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Limits of Free Speech

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All polls were conducted through Google Forms and shared through social media

LETTERS FROM THE EDITORS

This second issue has been a whirlwind but also a great experience. Seeing everyone's growth has been gratifying and we're so proud of our reporters. I'm so excited to spend my last semester of high school with the most amazing editors! I hope everyone enjoys the articles we have prepared for you all! Good luck to everyone on semester exams and enjoy your well deserved break!

Working on this second issue as Copy Editor, though challenging at times, has been great overall, and I am very proud of what we have accomplished this quarter. To the staff: You have all grown so much in a short time, and your writing in this issue has been a joy to read. I look forward to even more creativity and ideas for articles to come. To my fellow editors: You are all so great at what you do! I have seen all the moments where each of you has stepped up and led the staff to success; it hasn't gone unnoticed. To our readers: I hope you enjoy this issue and that by reading it, you will learn more about our school, community, nation and world at large. Congratulations on all of your hard work this semester! I hope it has paid off and you will enjoy the holidays.

This past quarter has been a whirlwind of experiences; it's hard to believe a full semester has already flown by. From delving deeper into the journalistic sphere to wrapping up lingering IB projects and college applications, I have truly savored every moment. As our reporters took on new articles this past issue, possibly outside of their comfort zones, seeing their winning attitude and determination has been truly inspiring. I'd like to extend a heartfelt thank-you to all of the readers for their interest and support. To any fellow seniors, the next semester will be especially pivotal in determining our next few years, so I hope this Winter Break serves as a time for reflection, comfort, and excitement for what's ahead. To everyone, good luck on finals! And happy holidays!

This second quarter has really shown what our staff is capable of. We've made noticeable improvements in every area, and it's clear that our team is stronger than ever. I'm so proud of how far we've come with our writing and photos as well! Being part of this community is incredibly rewarding, and I wouldn't trade it for anything. I'm excited to see what next semester brings as we continue to grow and shine!

MISSION STATEMENT

At Panther Prints, our mission is to serve as a connection between the Plano East student body and surrounding communities. Through inspiration and high-quality content, Panther Prints offers diverse coverage passionate writing, relatable stories and a unique point of view. Our credible sources allow an in-depth experience that appeals to both the public and the individual. Our publication offers an informative and distinctive outlook on current interests.

DIGITAL MEDIA POLICY

We at the Panther Prints commit to responsibly utilize all of our media platforms to unite and inform the student body. We strive to create original content and attribute credit to all sources. We require our staff to uphold these values and to accurately report the news to the student body and community.

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FAFSA

By Megan Glass

The 2024-2025 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) opened on Dec. 1, providing students with the opportunity to apply for financial assistance. Completing the FAFSA is essential for anyone pursuing an undergraduate degree, as it gives access to grants, scholarships, work-study programs, and low-interest loans. By filling out these forms, students can significantly reduce the overall cost of their education and increase their chances of attending their preferred school without excessive financial burden.

Generally, FAFSA asks for parent or guardian tax return information, proof of income, assets and demographic information. According to Federal Student Aid, The 2024-2025 FAFSA form will ask for 2022 tax information. It's a long process so taking the proper steps to fill out the form before June 30, 2025, is necessary.

It is important to file early as FAFSA provides some financial aid on a first-come, first-served basis, so applying early can increase a student's chances of receiving aid. Despite the stereotypes behind financial aid, FAFSA is not just for low-income students seeking grants. Middle and even high-income families may benefit from federal work-study programs or qualify for certain scholarships.

Struggles With FAFSA

By Jade Chu

Colleges and their associated expenses aren't the best combination, as they quickly add up. This is where the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) plays a vital role. FAFSA determines students' eligibility for loans and Pell Grants, helping millions of students each year. Although this is an essential resource, there were 40 separate technical issues in 2023. To make matters worse, there were lingering problems with deadlines, which significantly affected the application process for students. "It was awful," AVID teacher Summer Simmons said. "Everyone believed it was going to open on Dec. 1, but it kept getting pushed back. It didn't open until New Year's, and even then, they kept telling everybody it was a soft opening, and we didn't want everyone to submit their FAFSA applications right away." This issue didn't just affect students—it also impacted colleges. The delay in FAFSA processing led to delays in developing students' financial aid offers, causing a ripple effect. Students have limited time to decide where they want to enroll and the delay forced many to rush their decisions. "The biggest issue is a lot of my students depend on FAFSA money to determine where they're going to school," Simmons said. "But, with the FAFSA delay, they couldn't make an informed decision. The deadline got pushed back to April, and that added a lot of pressure on students to decide where to go before they knew how much financial aid they would receive." AVID teachers, who help students prepare for college, witnessed firsthand how the FAFSA issues affected their students. Time was a determining factor of where students would have to go to school. There are numerous students who have good grades, but when it comes to going to college, money from a scholarship isn't enough. "Some students ended up choosing a different school just to avoid waiting on the FAFSA deadline," Simmons said. "They picked the school they knew they could afford. FAFSA did say more students would qualify for grants, but in my opinion, I didn't see as

many students qualifying for grants as expected." According to Forbes FAFSA has a difficult time looking at the overall picture when it comes to determining how much money students should be granted, specifically for those in the middle-range financially. "This issue falls on most of my students on not being poor enough to get grant money but too rich to get grants and FAFSA will offer loans but you have to pay back for it," Simmons said. "In my opinion, they aren't helping a lot of kids in the middle range. It puts a lot of those kids in a bind and a lot of kids can't go to college or end up going to a school they would prefer." In 2023, students faced a stressful journey when applying for FAFSA, especially since their financial aid is directly influenced by their family's income. Many issues arose with the department's processes. Senior Akira Gary noticed her classmates struggling through the complicated process and expressed her concerns. "All my senior friends were struggling with the application process," Gary said. "The forms are unnecessarily complicated. Without FAFSA, you're genuinely left in the dark. Not having it processed on time is detrimental." The FAFSA department also struggled with communication and it failed to consider some of the deeper financial needs of families. FAFSA does not take into account how many siblings are attending college in the same household, which can impact families with multiple children in school. "Having siblings can hurt you in the application process," Gary explained. "If your parents are responsible for more children, they're financially stretched, and FAFSA doesn't truly consider how expensive that can be." Although FAFSA expresses the desire to make sure that 2024-2025 applications are going to be all hands on deck and changes have been made in order to make sure that the improvement is beneficial to incoming students. As of 2024 so far, FAFSA has released their financial aid much earlier than previous years.

Jocks, Nerds, Emos, Us

By Aycen Koa Matsumoto Castro

High school stereotypes are as well-known as high school itself. The concept of differentiated groups and social hierarchies is something most people associate with American high schools. Highly popularized during the 80s-90s through pop culture, a variety of movies and TV shows helped publicize these stereotypes, with even some modern media still carrying out these views. But as we all know, high school life isn't exactly like what we saw on T.V., but how much of it is? Over the years, how have these cliches affected the way many view high school today? "There's a reason why I don't tell people I'm in theater, compared to how I'm in swim," varsity swimmer and lighting designer Loren Mediana said. "It's because people assume because I'm in theater I would be really annoying, or they would have these certain stereotypes of theater kids." We've all seen it, the jocks are the macho-tough guys who only care about 4 things; Sports, girls, bullying, and sports. The nerds enjoy studying math and science whenever they aren't in math or science class. The emos can be found under the bleachers listening to My Chemical Romance, and talk about how much angst they're in. "The Outsiders, that's a good movie," outside linebacker Joshua Brown said. "It was like, everybody had their separate group, everybody was trying to fit in, so it's pretty much like high school. Everybody's trying to find themselves." One piece of media that highly expresses these high school cliches is the 2006 Disney movie, High School Musical. This movie portrays the stereotypical American

high school. It follows a classic high school romance, a popular star-athlete falls in love with the unpopular nerdy girl, and now the two must find a way to keep their relationship, despite being in different cliques that could jeopardize their own reputations. The movie pushes the cliches of high school fairly high, and with it, children's expectations. As many young viewers who are set to one day go to high school watch this media, they are easily influenced by it, not only expecting to experience similar events to the movie, but also feel pressure to act more like the characters shown. "I think I always wanted to be a jock, just fit in with the team." Brown says, "Seeing the jocks on T.V. and stuff like that, it just made me want to play football too." In a study published by the Child Development Journal, psychology professor, Eva Pomerantz, conducted a study on various Chinese middle school students. These students were separated into two different groups, the first of which were only asked to describe their views on the behaviors of teenagers, while the second were asked the same, but also arranged to carry out the behaviors of more responsible students. This study concluded that students who were tasked to focus on their behaviors showed a much larger increase in educational prowess than the first group, proving that while many different stereotypes can have a negative effect on chil-

dren, it is by setting a more positive example on those expectations that they will become more successful and independent for themselves, rather than what they think would be expected of them. "Most of [stereotypes] I would say can be true, but at the same time they're not true," Mediana said. "A lot of the people in my class are not annoying, and they're really chill people." As high school students, many see the way a high schooler's apparent "daily life" is portrayed on screen. Some may find it relatable, some of it not so much. The way high school is portrayed in entertainment sets many different expectations for people, but that media shouldn't be the thing that leaves your impression on it. It is quite ironic how High School Musical, despite highly dramatizing many Hollywood tropes of high school, would be the one to spread the message of "Going against the status quo" and "Being true to yourself." High school stereotypes may not be realistic, but that doesn't mean we can't learn from them. "I would keep the tropes, I feel like those tropes are more old school, compared to now," Mediana said. "I think it's just there to keep stuff entertaining, and to tease middle schoolers like 'Oh this is what high school is really, and there's cheerleaders, and there's nerds, and there's gamers!' I just think [stereotypes are] there to be entertaining."



Mentors Who Get It: How Educators Guide Students

By Megan Glass

In today's classrooms, young teachers and coaches play a crucial role in shaping students' lives. With their close age and familiarity with current trends and Gen Z culture, they bridge the gap between authority and mentorship -- something that older teachers may find harder to differentiate. For students who lack a strong support system at home, these young educators become more than just academic guides. They are mentors, patient listeners, and sometimes even lifelines. "I think you get a little bit of instant respect when you're closer to their age, because you can talk about the same music as them," Head Football Coach and Athletic Director Tony Benedetto said. "You could talk about the same video games and things that they watch on TV, but I don't think those things last. Those are just superficial things that help you get a foot in the door as a younger coach. I think that just by being yourself, kids like that a lot." This ability to relate on a personal level makes younger teachers more approachable, encouraging students to open up about challenges ranging from relationships to mental health. By creating a space of trust and understanding, they are not only helping students succeed academically but are also providing much-needed emotional support. "In general, if you have a young man who's struggling with discipline, organization, or he's pushing back on adults, then you probably are taking that as something is not going well

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"I've had a lot of boys who don't trust older men in general, because maybe they have issues with their father or they have a fatherless home. You have to really show this kid that you, as a man, can love him. And how do you show him that? By talking to him, getting to know him and pushing him to be his best." Strong bonds between teachers and students can be especially impactful for students facing challenges at home. Many young teachers find themselves stepping into advocacy roles for students who may not have a strong support system. The generational gap between parents and teens often leaves young people seeking guidance from someone closer to their age—someone who can offer understanding without the pressure of parental expectations. "I've seen a lot of students struggle with acceptance, especially those in the LGBTQ community. It's heartbreaking, but I'm grateful they feel safe coming to me," AP World History teacher Bradley Grissom said. "I still keep in touch with a former student who needed that support and trust—it made a world of difference for them." The differences in how students respond to younger versus more experienced teachers are clear. While older coaches may leverage their years of experience, younger coaches bring a level of relatability that can resonate more deeply with athletes. After many years of cycling through teams and players, seasoned coaches may interact with countless athletes with similar stories, sometimes losing that personal connection in the process. "I think after pushing a kid to do their very best, decompressing and talking about it really helps, and coaches and teachers often miss that," Benedetto said. "Older coaches feel like the kid owes it to them to work



hard, and [the coaches] don't owe it to [the athlete] to build a relationship with them at all. What we do as coaches here is that when we get on a kid, push him to be his best, and then when the dust settles and the practice is over, you get to know them a little more, sit down and talk." However, being approachable comes with its own set of challenges. Striking the right balance between being a mentor and maintaining authority is a constant struggle for many young teachers. Establishing this balance is crucial because students who respect their teachers on a personal level are often more willing to engage positively in the classroom. "I'm still working on it," Grissom said. "The key is having consistent rules for everyone, even if you're close to a student. That way, when rules are broken, you can have a more relatable conversation—like, 'Hey, you know better'—rather than coming down harshly as an authority figure." High school can be an incredibly stressful time, especially when students are juggling sports, academics, and other responsibilities. In these moments, having teachers who genuinely care about their students' success and show empathy for their challenges, can make a significant difference. "There has to be this moment where the kid knows that you got them," Benedetto said. "When there's a stressful moment, you pull them aside and pick them up and encourage them."



President-Elect Trump's Policy Plans

Photo from Bloomberg

By Camille Wright

Once President-elect Donald Trump is sworn into office on January 20th, he plans to pursue policies that will shape many aspects of American life. From immigration reforms to tariffs on imports, these changes could have far-reaching impacts on the country's future. "I think it's going to be a big, very severe one impact," an anonymous student said. "Whether that be positive or negative, we don't know yet, but his plans of action are very drastic from the approach we've seen presidents in the past." Trump's education agenda includes cutting federal funds from schools that teach curriculum on divisive topics, such as Critical Race Theory and "gender ideology." According to Politico, Trump also supports school choice programs that allow public education funds to be used for nonpublic schools and plans to adopt a merit pay program for teachers. "I will also work to ensure that every homeschool family is entitled to full access to the benefits available to non-homeschooled students—including participating in athletic programs, clubs, after-school activities, educational trips, and more," Trump said in an Agenda47 video. "To every homeschool family, I will be your champion." Trump also plans to invest in alternatives to traditional higher education, including community colleges, trade schools, and career training programs. While on the campaign trail, Trump announced he would let Robert F. Kennedy Jr. "go wild" on health policies during his administration. Though the specifics of his prospective role aren't clear, Kennedy has since said he would want to remove fluoride from water and continue with his "Make America Healthy Again" movement by removing

"toxic additives and pesticide residues in food." Vice President-elect JD Vance plans to change health insurance and proposes separating those with chronic conditions from those without. This will lower costs for those without pre-existing health issues but would increase the cost for those with existing conditions and those needing medical care. "We want to make sure everybody is covered," Vice-president elect JD Vance said in an interview during NBC's Meet the Press. "But the best way to do that is to actually promote some more choice in our health care system and not have a one-size-fits-all approach that puts a lot of people into the same insurance pools, into the same risk pools, that actually makes it harder for people to make the right choices for their families." During his campaign, Trump heavily emphasized his administration's plans to reshape U.S. trade and tax policies. His proposed tariffs include a 10-20% levy on all imports and a 60% tariff on Chinese goods, using emergency powers to implement them. On taxes, he aims to make the 2017 tax cuts permanent and introduce measures like eliminating taxes on tips and overtime pay. If the tax cuts expire in 2025, most Americans will face higher taxes. Congress will play an important role in determining whether these proposals are possible, and each one could have long-term impacts on the U.S. economy. "When the Republican Party voted him in, they voted him in off of what the Republican Party usually stands for, not the politician itself," an anonymous student said. "So in a party that calls for lower taxes, I think that's what they're expecting. Trump plans to implement new immigration policies

to improve border security and reduce illegal immigration. His proposals include hiring additional border agents, building new detention facilities, and reinstating the "Remain in Mexico" policy, which requires asylum seekers to wait in Mexico while their cases are processed. Trump also proposes ending "catch and release" practices and automatic citizenship for children born to undocumented immigrants. However, many details, including funding and implementation, remain unclear, and some proposals could face legal and logistical challenges. "I can understand why Americans would want take away people who are not citizens," an anonymous student said. "But then again, your taking away the people who have been doing the work. They're putting our food in supermarkets, the crops that we can get in America. They're the people who harvest them." Immigration policies remain a contentious issue that has ramifications for national security, familial bonds and economic contributions," an anonymous student said. "Discussions often reveal differing perspectives, and especially as new voters seek to contribute to political processes, it is all the more important that voters stay informed. "I just heavily, heavily advise education and do your research and don't go off what everybody else is saying, because what everybody else is saying is what the people around them are saying, and it just continues the cycle. It could be factual, but a lot of the time it is in factual."

While this piece discusses various aspects of President-elect Trump's proposed policies, district guidelines prohibit coverage on certain topics. This limitation reflects district policy rather than a lack of relevance or significance to these issues.

Home for Holidays: Value of Homemade Gifts

By Melanie Pinkerton

With the holiday season just around the corner, people scramble to find the right gifts for loved ones in stores and online. Little do they know that some of the most cherished gifts are the ones made by hand, either by a loved one or a business that creates their products with individual care. “Putting a lot of time and effort into something and knowing that it’s appreciated makes me feel really happy,” senior Addison Duke said. “That’s why I keep doing it.” Duke crochets and makes dozens of gifts for friends and kids who she cares deeply about or is proud of. Buying a gift may be easier and faster than taking the time to make a gift by hand, but creating something on your own for someone else really shows how much you value the person in your life. Store-bought gifts are also often discarded, regifted, upcycled, or thrown away shortly after someone receives them. A personal handmade gift holds a lot more value. “I feel like with store-bought [gifts], once people don’t find a use for it, they donate it or throw it away,” Duke said. “With homemade gifts, I can tell they put effort into it, and that really means a lot to me.” However, especially in recent years, people have also turned to small businesses that create gifts by hand. Farmers with fresh produce, candle makers with natural ingredients or an artist who loves to create are all examples of small business owners who make their products with care. Even though a loved one didn’t actually make these gifts, people still appreciate the notion of receiving something that

someone made themselves compared to a copy-and-paste product from a factory. “A lot of the time people like personalized things, like when people make a keychain with your name on it or draw a picture for you,” Nagaraddi said. “I’m not super artistic but for people’s birthdays I like to make a bracelet with their name on it and their favorite colors.” The best thing about these businesses is that they’re local and close. Some students even run their own businesses, one of which is The Candle Corner. Nagaraddi and her friends started making candles and selling them for fun a few years ago. Since then, their work has flourished into a small business that supports local charities and creates cute and fragrant personalized candles. “We have four people [and] each of us has a different role,” Nagaraddi said. “We do things like making the candles, marketing them, we have tech support, and we pay attention to what customers like.” The Candle Corner allows customers to pick their own scent, color, and even a personalized message for their candles. The candles are easy to make and include vegan soy wax. Each one is prepared with special care, and part of the profits goes to local organizations. “Our product is hand-made, vegan, and it’s for profit, but we also donate a portion of the proceeds to local charities,” Nagaraddi said. “Our main cause right now is the Children’s Advocacy Center; any extra money that we have, that’s where it’s going

right now.” The business hopes, even though they may not know their customers personally, that their candles are comforting and warm the homes of those who receive them. They have a page on Instagram and a website where they post photos of them and their work to try and connect with their audience. “We show pictures of us making [candles],” Nagaraddi said. “The whole point is to make it feel local and like we put our time and effort into these candles to give to you.” Homemade gifts show time, effort, and care, and have the potential to kindle meaningful bonds and memories. Whether you create a gift yourself or work closely with a small business to customize something special for a loved one, consider taking time out of the bustle of the holidays to show loved ones you care with a handmade gift this winter. “Gift-giving isn’t just to make other people happy, it’s to make yourself feel happy,” Duke said. “That’s why so many people do it.”

Photo from Cafe Crochet



Students At Work

By Carter Fleming

Life as a student is busy. Many students are involved in extracurriculars like clubs, sports, or community service. But, what people often see are students with jobs. A student with a job is not out of the ordinary, and being employed is something most students yearn for. But how do students get these jobs, and what are the implications? These are all things students should think about when mulling over the thought of employment. Students who have jobs first have to find those jobs. Students may have a harder time finding jobs due to the current job market. Many are looking for employment, and because of this, employers can pick and choose the best candidates for a job. Since COVID, more teenagers from 16 to 19 have jobs, per the Bureau of Labor Statistics, but in the past year, unemployment in young adults spiked to 14.1%, a 1.3% spike from last year's high of 13.1%.

"Finding a job is so hard, you don't know what you're doing," career prep teacher Rebecca Ward said. "You don't know what's available out there, you don't know how to prepare." Per the Indeed career guide, most jobs require applicants to have experience or skills needed in their fields, which is unrealistic for teenagers trying to get their first job. Skills like professional speaking or overall discipline without any prior experience in the workforce are hard to gain. These disadvantages make employment harder to come by for some teenagers. Employers recommend that when trying to get a job, applicants make a resume out of all strengths and

applicable experiences. Preparing for potential questions during an interview and dressing appropriately is also advised. "Chick-fil-A was the hardest job to get," senior Ella Portaza said. "It's because I was 15 and finding a job was the biggest struggle." Working a job has more benefits than the money gained from it. Experience from working teaches a person skills that are usable forever. Depending on the student's job, they may gain discipline,

"I got to be a role model for my siblings, which pushes me a lot. I've got pressure on me, but diamonds get built under pressure."

- senior Zana Mirza

time management, or communication skills. Being able to implement skills like time management can help with everyday life and how one may organize their day. A mix of these skills gives advantages to those who gain these skills while working, being able to use those skills to move up the employment ladder. "My job is fantastic, I love what I do especially since I get to work with soccer," senior Cole Ramey said. "It does require a lot of balance. You have to be disciplined in what you do, whether it's athletics, your job, or academics, you have to have a good mix." Being employed in high school may be tolling. Having a job outside of

school, in essence, is another extracurricular activity taking up student time. Jobs take up more time compared to other extracurriculars and, in actuality, can easily burn a student. School is the main priority of children 5 through 18. Compared to most adults, who spend their time making a living, having to balance both working a job and working in a school can cause a burden to those who take it on; it can be mentally and physically draining, which affects a person's health. For juniors in high school, they have less time to prepare for the SAT than seniors who may be applying for colleges. "It took a lot of time, and was a lot of work," senior Kris Ruiz said. "Having a job affected my grades because I had less time and I was always super tired. I stopped working because I had to focus on senior year, college applications, and SAT work." As busy as a student's life can be, one can manage to fit a job into their life, a job which may be related to their interest. Overall, having a job as a student is something students might want to strive for based on their goals. A job is an advantage seen by those who do currently work, an aid in their goal. It's a life-preparing learning experience acquired from students who benefit from being employed as a student. "I got to be a role model for my siblings, which pushes me a lot," senior Zana Mirza said. "I've got pressure on me, but diamonds get built under pressure."

John Tague: Incredible Individuality

PANTHER PROFILE

By Reece Yeamans

Baggy clothes, long hair, careless attitude; these are the things you see for the first time when you look at John Tague. Known for dressing up like Jesus and standing out amongst any crowd, Tague makes a name for himself by refuting societal norms in his own unique way. “I’m an oddball,” Tague said. “I’m eccentric, very eccentric, I would say I’m weird even.” Tague takes pride in

his oddity though; he doesn’t see non-conformity as a negative. Tague models a philosophy that has been largely abandoned in the world we find ourselves in. “I don’t want to have a successful life, I want to have a fun life,” Tague said. “If you’re successful and you’re not having any kind of fun what’s the point?” The cultural

climate of America today imposes a general model for life. It is expected that children do well in school, move onto advanced education, and then once they are adults enter a career they will have until retirement. This is how many Americans live their life now and will continue to live their life, but for Tague, this is not the purpose of living. “You got to find your own success, and I think your own success is how happy you are in life,” Tague said. “What you want to be,

or what drives you to do what you want to do.” To the people around him, Tague acts as a break from the monotony that we can often find ourselves in. By standing out Tague acts as a sort of comic relief for those around them. “He for sure positively affects people,” senior Jaxun Tague said. “Even if it’s just giving them a smile on their face before they have to go back and do their schoolwork.”

Photo from John Tague



More than just happiness, interacting with Tague offers a whole new perspective on life. When you’re forced to look at everything you know through Tague’s eyes, the world suddenly becomes a much more full and complex place. “Because of Johnny, I know how to talk to people who are different, and understand them and hear what they’re saying,” Jaxun said. “He’s really put that into perspective for me because he’s nothing like me.” Through the infectious positivity Tague spreads, and the lens he offers

through which the world can be viewed, Tague makes the world a better place. Tague embodies a form of positivity that accomplishes both self value and acceptance of others. “If more people lived like Johnny we’d be closer to world peace than ever,” Jaxun said. “Johnny’s such a positive guy, and I wish more people had that attitude.” For Tague, though, his fun doesn’t come from raising up others in his life. It comes as an added benefit to who he is, however, he values his individuality far more than anything. “I don’t do anything for anyone, I do everything for myself,” Tague said. “I dress for myself, I talk the way for myself, and the long hair is for myself.” Tague refuses to become just a cog in the machine. His life is his to live as he pleases, and he fully intends to enjoy it while it lasts. But for Tague,

this extends beyond his own life, as he believes that everyone should be allowed to do what they want to do. “As long as I know where I’m going and how I control myself, I don’t care about what everyone else does,” Tague said. “You have to let them have their own freedom.”

Tague is now pursuing a GED outside of the traditional high school setting. Tague hopes to find personal success outside of the traditional setting, in a way that will help him feel fulfilled.

Planting Change: SAVE Spreads Sustainability

By Camille Wright

A light breeze rustled through the trees as SAVE club members scattered across the school campus. In one hand, they held a trash bag and in the other, a trash grabber as they readied to pick up litter across the school campus. Among them was sophomore Manya Nagesh, the club's founder, watching as students gathered to begin their afternoon project. For her, this wasn't just a cleanup but the first step towards her goal of bringing environmental change to her school. "That was kind of my dream," Nagesh said. "I kind of wanted to integrate helping the environment into like a club and at PESH try to, like, spread the awareness of [the] environment and try to encourage other people to do stuff that's similar to, like, saving our environment, and try to initiate the change." In a school filled with clubs for different interests and goals, SAVE, short for Sustainable Action for a Vital Environment, stands out as a new addition entirely focused on sustainability and environmental impact. "I also think it was unique because there hasn't really been

a club dedicated [to] this specific environmental change," SAVE president Anshveer Kang said. "I know there are other clubs for service, but not specifically for environmental issues." SAVE members participate in hands-on projects at every meeting. The team designs each project to raise awareness about environmental issues in school and the community and encourage others to make their lives more sustainable. The type of project depends on the week, but they first introduce the plans at the meeting and spend the rest of the time working on the project. "This year [is] the starting point and the beginning of the SAVE journey," Nagesh said. "We aspire to get a lot of people in our club to work together and help other people know the importance of our environment as well." This year, the club has done many projects, including making homemade seed bombs by combining compost, clay and seeds. In their most recent meeting, 52 students worked together to make compost kits. SAVE plans to find a place to create a garden on campus,

and club members will use items like the composting kits to create a flourishing nature scene. "Our main goal is just to spread awareness, so we're not specified to one particular cause," Nagesh said. "It's like a big over- all, general cause, [of] what people can do to like, what they can do to like, spread the awareness and try to initiate the change." At the end of the year, SAVE will host a special ceremony to recognize its members who have consistently made positive contributions to sustainability in the school and community. Students will receive awards based on their participation in meetings and activities, with greater involvement leading to more awards. These recognitions will not only be a point of pride but can also enhance a student's resume, reflecting their commitment to environmental change. As more students join, SAVE's impact continues to grow. For Kang, the best part of the club is the sense of community it fosters. "I think the best thing is probably the community and having so many people come together to help in aiding the environment, even if it's small things, like just picking up plastic off the ground and a trash pickup," Kang said. "But when everyone comes together, it's a really good feeling." The biggest thing that sets SAVE apart from the typical environmental clubs and groups is their commitment to equipping others to impact their environment, even outside the meetings. "If you ask anyone, they would say that 'yes, the environment is good to save' and whatnot, but no one is trying to do anything about it," Nagesh said. "So, our main goal is to initiate the change. We try to make people do something. Not just say it's important."



Photo from Jacob Medows


 Photo from Freedom Forum

Censorship: Navigating Limits of Free Speech

By Aisha Ali, Celine Tan and Reece Yeamans

In the United States, every citizen is guaranteed protection by the First Amendment, meaning they have the right to free speech. Specifically this right is that opinions can be expressed in religion, news and protests. But the question arises: what is free speech? When speech threatens the safety of a group or the cultural cohesion of America, then there are concerns surrounding whether or not that speech should be allowed. While some groups advocate for the careful selection of what can and cannot be said, others see the ability to speak their mind as a core value of the American identity. “It’s really important to learn,” senior Ishika Kothari said. “Learning and talking is essentially what brings out the truth.”

Censorship in School: Reasoning vs. Ramifications

Censorship in schools is a major issue to many Americans. The debate over whether or not free speech completely exists in schools has many strong arguments on either side regarding a variety of issues. Pro-censorship advocates argue claims such as brainwashing and indoctrination against anti-censorship advocates, while the anti-censorship advocates lobby the argument that teachers are unable to teach against the pro-censorship advocates. “Certain topics being too controversial to teach does impact my ability to teach certain topics,” an anonymous teacher said. “Because things that are very controversial are also really relevant.” In the classroom environment, there is a struggle between saying what needs to be said and getting the permission to say it. In the political climate of modern America, some educators

feel they need to walk on eggshells at all times, largely due to the war raging on against education from parents’ rights groups, backed by state legislatures. Senate Bill Three (SB3) came into effect in Dec. of 2021. The bill’s purpose is to stifle conversations surrounding race, gender and systemic oppression while emboldening those regarding U.S. exceptionalism and patriotism. The bill also, however, bans other, more widely agreed upon subjects as well. According to SB3, “Educators cannot require or make part of a course inculcation that one race or sex is inherently superior to another, an individual should be discriminated against because of race or sex and an individual’s moral character is determined by race or sex.” While these laws do act to protect people of different races and sexes, they hinder important discussions regarding the real situations many people still find themselves in. History and reality may sometimes be uncomfortable for groups on both sides of an argument because facts don’t care about your feelings.



Feelings, though, have increasingly become involved in controlling what goes on at school. This comes in the form of parents' rights. Increasingly, the argument comes up that the parents of students have the right to control what their children learn. The Texas Education Code states that "parents have the right to temporarily remove their child from instruction or another school activity when it conflicts with the parent's religious or moral beliefs." Parents' rights groups and Texas legislators use this reasoning to justify a type of soft censorship wherein, through omission, information is hidden or obscured. This is the logic behind book banning and Texas' opt-in sex ed policy. This reasoning is used in issues such as book bannings. The problem arises that the facts of sex and the ideas presented in banned books are real-world concepts that many students already have experience with. The big issue is these subjects are controversial. "The main restriction is controversial versus uncontroversial," an anonymous teacher said. "I understand why people would want us to stay with uncontroversial things, but also why talking about controversial things can lead to a deeper understanding or learning experience overall." Censorship extends beyond the classroom though. There have been many debates over what is and what is not covered by the First Amendment in regard to expression. For instance, following the leak of the Pentagon Papers during the Vietnam War, the federal government attempted to persecute The New York Times and The Washington Post for exposing

instances in which the government lied to the people of the United States. The Supreme Court ruled unanimously that prior review and censorship of the press was a direct violation of the First Amendment. While the case of the Pentagon Papers upheld people's right to expression, there are several forms of media that do not receive the same protections. Notably, there are several banned books in the United States. Despite the fact that the federal government does not ban books on a nationwide scale, there are still many local book bannings. In the 2023-24 school year Texas was the state with the third-most book bans in the nation, with a total of 538 book bans across 12 districts according to PEN America. Of these books, "37% of the banned books had characters of color or themes of race and racism. 36% had LGBTQ+ characters or themes." These statistics make many ask the question: what is the end goal of this censorship? "I think a lot of the time these institutions have agendas they don't make clear," Kothari said. "They're essentially trying to silence the narratives of minority groups, and maybe they don't think it's important." By silencing the narratives of minority groups, those in favor of censorship obscure the full picture of America. It becomes difficult for those ignorant of historical facts and human perspectives to broaden their horizons when pro-censorship groups restrict free education and information. "It creates a culture of ignorance," Kothari said. "By silencing narratives, you're not telling people the whole truth and you're not giving people who were

discriminated against the justice they deserve."



School Protests: Evaluating Student Rights

The ongoing debate over the limitations of censorship sheds light on the effects of restricting debatable topics. The main debate covers whether or not censorship imposes on students' First Amendment rights; the recent rise in censorship among educational institutions sparks controversy, especially over the limitations of student protests. "Beyond book banning, I think another form of censorship could be silencing protest groups on university campuses," Kothari said. "I think that's also really harmful because obviously you want to promote free speech, and you want to ensure that these protests are peaceful. But by cutting down on these protests entirely under the excuse that it's providing hate on a certain demographic, you're essentially silencing the freedom of speech, and you're not allowing for diversity, equity, and inclusion to exist." For instance, The Mercury was known as the University of Texas at Dallas's original newspaper team. However, after student media advisor, Lydia Lum, accused The Mercury's editor-in-chief Gregorio Olivares of violating student bylaws, because they had written about pro-Palestinian

student encampment and subsequent arrests; the entire newspaper staff unanimously went on strike by refusing to continue publication. In response to the university's rapid censorship, The Mercury rebranded by successfully establishing their own student-initiated news source, now known as Retrograde. "Honestly, maybe because times were different then, but I felt fairly free to say what I wanted to say in papers that I wrote or in a classroom," Adrienne Caughfield, the Dual Credit U.S. History Teacher, said. "Even though, like most teenagers, I didn't want to say anything in a classroom. But I never really felt like anybody was calling me out for anything if I was." Journalistic writing and newspapers have always been used as a way to communicate their opinions on events, whether they are problematic or not. Some students feel that Restricting certain controversial topics is a violation of First Amendment rights by limiting free speech. "[Speaking out] is not just being made fun of or bullied anymore; it's public. It's on social media, it's being doxxed, it's your whole life that could be just exposed in a really bad way," Caughfield said. "Sometimes it could potentially get violent; nobody wants to expose themselves to that, and I don't blame them. I think about questions I could ask in a classroom, and usually when I

ask questions that are even vaguely controversial, usually what I get are students who smile, but they won't say anything because they're afraid." For example, students organized a walkout, where the initial goal was to advocate and raise awareness among students and on social media, but the school and students faced significant backlash after the event. "[Blaze Media and Ground News] published articles and wrote on X [criticizing students for] attending the walkout," junior Nawal Hassan said. "I don't think there's anything wrong with bringing up [societal] or global issues in school because it raises awareness." criticizing Social media is a source of information; although it's not always reliable, censoring certain problematic topics continues to cause even more controversy. Social media is an integral part of society that influences students, but school districts aren't able to control everything online. "They [were] twisting everything that [the students] were trying to do," Hassan said. "Political opinions can't be talked about [for] the teachers, at least, but the students can say what they want." It's common for topics online to be taken out of context, and according to Phys, students are typically reluctant to give their hot-takes or comment on controversial topics. This is commonly known as the 'spiral of silence' and contributes

to self-censorship. It is a phenomenon in which social media users, primarily students, shy away from discussing controversial topics unless their audience agrees. No one would know about the topic unless people actually talk about it and choose to learn about it," Hassan said. That's not limited to just [the walkout]; it applies to all global issues and politics. It's about actually choosing to educate yourself."

Media Censorship: Necessary or Unwarranted?

Although verbal expression is the form of the First Amendment that usually comes to mind, the freedom of expression is not limited to words and dialogue. Artists possess the unique ability to express their views in a more abstract form through the works of theatre, literature, music and more. Consequently, censorship manifests itself differently in these other categories. "Art is always going to be the most emotional and indirect direct way to discuss something," IB senior Ryleigh Peterson said. "And I feel like censorship is often, right now in today's age, a little bit less [strict] on it, but we have had to work really hard to get there. We have had a long line of artists that had to question what art is and what extent to which we're able to express ourselves

49.5% of students are not reluctant to share their opinions on controversial topics

34.5% of students prefer to stay out of controversial discussions in general

in order for us to make it here.” Locally, the school’s International Baccalaureate (IB) and Advanced Placement (AP) classes study historic European artwork in which some pieces exhibit nudity. Classes encourage studying a variety of different expressions of media as long as they are not vulgar in nature. Many students like this policy since it promotes the exploration of more topics. The popular belief is that the role of art educators should be to expose students to a diverse set of art experiences, even if the educator does not personally like or endorse each artwork. It is then up to the student to accept or reject any artwork they see. “Since we’re a senior high campus, we have been fortunate to have productions that feature some pretty complex topics and subject matters,” theater director Brian Grunkowski said. “Our East Side Community is a wonderful, encouraging community that is open to different perspectives and different designs. I feel like I have the opportunity to show more complex stories because of the community’s acceptance.” However, when faced with the contrasting beliefs of multiple communities on a global scale, it might be more difficult for artists to utilize their creative liberties. Private groups and public leaders may attempt to censor artwork to avoid political controversy. According to UNES-

CO, there were 1,200 violations of artistic freedom in 2021, ranging from censure of artworks to physical attacks on artists. As a result, 39 artists lost their lives and 119 went to prison. A 2021 Freemuse report found that one of three cases of artists getting arrested was due to online activity. “A lot of times, [social media corporations] shut it down [when people try to express their beliefs],” Caughfield said. “They’re trying to police what is being said. They’re trying to protect themselves, but at the same time, they’re being too restrictive. To have [your First Amendment rights] restricted because it doesn’t fit business-wise is problematic.” Laws regulating social media are currently made by the states. States such as Texas and Florida have legislation that prevents social media companies from censoring controversial content related to topics such as anti-vax and election fraud. According to the American Civil Liberties Union, elected representatives and government organizations cannot censor comments on their official social media pages, which are public spaces, due to the First Amendment. However, social media companies often use automated monitoring systems to block curse words and trigger words. “I see [hate speech] a lot on X,”

Peterson said. “I think it’s ignorant of us to censor what we would call ‘trigger words’ and not censor hate speech, or at least have disclaimers or information regarding that sort of behavior and rhetoric.” Censoring trigger words seeks to prevent people from discussing overly sensitive topics, but sometimes this can hinder educational discussions of important topics such as mental health. According to The Street, users combatted this by creating an online language known as “Algospeak”, where they substitute creative nicknames for known words that upset the algorithm. As social media gains a more prominent role in today’s world, many people place emphasis on the responsible use of social media. “I hope to see an increase in media literacy from both children, young adults and elderly,” Peterson said. “I hope that both the censorship and the lack of censorship will increase people’s [desire] to learn more and be [better] educated. I think that could be really the best result of our current use of social media.”



12.4% of students are reluctant to share their opinions on controversial topics

3.6% of students chose not to comment

*out of 194 students polled

Battling Winter Blues: Gym Arcs, New Years Arrives Early

Photo from Vecteezy

By Aisha Ali

Winter is a season of opportunity, personal growth, preparation and winter blues. As days grow shorter and colder, all any teenager wants is to curl up in a warm, cozy blanket. However, with both determination and resilience, certain ambitious students get a head start on their fitness goals for 2025. Preparing for the new year even earlier than others, athletes incorporate strict workout routines into their jam-packed schedules. Going to the gym isn't easy. It's a hard habit to build and requires hard work. Students join school sports as both an extracurricular activity and a physical one. "It's little things like going to the batting cages over the weekend," softball player and junior Aisha Nawaz said. "So, getting here and just really putting in that work, putting in multiple hours in the batting cages and in the catcher's room." Whether it's arriving to practice early or staying late, Nawaz vigorously trains for the upcoming softball tryouts. Softball allows Nawaz to maintain a stable workout routine in a way that she can manage both at home and at school. Although softball can be tedious and time-consuming, the benefits of the sport continue to outweigh the disadvantages. "I didn't have great health growing up, so I was in the hospital a lot," Nawaz said. "Working out has definitely helped me get healthier. It used to be really

hard to balance it, because I wouldn't know when to go. Then by the time I got home from school, I would assume that there's not enough time. But recently, I've carved time out of my day to go. I don't like to make excuses to not go because I don't have time. It's between waking up early or staying up late and going to the gym and just kind of fitting it in where I can. Because you never know, some days you can't go, some days you can't go." While it's easy to make excuses and ditch going to the gym or even working out at home, a school sport isn't as easy to skip. No matter how tedious it may be, student-athletes persevere by digging time out of their personal lives and crammed schedules to exercise. "I'd say early in the morning, that's probably the best time to work out," senior Victoria Johnson said. "I feel like later at night, I can definitely work out, but it's just harder because you're more tired and you're focused on getting the workout done, but early in the morning, I feel like that's the best time that I love getting a morning workout in." Johnson understands the struggle of balancing exercise and academics as well as any student-athlete. She already has plans set in place to make 2025 an amazing senior year, and that starts with physical health and a healthy diet. Bulking is a diet consisting of an intentional calorie surplus; it's a strategic plan of

gaining not just weight, but also muscle mass. Conversely, cutting is a diet that consists of a calorie deficit where calories are limited and counted; higher protein intake is a top priority to reach body goals of cutting, or losing, body fat while maintaining muscle mass. "From the diet aspect, I do try to eat more clean and limit fast food and stuff more," Johnson said. "I would say cutting would be during this time going into track season, like winter is probably like when I actually start cutting, which sometimes sounds backwards, but during the summer, I pretty much eat whatever I want, and then during the winters I start to cut for track season." Transitioning between cutting and bulking as the year progresses can be exhausting, but Johnson strives to limit junk food intake altogether by eating in moderation during the winter time. Despite the amount of dedication and ambition, fitness is a continuous journey, and any journey is inevitably a challenge. "Being able to challenge myself, physically as well as mentally, especially within track, it's more of like a mental game than it is physical, knowing that even though your body thinks it's ready to stop, your mind can keep going," Johnson said. "I've been able to apply that, not only from track but in my separate life at the gym, my clubs, Pickleball, JROTC, everything."

Bowling Team's Journey to Striking Success

By Celine Tan and Redding Van Sickle

The bowling team may not grab the attention of primetime sports like football or basketball, but it thrives in its own lane. Every Tuesday night from nine to 10:30 PM, when most students are climbing into bed for the night, the team gathers for practice. Under the guidance of head coach Michelle Shelton, this team continues to build upon their impressive legacy, reaching beyond expectations for high school sports. "We're aiming to keep improving every week, get stronger as a team, and make it back to state," senior Gavin Underwood said. "We want to push for a championship, but we know it's all about steady progress." Over the past two years, the boys varsity team reached the state level, placing in the top five every time. The varsity girls, however, achieved it all and lifted the state championship just two years ago with the class of 2023. "Seeing them lift that trophy was incredible," Underwood said. "It showed us what's possible if we keep working." Their late-night practices, characterized by a fun and relaxed atmosphere, are different from other sports. Members show up to improve their

personal techniques while also bonding with each other by participating in an activity they all enjoy. Keeping morale high and learning others' bowling styles is crucial so they can fully be in sync at competitions. "I think people should know how much we invest in this sport," Underwood said. "It's easy to overlook, but we're serious about it. We work hard, we show up every week, and we want to make our mark. The bowling team is unique because, to me at least, it's a very fun and casual environment where everyone just wants to have fun," senior Kamryn Anthis said. "It can be competitive, and it's really exciting when everyone gets into it, but it can also be very friendly. The coaches are really great and supportive, and it's overall a really great group that I'm happy to be a part of." Even without an official team captain, they have natural leaders on the team. All fingers point to senior Jaycob Felder. Felder brings a steady leadership presence both on and off the alley, guiding new and returning members with his dedication to building a positive environment that inspires growth. As their chemistry grows with each practice, the team gets sharper and builds a team identity that thrives under the radar. It's this blend of individuality and unity that makes every game feel like a new challenge and a mutual learning experience, ultimately strengthening their bond frame by

frame. Looking ahead, the team's goals remain clear: improvement and

consistency. "An obstacle I've had to overcome is not being very good at bowling," Anthis said. "I had no experience when I started out and I'm still definitely a beginner. For the girls, we all started out at square one and so we've gotten to grow and learn together. We've all been steadily improving and getting our scores up higher and higher with each game." The team's steady focus contributed to building a notable presence at the district and state levels. Almost every Saturday, the team competes at the district level at either Plano Super Bowl or Allen Bowl in Allen, TX. These competitions are what the members look forward to each week. It's easy to overlook a sport like bowling, but they don't need the spotlight; the reward comes in showing up each and every week and competing at the highest level. "When you're on the lanes, it's just you and the pins, but knowing the whole team is behind you makes all the difference," Underwood said. "We push each other, not just to win but to stay positive, especially if someone's having an off day."



Journey to College Commitment

By Varsha Jhanak

According to the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), around 530,000 out of the near eight million high school athletes compete in NCAA college sports in all divisions each year. The journey to collegiate-level sports is a treacherous one. From athletic excellence to academic commitment, prospective college athletes must have everything. The path to college commitment begins far before high school, with many athletes beginning their careers young. “I started gymnastics when I was about 18 months old,” senior and UC Berkeley Men’s Gymnastics commit Liam DeWeese said. “It’s really been a day one sport for me. I obviously did other stuff: soccer, baseball, flag football. But, I wasn’t really good at them. Gymnastics was the most fun and that seemed the most interesting to me at the time. I was doing gymnastics as a baby but I didn’t start doing competitive gymnastics until I was in 3rd grade. That’s when I started getting competitive about it.” Early into high school, athletes must decide if they want to confine their sport into the collegiate level. After deciding, student athletes can jump head first into the recruiting process. “I had always been pretty good at [baseball],” senior and Yale Baseball commit Jackson Hays said. “But, I really started to see the potential for me to play in college my sophomore year when I was on varsity. I realized that the competition around me was all really good and I was competing with them. So, I knew I could play in college at the D1 level.” Each sport has a variation of the recruiting process. For some sports, college coaches come to tournaments to watch athletes. In others, camps at the college are important to show coaches skills in their environment. However, for all sports, the process brings stress. “Just because all this recruiting happens in such a short time frame, everybody gets very stressed out that they need to cram all this work into such a short amount of time,” DeWeese said. “I think that mental stress

makes it very difficult for people. On top of that, the stress can actually make your body worse. A lot of people talk about that mind-body connection. When you’re just too stressed out, you’re not getting enough sleep, your body will degrade faster than it should or faster than it normally does. That on top of the physical intensity of the sport makes it way too easy for people to get injured, especially during their senior year.” Athletic ability is not the only factor college coaches consider when recruiting. “Academics is such a huge part [of committing],” DeWeese said. “Since men’s gymnastics is not a big sport, they don’t

“Sometimes, we miss our proms, our homecomings, we miss major events in life that only happen once. I feel like when you know all the time that you put into it, you’re finally getting what you feel like you deserve.”

- senior and UCLA Soccer commit Payten Cooper

have as much leniency with the colleges to get kids accepted. [The coach said] we have four boxes to check: athletics, academics, finances because they don’t have a lot of scholarships to give out, and your personality. They had to run my transcript through the admissions office before we could even think about recruiting. They had to calculate my GPA and see if I’d be able to get in. Luckily, I was. Academics is such a huge part for a lot of these schools. If you can’t promise that you’re going to pass your classes, these teams can’t compete you. Every coach I’ve ever talked to had the same ideal on this and it’s that, you’re a student athlete. Academics always comes before your performance.” Not only do college athletes have to excel at sports, but also in academics. To accommodate for the athletes’ busy schedules, many colleges allow their athletes to pick classes

early to adjust to practice schedules. “I knew that the academic side was very important,” Hays said. “With Yale, that’s about the best you’re going to get. I know [balancing academics and athletics] is going to be a lot. Obviously, it’s going to be a lot [but] I just have to be disciplined, spend my time wisely studying and practicing.” Student athletes put in extreme efforts to reach the collegiate level. Many sacrifice much of their time in order to excel in their sport. “During COVID, that’s when it kind of hit me, like that what I’m doing, this is just my life,” senior and UCLA Soccer commit Payten Cooper said. “When I tell people all the time I eat, sleep, breathe soccer, this is all I do. It hits you when you hit high school. Sometimes we miss our proms, our homecomings, we miss major events in life that only happen once. It hits you that this may be the end but by your senior year but that’s when you know you’ve officially done it. I feel like when you know all the time that you put into it, you’re finally getting what you feel like you deserve.” After such a grueling process, college commits still keep their ambitions and motivation high for their collegiate athletics. “[Winning in college is] going to be really hard,” DeWeese said. “I know people who are in the same graduating class as me, they are way better than me but I’m going to beat them. I will do everything in my power to do so. Granted, I’ll feel bad but that’s what I want to do. There are people who are way better than me that don’t have a spot. I feel like once you get to college, it’s not that you owe it to yourself to be the best you can. It’s that you owe it to everybody who didn’t get your spot. There’s limited spots and you can’t make a team and screw around the rest of your collegiate career. You have to prove why you got that spot. I need to prove to [everyone] that I got my spot for a reason. I just need to win.”



Photo from Plano East Hockey

Skating to Victory: Spirit of PESH Hockey

By Kristhel Soto Castro

Plano East Hockey earned impressive titles over the last three years, known for being 2022 Texas State 2A Champions, 2023 Texas State 2B Champions, and recently, 2024 DFW Varsity Bronze City Champions. During the fall, the hockey players participated in weekly tournaments every Wednesday and Sunday after school or during the weekend. This school year, the hockey team aims to demonstrate the growing results of its summer training throughout this fall season. Hockey practice occurs at the Richardson or Plano Star centers on weekends as early as eight in the morning. Training is a key habit for the athletes to further strengthen the team's coordination while on the rink. In addition, the players are also encouraged to practice in their own free time as well. Usual team drills include developing skills like passing, shooting, puck control, skating control, and defensive positioning to help players improve on the ice. From basic skating exercises to complex team strategies, these drills help play-

ers sharpen their skills and work cohesively as a unit. "I've been practicing this move where you drag the puck behind your dominant side and tap through your opposite side through the legs," right-wing player Ripley Dean said. "In a game against Propser, I did it going into the O-zone and it led to the game-winning assist which was pretty nifty." On Oct 30, the Plano East Varsity Hockey team held a reputable stance against Plano Senior at the Plano Starcenter. Both teams attempted over 40 shots at the goal during the first third of the game but both teams were equally matched and remained deadlocked on 0-0 throughout the first 45 minutes of the game. Plano East consistently pressured their opponent in the O-zone. Number 23, John Davis, and number 16, Hayden Block, dominated their offense position and worked in tandem on opposite sides of the rink to set up a goal. In a turn of events, during the last 10 minutes of the match, Plano East scored a last-minute goal against the opposing team

and sealed their victory over Plano Senior. "We've had a pretty slow start but worked our way back up to a 3-5 record," Dean said. "The teams' really starting to move the puck a lot better and really just had a rough beginning schedule, but we should start to level out here in the next 2-3 weeks. Overall there's been a lot of improvement from the summer though." This school year, the Varsity and JV teams are determined to continue their winning tradition and push to bring the season's end to a strong close, aiming to add another championship title to their impressive list. The Panthers are driven to uphold the athletic prowess reflected in the team's past years and are focused on building a legacy of excellence both on and off the ice, extending beyond to inspire the future generation of Panthers. Here is a word of advice from a Varsity player to students interested in joining the Hockey team next year: "There's a big learning curve whenever you first start [hockey], so just stick with it and bear down."

Materialism Overshadows Holiday Joy

By Celine Tan

For many, the holidays are a season of joy and celebration. Days off from work and school give people the chance to connect with loved ones and spend cherished time together. However, it seems like somewhere down the line, the focus shifted from loving celebrations to consumerism. Holidays, especially near the end of the year, bring shopping sprees and mega sales, promoting widespread materialism.

Now, the holiday season is overly materialistic. Society's wrongly normalized emphasis on gifts and elaborate spending detracts from the true meaning of the holidays. In the swipe of a card, materialism replaces cultural meaning and traditions with hefty transactions. For example, Christmas is one of the most celebrated holidays worldwide. The 2000-year-old holiday bears deep meaning for Christians as it celebrates the birth of Jesus Christ. Originally characterized by generosity and goodwill, even many non-Christians banded together to spread holiday cheer through Santa Claus meet-and-greets or Christmas caroling. Recently, though, people are experiencing a greater financial burden as they feel the need to spend a large sum on gifts. According to Lending Tree, 35% of Americans took on holiday debt in 2022, with an average balance of \$1549. Worse, the percentage of holiday debtors who said it would take five months or more to pay off that debt rose significantly, too, increasing from 28% in 2021 to 37% in 2022. This shift to consumer-driven rituals mirrors the broader problematic belief that monetary cost defines personal value. The increasingly materialistic focus of holidays creates stress and amplifies inequalities. According to a study by the American Psychological Association, 38% of people feel financial pressure during the holidays, often at the expense of their mental health. This is likely a

result of how sales often follow a major holiday: Black Fridays follows Thanksgiving, and Boxing Day follows Christmas. Even less popular holidays such as Labor Day or Memorial Day, see sales in department stores. In culmination with the unrealistic expectations for Instagram-worthy gifts and decorations that social media brings, people may consequently feel inadequate. Parents, espe-

According to Lending Tree, 35% of Americans took on holiday debt in 2022, with an average balance of \$1549.

cially, feel pressure to give their children expensive gifts, as if the price tag equates to how much they care. The pressure to participate in holiday shopping creates a divide between those who can afford to keep up and those who cannot. Massive sales come at a high environmental cost since consumer goods such as clothing and electronics often have short lifespans. According to the United Nations Environment Programme, the fashion industry alone contributes up to 8% of global carbon emissions and 20% of wastewater annually. Black Friday sales, specifically, encourage unsustainable production to meet consumer demand. The environmental cost of manufacturing and transporting billions of products contradicts the traditional message of gratitude Thanksgiving seeks to inspire. Even holidays that don't come with a massive sale can take a large toll on the environment. According to Time

Magazine, Americans generate 2000 tons of plastic waste each Halloween, mostly from single-use costumes and candy wrappers. Decorative items marketed as "must-haves" often end up in landfills after a single use, contributing to a culture of waste. Some argue that materialistic holidays are unavoidable and necessary in a capitalist economy as consumer spending leads to economic growth.

According to Deloitte, retail sales during the holidays account for 20-30% of annual revenue for many businesses. Admittedly, the holidays are a prime time for companies to hold sales as everyone is searching for the perfect gift for their loved ones. Gift-giving is a common way for people to show their appreciation for others, and the tradition of opening presents underneath the Christmas tree is not entirely unwarranted. However, people must reassess their values to ensure their reasons for celebrating are sincere. A study by Cornell University shows that experiences bring longer-lasting joy than

material possessions. Gifts are fun, but what's more special are the memories and connections people build with their loved ones, soaking in the warm family atmosphere or paying homage to their cultural heritage. As the holidays roll around, it is important to remember the famous quote: money does not buy happiness. Christmas isn't about buying the most expensive, elaborate gift but buying the most meaningful one. From souvenirs denoting inside jokes to concert tickets for one's favorite artist, the best way to show appreciation for someone is by presenting them with a highly personal selection of gifts. By reclaiming the values that once defined these holidays and traditions, everyone has the chance to celebrate a meaningful and memorable upcoming season. The holidays are not about having the most but about appreciating all that we already have.

Duality of Media: Books vs. Movies

STAFF EDITORIAL

By Melanie Pinkerton

The “book or movie” debate has a grip on readers and moviegoers alike with every new cinematic release. Movies can either help an underrated story hit it big with a fantastic film or tank its reputation with a less-than-stellar one. Not to mention personal preference, accessibility and time, which all play big roles in whether one decides to watch the movie or read the book, and if they do both, decide which is better. Books and reading are a more beneficial and accessible way to enjoy media, challenging individual brains and focusing on the details that really make a story. Books provide a deeper story, focusing on detailing characters and scenery and challenging the reader to use their imagination and creativity to build the story in their mind. They also improve literacy and comprehension skills compared to sitting and watching a screen. The general consensus is that the book already has better content than theatrical remakes and revamps. According to a chart from Indiana University Bloomington adapted from the Washington Post, which compared IMDb and Goodreads scores for over 800 books turned into films, the book was more often than not rated higher than or preferred over the movie adaptation. The article, coupled with the chart, discusses how books contain deeper properties than movies. Books have the ability to give perspectives and enact scenes that are difficult and awkward to do on-screen. Each person’s interpretation of a book is unique, yet the volume of information a book contains for a story surpasses details that directors capture in films. A longing

glance between two movie characters could really be several pages of deep, thought-out emotion and meaning in a book, which moviegoers would never truly know. Books also expand literacy, creativity, and imagination. According to the World Literacy Foundation, books teach children to build mental images from words and allow them to manipulate these ideas in their minds as they read a story. This leads to more potential for unique ideas, creativity, and a larger imagination overall, not to mention improved literacy. Reading works similarly for adults and can also improve stress and have certain health benefits. However, movies are seen as easier to digest than books. For those who have a harder time picturing stories in their mind or stumble over words as they’re trying to read, movies are a much easier form of media to enjoy. Even those who enjoy books may just need a little brain break and turn to movies after stressful days at work or school. Movies also take less time to enjoy than books do. Depending on how much time someone has, it can take days, weeks, and even months to finish a book. According to an article from The Harvard Crimson, movies display more of a story on a screen much faster than a book does and reach a larger audience of people as it is easier to understand and watch. Although they may take longer to enjoy, reading a book is more rewarding than watching a film. Taking the

time to read a novel fills the reader with a sense of accomplishment and appreciation for the story compared to watching a movie by means of relaxation over the course of an afternoon. Movies are also fantastic forms of media in their own right. Special effects, exciting visuals, and talented actors create an entirely separate form of entertainment from books. Movies actually make things exist instead of forcing the audience to get an idea in their mind, and therefore, the general population gravitates to theaters and streaming services. However, this does not devalue books or make them any less crucial to understanding a full and real story. Given the proper amount of time and brain power, books are a more satisfying form of entertainment, as not only do they create a longer and in-depth story but also a sense of fulfillment and magic within the reader. Audiences may tend to turn to movies in larger groups with open minds, but books will always magnify information and detail within a story. Movies base their art form on books, which forge worlds of their own through a plane of pen and paper. While movies make it easy for the audience to visualize something that already is, books spark the

minds of readers with the possibilities of what could be.



The Panther Prints staff voted 9-4 believing that books are better than movies

Movies That Made Our Generation

By Varsha Jhanak



Photo from IMDB

Barbie Princess Charm School (2011)

The beloved Barbie movie series' 12th installment featured a blend of empowerment, friendship and enchantment. The film focused on themes of self-discovery and perseverance. The film revolved around Blair Willows, a modest girl who realizes she's meant for more. Growing up with Barbie movies meant that our generation learned inclusivity and compassionate lessons in a dreamlike world. In particular, Princess Charm School struck a chord with its underdog narrative, encouraging young viewers to have faith in their own abilities.

Marvel Cinematic Universe (2008-Present)

The Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) became a defining cinematic phenomenon of Gen Z's childhood. From Iron Man (2008) to Avengers: Endgame (2019), the film series created an interwebbed superhero universe that combined action with humor. It changed popular culture around the world and taught Gen Z the importance of cooperation and determination. For our generation, the MCU is more than just movies; it's a community and an integral part of growing up.



Photo from Radio Times



Photo from Disney Movies

Tangled (2010)

Loosely based on the Brothers Grimm's Rapunzel, this Disney hit became a classic for Gen Z. Tangled showed desire for adventure and individuality through its stunning animation, iconic songs and Rapunzel's bold journey to see the world outside her tower. This generation got role models who represented bravery and growth through Rapunzel's bravery and Flynn Rider's redeeming journey.

Zootopia (2016)

In the busy animal metropolis, Zootopia provided an insightful yet simple metaphor for children on prejudice and societal injustice. This film's humor, intrigue and potent social justice criticism won over Gen Z. Its critical thinking about stereotypes and diversity through entertaining animations helped convey important messages to youth.

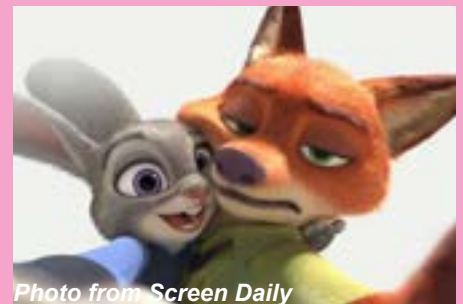


Photo from Screen Daily

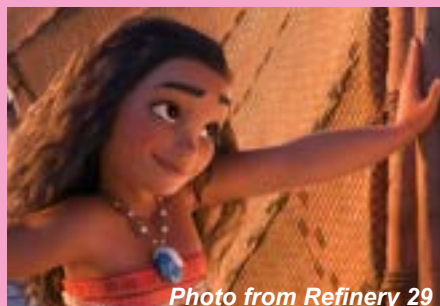


Photo from Refinery 29

Moana (2016)

Moana is one of Disney's most inspirational heroines because of her spirit of adventure and her ties to her Polynesian heritage. Her drive establish her own path was admirable to Gen Z, demonstrating the strength necessary for leadership. Moana's breathtaking scenery, catchy soundtrack and celebration of cultural identity served as a reminder of the value of honoring tradition while welcoming change. It served as a reminder to Gen Z of the strength of community and self-belief.

New Year, New You

By Jewel Jeffery

A New Year's resolution is when one sets expectations for the new year and hopes to achieve them. New resolutions circle the sense of renewal. Just like a lot of people in the world, students have New Year's resolutions that they would like to fulfill. Students brainstormed and planned ways to achieve these goals. Everybody has room for improvement, and being a better version of yourself each new year is important.



As graduation approaches quickly, senior David Alausa's New Year resolution is focused on being more independent. "My New Year resolution is to be more independent," Alausa said. "I am going to invest more time in myself and less time in other people." Since he is going off to college soon, his independence is very important. He plans to strategize and figure out a way to achieve this goal. "A lot of things are going to happen and I can't depend on other people," Alausa said. "I am going to have to be self-reliant and I am going to have to take a lot of things into my own hands. I want to believe in my power and what I can do by myself rather than relying on others."



Like many seniors, after high school, there are several roads they can take. Whatever it is that a student may decide, it all depends on how hard they work towards that goal and how well they plan. Senior Christian Lively's New Year's resolutions consist of future readiness and college goals. College has many positive outcomes and can leave one with job security, career opportunities, and a chance to network. "I want to get accepted into Texas A&M and find an internship during the summer." Lively has plans in mind to improve his resume and spend more time doing things related to his goals to accomplish them.



Many students have hobbies and skills that they are good at, and some want to improve while others want to resume. Senior Olivia Falabella's New Year's resolution is to get back into cheerleading. Falabella says she is out of cheer because she got injured a while back. "For cheer, I'm going to go to the gym more so that I can build up my strength so I'll be good by the time I go back," Falabella said. "I've done cheer for 13 years of my life, I'm very passionate about it. I just want to get back into it." Another one of Falabella's New Year's resolutions is to get her post-high school plans set and ready. "I would also like to come up with a final plan for college," Falabella said. "College is important to me because I am trying to become a physical therapist." She plans on viewing all of her options before making a final decision to help her be secure in her future.



One of the most important things in life is to take care of yourself. Junior Abby Marx's New Year resolution is all about self-care. "One of my resolutions is to make more time for myself," Marx said, "I sometimes make more commitments than I can handle, so I want to make sure I make time for myself so I don't get stressed out." Marx also wants to put herself out there more. "I'm usually pretty shy and reserved most of the time and would like to try to meet new people." These resolutions are necessary to Marx because she believes they will benefit her.



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