

# the INDEPENDENT

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## Students, teachers excited for return to school, more social interaction

Community anticipates a more normal in-person experience

By Emma Ketchum  
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

A large majority of the students returned to the building for in-person learning on April 12, Principal Patricia Puglisi said.

The School Committee voted to change the social distancing requirements in each classroom from six feet to four feet, so now there can be 26 students per classroom instead of 13, Puglisi said. This rule change made it possible for the elimination of cohorts, so everyone can go into school for the full week, with no remote days.

So far, 313 students have decided to go back, while 88 students in grades 9-11 are stay-

ing remote, and 61 seniors will remain remote or are done with academic work, Puglisi said.

Puglisi said if a student decides to go back to school, they are not allowed to switch back to remote, but a remote student is allowed to return at any time as long as they give two weeks' notice before they go back.

Cleaning procedures will be the same as they were for hybrid learning. The classrooms will be deep cleaned every night, and the bathrooms will be cleaned every few hours, while students and teachers wipe down surfaces after every class and lunch, Puglisi

**'I am really looking forward to getting to know kids and their personalities better.'**

- CAROLINE EPP

said.

Most of the teachers will be fully vaccinated when the students return; about 85 percent of staff members in the district have already gotten their first or second vaccination, Puglisi said.

Photography teacher Caroline



EMMA KETCHUM PHOTO

Students in AP Photography work on their portfolios on the first in-person school day. Photography teacher Caroline Epp said she is eager to see her students face to face again.

Epp said this will make the transition more comfortable for the teachers.

Epp said she is pleasantly surprised to see a large number of students going back and thinks it will feel a lot more normal, mak-

ing it easier to have conversations and interactions with the students.

"I am really looking forward to getting to know kids and their personalities better, which is easier to do in person than over Zoom," she said.

Epp said she has informed her students that she wants them to let her know if they feel she is distracted by the students in the classroom and is not giving the

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## Seniors choose colleges, give advice about application process

By Madeline Lai  
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

As the college admissions process winds down, seniors are reflecting on their individual application process and committing to colleges.

Senior Stephanie Pratt, who will be playing tennis at Hamilton College in Clinton, N.Y., said applying to college during the pandemic was difficult because of the lack of in-person campus tours, but she was able to narrow down her choices and choose the best fit for her academically and athletically.

She said she would recommend finishing applications soon-



COURTESY OF CHARLIE GENDRON

Senior Charlie Gendron said he committed to Penn State University, where he will major in professional golf management.

er rather than later.

"My biggest piece of advice to students applying to college next year is to start the common application and essay over the summer. I did this, and it took a lot of stress off my shoulders in the fall because I did not have to juggle writing my essay with my classes," she said.

Senior Lilly Coote, who will be studying internationally at Queen's University in Ontario, Canada, said her college process was overwhelm-

**'My biggest piece of advice to students applying to college next year is to start the common application and essay over the summer.'**

- STEPHANIE PRATT

ing at first.

"I would highly recommend not putting a ton of pressure on this decision. I remember hearing a friend of mine say, 'I'm just going to apply to some schools, pick the one I like the most, and if I hate it, I can just transfer.' It was the first person I saw be so nonchalant about the college application process," she said.

Coote said once she adopted a similar mentality about her applications, she felt less stressed. She said she is excited to live in Canada and experience school in another country.

"I am already starting to learn

SENIOR COLLEGE PLANS, page 2

## Seniors adapt to SCORE changes

Students find safe, engaging internships amid pandemic

By Izzy DiPasquale  
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Seniors have adapted their SCORE projects to work with program changes and challenges created by the pandemic.

Spanish teacher and SCORE adviser Margaret Kane said that even before COVID, the program changed to no longer require research projects and instead to promote real-world experience.

Kane said that while students have limited means of getting internships with organizations due to the pandemic, the process of finding opportunities teaches students valuable skills.

"Some students have had to change where they are seeking their internship, but that is a great life experience because if you are at a dead end, you look for another way," she said.

Senior Bonnie Gerhardt said she will be doing her SCORE project with athletic trainer Stephen Sablack, which she has been planning to do since last year.

"I had seen some seniors working with the athletic trainer my freshman year, so when Stephen started at the beginning of our ju-

nior year, I remember talking to him about it almost immediately because I knew that I was interested in sports medicine and rehabilitation," she said.

She said she will be shadowing Salblack as he works with athletes, attending games, and learning about some of the qualifications of becoming an athletic trainer.

Gerhardt said that while the pandemic did not affect her ability to do her project with the athletic trainer, the challenges that COVID has created have made her more grateful for the position.

"I have wanted to work with the athletic trainer since before COVID was even a thing, but I do think that I leaned even more towards doing my project with him because it would be an opportunity to still have an in person internship," she said.

Kane said that there have been many students who have taken the initiative to create their own SCORE projects.

Senior Emma Francoeur said she decided to create a podcast addressing inequalities in the world today, such as gender, immigration, and race.

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# DECA students compete in second stage of competition

## Junior elected state officer through Instagram, Zoom

By Carson Komishane  
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

DECA students competed in the second round of the competition season, the State Career Development Conference (SCDC) in order to obtain a spot at Internationals, which occurs in April. DECA chapter officer Lynn Benali, a junior, was elected for state officer.

All of the students who participated in this competition previously won at the district level, DECA adviser Dean Martino said.

"These awards are hard earned. Students spend hours upon hours preparing and practicing for these events. I am proud of all of our competitors," he said.

Martino said that for this particular competition, students had to complete a 100 question exam in 60 minutes, followed by two business case role-plays, where scenarios were presented to them that they had to solve. If a stu-

dent's score was high enough, their second role-play video was scored by a judge, and the top six scores qualified for Internationals.

DECA chapter officer, Aidan Cunningham, a junior, placed first in his category and qualified for the international competition in April, Martino said.

"It was difficult managing school work while simultaneously preparing for competition because in order to do well, you need to learn about your instructional area and take multiple

practice tests so that you are familiar with the questions and the material," Cunningham said.

He said he competed in the personal financial literacy event, which was challenging because the material in the event is not covered in any classes offered at the school.

"I spent a lot of time learn-

ing the material on my own using the internet and books. It was difficult, but I enjoy both school and DECA, and this has greatly improved my time management skills," Cunningham said.

Benali said she simultaneously prepared for this competition as well as campaigned for state officer.

"My two main goals I presented were to create an app that allowed communication between different Massachusetts chapters, as

well as to redesign the website that is already available," Benali said.

The state officer campaign was virtual and included a campaign over Instagram and Zoom, where candidates created posts and live videos in order to present their key ideas and plans to the voters, she said.

**'These awards are hard earned. Students spend hours preparing and practicing...I am proud of all of our competitors.'**

-DEAN MARTINO



COURTESY OF LYNN BENALI

Junior Lynn Benali campaigned for DECA state officer on Instagram. She created posts with her catchphrase "win with Lynn" in order to entice voters to support her campaign.

"I found it difficult to campaign over Instagram because it was challenging to reach all the voters, especially when many of them did not know who I was," Benali said.

Martino said he thinks that Benali ran a masterful campaign ex-

ecuting engaging communication strategies.

"I am proud of her and the ethical campaign she ran. Lynn will make a great DECA state officer, and our Manchester and Essex communities should be proud of her accomplishment," he said.

## Work recommences on Vision of the Graduate

By Olivia Turner  
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

After COVID-19 interrupted the academic year in the spring of 2020, the district was forced to postpone work on the Vision of the Graduate, but school administrators and community members are beginning to plan again.

"We developed a vision of the graduate, which talks about the skill and dispositions we believe students should have upon graduating from Manchester Essex Regional Schools," Principal Patricia Puglisi said.

She said the document has become a cornerstone for the dis-

trict's strategic planning, which outlines how the district and its schools will operate.

Puglisi said the Strategic Planning Steering Committee is led by the superintendent and involves School Committee members, the middle and high school principals, and a parent and a teacher from each school in the district.

She said the committee meets weekly to discuss ways to involve the community in the planning process.

The committee has begun to work on overarching themes and is currently formulating a survey that will be given to students, parents, and community members.

The survey will "ask questions about how they feel about the schools, how they feel about each aspect of the vision of the graduate, and how schools are meeting students' needs toward accomplishing that," Puglisi said.



INDEPENDENT ARCHIVE PHOTO

The new ideas for Vision of the Graduate, a document with skills and dispositions students should have when they graduate, are being used to help the district plan goals for each school.

She said "World Cafés" will be held during the week of April 27, which will offer opportunities for community members and parents to discuss opinions about the future of the Vision of the Graduate.

Subsequently, the School Committee and the Strategic Planning Steering Committee will meet to develop the details of the strategic

plan, Puglisi said.

Senior Abby Conway said she thinks independence and critical thinking are valuable skills for students to graduate with.

"I think kids need to work on becoming independent... [and] thinking for themselves... They'll grow through their learning of independence," she said.

According to the 2021 MERSD Vision of the Graduate and Strategic Planning document, "MERSD, in partnership with its communities, will provide 21st Century educational opportunities and resources so that all students can achieve academic excellence, realize their highest potential, and succeed as responsible citizens in a global society."

Puglisi said each school within the district will develop goals within the overarching district goals. The strategic planning cycle lasts 10 years, and goals are revisited every other year, she said.

"I look at this process as a really valuable opportunity for the schools to really take a look at teaching and learning and to really think about what is important for students in this ever-changing climate that we live in now," Puglisi said.

## CONTINUATIONS

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students on Zoom the same attention.

History teacher Lauren DuBois also said she is looking forward to the students' return and thinks it will be a great way to increase the energy level in classrooms.

"As long as people feel safe, follow the rules, and are mindful, it should be a good transition," she said.

Juniors Emmet Sheahan and Kellan Heney said they are both excited to go back to see people they have not seen since the start of quarantine and to have more social interactions throughout the day.

Sheahan said he is most looking forward to showcasing his new sense of style to his peers, which he has not been able to do over Zoom.

Heney said he expects it will

take some time to adjust to such a new schedule but is looking forward to the transition.

Puglisi said in the fall there will be no remote option, and everyone will be back in-person. There will be an option to continue remote learning under a free program from the state, but that would mean having to unenroll from Manchester-Essex to enroll in that online school.

"It's important to get back to school this year, so we're ready for the fall," she said.

**SENIOR COLLEGE PLANS** about the geography, government system, different currency, and speaking in French. It's going to be a bit of a challenge, but I'm looking forward to it," she said.

Senior Pieter Breuker, who will be playing tennis for Bowdoin College in Brunswick, Maine, said he prioritized a school with a balance between strong athletics and academics.

"I had to weigh the importance of academics versus tennis to find which would make me the happiest during and after college. I came to the conclusion that it is very important for me to have a strong and competitive tennis environment," he said.

Senior Sylvie Oldeman, who will be attending Barnard College in New York City, N.Y., said she applied Early Decision and was accepted in December, leaving her with a completed application process early on.

Writing proficient supplemental essays on applications is important, she said.

"Try not to write about what you think a college wants to hear because thousands of students will do that, and you want to stand out. You will have your best chance at getting in if you talk about your genuine interests and experiences," Oldeman said.

Senior Charlie Gendron, who

committed to Penn State University, said when applying, he looked for a school with his specific major of professional golf management that also has a strong school spirit.

"Both current students and alumni of the university still bleed blue and white, and it is exciting to know that I will be a part of that community and network," he said.

Applying to college early and hearing back sooner, Gendron said, was the best decision he made during his application process.

"Apply early action if you can. While it may seem really annoying to be working on applications over the summer and early fall, it definitely pays off when you hear from your schools in the January time frame," he said.

### SCORE

She said that the purpose of her podcast is not to try to persuade

people with her own opinion but to educate them.

"I have to be careful on what I say because a lot of these topics are relatively controversial, so instead of giving my own opinion about topics, I decided to provide more facts," Francoeur said.

Francoeur said that she plans on focusing on a different topic for each of the five weeks of SCORE.

She said that COVID did have an effect on her choice for a SCORE project, but she feels that her topic is very relevant during this time.

"I thought that it would be hard to get an in person internship, so I decided to create something where I can work with my own schedule. Also, I feel like especially during these past few months these issues are all we see on the news, so I want to do everything I can do to educate people on these subjects," she said.



# Class officers plan COVID-safe Senior Week activities, prom

Senior class organizes plans for graduation week

By Eli Heanue  
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

This year, the prom will be held at Castle Hill in Ipswich and will be open only to seniors from the high school.

At this point, senior class adviser Phyllis Musco said the event will be limited to 150 people, which includes students and chaperones.

“We have to follow the state guidelines, so that means it’s a senior prom. We had discussed having guests from other schools, but that depends on how many tickets we sell, and then there’s the issue of mixing people from different towns,” she said.

Because of the pandemic, Musco there have been changes made to the prom to accommodate for the state guidelines.

“We have to have more buses to space people out, and while



DJMCRENN/COMMONS.WIKEMEDIA.ORG

**This year, the senior prom will take place outside of the Crane Estate in Ipswich and will be limited to 150 people.**

we’re at the prom, everything will be outside under a tent. The dancing will be outside, bathrooms will be inside, and masks have to be worn at all times, unless the person is eating,” she said.

Musco said the event will be catered by Fireside Catering,

who provide food for all events at Castle Hill.

“Dinner will be under the tent, and it will be a buffet style pasta bar. Dessert will be a Kane’s Donuts table, and there’s a popcorn bar also,” she said.

To fund for the prom and Senior Week, Musco said that

parents helped raise money during the pandemic.

“COVID kept us from fundraising, so a bunch of parents got together and coordinated to donate money because we couldn’t hold the auction we normally would at the end of junior year,” she said.

Senior vice president Emerson Khale said the class officers are planning activities other than the prom for the end of senior year.

“Right now, some of the money we’ve raised is going towards the senior day on April 9. The

week of graduation, we are going to have a Senior Week. We are still figuring out what activities we’ll have on the first couple of days, but we know we’ll have the Baccalaureate speech the day before graduation, and we are

going to do a car parade on the Wednesday before graduation,” he said.

Senior treasurer Emma Francoeur said the class officers have a general idea of how to get seniors together for the end of the school year.

“Right now, we’re thinking about having a senior beach day on June 1, the Tuesday before graduation, where seniors can hang out and have fun.”

Francoeur said it is important for the officers to give seniors a chance to come together and get back some of what they missed during the pandemic.

“We didn’t get a pep rally, and we haven’t had a normal senior year, but things are finally starting to look up now. We are actually going to have a prom and a real graduation, and it is exciting,” she said.

**‘Things are finally starting to look up now. We are actually going to have a prom and a real graduation, and it is exciting.’**

- EMMA FRANCEOUR

## Community memorializes former English teacher with stone bench

By Olivia Turner  
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Former English teacher Gloria Tanner’s colleagues and students arranged for a bench to be installed in the school orchard in her memory.

English teacher Mary Buckley-Harmon, who collected donations for the bench, said the school community wanted to honor her after her death in October of 2020.

“When she passed, we weren’t able to recognize her or have any kind of memorial, so we were talking about what we could do to memorialize her,” she said.

She said the 42-inch granite kidney-shaped bench will be inscribed with the words “In Memory of Gloria Tanner” and will be surrounded by plantings.

“She loved being outdoors, so we thought it would be a great idea to create a place where fac-

**‘Students truly had really, really fond... memories of her and her interactions and how kind she was. I think this is a great testament to who she was.’**

- KEITH GRAY

ulty and students could enjoy nature and just relax,” Buckley-Harmon said.

Because the bench will be located in the orchard, the memorial is a collaboration with the Green Team, led by science teacher Keith Gray, she said.

There will be gravel underneath the bench and a perennial garden nestled behind it on the



COURTESY OF CAROLINE EPP

**A stone bench in the orchard will be dedicated to former English teacher Gloria Tanner, who passed away in October 2020.**

hill, Gray said.

He said the Green Team will care for the plantings around the bench.

Buckley-Harmon said after the School Committee approved the project, she sent an email to the district staff and, within 24 hours, collected enough money to purchase the bench.

In the two weeks after the

bench was approved, enough extra funds were donated to purchase landscaping material and plants for the site, she said.

Buckley-Harmon said Tanner’s former students heard about the project and put it on social media.

“I was so touched that these former students...found out about it and got the word out,”

she said.

The Cressey family, which owns a greenhouse in Rowley, Mass., offered to donate plants for the memorial.

Buckley-Harmon said the site will be prepared in late spring after the ground has thawed, and the memorial will likely be finished in early June.

“I’m just really excited to have this spot to remember her. I know I’ll be down there a lot,” she said.

Gray said he thinks the memorial is a wonderful idea because Tanner taught for a long time and impacted many people.

“Students truly had really, really fond...memories of her and her interactions and how kind she was. I think this is a great testament to who she was,” he said.

In addition to the memorial bench, Tanner’s family has set up a scholarship in her name. The Gloria Márquez-Sterling Tanner Scholarship will be awarded to a graduating senior of \$1000 annually.

## Literary Cape Ann holds virtual panel for young writers

By Caroline MacKinnon  
INDEPENDENT STAFF

Continuing community literary discussions during the pandemic virtually, Literary Cape Ann is inviting young writers to join the next panel, “Nurture Young Writers! Why it Matters and How to Help,” through Zoom.

Literary Cape Ann is a non-profit organization that commemorates the Toad Hall bookstore in Rockport, which closed in 2017. According to Literary Cape Ann, they provide Cape Ann with information and events that support and reinforce the importance and value of literary arts.

Literary Cape Ann holds panels annually on different literary

topics around Cape Ann.

This year the panel will be held virtually, said senior panelist Oli Turner and head of the Teen Writers’ Club at the Manchester Public Library.

“The topic of this next panel is young writers and resources that can be provided for young writers,” Turner said.

The panel is made up of a variety of writers, including middle and high school aged students, college graduates, Salem State profes-

sor John Scrimgeour, and the moderators from Literary Cape Ann, she said.

“We’re having discussions

**‘We’re having discussions about ways that we can help young writers and advocate for their voices to be heard.’**

- OLI TURNER

about ways that we can help young writers and advocate for their voices to be heard within the Cape Ann community as well as providing them opportunities for growth, learning, and involvement in the community,” Turner said.

The panel will discuss individual experiences from writers

of all ages and ways for young writers to get support and helpful resources, she said.

“We’re having a round table discussion on Zoom about these issues and each of our individual experiences,” Turner said.

The panel will be half young writers and the other half being people who work with young writers, she said.

“It’s meant to be an engaging and entertaining discussion for about an hour and a half, getting various perspectives of people who have different roles in the writing community,” Turner said.

The panel will be held on Saturday April 24 at 3 p.m. through Zoom and will be free to attend. For more information, visit Literary Cape Ann’s official Facebook page, LiteraryCapeAnn.



COURTESY LITERARY CAPE ANN

**The nonprofit organization Literary Cape Ann provides events to young writers in an effort to support literary arts.**



# Class officers find ways to fundraise during a pandemic

COVID-19 has challenged students to raise money amid safety guidelines

By Ema O’Neil  
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Despite the pandemic, class officers are continually finding ways to fundraise for their grades.

Class officers raise money in order to support events such as prom and Senior Week. However, most annual fundraisers have either been postponed or canceled due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Fortunately, the senior officers started their fundraising early on, said Eden Mayer, secretary of the senior class.

Mayer said that the senior officers have been planning and holding community-based

fundraisers since their freshman year. This includes events like restaurant nights, babysitting nights, and bake sales.

Similar to the seniors, the freshman class officers have already started fundraising after their delayed elections.

President of the freshman class, Phileine de Widt, said that she and the other officers recently held a spring fundraiser event where families could

order pansies up until April 3. They raised over \$1,000, and all of the proceeds went to the class of 2024.

“It is unfortunate that

we missed out on a whole year of fundraiser opportunities; however, we are working really hard, and I know we can get this done,” de Widt said.

The pandemic does not seem to be an issue for the junior class as well, according to Lukas Shan, president of the junior

**‘If a pandemic hasn’t stopped us, then I don’t think anything can.’**

-LUKAS SHAN



COURTESY OF SOLANGE DE WIDT

**Phileine de Widt, president of the freshman class, and the other class officers recently held a spring fundraiser where they sold pansies to local families and raised over \$1,000 for the class of 2024.**

class.

“We basically just needed to come up with fundraising ideas that would both respect social-distancing guidelines and effectively raise money,” Shan said.

So far, the officers have had multiple successful fundraisers.

Recently, the officers also had a fundraiser at Chipotle where juniors and their families could order food, and a fraction of the proceeds went to their class.

“[Our officers] are so incredibly focused and determined and if a pandemic hasn’t stopped us,

then I don’t think anything can,” Shan said.

Chase Dickson, treasurer of the sophomore class, said that his team was able to come up with many new ideas this year.

“[The pandemic] has, in a way, helped us,” Dickson said.

## School Council addresses school improvement virtually

By Caroline MacKinnon  
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Holding meetings virtually, the School Council continues to discuss school improvement during the 2021 school year.

“School Council is required by Massachusetts state law. In 1993 there was an Education Reform law, and part of that included an establishment in all schools of a School Council,” Principal Patricia Puglisi said.

School Council includes students, parents, teachers, community members, and the principal, she said.

“[The] main focus [this year] has been school learning structure, moving from remote to hybrid, and then back in person,” Puglisi said.

Past yearly focuses of the

School Council include the Chemical Health Policy, and the Academic Integrity Policy, and the vision of the graduate, she said.

“The School Council has a role to guide school administration in terms of the school improvement plan, the student handbook, and budget considerations,” Puglisi said.

Puglisi said that this year School Council only includes two senior student representatives, rather than the typical two juniors and two seniors, due to the pandemic. Elections will be held this year for two rising seniors and two rising juniors for next year.

“When we have student voices on [School Council], it is very helpful because oftentimes students have a different opinion

about the direction of policy than maybe parents or teachers do,” she said.

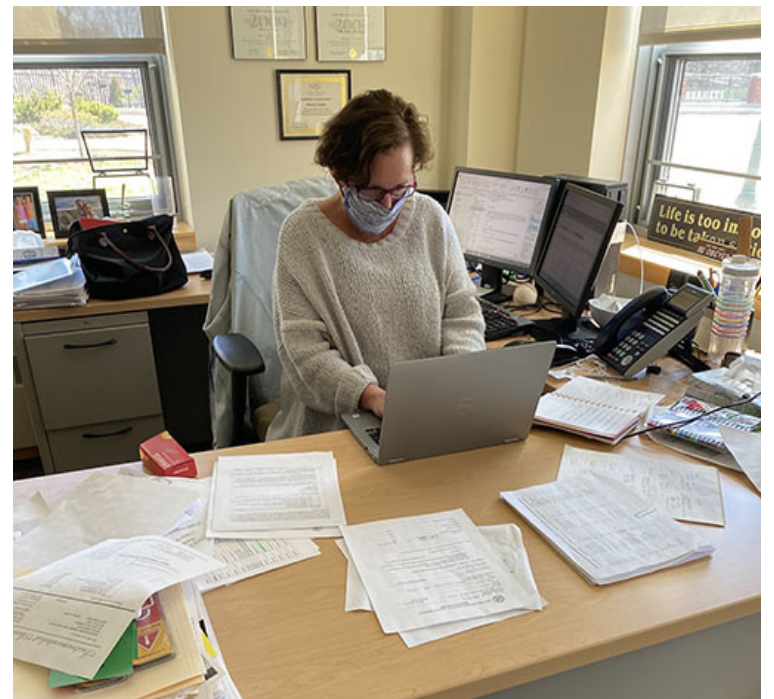
Puglisi also mentioned that the School Council is responsible for important events such as the career fair for sophomores and juniors.

“[School Council] is an important component of the school in terms of guiding the direction of the school and guiding me as the principal,” she said.

History teacher and School Council member Jennifer Coleman said the School Council discusses school policy and what is happening in school this year through Zoom.

“In the last [virtual] meeting, we talked about the transition to hybrid, and I just shared my opinion as a teacher about how it was going,” she said.

Senior Lars Birkeland, one of the two student representatives for the School Council, said the School Council is a way for everyone to communicate and



COURTESY OF MARY LUMSDEN

**Principal Patricia Puglisi works with the other School Council members through Zoom to plan events and discuss important topics.**

discuss ways to make the school better.

“I don’t think that there’s

much of a dialogue between students, parents, teachers [and] the administration often,” he said.



COURTESY OF AVA RICCI

**Sophomore founders of the Comfort Cases Club, Ava Ricci and Sophie Zalosh, received donations from local dentists’ offices to donate to children in the foster care system.**

## New Comfort Cases Club spreads awareness

By Amy Vytopilova  
INDEPENDENT STAFF

Sophomores Ava Ricci and Sophie Zalosh have brought Comfort Cases, a non-profit organization, to the school to spread awareness about children in the foster care system.

Ricci said she became interested in the organization because of its founder.

“The organization is a company run by Rob Scheer, who was a foster child when he was younger, and he had to carry all his belongings in a trash bag to his foster homes...he and his husband decided to adopt kids

of their own, and they realized that nothing in the system has changed, and they came to them with trash bags,” she said.

Ricci’s mother also helped her with the club by donating to a similar cause, Ricci said.

“A family friend from my mom knows Rob Scheer, and my mom actually helped out someone who needed clothing one time by

giving them some of my and my sister’s old clothes,” Ricci said.

History teacher John Mullady became an adviser when Ricci, a former student, emailed him and asked for his help, Ricci said.

Mullady said the organization is a great way to spread awareness around communities which may not be as educated.

“It’s a really nice charity, and it provides services for a group in our country that is often overlooked and neglected,” Mullady said.

Zalosh stepped in to help Ricci with the club and has helped in

receiving donations from local businesses Ricci said.

“We have gotten lots of donations from dentists’ offices, and they have given us a ton of travel-sized toothbrushes and toothpaste...you can just call your local dentist office and tell them about the organization, and why you’re looking for donations,” she said.

Zalosh also said that unpackaged toiletries are their main focus of donations at the moment and can be dropped off at the main entrance of the school.

“If people have travel-sized toothpaste, toothbrushes, shampoo, and conditioner lying around their house that they haven’t used and are still packaged, they can drop them off at the high school in a large plastic bin,” she said.

**‘It’s a really nice charity, and it provides services for a group in our country that is often overlooked and neglected.’**

- JOHN MULLADY



# College tours during COVID-19

Should campus visits be available for accepted students?

**Pro**  
Madeline Lai

Colleges should be holding in-person tours for accepted students because the benefits of holding tours on campus outweigh the risk-factors for virus transmission and increased interstate travel.

If tours are held with certain restrictions that lower the risk for the transmission of COVID-19, seniors who have already been admitted to said college deserve to be given an in-person tour before they commit to spending potentially hundreds of thousands of dollars on tuition and enrollment.

Modifications that would be easy to make for campus tours could involve wearing masks, maintaining six-foot distance between families, staying outside of buildings, and restricting the size of tour groups to smaller numbers of admitted students only.

These regulations would significantly decrease the risk of transmitting the virus, at the benefit to all families receiving a live, physical campus tour.

In-person tours for prospective students are a crucial step of the application process as they deliver to families a personalized experience of walking around the physical campus with a current student who is available to answer questions about the school.

Although virtual tours are a sufficient substitute for students interested in getting to know a school on a more basic level, a live, in-person tour is an irreplaceable experience that should be maintained for dedicated applicants.

In an article by the New York Times, Sunil Samuel, an admissions officer at Hofstra University, said pictures, videos, and virtual tours cannot compare to a physical visit.

“The hardest thing to recreate is what we call that ‘wow’ moment, when you’re on campus and you’re like, ‘Mom, this is where I need to be,’” he said.

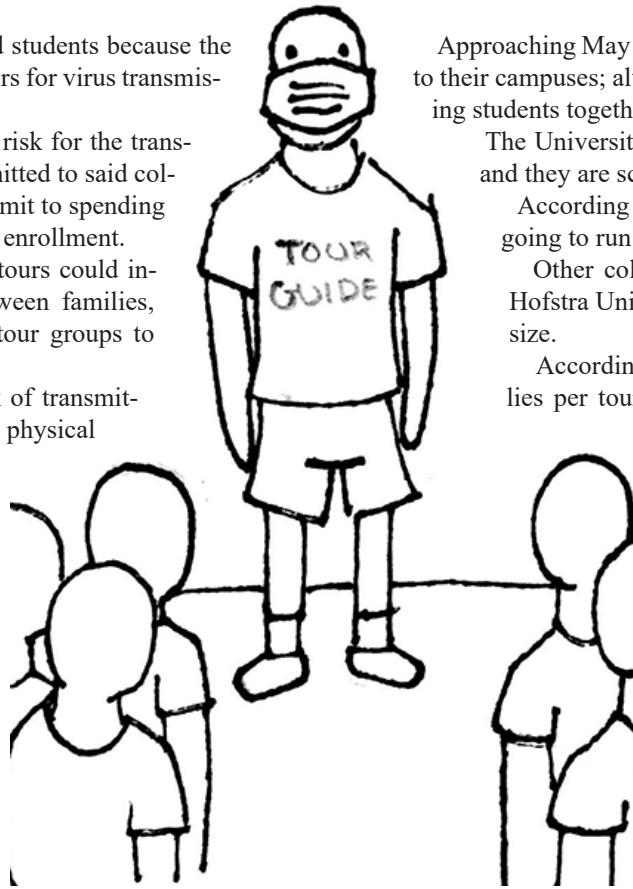
In addition, virtual tours are given to a greater quantity of students at one time, which leads to a less personable experience, where all of the questions that are asked may not be answered. By contrast, a smaller, in-person tour group allows every family to be heard and be given greater in-depth information with a more personal tour.

According to an article by CNBC, interstate air travel nationwide is already on the rise now that vaccination rollout has begun, and the number of new coronavirus cases each day is significantly less than previous months.

The number of high school seniors traveling between states for tours will likely minimally increase the amount of interstate air travel, and the benefit to students of allowing such tours to occur is greater than continuing with virtual tours.

Although in-person tours may seem like a threat to increased rates of transmission of the virus, with added precautions that can be taken by colleges and families and restrictions during campus tours, the risk is minimal.

In exchange, students are given the best opportunity possible with live, in-person tours to choose the right college, a decision that will impact the rest of their lives.



ELI HEANUE ILLUSTRATION

**Con**  
Eli Heanue

Approaching May 1, schools around the country are inviting prospective students to their campuses; although this is important in the college decision process, bringing students together from around the country is dangerous.

The University of Pittsburgh is one of the schools offering in person tours, and they are scheduling them to fit the decision deadline.

According to admissions.pitt.edu, the school’s in-person tours are only going to run during the month of April.

Other colleges, such as Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) and Hofstra University, are also offering these tours but are limiting the group size.

According to RIT’s website, the school is only allowing up to two families per tour. Hofstra will allow up to three families according to their website.

Although seeing campus is an important part of the decision making process, inviting students from other states to visit schools is unsafe and irresponsible.

Encouraging interstate travel could put prospective students as well as current undergraduates at risk.

These in-person tours are an effort to entice students to particular schools and a way for schools to compete with one another. Students may be more likely to choose one option between two schools if they can see it in person.

Limiting the capacity of these tours is a step in the right direction, but having multiple families from different areas and a tour guide is a dangerous combination.

Not only is offering these on-campus tours a danger to the health of students, but it also gives schools in certain states an advantage. Some schools cannot host in-person tours because of their state’s COVID guidelines.

Also, many schools have been offering interactive virtual tours for students during COVID, which give prospective students a feel for the campus without having to travel. This option is much better than in-person tours during the pandemic.

Inviting students to visit campus is unnecessary and unsafe. Students have access to virtual tours and informative online sessions without having to risk their safety and their families’ health. Schools should not be encouraging students to travel in between states or holding on-campus tours until after the dangers of the pandemic have passed.

According to study.com, social media platforms and online information sessions also give prospective students a way to connect with current undergraduates and get a good feel for the student body.

Apps like Reddit, Instagram, and Facebook give high school students a unique opportunity to connect with college students at different schools within specific majors.

Students should take advantage of safe opportunities to connect with and explore potential schools, rather than traveling during the pandemic. Although, for the majority of schools, in-person tours are limited to small parties, they are still unsafe and should not take place.

## School fighting policy should be updated to reflect changing ideology

More progressive stances consider self-defense

By Ryan Olivier-Meehan  
INDEPENDENT STAFF

The fighting policy in the student handbook should be updated to better reflect the administration’s revised approach towards the reduction of violence in school.

According to an article published by the American Psychological Association, zero-tolerance policies were developed in the 1980s and would severely punish disruptive students regardless of the infraction or its rationale and were shown to actually increase bad behavior and also lead to higher drop-out rates.

The handbook states all parties involved in a fight will be suspended, regardless of their role or level of violence.

This black and white nature of the existing policy is outdated and places victims at fault for the actions of aggressors and bullies.

Dean of Students Craig Macarelli said there was only one instance of a physical fight last year, and despite what’s written in the handbook, that situation was dealt with using a program called A Positive Alternative to Student Suspension.

“Instead of just going home, the kids involved in the fight work with clinicians and counselors to process the events leading up to the conflict and learn from the event,” he said.

Suspending students with no follow up or resolution doesn’t

fix the underlying problems that led to the fight. By understanding the situation in its entirety, school administrators can work with students and give them the tools to avoid similar situations in the future.

The existing school policy sends an unhealthy message to students. In a time where students should be learning how to deal with adversity, the policy recommends not standing up for oneself or else face reprimand.

The policy should be updated to reflect the idea that standing up for oneself and fighting back is necessary at times. Punishments should then be distributed appropriately to those truly at fault.

Guidance counselor David Conwell said, “In a perfect world, I’d like to see all parties

involved in finding a solution. I’d like the flexibility as an educator to adjust to what the situation calls for.”

Educators have to work with the student body to create a culture where fighting is frowned upon and other paths are taken

to diffuse the situation before the conflict becomes physical, he said.

As educators continue to change and improve the way they address conflict in school, the official policies should be updated to reflect these new approaches.



ELI HEANUE ILLUSTRATION



## STAFF EDITORIAL

## Second-hand shopping benefits environment, consumers

Not only is thrift shopping a fun activity, but it also has many benefits for both the environment and the consumer.

Buying second-hand clothes is perfect for people who cannot afford or do not want to spend a lot of money on clothes.

Just because something has been previously used by someone else does not mean the item is low quality, and the shopper can often find one-of-

a-kind things that are no longer being sold in retail stores. Thrift stores can also contain items made by well-known brands that are worth significantly more than the thrift store price.

Thrift shopping is an incredible way to help the environment as well. According to the Student Environment Resource Center at the University of California Berkeley, Americans throw away about 10.5 million tons of

clothing every year. This clothing ends up in landfills, where it cannot biodegrade.

Thrift shopping or donating unwanted clothes to second hand stores is an easy way to prevent landfills from growing larger.

The process of making clothes requires tons of resources and work. The SERC states that 1,800 gallons of water are needed to make just one pair of jeans. In an article

called “Should You Buy Clothes Second Hand To Reduce Your Environmental Impact?” by Tabitha Whiting, she states that it takes 70 million barrels of oil every year to produce the polyester fabrics that are used to make clothing.

The procedure for getting the oil needed to make clothing is very harmful to the environment and affects all wildlife in the areas surrounded by oil drilling



EMMA KETCHUM PHOTO

**Junior Ema O’Neil browses the selection of shoes at Goodwill in Danvers while out thrift shopping with friends.**

and can often lead to oil spills. Purchasing second hand clothes can help save these resources

instead of wasting them.

Factories where clothes are made cause tons of pollution.

In an article written on Insider called “The personal, political, and environmental case for buying all your clothes second hand,” author Sam Corbin, says the fashion industry is responsible for 8 to 10 percent of global carbon emissions. These carbon emissions in the atmosphere are what lead to global warming.

There are many thrift stores in Massachusetts for people to shop at, including multiple Savers and Goodwills, along with many smaller, local businesses.

These thrift stores also have other things besides clothing, like home decor, kitchen supplies, children’s toys, and books.

Prices can range depending on the thrift store, but they will most likely be a lot cheaper than retail price.

Donating to these stores is also a great way to help those who cannot afford expensive clothing, and who need to provide for their families.

If you own clothing that no longer fits but still can be worn by someone else, donate it or give it to someone who will be able to wear it. It would greatly help those in need and help the environment.

## Students need more education on women’s struggles

By Ema O’Neil  
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Although school curriculums teach students important topics regarding gender equality and women’s rights, the current struggles that women face must be taught in order to spark real change.

The recent murder of Sarah Everard, a 33-year-old woman living in London, has sparked outrage across the globe.

According to National Public Radio (NPR), Everard disappeared the first week of March after walking home alone at night from her friend’s house. After an extensive search, police discovered the woman’s remains on March 12.

The murderer was later discovered to be 48-year-old Wayne Couzens, a police officer patrol-

ling the street in which Everard’s body was found.

Since the case has been made public, women from all over the world have been posting on social media, recalling their own experiences with street harassment and demanding that violence against women be taken more seriously.

“These [posts] are so powerful because each and every woman can relate,” said Priti Patel, Home Secretary of the U.K, according to NPR.

Like Everard, women everywhere are experiencing harassment every day, sexual or not. In fact, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), 46.3 percent of women in the U.S (nearly 52.5 million) experienced some form of sexual violence in their lifetime.

For years, generations of women have been taught how not to get

raped, catcalled, or stalked while the ones who are doing the raping, catcalling, and stalking are not getting educated. This power dynamic must end immediately for the safety of all women.

A good place to start is in the classroom, especially when students are young. According to a survey done by Waterford Research Institute (WRI), children make assumptions that confirm gender stereotypes from an early age.

According to WRI, one of the best ways to teach gender equality to young learners is through collaborative learning. Teaching students to work with everyone in the classroom is extremely beneficial in establishing the idea that all people should be treated equally, regardless of gender.

“By working together, girls and boys can—if supported well—better understand the nuance of individual behaviors rather than stereotyping ‘girls’ and ‘boys,’” said the team at TeachThought, a brand dedicated to innovation

in K-12 education, according to Global Partnership for Education.

However, education regarding gender equality and women’s rights should not stop at the elementary level. Now, basic school curriculums include important topics such as the history of women’s rights, the idea of consent, and the current wage gap between men and women.

Although these topics are extremely important, students are not being taught the problems that women still face every day.

They are not taught that one in four women experience sexual harassment in the workplace, according to the CDC. Students are not taught that 33,000 girls

become child brides every day, according to the United Nations Children’s fund. They are also not taught that it would take 108 years to close the wage gap, according to the World Economic Forum.

**For years, generations of women have been taught how not to get raped, catcalled, or stalked while the ones who are doing the raping, catcalling, and stalking are not getting educated.**

School boards must evaluate their curriculum and realize that there is much more to be taught regarding gender equality. Teachers should address these issues directly and allow students to participate in safe discussions

to better understand the current struggles of women.

These facts are not easy to learn, but that is why they must be taught. In order for there to be real change, gender equality and women’s rights must not only be taught but also enforced.

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

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All submissions must be signed and put in the newspaper mailbox in the front office of MERHS.

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.



# Track and field team shows potential in first meets of season

Younger runners show potential while getting more race experience

By Ryan Olivier-Meehan  
INDEPENDENT STAFF

The girls' track team is 2-2 while the boys' track teams is 2-1-1 after their four meets against Ipswich, Amesbury, Lynnfield, and Essex Tech.

Head coach Mark Dawson said the loss to Ipswich was a result of the lack of depth in field and sprint events.

"We have a lot of depth on the distance side of the team, so we can make up a lot of points there, but we fall short when we don't have the numbers to cover other events," he said.

Dawson highlighted how

wearing masks had affected runners in both meets.

"Our team's been really good about it, but it's definitely been a detriment. The longer and harder you breathe, the more it gets pulled into your face, so it's made longer sprints like the 200 and 600 tougher. That being said, everyone's used to it now so it hasn't been that big a problem," he said.

Senior captain Eli Heanue said the first two meets have allowed inexperienced runners to get used to competition and allowed

experienced runners the opportunity to get back on the track.

"I'm not mad that we lost to Ipswich. We had a lot of good performances from runners like Will Kenney and Finn O'Hara, and competing let a lot of our younger runners try different events and get used to running against another team," he said.

**'It's pretty clear there's a lot of young talent on our team; they just have to learn how to run their race smarter.'**

-MARK DAWSON



ELI HEANUE PHOTO

The girls' and boys' track teams have beat Essex Tech and Lynnfield during the start of the season.

Senior captain Pippa Cox-Stavros said the girls' win over Essex Tech demonstrated the potential of several younger runners on the girls' team.

"Beating Essex Tech was the first win for the girls' team in two years, and that win was largely because of a lot of the

younger kids on the team that are super fast," she said.

Following the boys' win against Essex Tech, Heanue is optimistic for the rest of the season.

"We definitely have to work on a few things, but it's pretty clear there's a lot of young tal-

ent on our team; they just have to learn how to run their races smarter," he said.

Dawson said based on the performances of the freshman and sophomore runners so far, both teams should enjoy strong seasons in the coming years as things go back to normal.

## Football team ending season, to highlight seniors at home game against Ipswich

By Hadley Levendusky  
INDEPENDENT STAFF

The football team wants to make the rest of the season a memorable experience for seniors, coach Jeff Hutton said.

"Not being able to play in the playoffs or have a Thanksgiving game this year for our seniors has been hard. It is our job as a coaching staff to make sure they have a good experience for the season," he said.

The team's record is 1-4; they end the season with their senior night game against Ipswich on Friday, April 16 at home.

"We all would have liked to have more wins, and something has got to give in our execution for the next game," Hutton said.

The game this week will be the final high school football



COURTESY OF ABBY LEVENDUSKY

Senior captain and quarterback Will Levendusky passes the ball during a game against Amesbury which the Hornets lost 0-28.

game for all of the seniors.

"We want to finish on a good

note, for the seniors we love," Hutton said.

Being the last game, Glass said hopes they play well to end on a high note.

Due to COVID, the football team is playing in the Cape Ann League and not the Division 7 Independent as they did last year.

"The competition is more diffi-

cult this year compared to last year, and we have had a lot of injuries this season," senior captain Will Levendusky said.

Hutton said some players that have made an impact on the team this year are senior Michael

Quill, junior AJ Pallazola, and sophomore Ben Hurd, who have

all been great players on both sides of the ball.

Despite some execution errors, Levendusky said the defense has played well this year.

In a recent game, senior captain Gavin Glass injured his foot, which has made an impact on the

team, Levendusky said.

"It sucks being injured, but I still try to be at practice everyday and support my teammates," Glass said.

With many new players this year, Hutton said he is hoping to use the last game to see what the team will look like next year

and give the younger players a chance to play.

**'Not being able to play in the playoffs or have a Thanksgiving game this year for our seniors has been hard. It is our job as a coaching staff to make sure they have a good experience for the season.'**

-JEFF HUTTON

## Cheer team hopes to recruit new members next season

By Jordie Cornfield  
INDEPENDENT STAFF

With the beginning of COVID-19 last March, the cheer team could not practice. Like the football team, their season was rescheduled from the fall to the spring. Social distancing mandates have changed the cheer team's usual routines.

"Before COVID, we could touch each other when we danced. We can't do that now. Our routines for halftime have to be six feet apart," senior captain Dede Rodier said.

At the beginning of the season, the cheer team wasn't allowed to make pyramids, as it required the

girls to be very close together, but that has since changed, Rodier said.

"Now we can do smaller pyramids," senior captain Faith Burroughs said.

Rodier said that because of social distancing, the cheer team has had to make adjustments to the size of their stunt groups, which are now made up of only four people.

"Before the pandemic, we would usually do things as one big group, but now we're in cohorts," said senior captain Eva Parker.

Rodier thinks that while stunting has been hard, the team



COURTESY OF ABBY LEVENDUSKY

Senior captain Dede Rodier hopes that the rising juniors and seniors will consider doing cheer to help build the team.

always finds a way to have fun.

"It's hard to stunt because we can't move around groups. If someone is out, a stunt group can't go up," Rodier said.

The cheer team has been

boosting school spirit by posting on social media via their Instagram account.

"Before COVID, we could wear our uniforms on game days. School spirit is different online.

We have an Instagram account where we post reminders like 'there's a game tomorrow, show up if you can,'" Parker said.

All three captains agree that finding new members has been difficult during the pandemic.

"Our biggest challenge has been finding girls who are willing to join the team. We weren't talking to people about it. It was hard to reach out to people," Burroughs said.

As Parker, Burroughs, and Rodier will be leaving for college next year, the team will be much smaller.

Rodier said that the future of the team currently relies on rising juniors and seniors joining the squad.

"I want the upcoming grades to highly consider cheer. It's super fun," Rodier said.



# Four students juried into MAEA Recognitions Exhibit

Two art students receive special awards for work

By Isabella DiPasquale  
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Senior Eva Parker, sophomore Arabella Cox-Stavros, senior Olivia Renzi, and junior Sami Turner had art pieces juried into the Massachusetts Amazing Emerging Artists Recognitions Exhibit.

Parker and Cox-Stavros also received additional awards for their work, art teacher Tamera Burns said.

Parker said that her piece, which received the Davis Publications Media Fashion Award, was made to express the ways social media affect women and their mental health.

She said the dress is made of

red and black roses, symbolizing the transition from love to death or grief.

“The red roses slowly wither out to a darker red or black. The roses on this dress are a representation of one’s self-love deteriorating through comparison to others on social media,” Parker said.

Parker, who is taking the AP Studio Art 3-D Portfolio class, said this piece is a part of her portfolio, which consists of clothing pieces based on women’s issues and feminism.

“It felt nice to receive an award for a piece that is a part of my AP portfolio. It was a motivator for me to continue

with the rest of the portfolio,” she said.

Burns said that Parker took a strong interest in different aspects of women and legislation.

“She really does do a spectac-

**‘[Parker] really does do a spectacular job of researching the topics for her pieces, and she is working on a strong portfolio.’**

-TAMERA BURNS



ARABELLA COX-STAVROS PHOTO



EVA PARKER PHOTO

Senior Eva Parker and sophomore Arabella Cox-Stavros received special awards for their pieces, in addition to being juried in to the Massachusetts Amazing Emerging Artists Recognitions Exhibit.

lar job of researching the topics for her pieces, and she is working on a strong portfolio,” she said.

Cox-Stavros said her piece, entitled “Seanchai,” was inspired by the Gaelic storyteller of the same name.

“I learned about [Seanchai] through one of my favorite childhood movies, and I thought it was

really cool, so I wanted to do my own take on it,” she said.

Cox-Stavros said that she focused on the hair in this piece, as “each of his hairs represents a moment in time or a story.”

The painting received a Worcester Art Museum Teen/Adult Class Gift Certificate, in addition to being recognized in the virtual show,

she said.

Burns said that she has watched Cox-Stavros grow and develop as an artist in her classes.

“She has had a really strong year, and she is consistently producing high quality and well thought out work. She just has the mind of an artist,” she said.

## Zack Snyder releases recut of ‘Justice League’

By Wyeth Takayesu  
INDEPENDENT STAFF

Director Zack Snyder’s vision for the failed Justice League film in 2017 is successfully reassembled in a 2021 recut of the movie, titled “Zack Snyder’s Justice League.”

Based on the DC comics which follow a superhero organization of the same name, the film follows main characters Batman (Ben Affleck) and Wonder Woman (Gal Gadot) as they attempt to build a force strong enough to protect Earth against the invading forces of Steppenwolf (Ciarán Hinds).

Met with various challenges and powerful foes, the two team up with other superheroes such as Cyborg (Ray Fisher), the Flash (Ezra Miller), and Aquaman (Jason Momoa), to form what would come to be known as the Justice League.

The original Justice League,

a movie that hit theaters in late 2017 as the fifth installment of the DC Extended Universe, was met with overwhelming negative responses and ratings similar to its Rotten Tomatoes score of 40%.

Foremost in these issues was a disconcerted attitude towards the over arching themes and general tone of the film.

Having switched directors from Snyder to Joss Whedon following a tragedy within Snyder’s family, the two directors’ visions clashed and resulted in much of the movie being reshot under Whedon’s lead, The Hollywood Reporter said.

However, cuts of Snyder’s original ideas remained in the film and produced scenes where

Snyder’s darker tones would be met with a style of humor that would demean the brooding cast, leaving fans both confused and outraged.

Following information regarding the film’s chaotic production, fans and cast members alike petitioned for Snyder to return and assemble his own director’s cut of the film, cable entertainment channel Syfy said.

At 242 minutes, over four hours of film broken into six portions and an epilogue, Snyder delivers to loyal

**Although the movie is not without flaws, it has reestablished the faith of many fans with its darker tones.**

fans of the series by reinstating his ideal tone and addressing the prominent issues of the film with the removal of Whedon’s altered scenes and the addition of new scenes to better inform fans of the storyline.



HBOMAX.COM

Zack Snyder’s recut of ‘Justice League’ features more violent scenes and darker tones, reestablishing the faith of loyal fans.

In this iteration of the film, there are more violent fight sequences and blood, which when added onto the movie’s foul language, resulted in its initial PG-13 rating being changed to R.

Although the movie is not

without flaws, as it contains many scenes where the dialogue between characters became forced or unnecessarily added to an already long movie, it has reestablished the faith of many fans with its darker tones.

## Two senior art students paint mural for Bravo

By Hadley Levendusky  
INDEPENDENT STAFF

Seniors Isabella DiPasquale and Abby Thomas are working on a mural for the restaurant Bravo By The Sea, located in Manchester, as part of their independent study for art.

Beth Panagos, owner of Bravo By The Sea, said she reached out to art teacher Tamera Burns to see if she had any students that would be interested in painting a mural for her restaurant.

“I was going to reach out to a local art school, but then decided



ISABELLA DIPASQUALE PHOTO

Seniors Abby Thomas and Isabella DiPasquale work on creating a grid before sketching and painting their mural design in Bravo.

to reach out to the high school because I had seen some of my workers’ art and knew that they were talented,” Panagos said.

Burns thought of DiPasquale and Thomas because they were both seniors who were taking an independent study for art and

had already taken AP Studio Art, DiPasquale said.

“I wanted something to entertain customers while waiting for their takeout orders in the restaurant,” Panagos said. She said she wanted the mural to be colorful and like pop art while including something local.

DiPasquale and Thomas were inspired by the pop art style and ultimately came up with two designs for the wall: One is a map of Manchester and the coast; the other is a girl eating pizza. The color scheme was influenced by traditional pop art and will feature bright colors, DiPasquale said.

“We could basically do anything, and local scenery came up, so we used that idea inspired by the pop art movement,” Thomas said.

DiPasquale said they were given a lot of freedom in creating the mural.

Their process has entailed coming up with the idea, changing dimensions of their painting to make sure it fits properly in the restaurant, and painting the base and outline for their map idea, Thomas said.

“The process is very gradual and takes a lot of steps, but so far it is going very well,” she said.

There is construction going on in the restaurant, so DiPasquale said that she and Thomas work during the closing hours of Bravo.

“We have no specific deadline and are able to work on our own time but are hoping to have it done by the end of the school year,” DiPasquale said.