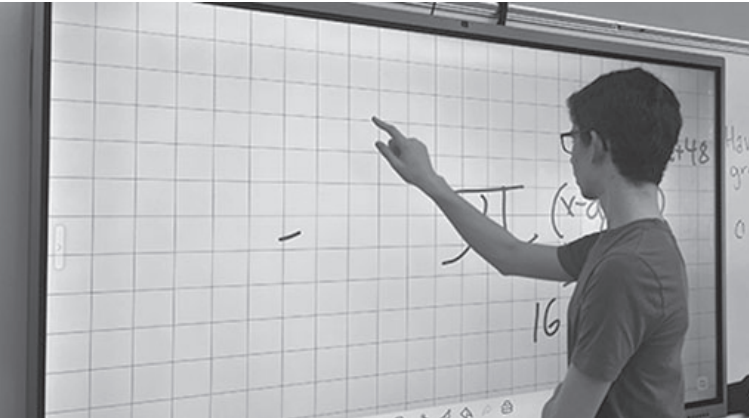
By Gwendolyn Berger
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Due to unexpected expenses, the Math Team applied for and received a \$2,000 grant from The Hooper Fund over the summer, said math teacher and team adviser, Lauren Woodcock.

She said after a bus did not arrive, the team had to host their own tournament and purchase pizzas for it last year.

The team also qualified for States and the New England meet for the first time, Woodcock said.

“Although [the] Math Team is



GWENDOLYN BERGER PHOTO

Sophomore Math Team member Tyler Cummins works on a math problem in team adviser Lauren Woodcock’s classroom.

part of the school budget, we had not come across States and New England transportation costs previously, so they depleted our funds,” she said.

Woodcock said former president and alumnus Joanna

Shan wrote the grant last spring, intending to use the funds as backup for transportation. Woodcock received news that they obtained the grant in June, she said.

“I was very ecstatic, excited,

and grateful for Joanna and Jack [Cummins] when we received the grant,” Woodcock said.

Senior president Jack Cummins said he reviewed the grant last year, but he plans to apply for the grant again next year.

He said he originally joined the Math Team because of his love for math, but now his new role as president focuses more on the organization of the team.

“The main change is that I’m now figuring out the lineups for team members ... it’s interesting to get a behind-the-scenes look at how [the] Math Team functions,” Cummins said.

Senior Charlie Rubens said

he likes competing on the Math Team and attending tournaments.

“There’s a lot of comradery on [the] Math Team. Ms. Woodcock is a great teacher, and she’s great

at explaining the harder problems. It’s an awesome experience for people who like math,” he said.

Sophomore Anne Stevens said she joined the Math Team

this year and enjoys competing at tournaments. She said she’s eager to see if the grant will raise awareness about their hard work.

“Maybe the grant will make people talk about [the] Math Team, and more people will be encouraged to join,” Stevens said.

‘It’s an awesome experience for people who like math.’

-CHARLIE RUBENS

Students dress up for Spirit Week, decorate halls, compete in pep rally

By Isabelle Donnellan Valade
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

After students dressed up daily for Spirit Week and attended different sporting events, the week’s competitions culminated in the annual pep rally.

Held from Oct. 7-11, Spirit Week assigned each day with a different theme, with grades competing for the most participation.

Monday was USA Day, Tuesday was Tropical Paradise, Wednesday was Country vs. Country Club, Thursday was Decades Day, and Friday was School Spirit Color Day.

On the final day, each grade decorated a hallway.

The senior hallway was “Survivor” themed, the juniors created a Candyland, the sophomores a circus, and the freshman an ocean.

Foreign language teacher and Student Council adviser Erin Fortunato said the week was fun and successful, despite being so busy.

“It went so fast. I feel like it was a hectic and crazy time. But people said it went really well, so I believe them,” she said.

In order for the event to run smoothly, multiple tasks had to be completed, Fortunato said.

She said she first had to meet with elected class officers and decide what themes to do each day; then she had to reach out to teachers and faculty regarding when the pep rally would be.

She also had to send a Google Form to teachers for recording the daily participation, and she had to update the script for the pep rally when the organizers decided to add student masters of ceremony in order to increase student responsibility.

“We decided this year to put in student emcees because we feel like it’s a nice way to have more kids involved in it ... I think [seniors Eoin Doyle and Satchel Rubin] did an awesome job for never having done it before,” she said.

Senior class adviser Barrett Alston said the inclusion of student emcees improved the pep rally.

“Adding them added an extra layer of it being student-driven, which is the whole idea behind the week. And I just thought that it was a generally positive and exciting moment for the seniors,” he said.

The pep rally competitions allow for an energetic environment, Alston said.

“Every year somebody cheats,



MARY BUCKLEY-HARMON PHOTO

Seniors Isabelle Donnellan Valade, Hannah Davis, Henry Stevens, Hayden Remington, Luke Holmes, and Leigha Akerley dress for USA Day, the first day of Spirit Week on Mon., Oct. 7.

and it’s always in good fun ... it’s nice to have everybody yelling and laughing, and I feel like everyone’s excited and happy to be there, cheering and shouting, and it has a really cool vibe,” he said.

Alston said his favorite part of Spirit Week is seeing the student reaction to the decorated hallways.

“Seeing the non-seniors and even some of the middle-schoolers’ faces when they’d walk through the hallway is my favorite part ... hopefully it gets them excited to be a part of the high school at some point,” he said.

Senior class officer Luke Holmes said the senior class had incredible involvement in Spirit Week.

“There was lots of participation, lots of fun, and it brings our school together, which is great. The senior class was also phenomenal with participation and spirit,” he said.

The senior class won the Spirit Week participation competition, Fortunato said.

“The seniors really dominated so much this year as far as the Spirit Week dress goes. I think that was kind of obvious,” she said.

Fortunato, who recorded the scores, said the juniors won second place, with sophomores close behind, and the freshman class came in last.

She said she wanted to give a special thank you to senior class officer Gwen Berger for all she did to help with Spirit Week.

“She came to offer assistance in organizing [Spirit Week] and communicating with the class and the other senior officers,” Fortunato said.

The sophomore class won an additional competition for student participation at sporting events each night. They received

a \$500 award from the Manchester Essex Boosters Club.

Fortunato said athletic director Cameron Molinare helped with Spirit Week and the Boosters award.

“She helped organize the coaches, the Booster prize, the gym details, and also getting students to scan in at the different sporting events,” she said.

Sophomore class officer Charlie Athanas said he was proud of his class for their participation.

“I think that because our grade is so close, everyone not only was fueled to win the Boosters award, but they also just wanted to support each other, which I find really cool,” he said.

Junior class officer Lila Brady said it brought the junior class together in a new way.

“I think it was necessary for our class to unite now that we are upperclassmen because we should definitely be more competitive for that trophy. It was great to see everyone so excited and having a lot of fun,” she said.

Brady said she tried to encourage participation in the sports games, but it was difficult.

“A lot of people play sports or have extracurriculars after school, and even though [our] council tried to remind people, it can still be easy to forget attending or filling out the form,” she said.

Brady said the Spirit Week tradition is beneficial to the school community.

“It brings people together and increases pride in our school, especially during this time of year when people are so ... busy with academics and activities. The week reminds us that we can still let loose [and] have fun,” she said.

Fortunato said students participating in school spirit outside of athletics is an interesting way to bring people together, which is rare in high school.

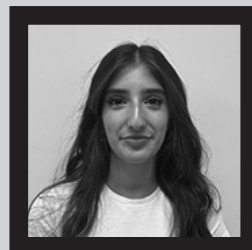
“I don’t feel like these days we have all that much opportunity to do this. We get very divided in all of our different groups, so being able to see everybody come together for those things gives a neat feel and vibe to the whole week,” she said.



Freshman Aliyah Doyon:
“Stuffing.”



Freshman Alec Rizzico:
“Sweet potatoes with marshmallows on top.”



Sophomore Hazelle Steriti:
“Stuffing.”



Sophomore Ellis Rodi:
“Mashed potatoes.”



What is your favorite Thanksgiving dish?

Junior Charlotte Earl:
“Homemade mashed potatoes.”



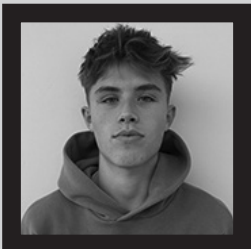
Junior Egehan “Eggie” Guntas:
“Mac and cheese.”



Senior Jenelle Ford:
“Mashed potatoes.”



Senior Chase Koeplin:
“Squash.”



New high school ACE teacher builds relationships with students

Works to support students in her class

By Stella Straub
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

After arriving in the middle school three years ago as a teaching fellow, Academic Curriculum Enhancement (ACE) teacher Jackie Hurley moved to the high school this fall after completing behavior analysis coursework at Endicott College.

Hurley said she loves her new job thus far and that her favorite part has been getting to know the students in the program.

“I love them. We joke around. We play games together ... I miss them when I’m out of

school,” she said. Hurley said she grew up in Kingston, Massachusetts, and attended high school at Notre Dame Academy. In 2022, she graduated from the University of Alabama with teaching certifications in early childhood, special education early childhood, elementary, and collaborative teaching, she said.

She received her master’s degree in severe disabilities from Endicott College in 2023 and a certificate in behavior analysis this past summer, she said.

High school ACE teacher Erin Kenaga said she and Hurley have had an excellent start to the year teaching together.

“I think our co-teaching has



STELLA STRAUB PHOTO

New ACE teacher Jackie Hurley engages with students and provides academic assistance and support across a variety of subjects as part of her teaching role in the classroom.

been pretty seamless ... we’ve got a nice group of students this year, a great group of aides, and two teachers, so we’ve been able to try new things. It’s been a great experience,” she said.

Kenaga said Hurley’s position was added this year to accommodate the growing ACE program.

Sophomore Riley Corrigan said Hurley helps explain things to her in ways that make sense.

“She’s attentive, so she tries to look around the room to see if anybody needs help. If somebody does need help, she’ll try and help or send another teacher [over] to work with you,” she said.

Corrigan said she has Hurley as a teacher for science, but Hurley will help her with other subjects like math and English.

“Her teaching style is very creative. She’ll do a lot of stuff that I normally wouldn’t do, but it makes [the class] interesting,” she said.

New athletic trainer focuses on student health

By August Capotosto
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Anna Perrotti, the district’s new athletic trainer, said she has been adjusting to her current role within the athletic department.

Through her position, she works with student athletes to treat and prevent acute or chronic injuries, she said.

“If kids have questions or concerns, I’m here to treat them and be a vessel to refer them to other care if needed,” Perrotti said.

Last year, the athletic department had a one-year contract with Coastal Orthopedics for two athletic trainers, athletic director Cameron Molinare said.

“Coastal stopped contracting athletic trainers ... [so] we went through a transition to see what



AUGUST CAPOTOSTO PHOTO

New athletic trainer Anna Perrotti emphasizes health and injury prevention as part of her role in supporting student well-being.

other companies and organizations are similar,” she said.

After interviews, the athletic department signed a three-year contract with Mass General Brigham to employ Perrotti, Molinare said.

“This consistency is important because it takes time to build trust with student-athletes so

they report injuries,” she said.

Perrotti said she grew up in Groveland and attended Pentucket High School, where she competed in track and field, gymnastics, and soccer.

She attended Merrimack College, where she completed a five-year program to receive her Bachelor of Science in Exercise

Science in 2022 and her Master of Science in Athletic Training in 2024.

Through Merrimack, Perrotti completed four season-long clinical rotations at Billerica High School, Saint Anselm College, Tufts University, and Phillips Exeter Academy.

She said she was interested in the close-knit community here compared to other locations she’s worked at.

“Everyone knows and supports each other ... and I liked the fact that I would get to know each kid and team individually,” Perrotti said.

She said students like to come in for treatment and touch base.

Molinare said that Perrotti’s open communication helps alleviate anxieties from injuries.

“Every week there are more student-athletes seeking treatment, which is a testament to her relationship-building with students,” she said.

FUN FACTS

- She has a lab-pointer mix dog named Maisy.
- She is a certified personal trainer.
- She recently became an aunt to a nephew named Will.
- She is learning to speak Italian.
- She enjoys cooking.
- She enjoys drawing in her free time.

New high school psychologist hopes to connect with students, faculty members

Addresses students’ individual needs

By Annie Pinkin
INDEPENDENT STAFF

Shanelle Taylor, the new school psychologist for the middle and high school, said she hopes to connect with students and help with any challenges they may face.

Taylor grew up in Ipswich and attended Ipswich High School. She said she played volleyball, was a part of the theater program, and played bass in the orchestra.

As a teen and young adult, she worked at Aéropostale at the Northshore Mall in Peabody and for Ipswich’s theater department where she was the assistant director, Taylor said.

She received a degree in psychology from Salem State University and then attended Tufts University, where she earned both an education specialist master’s degree and a master’s degree in school psychology.

She previously worked as a paraprofessional at Ipswich High School for two years and as a one-on-one aide for five years at Futures School in Beverly.

Taylor said working at a similar size district to MERSD has helped her transition.

Middle school adjustment counselor Erin Brahms said

Taylor’s skill set has made her feel as though Taylor has been working with her for years.

“She comes with a lot of knowledge and experience from her previous positions,” she said.

Taylor said she tests students for Individualized Education

Plans (IEPs) and meets with students having difficulties, whether it’s academically or emotionally. She then figures out the best ways for them to learn and helps create accommodations

with their teachers and counselors.

“I also collaborate with teachers and parents to create a supportive environment and ensure

‘I also collaborate with teachers and parents to create a supportive environment.’

-SHANELLE TAYLOR



ANNIE PINKIN PHOTO

Psychologist Shanelle Taylor works with student services.

that everyone has the resources they need to thrive, basically, to help students feel better and do better in school,” she said.

After testing students, Taylor works with the student services department to create IEPs and strategies based on what each student requires, she said.

“A school psychologist is the bedrock of what we do,” special education chairperson Jean Taricone said.

FUN FACTS

- Her favorite Halloween movie is ‘Halloween-Town.’
- She played the bass in her high school orchestra.
- Her favorite subject in school was history.
- She played volleyball.
- She wants to travel to Ireland.

Testing Policies

Should math and science courses permit test corrections for full credit?

Pro
Bissy Mitrano

Math and science courses should allow students to make test corrections for full credit in order to motivate them to take more difficult classes in high school.

Test corrections offer students opportunities to see and learn from their mistakes rather than to perform the same mistakes repeatedly.

According to Keyorda Kemp’s 2021 National Institute of Health article, learning from mistakes can improve student knowledge and problem solving-skills, which can help consolidate information in their memory.

“Success in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM)-related fields is dependent not only on what a student knows but also in part on the student’s ability to learn from their errors,” she said.

Small errors in complex math and science problems can have a significant impact on grades, regardless of student knowledge.

Teachers and students should be encouraging a sense of community in supporting every student by allowing test corrections, granting further opportunities to succeed in class.

Many students are unable to test well because of factors such as test anxiety, causing them to do poorly despite studying.

According to the 2007 U.S. Department of Education article, “My Child Doesn’t Test Well,” by Lloyd Bond, “Students will forget simple declarative knowledge and procedural operations that they have long mastered.”

Some students have more success on projects, essays, and group work rather than tests. Evaluating understanding in a limited way does not help all students perform well.

According to “The Assessment Trap,” by Henri Picciotto, “[Test corrections] lower the stakes in a good way ... if learning is the goal, what difference does it make if learning occurs a week later?”

The point of a math course is to learn the material rather than focus on the grade; however, not allowing test corrections undermines this purpose.

Other educational departments such as history allow test corrections for students in order to help them focus on learning the material rather than on the grade, which is what math and science courses should do if educators want students to succeed, both in high school and into college.

Con
Sabine Cooper

To set students up for success in college, math and science teachers should only allow students to do test corrections up to 70 percent, regardless of the difficulty of the class.

The opportunity to repeatedly earn more credit than initially deserved on exams may lead to grade inflation, which has been detrimental to students’ overall academic performance and learning, according to a 2019 NAEP High School Transcript Study.

The study examined the nation’s second-largest school district, the Los Angeles Unified School District. In spring 2022, 83 percent of sixth-grade students received A, B, or C grades, even though just 27 percent met or exceeded the standards on state and national assessments.

As a consequence of students earning back more credit than initially deserved, their standardized scores, like the AP exam, are not equivalent to their grades in that class overall.

Typically, a student’s grade should be a good indicator of their proficiency in a class, math and science department chair and teacher of AP biology Kristin Umile said.

“When I get the AP scores back, I feel like what happens in my classroom on a day-to-day basis reflects the scores that they receive, and I’m not sure that would happen if they had the ability to earn higher than 70 percent on assessments,” she said.

According to a 2023 Education Week article by Rick Hess, “Such grades [like A’s and B’s] tell students it’s OK to coast, give parents a false sense of how their kids are doing, and allow students to graduate without essential knowledge or skills.”

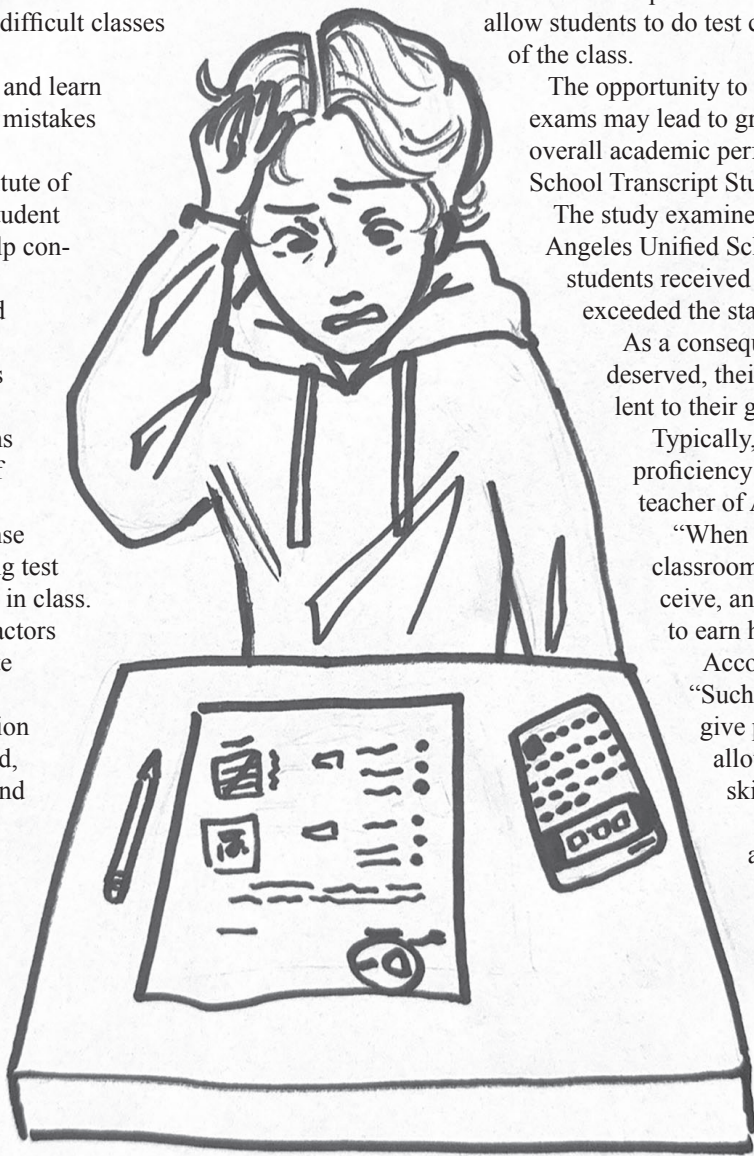
To combat this and set students up for success instead, assessments in higher-level high school classes should mimic the test-taking circumstances that students will likely face in college, particularly in AP-level classes, Umile said.

Another issue with unlimited possibilities for test corrections is that students build a reliance on test retakes in order to maintain good grades. This may cause students to not perform as well initially.

Umile said that, specifically for her freshman classes, she only allows retakes up to 70 percent for the first half of the year.

“What can unfortunately happen is that students just rely on taking test corrections in order to get themselves to a grade that they are okay with,” she said.

To adequately prepare students for college courses and help them build good test studying habits, science and math classes should only offer assessment corrections up to 70 percent.



AUGUST CAPOTOSTO ILLUSTRATION

Adolescents should limit their social media usage

By Alessia Omari
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Placing restrictions on social media use will be immensely beneficial to high school students, allowing them to avoid phone addiction and be more productive overall.

Young internet users become addicted to social media platforms due to the intermittent reinforcement and gratification that said platforms provide.

In the 2020 article “How Social Media Affects Student Productivity” for St. Cloud Technical and Community College, Brigid Brew said the brief dopamine high that social media offers causes online platforms to be extremely addictive.

“You log [online] for a burst of gratification ... the lack of consistency in rewards aggravates the user enough to revisit

the platform multiple times,” she said.

This instant gratification causes many high school students to rely on social media and procrastination as a coping mechanism to ignore the negative feelings that they’ve associated with doing their schoolwork.

In James Mulkern’s 2020 article “Using Social Media as a Procrastination Device” for the Green Wave Gazette, Mulkern said that his social media use was one of the main reasons that he procrastinated on his high school workload.

“Whether I am browsing my Twitter feed on my cell phone or watching YouTube videos on my laptop, social media has always been my go-to method of procrastination, the result of negative feelings surrounding schoolwork,” he said.

In order to avoid procrastina-

tion, high school students themselves must place restrictions on the amount of time that they spend online.

An example of a restriction would be setting up Screen Time on whatever device you are using. Screen Time is a program found on IOS devices that helps monitor and place restrictions on the amount of time spent on different applications per day.

Personally, I use the program in order to monitor the amount of time I spend on certain platforms, and I also place time limits on the total amount of time I spend on social media per day.

George Mason University’s article on Internet Addiction offers many solutions to social media dependency, such as setting time limits on internet use, developing other interests, and talking to a mental health counselor.

Students in the high school have demonstrated varying degrees of internet addiction, sophomore Bella Hilton said, and it is essential that students gain the self-control necessary to



NORDSKOV MEDIA/FLICKR.COM PHOTO

Online platforms such as TikTok are highly addictive, affecting the dopamine production of teens that use the app regularly.

individually address the issue.

Although social media addiction is prevalent among students in high school, teens are the ones that hold the power to address the issue amongst themselves and their peers, Hilton said.

“You’d think the most logical solution would be to ban social media, but it’s important for kids to learn how to regulate their internet use themselves,” she said. “I had to learn self-control in order to regulate my own internet

use, so now I know when to put down my phone when necessary.”

Teens must use programs such as Screen Time in order to place limitations on the amount of time they spend on addictive online platforms. If they don’t do so, their ability to effectively complete their school work and be productive overall will be compromised. They can do so by using programs in order to limit their screen time.

STAFF EDITORIAL

Lease of vans could address ongoing bus driver shortages

In light of recent difficulties finding reliable buses, the high school should lease two 15-passenger vans that could be driven by coaches and faculty to events for smaller athletic teams and academic groups.

The high school currently uses Salter Transportation, and due to the statewide bus driver shortage after the pandemic, issues with buses have become standard.

Operations administrative assistant Aaron Millman, who organizes the buses for the sports teams and general transportation, said his experience with Salter Transportation has been frustrating at times.

“We can confirm things a month in advance ... but sometimes it’s just not what we asked,” he said.

Millman said the buses might show up late, which also affects opposing teams.

Issues with transportation occur several times a week in athletics, and a few times this year, students on the general buses have been late to school due to a driver calling out sick, he said.

Science Team adviser Kristin Umile said that prior to the pandemic, her experience with Salter was positive.

She said Salter buses have been late multiple times and that they once reported a 4:30 p.m. pickup for an original pickup time of 2:30 p.m., at which point she called the bus off.

Debate and Math Team adviser Lauren Woodcock said the buses have been an hour or more late several times.

“We were in Westwood, Massachusetts for an extra three and a half hours ... I was concerned

about the possibility of a medical emergency of some sort,” she said.

Director of finance and operations Michelle Cresta said the possibility of getting vans has been on her mind recently.

“For situations [with small groups of students], these smaller vehicles would be ideal, and it really is a matter of just making sure our staff would be vetted and safe to drive those vehicles,” she said.



STELLA STRAUB PHOTO

Amid widespread bus driver shortages causing frequent transportation issues, the school should lease two 15-passenger vans to more reliably transport students to school and after-school activities.

Obtaining two 15-passenger vans would mitigate the issue of the statewide bus driver shortage because no special license is required to operate the vehicles, meaning coaches and faculty could drive them.

Athletic director Cameron Molinare said the school spent \$28,218 in fiscal year 2023 on transportation for small numbered athletic programs such as tennis, sailing, skiing, JV2 programs, and golf. This figure does

not even account for other school programs such as Math Team, Debate Team, and Drama Fest that use buses for small numbers of students.

Molinare said it costs approximately \$11,000 to lease a 15-passenger van for one year. Leasing two vans would cost at least \$6,000 less than what the school currently spends on small athletics programs alone, not including the expenses saved by other academic programs.

The change would cut down on maintenance costs, since the only additional expenses would be gas and insurance.

Molinare said reducing spending could help keep athletic participation fees down for families.

Leasing the vans would also help academic clubs reduce their spending on buses.

In order to keep student activities a priority and reduce liability issues, the school should lease two 15-passenger vans.

Legalization of psychedelic substances necessitates stronger framework than outlined in Ballot Question 4

By Stella Straub
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

While certain natural psychedelic substances have been shown to effectively treat mental health conditions, the plan proposed on Massachusetts Ballot Question 4 to legalize five psychedelic drugs did not include enough oversight to ensure user safety.

Had the proposed law passed, it would have allowed people over the age of 21 to grow, possess, and use psilocybin, DMT, psilocyn, mescaline, and ibogaine. These psychedelic substances are currently illegal both federally and statewide.

Passing Question 4 would have paved the way for the creation of therapy centers where residents could use certain



WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Although psychedelics like cubensis xalapa have health benefits, Massachusetts Ballot Question 4 lacked strong regulation of them.

psychedelic drugs under the supervision of trained medical professionals.

People over the age of 21 would also be able to grow the plants that contain these substances within their homes and share what they grow with other

tending a treatment center would likely push users, particularly those who are low income, to opt for unsupervised use.

“Given that the therapy centers will be expensive and may take years to open, most residents will likely opt for home use, bringing heightened risks to an already legally fraught issue,” The Editorial Board of The Tufts Daily wrote in the 2024 article “Editorial: Our guide to the Massachusetts ballot questions.”

While the proposed law bans people from selling their home-grown psychedelics, the high cost of legal treatment centers is likely to fuel an illicit market.

In Abby Patkin’s 2024 Boston.com article “Question 4: What to know about the proposal to legalize some psychedelics,” James Davis, co-founder of an advocacy group against Question 4, voiced his concerns about the affordability of the psychedelics.

“If the regulatory structure to

operate legally is that expensive, then it’s almost extra predatory against those who want to set up a legal facilitation center,” Davis said.

While the growing of these substances could lower the price, the cost is still high.

The use of psychedelic substances, particularly without medical oversight, can pose substantial harms.

According to the Center for State Policy Analysis at Tufts University’s “Voters’ Guide to 2024 Massachusetts Ballot Questions,” ibogaine can cause cardiac problems, DMT can have lasting neurological effects, and even lower-risk drugs like psilocybin and mescaline can trigger adverse reactions, particularly for people with pre-existing mental health conditions.

Any bill proposing legalization of psychedelic substances should include an outline for increased restrictions.

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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.

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Girls’ soccer falls in state tournament round of 16

Players improve connection to coach, teammates throughout regular season

By Isabelle Donnellan Valade
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

After ending their regular season with a record of 11-6-1, the girls’ soccer team earned the No. 9 seed in the MIAA Division IV tournament but fell to North-bridge High School in the round of 16.

“We are disappointed that we didn’t make it further but still proud of how far we came this season as a team,” senior captain Ella Arntsen said.

She said the team improved throughout the season.

“Everyone gained more confidence, and that [was] a huge turning point in our season. I also think by separating ourselves from the drama of the past seasons, we were really able

to focus on what’s important,” Arntsen said.

First-year coach Scout Grifoni said despite the intensity of a long season, the players were ready for the tournament.

“Everybody [was] inspired to take it game by game and try to have a good run in this tournament. Physically, we’ve had all season to prepare. So I feel like [we peaked] at the right time,” she said.

Grifoni said the captains did a great job welcoming her to the team.

“I’m a first-year coach, but I think that they’ve handled the transition well. There was a little bit of a learning curve, but everything that we went through helped guide us to the system that we have now. I’m really proud of them,” she said.

Senior captain Libby Lawler

‘Everyone gained more confidence, and that [was] a huge turning point in our season.’

-ELLA ARNTSEN



COURTESY OF ZAC CARVALHO

Girls’ soccer senior captain Madi Cook takes a goal kick during their game against Marblehead.

said after an adjustment period, the coach and players worked well together. Despite Grifoni’s busy schedule, Lawler said she’s able to play with them during practice and lead by example.

Lawler said freshman Ava Dickerson and junior Lily Oliver had a strong impact on the team.

“Lily is such a happy person. She’s always excited to be there, [and] Ava leads by example. She’s never in a bad mood, always on her toes, always really trying hard” she said.

Arntsen said senior captain Madi Cook also brought energy and spirit to the field.

The team worked together to create their values for the season, and Grifoni said she hopes to bring this with her in the future.

“In terms of the value system, ...having the team be a part of creating ours is a legacy that I want this team to realize they were a part of building” she said.

Boys’ soccer wins CAL, falls in round of 16

Seniors play well, boost players’ bond, improve team spirit

By Summer Demeo
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

After winning the Cape Ann League (CAL) championship for the first time since 2021, the boys’ soccer team was seeded No. 9 in the MIAA Division IV state tournament, where they fell to Northeast Metropolitan Regional Vocational Technical School in the round of 16, with a final record of 14-4-1.

Senior captain Sammy Bothwell said the team played well in its game against Northeast Metro Tech, even if it wasn’t the outcome they hoped for.

“We played hard, and sometimes I thought we were the better team, but sometimes the better team doesn’t always win,” he said.

Bothwell said he was happy with the team’s win in the first round of the playoffs against No. 24 seed Joseph Case.

“Winning our first playoff game was very fun because it was the first playoff game I’ve ever won for Manchester Essex,” he said.

Coach Robbie Bilsbury said the team practiced competitive drills and being physical to prepare for high-energy game days all season, especially leading up to the playoffs.

“Competing in those [drills] helped us throughout the whole season [to] play with intensity



COURTESY OF AVA FRITSCH

Sophomore Charlie Athanas competes for the ball during the boys’ soccer game against Ipswich, which the Hornets won 1-0.

and purpose and make each other better,” he said.

Senior captain Finn Birkeland said they had a good team environment, which helped improve the chemistry and style of play throughout the season.

“We all get along really well.

There’s a lot of inside jokes. It’s just a good environment, and I think that honestly help[ed] us play better,” he said.

Bilsbury said the seniors helped throughout the season to create a strong team bond and boost spirit.

“We all care about each other. We have tons of team dinners. Bus rides are fun and silly, and we all are playing hard for each other. When you see that energy field, it makes your heart sing ... [I’m] super proud of these seniors and the whole team,” he said.

Bilsbury said the team’s whole lineup was talented, but some of the most impactful players were Bothwell, who broke the school record for goals scored in a single season with 29 goals; Birkeland; senior captains Hayden Spencer, Charlie Langendorf, and Ali Erdoğan; and sophomore Imir Mustafa.

One of the team’s biggest strengths throughout their season was their ability to play together and distribute the ball to increase scoring opportunities, Bilsbury said.

“All over the field, we [were] just a really balanced, really, really talented team,” he said.

Football falls in round of 16

By Sam Heanue
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

After finishing the regular season with a record of 5-3, the Hornets football team looks forward to their Thanksgiving day game against Essex North Shore Agricultural and Technical School (ENSATS), senior captain Cian Brennock said.

Junior captain and quarterback Zac Hurd said the team hopes to establish a new rivalry against ENSATS to replace the long-running tradition of playing against the Georgetown Royals.

This tradition ended in 2023, when loss of interest led to the



COURTESY OF JARRETT CROFT

Manchester-Essex takes the field during the football team’s game against Amesbury on Nov. 1, which the Hornets lost 16-14.

end of Georgetown’s football program.

Hurd said the team is especially excited to play ENSATS, as it may revitalize an old rivalry between Manchester and Es-

sex Agricultural and Technical School (The Essex Aggies).

Essex Agricultural and Technical School, which merged with Danvers Technical School to become ENSATS, was Manches-

ter’s Thanksgiving day rival for over 50 years until 1969.

Head coach Joe Grimes said the Hornets are working to establish a strong relationship between the two programs.

“We want this to last a long time and be something the kids can look forward to every year,” he said.

Grimes said the rivalry between the Hornets and the Aggies was an important tradition for the town for many years.

“We played the Aggies every year, and the entire town would get involved. The paper would write about it, and there would be all sorts of activities around it,” he said.

Grimes and the team hope that students and families come out to support the team and enjoy an

old tradition.

“This was a big thing back when we used to play the Aggies and ... now that we’re playing [ENSATS], we hope we can make it as big as it used to be,” he said.

After qualifying for the playoffs as the No. 9 seed, the Hornets football team fell to No. 8 seed Gardner High School in the round of 16 in the Division VII state tournament on Friday, Nov. 8.

“We played a good game and it was a tough loss ... they scored a touchdown in the last minute and we ended up losing by one point,” he said.

During their non-playoff, consolation game against St. Mary’s High School on Nov. 14, Hornets lost 43-25.

Field hockey falls to Ipswich in state tournament upset

Wins CAL league title for third consecutive season

By August Capotosto
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

After qualifying for the state tournament as the No. 5 seed, the field hockey team fell to Ipswich High School, the No. 12 seed, in the Division IV quarterfinals on Wednesday, Nov. 6.

The team won their preliminary round game 6-0 against Sturgis Charter East on Friday, Nov. 1, securing a spot in the round of 16.

In their final match against

Ipswich, the team lost 1-0 after double-overtime in a shootout.

Senior captain Aisling Twombly said that despite the team’s confidence, they expected it to be a difficult game.

“At the end of the day, we played hard and there wasn’t really much else we could have done,” she said.

The team finished the regular season as Cape Ann Baker League champions for their third consecutive year, with an overall record of 15-2-2.

Coach Courtney Brown said the team ended their regular season with five consecutive shutouts. They beat Masconomet Regional 4-0, Rockport 6-0, Pentucket 1-0, Ipswich 1-0, and

Hamilton Wenham 4-0.

Brown said that to prepare for the tournament, the team participated in a joint practice hosted by Newburyport on Wednesday, Oct. 30, where the two teams completed drills, corner plays, overtime plays, and a scrimmage.

Newburyport won the CAL Kinney, another CAL division with larger enrollment schools, she said.

“We’re theoretically very similar teams, but there was a stark difference between ... the vibes of our practices, so much that [Newburyport was] really impressed with how well we work together in practice,” Brown said.

She said that the team will graduate six senior players after

the state tournament.

“There are huge shoes to fill across the board with all six of them, but ... it’s a great opportunity for the underclassmen to step up and learn from them as leaders,” Brown said.

Senior captain Brigid Carovillano said that despite having a younger team, many players who participated in past championships were incredibly excited to share that wonderful experience with their underclassmen teammates.

“[The team was] really excited to fill the footsteps of our past teams because we’ve consistently made it really far,” she said.

Twombly said that despite the conclusion of their season, the

relationships cultivated on the team remain important to the players.

“After our game [against Ipswich], we stayed on the field for close to a half hour debriefing about our season. There was a lot of talk about how this year was very different with the team being so close,” she said.

Twombly said that players have really helped each other grow as individuals and as a team throughout the regular season.

“There’s a lot of connection on the field that people feel is going to be missed; however, we have so much young talent on our team ... that it won’t be so hard of a transition,” she said.

Competition cheer team earns multiple podium placements

Wins CAL league championship for first time in 20 years

By Hannah Davis
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

After the cheer team found success in two competitions this season, head coach Casey Economo said she is proud of the hard work the team has put into their routine.

The team traveled to Shepherd Hill Regional High School on Oct. 27 to compete at the HILLoween Cheer Invitational

competition, finishing second out of five teams.

On Nov. 3, the team traveled to Austin Preparatory School to compete in the Austin Prep Cheer Invitational, finishing third out of five teams.

On Nov. 7, the team competed in the Cape Ann League meet and earned first place, qualifying them for the MSA North Regional Championship on Nov. 17 at Billerica High School.

Senior captain Elena Gangemi said the team’s success comes from their mindset while competing.

“I feel like we just have to be in a good mentality for the

competition ... have a positive outlook and ... focus on what we have to do,” she said.

Senior captain Maria Rising said she is excited the team placed at both competitions, something the program hasn’t accomplished in several years.

“I was really proud of our team for getting second place. It was really cool that our group of girls got to experience that,” Rising said.

Senior captain Audrey Smith said sophomore Chloe Psalidas was crucial to the team’s success at both competitions.

“She’s our only flier; she did everything so well. I think that

she works very well under pressure,” Smith said.

Rising also said she is proud of Psalidas’s ability to work well under pressure.

“She twisted out of all of her stunts. So instead of just falling straight down, she rotated her body, and she was really nervous to do that, so I’m proud of her for sticking with it,” Rising said.

Smith said she is proud of the team working together and relying on each other to achieve their goals at both competitions.

“We all have to be doing the same things at the same time, and I just think we all worked together and got it done,” Smith

said.

Economo said the team has been working hard all season to perfect their routine for the competitions.

“They’ve been hitting their routine prior to this. We’ve put in a lot of work this year with practicing full out sooner ... towards the middle of October,” she said.

Gangemi said she is proud of the hard work the team has put in to be successful at both competitions.

“We did so well, and a lot of the girls hadn’t competed before, and they all went out and didn’t let their nerves affect them,” Gangemi said.

Golf team sends individuals to MIAA state tournament

By Sabine Cooper
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

After finishing their regular season with a 12-2 record, the golf team tied for 5th place in the Division III state tournament, head coach Bill Melvin said.

The team finished in the top 3 at the Sectionals meet at the Stow Acres Country Club, allowing them to qualify for the state tournament for the first time in over a decade, he said.

“We had an excellent showing for the Hornets, and I’m pleased we qualified after so many years

of just missing it,” Melvin said.

He said several players had standout performances at the state tournament, such as junior captain Gray West, who tied for fifth, and junior Matt DeOreo, who tied for eighth.

West said the team struggled slightly in the tournament because of the unfamiliar terrain.

“We all kind of struggled because we had never really played 18 holes before as a team,” he said.

Junior captain Jack McCavanagh said the team plays points instead of holes during the regu-

lar season, which is a different system.

In the point system, the number of points received is based on the number of strokes taken to finish the hole compared to the par of that hole. The par is the average number of strokes to complete the hole.

Team performances are based on the five lowest score earned, McCavanagh said.

In the traditional 18-hole system, the players must stay consistent throughout all 18 holes, which can be challenging, he said.

Despite this, West said the team played well and persevered through the difficult and unfamiliar course.

Going into championship

season before the tournament, Melvin said he had high expectations for the team, which they exceeded.

“We wanted to qualify for the tournament, which we did, and win the CAL championship, which we came just short of,” he said.

The only matches that the team lost were to North Reading and Hamilton-Wenham, both of whom they later beat in Sectionals, Melvin said.

Melvin said he attributes much of the team’s success to West and McCavanagh.

“I couldn’t have asked for two better captains who were always positive and kept the team’s spirit high,” he said.

McCavanagh said the team

members had strong personalities that worked well throughout the season, which helped them to succeed when matches got difficult.

He said seniors Matt Graeter and Jack Lawler were the strong glue that held the team together throughout the season.

“Being older kids on a younger team, they brought great personalities to the team and were funny guys,” McCavanagh said.

Looking to next year, McCavanagh said he hopes that the team will win the CAL championship.

“Everyone did a good job maintaining mental toughness, and that will help us do even better next season,” he said.

XC teams run Divisional race

By Charlie Baker
INDEPENDENT STAFF

Both the boys and girls’ cross-country teams ended their season at the Divisional meet on Nov. 9 in Devens, Massachusetts, with the boys’ finishing 10 of 26 and the girls’ finishing 11 of 24, coach Steve Whitley said.

The boys’ team finished the regular season with a 1-4 record, losing two races by only one

point. The girls’ team finished with a record of 3-2, earning third place in the Cape Ann League (CAL).

The Divisional meet is broken up into three waves, and he said the teams would have had to finish in the top seven of their wave or earn one of three wild card spots to move on. Wild card spots are given to the fastest of the eighth and ninth place teams across all three waves.

Whitley said he was proud of the team’s performance in Divisionals.

“It was a tough race, and all the kids on both teams ran well.

You always hope to beat your seed at a big meet like that, and both teams met theirs,” he said.

No athletes advanced individually by finishing in the top 10 among runners whose teams failed to qualify, Whitley said.

Senior captain Sabine Cooper said the team was coming off a very successful CAL meet in Wrentham.

“There were a lot of [personal records], there was a lot of motivation and determination, and the team was very focused,” she said.

At the CAL meet, senior captain Henry Stevens said he

finished in the top 15, qualifying to be a league All-Star.

“Through that race he really worked at picking people off. At the two-mile mark, he was still in 20th, and he was able to move up to 12th place. It was a goal he had, and he had to work hard at it, but he made it in the end,” Whitley said.

He said the top male runners are Stevens, Rockport junior Lyall Cunningham, and freshman Isaiah Nicaastro. For the girls’ team, he named Cooper, senior captain Whitney Turner, junior River Silva, and freshman Kalin Bennett.

Whitley added that Rockport senior Henry Chadbourne, who has been injured for most of the season, has still been at every meet and contributed to the team spirit.

Stevens said he was happy with how the season went, and how younger athletes grew into stronger and more confident runners.

“I feel like it was a super successful season. We had a ton of freshmen this year, and they all really came into their own over the course of the season. Watching them improve has been really special,” he said.

Middle, high school students perform ‘Shrek’

Increased participation creates excitement

By Sam Heanue
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

In a departure from recent productions, the Drama Club included middle schoolers in their performance of “Shrek: the Musical,” emphasizing self expression and love, said senior Josh Cohen, who played Shrek. He said the extension of the musical to middle schoolers is encouraging for older students who want the Drama Club to have a strong future. “It’s really something special to see them developing their love for theater. It reminds me of how I was when I first got into the theater department,” Cohen said. The production also included surprise faculty cameos as the sun, moon, the cow that jumped over the moon, and the dish that ran away with the spoon. The musical’s plot follows the

ogre Shrek, as he reclaims his swamp, which has been over-run by fantasy creatures, who moved to the swamp after being evicted from their homes by Lord Farquaad (eighth-grader Thomas Chrzanowski), who condemns them for being different. He falls in love with the Princess Fiona (sophomore Cate Vendt), who possesses quirks of her own. Senior Alessia Omari, who played Shrek’s sidekick, Donkey, said the show’s positive message encouraged performers. “The big idea of the play, let your freak flag fly, is a really good message, especially since it applies to all the kids at this time in their life,” she said. She said the musical’s message spoke to younger members. “Theater attracts a lot of different kinds of people, and for some of them, it can be a safe space ... So it meant a lot that the play’s message was so relevant and supportive,” Omari said. Cohen said senior stage manager Charlotte Donnellan Valade and senior lighting designer Nick



SAM HEANUE PHOTO

Seniors Alessia Omari and Josh Cohen perform in the Drama Club’s production of ‘Shrek.’ The production included both middle and high schoolers, many of whom had never acted before.

Haley were essential in the musical’s success. “This was definitely the most ambitious play we’ve ever done. We used fog machines and air compressors so Nick and Charlotte were a huge help,” he said. The extension of the play to middle schoolers led to an increase in participation, director Tyler Garofalo said. “In the past we’ve been limited due to our small cast size. Now we not only have the numbers, but the cast and crew members created such a great bond across the grade levels,” Garofalo said.

Music Honors Society hosts Halloween-themed trivia night, plans fundraising events for future

Lower turnout than expected caused by timing of event

By Annie Pinkin
INDEPENDENT STAFF

After the success of last year’s trivia night, Music Honors Society (MHS) hosted a similar Halloween-themed event on Oct. 30. MHS wanted to replicate the triumph of trivia night while widening the scope of who could participate, senior treasurer Josh Cohen said. The previous trivia night was music-themed, but having Halloween-related questions this time made the trivia more accessible for both musical and non-musical participants, he said.

There were three rounds of trivia: movies, songs, and history, with questions created by Cohen and sophomore public relations officer Cate Vendt. At the end of the night, the Chrzanowski family prevailed, MHS adviser Ben Icenogle said. Cohen said the attendance was disappointing to MHS members. The nine contestants were all family members of MHS students. “It’s a little disheartening to see the disdain and negligence that the school community still treats the performing arts department [with] even with everything we’ve tried to do with MHS and beyond,” he said. Students said the timing and lack of promotion contributed to the event’s low turnout. “I didn’t know about it until

right now,” sophomore Will Athanas said. Junior Sydney Hemme said she, like many students, was too busy finishing assignments for the end of the quarter, which was two days after trivia night. “I would’ve gone if it wasn’t so close to the end of the quarter,” she said. Seniors were also finishing early applications for college, which were due Nov. 1. To improve fundraiser attendance in the future, the club plans to announce events a week or two in advance through morning announcements, social media, and posters, Vendt said. MHS has been ramping up their fundraising efforts to help offset the cost of the performing arts department’s trip to Montreal, Canada, in May, Cohen said.



COURTESY OF CAROLINE CHRZANOWSKI

The Music Honors Society hosted a Halloween trivia night to raise money for the club’s upcoming trip to Montreal, Canada.

Last year, they went to New York City, and as they travel even farther this year, they hope to raise as much money as possible, he said. “It’s just a nice way to celebrate the music department at the end of the year,” Cohen said. Additionally, MHS plans to release new merchandise featuring artwork by their members. “When the merch comes out, we’ll be able to sell prints and clothing with the art that was designed by students in the music department,” Cohen said.

Students collaborate to create postcards

By Alessia Omari
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Photography II students have created postcards of the school for teachers to sign and send home to students’ families, photography teacher Andrew Lucas said. Dean of Students Elisabeth Drinkwater said the project was created with hopes that it will be student-oriented and creative. “We’ll be able to showcase student work, as well as allow staff members to write positive notes to students,” she said. The project was a collabora-



COURTESY OF BIANCA TORRI

Sophomore Bianca Torri took a photo of the school for a project involving students in Photography II and Graphic Design classes.

tive effort between students in both Photography II and Graphic Design, Lucas said. “The photo students took photos, and then the Graphic Design students added logos that they found on the Internet for the school as well,” he said. The project allowed students to experiment with the medium

of photography, sophomore Bianca Torri said. “We experimented with the different settings on our cameras, and we made sure to include many colors and visual details in our photos,” she said. The main goal of the project was to communicate with families and display student work, Lucas said. “We want to show families what we’re creating in the visual arts,” he said. Torri said that the photo she took of the school building is one of the photos Principal Julie Sgroi chose over other photos submitted by students in her class. Drinkwater said she was inspired by a similar project that was implemented at another school she worked at, and she hopes that the project will promote positivity. “Every school meeting, the principal would hand ‘good news’ cards that we could send to students,” she said. “We want another way to communicate all the positive things that are happening.” Sophomore Bella Hilton said she is fond of the idea of sending cards with nice messages to students. “I think it’s a super nice thing for teachers to do,” she said. “I think it’s a creative way to receive positive feedback from teachers.” The project acted as a way to implement photography skills that had been learned throughout the year, Torri said. “It demonstrated the pillars of photography: aperture, shutter, speed and iso. We have been working with these skills in class,” she said.

Atomic Cafe’s pleasant seasonal drinks boost impressive menu

Store offers large selection of refreshments

By Gwendolyn Berger
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Nestled in the core of downtown Beverly, the Atomic Cafe is a delightful shop. Located at 268 Cabot St., Atomic Cafe was founded in 1996 and has since expanded to include multiple locations around the North Shore, its website said. At first, the Beverly store appears relatively small due to the cramped nature of Cabot Street. Upon entrance, however, the customer glimpses a spacious area lined with booths and tables. The register and kitchen are located in the cafe’s center, with

tables surrounding the section on three sides. While odd at first glance, this layout grants customers more privacy to study, complete work, and chat with friends. The store offers a wide variety of menu items, from hot sandwiches to frozen lattes. The sandwiches are reasonably priced, ranging between \$7.50 and \$12. A particularly delicious item is the Grilled Cheese on ciabatta bread; the rich melted cheese is perfectly complemented by the crispy bread, which crackles satisfyingly in a customer’s ear. If a consumer is looking for a meatier option, they have plenty of choices. They can enjoy a classic Bacon, Egg, and Cheese sandwich or the exciting Quirky Turkey. The cafe also has a delectable selection of healthy bowls to order, like the Gyro or Southwest bowl.

The store offers a wide variety of menu items, from hot sandwiches to frozen lattes.

In terms of drinks, the store sells coffee, tea, chai, matcha, and refreshers. The cafe also sells seasonal drinks, which are currently an apple cider, a pumpkin chai, and a pumpkin latte. These drinks are a fun twist to the menu and encourage seasonal cheer. Unlike the food, the drinks are overpriced, varying from \$4 to \$8. While the Mocha Chai is extraordinarily delicious, \$7 is an unreasonable price. For those craving a sweet baked good, the cafe has an impressive selection. Although the sweets vary day-to-day, customers can consistently expect a chocolate croissant or a donut to be present on the dessert display menu. While the store lacks visual decorations, a customer can stroll into the connecting bookstore if they find themselves searching for amusement. After receiving their order, the consumer can find a cozy place to sit -- which may be difficult as the store is often crowded -- or enjoy a stroll down Cabot Street.



GWENDOLYN BERGER PHOTO

Seasonal drinks, such as pumpkin chais and pumpkin lattes, encourage seasonal cheer at Atomic Cafe in downtown Beverly.

New animated film displays theme of love

By Whitney Turner
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Although intended for elementary-aged children, director Chris Sanders’ 2024 animated film “The Wild Robot” conveys important messages about love, growth, and loss that are relevant and meaningful to older viewers. “The Wild Robot” was produced by DreamWorks Animation and distributed by Universal Pictures. According to DreamWorks, the film was adapted from best-selling author Peter Brown’s 2016 novel with the same title. The film stars Lupita Nyong’o as Roz, a futuristic robot who is shipwrecked on an island inhabited only by wildlife. The film



DREAMWORKS.COM

“The Wild Robot” follows the journey of Roz (Lupita Nyong’o), a futuristic robot shipwrecked on an island inhabited by wildlife. follows her journey as she learns to communicate with the animals of the island and takes on the role of mother to an orphaned baby gosling called Brightbill (Kit Connor). With the help of an initially stubborn and mischievous fox, Fink (Pedro Pascal), Roz raises Brightbill, teaching him to fly and swim so that he will be ready for his first winter migration.

Roz’s newfound family with Fink and Brightbill teaches her how to speak the most important language: love. She overrides her programming, which allows her to form meaningful relationships and feel emotions past the capacity of a typical robot. Despite the film’s heartwarming depiction of a chosen family, it takes a tragic turn when Roz and Fink are forced to say a tearful goodbye to Brightbill as he leaves on his migration south. The remainder of the film is heartbreaking, as Roz must grapple with Brightbill’s departure, an extremely chilling winter on the island, her aging robotic body, and attempts by her manufacturer to recall her. The film offers a glimpse into

the life of a nontraditional family bound together not by biology but by love and dedication to one another. It touches on identity as Brightbill must navigate his differences from other geese, who are not accepting of him because of his family. “The Wild Robot” is a poignant film, likely to leave viewers misty-eyed in their theater seats. Its animation is colorful and soothing; its scenes meld glowing technology with nature undisturbed by humans. For younger audiences, some of the deeper themes of the film may be missed. But for viewers of all ages, “The Wild Robot” is a worthwhile watch, sure to tug on their heartstrings and teach them important lessons about love and loss.

‘The Wild Robot’ conveys important messages about love, growth, and loss.

New season of ‘Heartstopper’ displays authentic, honest teenage experience of young romance, self acceptance

By Isabelle Donnellan Valade
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Starring Joe Locke and Kit Conner as young love interests Charlie Spring and Nick Nelson, Season 3 of “Heartstopper” continues to captivate audiences with its honest and heartfelt storytelling. Alice Oseman, the author of the “Heartstopper” graphic novel, wrote the adaptation. The show was directed by Andy Newbery and released on Oct. 3. The season delves deeper into the relationship between Charlie and Nick, exploring how they face external pressures from school and family, as well as internal struggles, such as their

mental health. Locke and Conner’s acting is emotional and compelling, portraying the complexities of teenage love and LGBTQIA+ experiences in authentic ways. While focused on Charlie and Nick’s love story, this season extends the attention to the supporting characters’ individual stories, shedding light on the relationships and friendships between Elle (Yasmin Finney), Tao (William Gao), Imogen (Rhea Norwood), Isaac (Tobie Donovan), Tara (Corinna Brown), and Darcy (Kizzy Edgell). These characters show different experiences of self-discovery and personal development, allowing the plot to be as much about

finding oneself as it is about falling in love. Season 3 is not ashamed to explore serious themes, such as eating disorders, self-harm, and the struggles of being an openly LGBTQIA+ teenager. The series also displays the effect mental health can have on a family, with Charlie’s sister, Tori (Jenny Walser), demonstrating what it feels like to be a sibling of a person struggling with mental health. Despite the intensity of these topics, Oseman and Newbery balance these discussions with warm and hopeful moments, allowing the show to remain uplifting. This duality leads the show to resonate with several different age groups.



NETFLIX.COM

Season 3 of “Heartstopper” supports ongoing conversations about the importance of inclusive storytelling and queer representation. The impact of “Heartstopper” is undeniable, continuing to contribute much-needed representation in mainstream media. The show’s success has supported ongoing conversation about the importance of inclusive storytelling, with its diverse representation of queer identities. The fourth season has not been given a release date but is rumored to be released soon after Oseman releases the sixth and final book in the series. The third season of “Heartstopper” is a must-watch for its authentic depiction of love, friendship, and self-acceptance.