



New superintendent is excited to build relationships within the county



Despite his busy schedule, Dr. Aaron Spence agreed to meet in person with Cat Pizzarello (author) for an interview concerning his new position in LCPS. Spence was thrilled to answer other questions regarding the use of AI technology in classrooms and the recent logo change for LCPS for other staff writers on The County Chronicle newspaper staff. Spence expressed that he would like to help students as much as he can and give them the opportunity to talk to him directly. Photos by Daniel Adams.

Cat Pizzarello | Editor-in-Chief

Dramatics have filled LCPS in recent years, from attempting to return to normalcy after COVID-19 to the most recent rezoning of counties. Somewhere in between all the controversies, LCPS lost its prior superintendent and has been on the search for someone to fit the role.

Dr. Aaron Spence, former Virginia Beach superintendent, recently stepped up to this role and

expressed his excitement about receiving the position. “I’m having a blast,” Spence said. “I am really pleased to be able to come in and work in such a great school division.”

Having a good executive to lead a school district can be very beneficial to the success of the county, but the voices of students, parents, and staff of LCPS are of the utmost importance. “I don’t think it’s any superintendent’s job to figure out what they can do to improve our

county,” Spence said. “I think it’s our job together to figure out what we can do to improve our county.”

Spence expressed that he plans to spend his first months on the job reaching out to those in the LCPS community and focusing on building relationships. “One of the things that I’m doing right now, and one of the things that I’ll continue to do during my time here, is going out and talking to folks and listening to our families, and talking with students, and trying to

understand what their hopes and dreams are for our schools.”

In his efforts to reach out to the community, Spence hopes that he is “reimagining the superintendent” and their role in LCPS.

By reaching out to communities, students' voices specifically can really shine a light on what LCPS needs. Spence expressed his willingness to “get to know our student leadership and really work on student voice” to put the student’s

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LCPS creates logo after years of using county seal



The Loudoun County seal, left, served as the LCPS logo until a recent change to a more colorful logo specific to LCPS, right. The colors of the logo represent values of the school district and a more modern perspective. Photos courtesy of LCPS website (lcp.org).

Cat Pizzarello | Editor-in-Chief

Conversations and debates in hallways and classrooms begin to form about a change that is on everyone's mind. From the traditional and long-lived green and red seal to a now modernized display through bright colors and bubbly letters, the new logo for Loudoun County Public Schools has shocked the LCPS community.

Since Loudoun County Public Schools' original establishment in 1870, the logo across LCPS's division has always stuck as the county seal. The seal dates back to 1968

and was devised by the College of Arms in London; it seems now, however, that it was time for LCPS to retire it and devise its own logo.

On September 26, 2023, LCPS unveiled its new trademark, now including a timeless structure, bright colors, and an important message. “We did want to convey some sort of modern forward thinking,” **Dr. Aaron Spence**, superintendent of LCPS, said.

“Those colors certainly are more aligned to the kind of modern people,” Spence said. “Each of them conveys certain elements that are

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Parking etiquette for student drivers

Courtlyn Armstrong | Staff Writer

Loudoun County student drivers deserve designated parking spots for school, and it is important to follow proper protocol. Every year, students submit for parking spots for the school year, and even though seniors do have priority, it's still challenging with limited space to get spots and many are wait-listed. Overcrowded parking can be a safety hazard.

Security officer **Daemien Korker** says he “likes to keep people safe and secure” including in the parking lot. At this school there are a lot of people who care to keep the students safe so respecting them and the school environment is very important.

In order to get a parking spot most students will need to sign up prior to the beginning of the school year. Students must also fill out a Loudoun County parking permit agreement with their parents which states the rights of what the students should expect when it comes to violations and privileges and as well as a Commonwealth of Virginia Department of Education High school parking pass application.

“Everyone is always in a rush to leave and forget that there are other people that want to leave just as bad,” senior **Chloe Beal** said. “I don’t think there is a specific way to solve the problem, but I do think if people were more patient and not whipping around the parking lot then it would help”. This shows how much care the students have for others in a parking lot and how it could be dangerous.

Seniors like Beal have early release. Beal thinks that “it's not as chaotic during early release because it's mostly seniors who have had their license and are more respectful and aware of their surroundings.”

Students should be cautious and not worry solely on getting out but looking out for others. Also, if students do obtain a parking spot, it's not all sunshine and rainbows because some of the other students can make it an uneasy environment.

This means that following proper parking etiquette is important to the schools faculty and students because it can be dangerous and result in reckless driving, student car crashes, and disagreements. A lot of kids don’t want to have to deal with those kinds of acts and they should be able to park their car and leave with ease. Not only that, nobody wants someone else to take their parking spot. Can you imag-

ine the battle over parking spots if they were not pre-assigned?

Loudoun County has a good system established, as long as students are respectful and follow proper parking etiquette.

It's best for students to stay courteous and attentive when it comes to avoiding occasional parking spot mishap. A lot of people might say they aren't dangerous but they could result in potential road rage accidents or pedestrian accidents.

There are many times at dismissal when students are challenged to get through the two lane carpool line by the annex, along with the additional line that wraps around the cafeteria and behind the school. Not only have there been student accidents near campus, Other schools like Catoctin Elementary School, which have kids and parents going in and out of the building, and students at the crosswalk or walking home.

Drivers should stay super alert to cars and pedestrian traffic. Not only the ones on the road, but those crossing such as pedestrians must keep a watchful eye as well. No one wants to get hit by a car, hit someone or even get their car in an accident or fender bender. This is why, to stay safe, students should all be respectful, alert and while in a parking lot.

Many students who have just gotten their permit will often have other passengers than they are allowed to have but teachers teach kids in classes like drivers ed so that they listen but the students seem to not be impacted by it because of their actions in response.

It's important to use what you learn in classes, because you can get major ticket fines, get your license revoked, face jail time or, even worse, get in a tragic irreversible accident.

Painting parking spots has been a fun tradition for students (main-

ly seniors) to do for their school year. It does come with a fee of \$200, and also requires a drawing or sketch submission to be school appropriate/approved. September 10,16 and 25 are the dates that students painted their spots, and they enjoyed the time together sharing a part of themselves with the school.

The parking spots are limited to one person per spot so being respectful of other people's spaces is something that the students should also be aware of. Parking etiquette is very important. Police enforcers are trying to keep it contained and under control and we need to respect the people working to keep us safe. There is no good outcome from being reckless, selfish, unalert and rude when it comes to getting in and out of the parking lot. Remind yourself of these simple acts of kindness and being respectful students:

Respect others, cars, and space
Park in the middle

Don't be disrespectful and rude
Use one spot (your spot)

Don't block other cars

Watch for pedestrians

Respect authority, crossguards and signs

Stay alert (avoid in car distractions)

These things seem little, but make a huge difference to people, especially when trying to stay safe when maneuvering in a very busy and crowded parking lot.

Proper parking etiquette is important because you want others to be respectful to you and your property while making sure everyone is safe, while in and out of a vehicle. Therefore you should be kind and stay cautious, being kind can calm other drivers and yourself, but being cautious is staying safe which is important even within our parking lots and school environment. •



Airborne picture of one of Loudoun County High Schools parking lots. This is a past picture of the athletic entrance parking area where parking spots have been painted by students. Photo courtesy of Loudoun County High School Homes.com

THE COUNTY CHRONICLE

Loudoun County High School
415 Dry Mill Rd., SW
Leesburg, Virginia 20175
phone: 571-252-2000
fax: 571-252-2001

EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

EVELYN KUZMINSKI
CAT PIZZARELLO

LAYOUT EDITOR

EVELYN KUZMINSKI

MANAGING EDITORS

BEREK HARRISON
TAYLOR HELFER

BUSINESS MANAGER

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BRIANNA MARTINEZ
KAREN MARTINEZ-MELENDZ
CAT PIZZARELLO
KARAN SINGH

ADVISER

VALERIE EGGER

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Homecoming night through the eyes of royalty

Sophia Casciano | Staff Writer

My name was announced from the microphone echoing through the stands of the football stadium, followed by applause and cheering. My mouth was on the floor in disbelief while being embraced in a hug between both my parents. A crown was then placed on my head, catching my hair. The small pinches pulled me back into reality as it quickly set in that I had just won the 2023 Homecoming Royalty.

Homecoming week had yet to start, and I was beyond excited for my senior year homecoming. It all began with a simple announcement sent out to the students about participating in the 2023 homecoming court. I immediately knew I was interested in joining because, ever since I was a kid, I had wanted to win homecoming queen. After signing up, I was sent a chain of emails along with the other participating students. The emails consisted of game day preparation, pep rally relay race information, and forms we had to fill out about ourselves. I was overall intrigued by the whole process. The school week had begun, and the hallways were filled with students wearing all sorts of fun outfits fitting the spirit day dress code. As each day went by, I grew more and more excited, but with that excitement came nerves. I made sure to fill out the forms and read through the very descriptive instructions for the halftime walk. I knew that being prepared would calm my nerves temporarily. Friday soon rolled around. Walking into school, the first thing I could lay my eyes on was a sea of various shades of gold and yellow. Very quickly, unease returned to my body, sending goosebumps up my arms.

My eyes were glued to the clock through each block until the final bell rang, which meant one hour until the pep rally. During that hour, my partner and I made sure we had our gold on support! All members of the homecoming court were to be at the gym before the pep rally started so we could run through the steps of the relay race. The race was finally revealed, and with your partner, you had to go through a series of obstacles while racing three other groups. The first obstacle was a three-legged race followed by a potato sack hop, which led to a towel pull testing your partner's strength, then we had to complete three tosses, and finally we had to hold our partner's feet while they wheelbarrow hand walked to the finish line. Before I knew it, I was sitting on a beach being dragged through half of the gym in front of an audience of high schoolers and faculty members. Our first-place position was short-lived once we got to the wheelbarrow hand walk. We eventually tumbled our way over the finish line, flushed-faced and out of breath; we most definitely were not in first. Coming in a close second place, the races were over, leading us to the announcement of the boys homecoming royalty. I was hoping to hear my partner's name announced, but sadly, our second place streak didn't stop at the race. Even though I was very happy for the winner, I was more happy that the relay race was finally out of the way. The real preparation finally began when I got home, curling my hair and putting on my dress. I was beyond excited, and my nerves melted away. 7:00 p.m. finally rolled around, accompanied by my escorts, AKA my mom and dad. We found our seats on the sidelines before



Sophia Casciano (middle) with her parents Lou Casciano and Amy Casciano moments after she was crowned 2023 homecoming royalty. Photo by John Klimavicz.

the game started; all the girls were wearing their sashes and looked amazing. During the whole first half of the game, my mind was filled with all different scenarios of who was going to win, if the announcer would pronounce my name correctly, and so much more. The final buzzer went off, declaring halftime. The football players marched off as we pranced onto the side of the field and prepared to walk on. Alphabetically lined up, I watched as the first girl walked across the field with her parents while they read her name, important accomplishments, and what she hoped to do in the future. After watching another girl walk down, it was finally my turn. "Sophia Casciano" was read by the announcer, and we started our descent down the field. A smile glued across my face while the announcer contin-

ued to read his script. The moment grew to a close when the flashes of the cameras settled in and a new name was announced. I watched as my friends got their turns to walk, just as I did. After the last script was read, there was no time wasted when announcing royalty. "And the 2023 homecoming royalty is," filled the silence. At that moment, time was frozen, and I could not believe where I was standing, but my name echoing through the night left me speechless. After winning, the crowd broke out into applause. A tiara, a new sash, and a big bouquet of flowers were all given to me.

After all the hugs and all the pictures were done, I was so excited to win the 2023 homecoming royalty, and I was so happy to have been a part of the homecoming court with my friends. •



Contact
Edward Pizzarello
 at
ed@pizzainmotion.com!

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SPENCE continued from page 1 needs at the center of their plans.

Students, staff, and parents can most easily reach out to Spence online, specifically through a form titled “Ask the Superintendent”. Community listening sessions are also available to anyone and are great ways to voice ideas.

“I am interested in working on and working with our communications team, to really think about

how we celebrate our teachers,” Spence said. “I think our teachers need to know we love them.” Spence wants LCPS staff to know that the community is behind them.

Along with reaching out to the LCPS community, Spence is excited to become a part of it. “I’m looking forward to not being the new guy... and learning as much as I can,” Spence said. Being a

new addition to the staff at LCPS, Spence has provided an entry plan to highlight priorities he intends to manage that can be accessed on the LCPS website.

“And, you know, obviously, having brought my kids here to be students, I am looking forward to watching them learning as well in our schools,” Spence said. Spence has several kids now at LCPS schools and expressed that

he hopes to really get immersed in the LCPS community.

Spence provided many details about his role in LCPS on the LCPS website, including information about listening sessions and his efforts to reach out to the community. “I want to wear off so that I can make people feel like I’m really what I’ve been saying I am, which is wanting to be a part of this community.” •

LOGO continued from page 1 important to us as a school division.” The seal features four bright colors: vibrant red, apricot, airy blue, and navy purple.

According to LCPS, vibrant red is meant to represent excellence and innovation, while also tying in notes of red from the county seal. Apricot is meant to represent the diversity and sense of community within our division, while airy blue exemplifies trust building. Navy purple, which can be found on the trims of the LCPS website as well, shows agility and opportunity.

All of these colors tied together set up pillars for the values that LCPS strives towards.

As for the design, the logo was chosen from a selection of 115 student designs across the county. Out of those student designs, three designs were recognized and inspired the creation of the logo.

Melissa Cho, senior at Briar Woods, **Faun Erbe**, senior at Lightridge, and **Asher Brennan**, senior at Loudoun Valley, were all recognized for their designs at a school board meeting held on July 13, 2023. From there, three designs were derived from the students’ original artwork and then narrowed down to one.

“They have been talking about this for a few years,” Spence said. “The truth is LCPS didn’t

have a logo. LCPS was using the county seal, so we wanted to have our own identity with that.” The process for the logo change began as early as 2021 and has continued to be in the works until 2023 when the initiative was taken to design the logo.

As for finances, the county has budgeted \$52,500 for the changing of the logo and thus far the county has spent a little over half. “[Staff are] all going to have the old seal until they go through their regular replacements,” Spence said. Over time the new logo will become immersed into each school in the county.

“So much of the changes are digital, which is obviously not really a heavy cost,” Spence said. The logo change can easily be seen on the LCPS website, attached to staff emails, and being slowly implemented in schools across the county.

The logo is meant to represent the idea of looking ahead and a bright vision for the future. Whether you are a fan of the new logo or prefer the traditional seal, many efforts were made to ensure this trademark had a meaning.

LCPS’s mission statement for the county remains the same, but with the new logo change, there is an additional mantra that LCPS hopes will inspire their values for the county: “Engage. Empower. Enrich.” •



Small changes have been made throughout the county implementing the new logo in as many areas as possible. At the LCPS County building the logo is displayed on the entrance doors, along with an informative video in the lobby expressing the change for the logo. Photo by Cat Pizzarello.

Surprise essay format and other changes made to history classes

William Klutz | Staff Writer

Everyone that has taken AP World History in the past likely remembers the constant chapter tests and preparing for a forty-minute timed essay for which you didn’t know what the prompt would be. Now, for better or for worse, round two has been added to chapter quizzes, meaning students can re-take and get up to 100%. Unit tests have also been added to the class.

AP Government is seeing changes to the overall content of the course. However, the change that affects the most students is the change to the essay format for AP

World and AP US History exams.

All these changes came into effect immediately on September 12, over a month into the school year. “Previous to that change, any changes in the AP always come out for the following year,” AP US History teacher **Nancy Thomas** said. “You’re never surprised like that.”

Steven Williams, who teaches AP World, said that he and other AP World teachers had no input on the decision. “They send out questionnaires, like polls... little surveys for us to do, but it really wasn’t anything to do about rubrics,” Williams said.

Some APUSH students had

already written their first essay when the changes were announced. Thomas said she was “floored” and “stunned” when she saw the email announcing the essay changes.

The main changes to the essays involve the number of times students have to do extended sourcing, or HAPP, as it is taught, for each document. “It’s the same skills,” Williams said. “You just have to demonstrate them a fewer amount of times. So in theory, it’s going to hopefully increase scores.”

The changes came off of a year when there was a nearly 70% pass rate of the AP World exam. “The pass rate was good, but it kind of

seems like it’s going to help increase the pass rate, which kind of makes you think, ‘Okay, why are they doing this?’” Williams said.

It is also important to note that students will have the same amount of time, 55 minutes, to write their essays on exam day.

Students who took AP World in the past felt somewhat similarly. “I think it makes it easier for people to just... get a better score, but I think it counteracts what the whole point of the AP test is, because people can... not put as much energy in and still get a decent score.” junior **Octavian Ashford**, who took AP World as a sophomore, said. •

LCHS receives 2023 Continuous Improvement Exemplar Award

Dylan Johnson | Staff Writer

Loudoun County High School has received the 2023 Continuous Improvement Exemplar Award from the Virginia Department of Education. Principal **Dr. Michelle Luttrell** explained how.

When a student enters high school as a freshman, they are a member of a cohort along with all the other freshmen moving towards graduation. “You have a very determined amount of time to earn so many credits to pass so many state assessments, and the goal is to keep you guys together moving towards graduation,” Luttrell explained. “It is about the efforts of the school, the teachers, school counselors, working together to make sure students graduate on time with their cohort.”

In the past there has been an increased rate of people dropping behind their cohort. “For my first couple of years here, kids were

not graduating on time, they were not graduating with their cohort, we still have a very high graduation rate so it was a very specific group of students in our school that were not meeting on time graduation,” Luttrell said.

There are circumstances where students will come from other states, districts, or even other countries with varying levels of education. Those people are still expected to graduate on time with their cohort. “They have a lot of classes to recover, so some students come and they are behind, and we have to try to accelerate and try to recover,” Luttrell explained. “It can be pretty complex and pretty tricky, but the goal is to make sure that everyone graduates on time with their peers.”

This specific award that the school has received indicates that the school is doing what they can do and controlling what they can control in terms of helping students with what they need. “I

think our staff has been very committed over the years to creating the best lessons they can for kids,” Luttrell explained. “Something I think we should celebrate is that they’re really trying to be thoughtful about that, and I also think our unified mental health team has been excellent, because it’s been a really tough stretch of time for kids.”

This award is a good sign of how far County has come, keeping in mind the fact that COVID-19 has had quite an impact on education. “Wearing masks impacted our ability to communicate with one another,” Luttrell said. “When you can’t see someone speaking to you and you can’t see someone smiling it kind of dehumanizes us a little bit and it impacts the way that we communicate,” Luttrell added. “This is the best school has felt holistically since we’ve come back from COVID-19. It’s better than last year, last year was better than the year before, so I think

we’re going to continue to just start to feel healthier again.”

Even with all the things we are doing right, there is still room for improvement. “I think sometimes maybe we just approach things as ‘it’s just content,’ without realizing that that might actually have been a lived experience of someone or someone’s family member,” Luttrell said. “Nobody cares about how many standards you have to cover, we want students to learn, we want students to discover who they are, we want students to be stronger and healthier and more confident when they graduate.”

“I’m really proud of the staff,” Luttrell said. “They really do love you guys, and they really try to give one hundred percent every day to the students. I’m glad someone from the outside is celebrating them because they deserve that. They do work very hard for our students and I’m really glad they’ve been honored in this way.” •

Students deal with schedule conflicts as the year takes off

Karan Singh & Karen Martinez-Melendez | Staff Writers

As the upcoming school year begins, students and teachers prepare for a year of learning, teaching, and growing. However, amongst the students, a new problem has arisen. Students are complaining they haven’t gotten the classes they signed up for.

Rezoning has been very heavily talked about at Loudoun County High School. Last year, it was rumored that students would get rezoned depending on where they live and how much space was available at their local high school.

Once rezoning took place, many students were transferred to different schools; however, students were able to stay at their current school by filling out a request form.

As the 2022-23 school year went on, this rezoning topic settled as students were offered choices to stay at their current school, or be moved to another.

With class sizes increasing, students suspect that rezoning played a huge part in classes offered to them this year.

These rumors, however, were quickly dismissed by **Dan Croyle**, head of counseling department, who has been working at the school for 13 years.

Due to reasons like having to change schools or positions, or changing the department that they work in, six teachers were transitioned to different areas of the work field, Croyle said. This difference in the number of available staff brought changes to classes.

“I believe there’s less flexibility with class changes because of the size of classes,” Croyle said. Classes that would normally have around 25 students now had around 31 students.

Scheduling processes for the new school year start in February of the prior year. Students meet with their counselors and discuss their class choices for the upcoming school year.

By the time the new school year rolls around, many students have changed their mind on what classes they would like to take.

“Sometimes students change their mind,” Croyle said. “Once you change your mind, we have an allotment of teachers based on what we talked about in the spring as opposed to what people want in October.”

When students get their new schedules in late August, they see the arrangement of their classes for the upcoming school year. If they don’t like what they see, they go to their counselor, wanting to change their schedule.

However, it is very hard for counselors to change the schedules of so many students at the beginning of a new school year. The majority of

the time, students’ schedule change requests are rejected.

“I would say a majority of the students got the classes they wanted,” Croyle said. “So I think there’s a different way of replying [to the problem]. I think a lot of times, students get the course requests they’ve requested, but not necessarily either the format or the sequence of classes they want.”

Students also have preferences for their classes. While most like having classes with their friends, others may prefer to have PE at the end of the day.

These preferences are really hard for counselors to work with, especially when so many students have their own particular likes and dislikes.

“The upperclassmen get in a pattern of picking multiple things in the spring,” Croyle said, “and then when the new school year starts, they want to pare down and we don’t have that flexibility.”

“It’s like you’re going on a family vacation and you buy four swimsuits, but you really only need two,” Croyle said. “You take them home to see what looks the best and then

you want to return the two that didn’t work.”

Many classes are also only offered for one block, due to their lack of demand.

Other activities, such as students attending the Academies of Loudoun, can also affect how classes are offered to those students.

These problems can also be caused by reasons that counselors can’t control, like the number of classrooms for specific classes, or the number of students willing to take a class.

“I would also say that there are a lot of things that are under the radar that people don’t realize,” Croyle said. “There are a lot of things that happen behind the scenes, and people just assume we can just change any schedule we want.”

Even though scheduling conflicts will always stay around, it’s important to know that there’s a lot of contributors to these problems.

“If there’s an opportunity to offer a class, we did,” Croyle said. “I think it [scheduling problems] happens every year. We do the best we can to get the highest percentage of students that have requested a class in it.” •

Schedule Conflict

I'm reaching out because there is a conflict with your schedule. _____ and _____ are both offered the same block. Please let me know which class you would like to take and another elective to fill your schedule. You can call me at the number listed below or respond to this email.

An email sent to a student regarding schedule conflicts. The student was unable to take two of the electives they chose because the classes were both offered the same block and for only one block. Photo by Karan Singh.

Anticipation builds for Platinum Jubilee ahead of 70th anniversary

Brianna Martinez | Staff Writer

This 2023-2024 school year marks 70 years since the opening of LCHS and the school community is beginning to prepare for the biggest celebration to date.

County is the oldest high school in Loudoun, and with this remarkable feat of being open and functioning for so many decades, principal **Dr. Michelle Luttrell** along with members of the staff and student body, have begun to arrange tours of the school, student performances, outdoor activities with special guests, and many other events to unite our community and celebrate our school's history.

The idea to call the celebration the Platinum Jubilee was crowned by Luttrell, as a little dedication to **Queen Elizabeth II**, after her 70th year of reign was also named her Platinum Jubilee. "Another nod to the Queen might be in a formal tea held in celebration as well," Luttrell said.

The celebration planning has mainly been spanned out into the next school year, with a grand welcoming of the 2024 student class in September, a student-focused parade downtown during homecoming season, tailgating for football games, marching captains performances, and many other events in the works.

"Once the schedule is set and everything is finalized, we'll start promoting and that will probably start when we get back from winter break. We're looking at a kickoff in April," Luttrell said.

September 14, 2024 marks the exact 70-year mark of County's operation, as it was originally opened on that day in 1954. Of course in 70 years so many aspects of a school community can change, and for County, those changes are especially important to the community we have now.

"The physical things that you can see, like the renovations, those are very visible changes, and when alumni come back they notice that immediately," Luttrell said. "What you can also see and what you can more importantly feel, is the culture

of the school. I think this is an incredibly positive school community."

County opened during the segregation of the 1950s but over the decades has become more diverse and inclusive.

"I think we have a very accepting group of students in terms of being inclusive and celebrating the uniqueness of one another; that's something that our students do really well," Luttrell said.

Another important part of County's history is its staff and teachers who make a difference in students' lives. One staff member who has been here for many decades is current vice principal **Mark Patterson**. He has worked at County for a total of 29 years and has also aided in opening another LCPS school, Briar Woods High School. He has been a part of many different aspects of running the school from being a social studies teacher, SCA administrator sponsor, the Senior class sponsor, and currently vice principal.

"When I began, Loudoun County only had four high schools and now there are 20. I really believe that Loudoun County schools are some of the best to be found anywhere, and we have been able to keep this dynamic despite the incredible growth in popu-

lation," Patterson said.

What is most noticeable about the growth of the school is the very visible physical changes over these past decades.

"When I started here, the library was where rooms 229 – 235 are now, the current library was the aux. gym and my classroom was where the sky bridge now connects to the 200s hall. Also, the NJROTC annex was a maintenance garage for the county," Patterson said.

However, social changes have not gone unnoticed. Even with the creation of so many other local high schools, County does seem to have more of a noticeable local high school feel.

"Despite all the changes, kids are still kids. I say kids, but high school is where we get to see them grow into young men and women. They're funny, full of energy, and loaded with ideas. That hasn't changed over the last 30 years," Patterson said.

One part of the school community that has not changed though, is the clear dedication of teachers to their students and that has been noticed by all parties involved in the evolution of the school. "Teaching is a very demanding profession, and keeping a dedicated and talented teaching

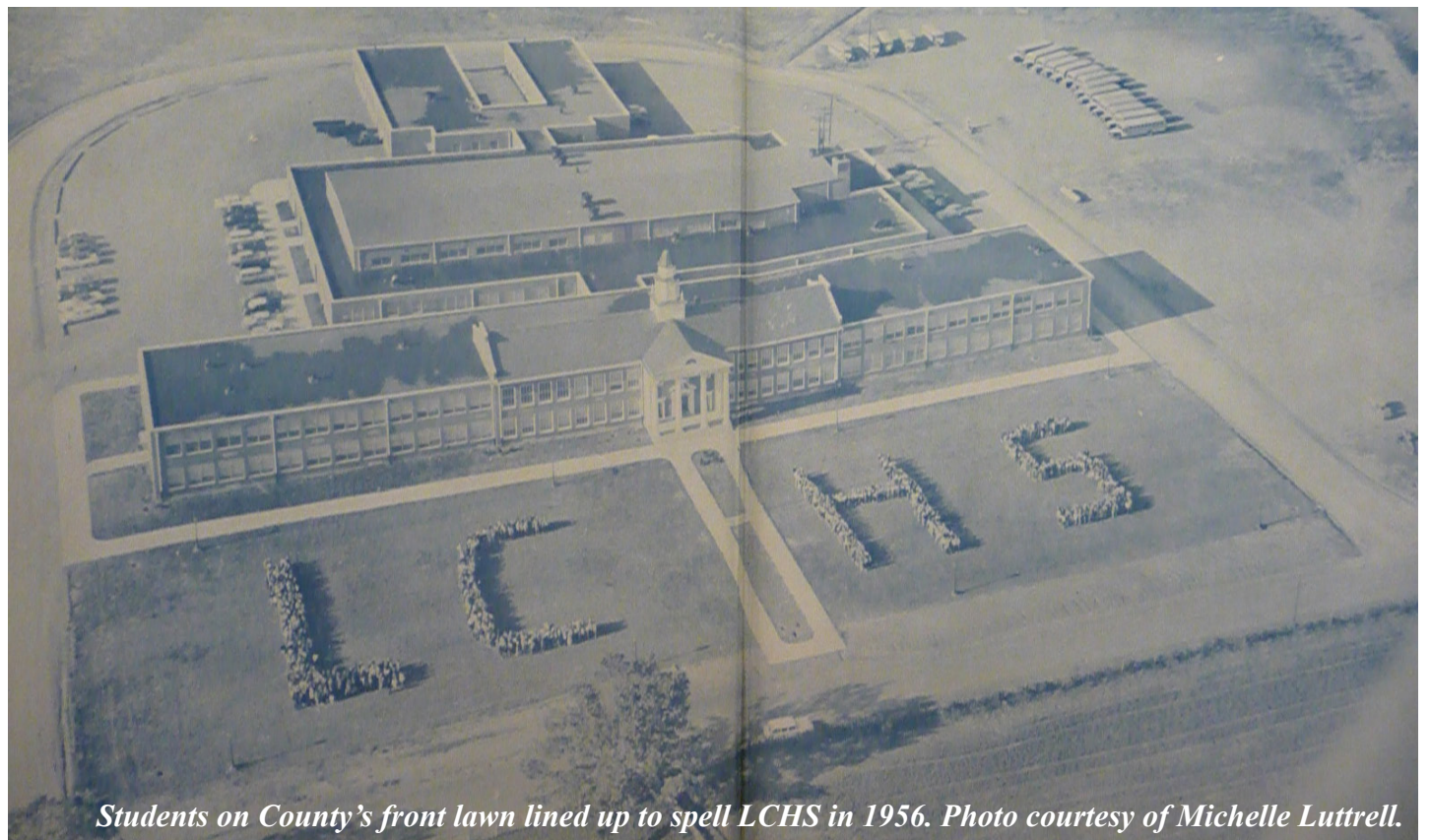
force has been no small accomplishment," Patterson said. "Actually, not just teachers, but all of the remarkable staff that keep our schools focused on providing the best environment for learning. This really hasn't changed in my 29 years."

"That's something that I've seen in my 10 years, just the quality of teaching and how connected the adults are trying to be with the kids," Luttrell said.

The anticipation has officially begun to see what staff and students have in store to celebrate County's history; they couldn't be more excited about the celebration and for the future of County as well.

"We have a lot to be thankful for and a lot to celebrate. 70 years, not many school communities can say that they've celebrated 70 years and that they keep getting better," Luttrell said. "We just keep getting better as a school community, so I'm really excited for it."

"Just as I hope for everyone, I hope they can live in a peaceful and just world. I hope they help in the cause of social justice and environmental reclamation. I truly hope that education can make the connections for student to be able to live their best lives," Patterson said. •



Students on County's front lawn lined up to spell LCHS in 1956. Photo courtesy of Michelle Luttrell.

Remodeled bathrooms earn student approval

Courtlyn Armstrong | Staff Writer

At Loudoun County High School the staff had a renovation on the bathrooms. The school has been re-doing our new gyms, getting new fields and now have remodeled the school bathrooms.

School bathrooms help with students' well-being, cleanliness, school color spirit, unity and comfort.

"The bathrooms are much more

clean and bright, and it is nice to have the taller stall walls because it provides more privacy," sophomore **Ermina Saleem** said. Clean bathrooms provide the students with a good source of hygiene and personal privacy.

Prior to the renovation, bathrooms had broken locks, sinks not working, stalls with very low wall privacy, dirty toilets, and very dated tiling. The school has people cleaning the bathrooms before

school ends and after.

With these improvements, students now have new hinges/doors, new tile, new automatic toilets, new lights, and new mirrors. Students are helping out by putting a calendar for the months on the doors inside the bathrooms such as monthly stall wall posters that include sports, band, and spirit events.

Some bathrooms might take 3-4 weeks to complete, but some took

longer. This is why the faculty decided to get it done during summer therefore it will be ready for the new school year upcoming.

"Compared to Simpson the bathrooms here are much better," freshman **Justin Goodhart** said.

Bathrooms were renovated on both levels of the school. Cleaning up trash and discouraging drawing on the walls helps to preserve our bathrooms now that they have been renovated. •

Teachers rebel against technological norms

Berek Harrison | *Managing Editor*

In our technologically entwined world, computers are becoming commonplace in close to every activity. This norm is especially true for education, where it seems that boosted by the pandemic, schools have become hyper-reliant on technology. Recently though, some teachers have been turning away from the technology standard of modern education.

One of the reasons teachers are cutting back on technology is because it's a distraction. "If a student has their computer open, the chances that they're on a different site are pretty good from what I've seen," **Kathie Rowley**, school counselor, said.

Computers are also providing a difficult atmosphere for learning, "There's so much available on the computer, it's hard for students to resist," Rowley said, "... it's become harder for them to just pay attention in a mundane atmosphere where computers aren't present."

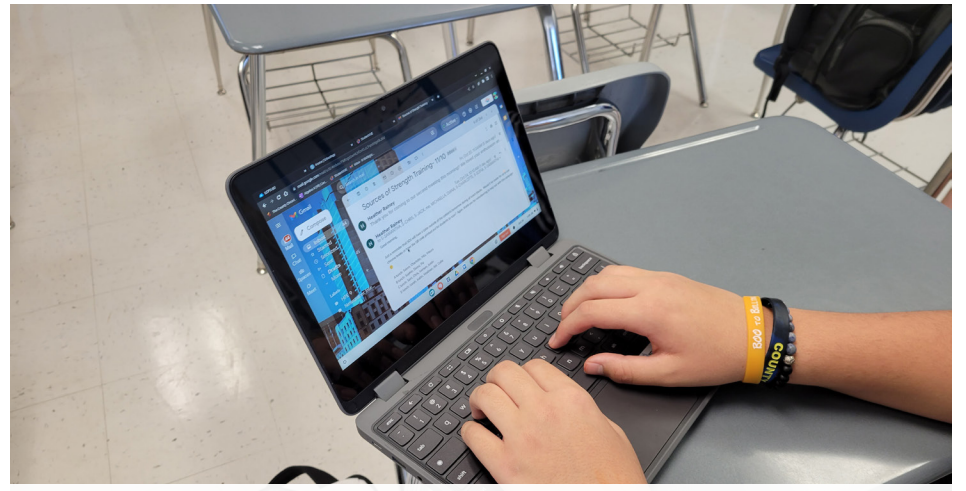
Many other teachers also feel this way. In a poll sent out to teachers at our school, 65% of respondents stated they thought technology was harmful to students.

Another problem with technol-

ogy is information absorption. The reason many students type with a computer instead of writing down notes is because they are faster at typing than at writing down, "But an interesting trend emerged," **Julie Campos**, Operations and Student Success at MedCerts said. "It seems that although typing may allow you to take more in-depth notes, it does not always lead to better retention of the information they contain."

Many teachers are already implementing policies to make more assignments be handwritten. "I know of a couple teachers this year who have chosen to go back to what some students would consider to be kind of an old school and old fashioned method of let's write out this essay," **Mathew Armes**, school counselor, said, "And I don't think there's necessarily anything wrong with that at all." 71% of teachers polled also agreed that writing it down helped students learn information better.

But technology isn't all bad, and it's not going away either. Education technology took off in scale since the 2020 pandemic, growing to a staggering 123.40 billion dollar industry today, but it's been around far longer than that. "When I started in counsel-



Student uses technology to view an email. Photo by Berek Harrison.

ing, we didn't have any computers," Rowley said. "Everything was paper. Even transcripts were on a card." So when Rowley did get computers, lots of the time-consuming tasks that used to involve writing got much easier.

Before it was useful as a learning tool, education technology could be utilized for teachers to complete work that would have been time-consuming, more quickly and easily. "Really helpful overall, technology can be very, very advantageous," Armes said.

And it's come more to the forefront of teaching since the COVID-19 pandemic. Even though education over the pandemic was poor, it would

have been a complete disaster without the use of education technology, partly because it individually provided students with resources and connection to their teacher even when they couldn't meet in person, "In addition, education technology can be uniquely deployed to facilitate the teaching of 21st-century skills such as communication, creativity, persistence, and collaboration." The World Economic Forum said in an article on the future of education technology.

Regardless of its usefulness or problems, education technology is here to stay. "I think [education technology] is going to be the future," Rowley said. "And, I don't think there's any way around it." •

New study hall class routines make potential academic changes

Brianna Martinez | *Staff Writer*

Since the beginning of the 2023-2024 academic year, study hall classes have been changed from the way they have been conducted in the past. The changes made were to the actual class schedule, how the class time is being spent and what students are expected to do in that time.

In the past, most study hall classes were to students more of a self-conducted class where they could manage their own time to do any assignments for other classes, rest, read, or spend time on their devices. Now the daily schedule has time accounted for each class period.

In the beginning of each class the students are expected to participate in 20 minutes of sustained silent reading time, followed by about 45 minutes of individual work time, and class ends with any extra time to do partner assignments, if needed.

The idea to make a structured daily schedule was made by three teachers: **Stephane Longchamp**, marketing teacher, **Valerie Rife**, literacy specialist, and **Danielle Parke**, gym teacher. They had the idea after a forum was presented to them by principal **Dr. Michelle Luttrell**, made for teachers to come out with feedback on how our last school year went in their opinion and ideas on how and where to make improvements.

"The intent was to create a more structured environment for study hall," Longchamp said.

These teachers, along with Luttrell herself, recognized issues with student productivity in study halls and decided that changes needed to be made.

"The number of students that were at minimum failing one class, was just way too high," Longchamp said, "I think it was 50 or more, going off of the top of my head."

Literacy specialist Rife was also concerned about the levels of proficient reading in students in their free time.

"I felt like students were not spending enough time practicing reading," Rife said, "I tell the kids, if you want to become a better soccer player, you have to practice, if you want to become a better musician, you have to practice. In order to practice your reading, you have to do it in school, because not everybody has that gift of time at home."

These concerns were addressed in making the new class schedules and direct fixes were made in setting aside independent work time and independent reading time.

To make sure that these schedules are working, these teachers have made time to physically check in with various study hall classes, and taken data on how well they see student productivity in person as well as

in the grade book.

"From what we observed, we feel like number one, the environments are what we intended," Longchamp said, "When we go into study hall rooms, the structure is there. We're seeing students reading, doing their work, or they're just kind of quietly doing what they want."

"The objective point of view is that it's working" Longchamp said.

Not only are these changes in students study routines being made to benefit their work in school, but to also keep them on the right track to succeed in a higher education.

"The idea of having that sustained silent reading time for students, is to build up that stamina, to fall in love with books, to build practice, to make you more marketable, to make you more well rounded, and to have your vocabulary increased," Rife said.

"I think just being able to provide students with a support mechanism that will help them stay ahead, help them if they're behind, and help them be in an environment that will help them get head, or get back on track," Longchamp said, "I think it really is for the students, and it can only be beneficial for them."

Due to the very new nature of the implementation of these regulations, teachers do recognize that some things might work better than others and some things might need to

change.

"Theres change and things happen, but I think it's better to have something in place for the overall main skeleton, if you will," Rife said, "We'll go with that, what works, and what doesn't work will be tweaked and changed."

"Worst case scenario is if you're a student who is constantly on top of your work or ahead, then its a quiet environment that you can get other things done in, or just have a mental health break," Longchamp said, "From there we can adjust if necessary, or figure out what might not be working and if it is not then we can continue to move forward."

For the rest of this school year, this schedule is going to be implemented and teachers are going to get data and feedback from students and teachers on how to make any adjustments or improvements.

"I hope that the reading piece doesn't go away, but perhaps the structure of it could change," Rife said, "we're trying to making this open, so we want input from students and staff so it's not like 'this is mandated and this is going to happen with no change'."

"It's really just making sure that we create an environment that helps them to be successful, and so I believe that as long as we're seeing that, then it will continue." Longchamp said. •

Athlete of the issue: Captain Lindsey Johansen leads field hockey team to success



Emma Janusko (left), Lindsey Johansen (middle) and Jane Garvey (right), engage in field hockey gameplay against Woodgrove. Johansen is a captain on the field hockey team, leading her team to a successful season. Photo courtesy of @lchsfieidhockey via Instagram.

Taylor Helfer | Managing Editor

As Taylor Swift's reputation album plays through senior **Lindsey Johansen's** headphones, her excitement for that night's field hockey game grows, as does her passion for the sport.

Johansen, referred to as "Linds" on her team, is a captain on the field hockey team, assisting her team in a successful season. Before playing the fall season at County, she started her career playing for the Hammers Field Hockey club. Through outside experience, she learned the perfect position for her.

"I currently play defense but I started out as a midfielder," Johansen said. "Slowly coaches were

like, oh, you'd be better at defense. Then I slowly started to like that position more."

Although she eventually found her passion for field hockey on her own over the years, Johansen's mom was one of her biggest motivators.

"My mom played field hockey when she was in high school for the Connecticut State team," Johansen said. "She was like, I think you'd really enjoy it. So, I played and made friends and it was awesome,"

Coaches have always been a big part of Johansen's career, from being a role model to simply giving helpful advice on the field.

"One of our coaches says you have to be like a goldfish and

forget," Johansen said. "You might have gotten a goal scored on you, but if you forget then you can keep playing the game."

With these helpful remarks from coaches, Johansen serves as one of the captains of her team helping younger athletes on her team, giving them motivation and advice alike.

"The best advice I would definitely give [to younger athletes] is to have the desire to get better," Johansen said. "Not to just expect playing time or anything, but if you work to get better, then you will be a better player."

Being a part of the County field hockey team is filled with fun dinner parties, a great dynamic, and many fun new friendships.

"I think we're one of the best team dynamics at school," Johansen said. "We have dinner together every Sunday, or an activity and honestly everyone is friends with everyone." She later added to the compassion shared on the team, saying, "Everyone definitely loves each other."

Through a strong team dynamic and her outside experience, Johansen has been helpful in leading the team to a successful season so far. As of October 13, the team has a record of 10-3. Even through tough losses, Johansen is sure to keep a positive attitude.

"No matter what has happened, everything ends and you just have to get over it," Johansen said.

By being a strong force on her County and Hammer's field hockey teams, Johansen has been able to capture the attention of colleges.

"The recruiting process was definitely tough," Johansen said. "But, my coaches through my club helped me a lot and we went to a lot of recruiting tournaments all over the East Coast."

Johansen eventually committed to playing Division III field hockey at St. Lawrence University.

"I went up to St. Lawrence and I went to a few others, but St. Lawrence was definitely my favorite," Johansen said. "So when I got my offer I was really excited. Then I went up a few weeks ago to have an official visit and just loved it."

Through support from numerous coaches, teammates, and relatives - as well as Taylor Swift, Johansen's favorite hype music artist - she has been able to be a successful teammate and leader. Field hockey has given Johansen an opportunity to develop both her technical and personal skills and growth. "It's a learning experience." •

Annual Athletic Hall of Fame induction leads into the school year

Brianna Martinez | Staff Writer

To kick off the 2023-2024 school year, County held its 13th annual Athletic Hall of Fame induction ceremony in early September. The ceremony was conducted by principal **Dr. Michelle Luttrell** and athletic director **Kate Cassidy**, to pay tribute to the new inductees with an award of recognition, the ability to put their picture up on the Hall of Fame wall in the athletic hallway, and lifetime passes to all athletic

games.

The Hall of Fame was made as a way to pay tribute to past coaches, student athletes, and athletic contributors that have made a significant impact on our school community.

"These people have left a legacy for the kids that are here now; they can walk by and look at the pictures and think 'that's something to achieve too.'" Cassidy said.

Alumni can apply to get their application reviewed for a chance to get on the Hall of Fame. On the

first of February of each year all applications are due; submitted applications are valid to be reviewed for the next three years if they are not accepted that following year. The number of alumni chosen to be featured is dependent on the amount of applications submitted for that year.

"It's largely based on how many applicants we get," Cassidy said.

The inductees are chosen by an application process available to them after at least ten years of graduation from County. From the

amount of applicants received over the last school year and over the summer, five alumni were selected to be featured in the Hall of Fame.

The alumni inducted were **Calle Brown, Joe Bushrod, Bill Moravek, Jenna Strange, and Chase Williams**, chosen for their past involvement in County sports and their athletic achievements outside of these school walls.

"They've made a significant impact when they were here, and left school and gone on to either coach, play, or do something [athletic] in

college,” Cassidy said.

The first ever Athletic Hall of Fame was held in 2013 by the athletic director at the time, **Ken Wright**, and principal at the time, **William Oblas**. Even though the Hall of Fame is fairly new to the school, the athletics department is

very excited to make this a long standing tradition.

“With next year being our 70th year, [the athletics department] thought that with 60 years of history, we’ve had some pretty good athletes and coaches come through here and we need to highlight

them,” Cassidy said.

Traditionally, the induction ceremony is done on the football field before the first game of the year, but because of extreme weather conditions, admin decided to hold the ceremony in the library. With a very comfortable, homey feel,

these inductees are making their mark in school history and setting an example for students to keep making an effort to be exemplary in sports.

“If you work hard and that’s one of your goals, then it won’t hurt to try.” Cassidy said. •



The plaques of the 2023 Athletic Hall of Fame inductees, Calle Brown, Joe Bushrod, Bill Moravek, Jenna Strange, and Chase Williams. The Athletic Hall of Fame in the athletic hallway features all past alumni presented with the award. Photo by Brianna Martinez.

Golf team wins fourth straight district championship

Courtlyn Armstrong | Staff Writer

The golf team, coached by **Mark Alexander**, performed extremely well yet again at districts, coming out on top as new district champions. The LCHS golf team won the 2023 Catoctin Districts Tournament on September 26, 2023, with top 6 finishers **Liam Howard** (second) and **Ayla Browning** (fifth).

On September 27, the golf team raised the district champions flag in honor of their district tournament win the day before.

Golf can be a very hard but thrilling sport, but competing in the district tournament was a total of only six students. Last year the golf team’s extraordinary performance earned them a spot at states. The golf team will be heading to states again this year after the regional tournament where they placed second and qualified for states.

Out of 33 schools and 18 holes, County won and continued to get stronger, but some might wonder how they always seem victorious. The team supports each other no matter what or who they are playing.

Sophomore **Graysen Armstrong** said, “It’s nice to be on a team because it’s like a second family.”

This shows that even though it takes time to make yourself better, having support can help you improve even in the littlest ways. The school can tell of the improvement from this team based on the results of tournaments such as the regional tournament.

The regional tournament allowed the team to secure a spot at states for the fourth year in a row where they will be going against Woodgrove, the team who won regionals and other teams that will sow proper competition.

Howard and senior **Reed**

Theiss earned medals for their performance at regionals. Both are seniors and have been on the team all four years of their high school experience.

One of the members of the golf team, **Theiss**, is going to continue his academic and athletic career at Lafayette College, and is now committed once he graduates in 2024. Seniors **Howard**, **Browning**, **Chase Oatman**, and **Peter Duiven** are also leaving the team, which is going to be a great loss for the golf team,

but they are looking for many new recruits to carry on the Captain’s legacy.

The VHSL State Tournament was Tuesday, October 10, and the team finished third in the VA Class 4 State Championship with a 292. Not only did they finish third as a team, but **Browning** with three late birdies turned in a team lead of 69 (-3). **Browning** also earned All-State honors for getting in the top six finishers.

“It has been very fun watching her grow as a competitor

over the years,” **Alexander** said.

Browning isn’t the only one on the golf team to earn All-State honors; **Theiss** shot a 71(-1) and finished in the top ten.

The team has worked hard to improve from their past years and they dominated these tournaments, showing that perseverance is key to success.

Hopefully this following year the Captains will be able to carry on their triumph and the impact that this team has left while continuing the reigning wins. •



The golf team claimed the title of District Champions on September 26, 2023, proceeding yet again to regionals, then states. This is the team’s fourth consecutive year earning the district title. Left to right: Chase Oatman, Liam Howard, Jackson Quinn, Reed Thesis, Ayla Browning and Peter Duiven. Photo courtesy of @LCCaptainsGolf via X.

“I ran through a hurricane and survived.”

Cross country team perseveres at Oatlands Invitational



Freshman Madelyn Homa (left) and sophomores Fallon Murphy and Kalie Brown trek their way up the muddy side of a hill to their base. Moments before, Homa went through a traumatic experience as the crazy winds blew her umbrella inside out. Photo by Karan Singh.

Karan Singh | Staff Writer

On September 23, the cross country team ran at one of their biggest meets of the year, Oatlands Invitational. Being an already challenging course, the runners shed their blood, sweat, and tears at this race when a sudden storm wreaked havoc upon the land.

Cross country runners race at

Oatlands Plantation every year. The course is well known throughout the area, and teams from all over the East Coast participate in this meet.

On September 23, Riverside High School hosted the historic meet for the first time, and teams from over 40 schools ran.

This course is not known for being easy. As the course progresses,

the difficulty increases, until eventually, runners reach “Hell Hill” around the 2.5 mile mark. This hill is known by all runners for its steep elevation. However, what makes this hill even more challenging to run across is that after climbing the hill, the course remains flat, and does not progress downhill.

This year’s meet was definitely one to remember as runners ran through severe weather conditions. The day of the meet, the temperature was at a low of 55°F and there was a lot of rain.

Wet and cold runners had to run through the rain, on a muddy and slippery course, at their hardest meet of the year - and they were not happy about it.

“I felt very tired, cold, and very stressed out,” sophomore **Kalie Brown** said. “I wanted to stop and quit.”

The muddy conditions were almost impossible to run in. Runners were falling left and right.

If she had to do that race again, she would simply “not go,” Brown said.

Meanwhile, junior varsity runners, like junior **Elle Shin** and freshman **Madelyn Homa**, had similar thoughts while running.

“Why did I sign up for this?” Shin said. “I wanted to stop and quit.”

While some may think that this muddy race was the peak of cross country fun, others may view it as a serious danger zone.

“I was trying really hard not

to slip because a lot of the girls around me were falling down the hills,” Homa said.

Homa herself wore three layers of clothing to the race to protect herself from the atrocious weather.

“I wore two coats and a rain jacket,” Homa said.

While the critical weather conditions had most runners questioning their decision to run cross country, they seemed to have no effect on junior **Joe Tafe**.

“I felt pretty good,” Tafe said. “It was kind of just like slugging around in the rain and mud. You couldn’t really send down the hills because the mud was so packed, but it was good.”

Tafe wore arm sleeves and gloves to deal with the cold and said that his uniform getting wet and stuff “wasn’t really that big of a deal” to him.

While all runners had a hard time getting through the 3.1 miles of this course, it seemed as if junior **Sadie Byers** had the most challenging race.

“It was kind of horrible and I didn’t want to be there,” Byers said. “It was freezing outside and I did not want to race.”

As she described her thoughts while racing, Byers revealed the dark secrets of cross country running.

“When I saw a bunch of bodies drop, I was like, ‘I have to keep pushing on because this is my chance to get in front of them.’” •

Meet Michael Tafe, Virginia’s fastest freshman cross country runner

Dylan Johnson | Staff Writer

Michael Tafe is the fastest freshman in Virginia in cross country as of September 30, and he has worked very hard to get to this point.

Tafe has played sports such as soccer, flag football, lacrosse, and more. Eventually he started cross country. “I joined cross country, or I initially joined indoor track because right after football season I was always the fastest guy out there, and I was always the running back, so I decided to just make my way towards track and eventually it stuck,” Tafe explained.

Tafe has done a lot to get to where he is now. “It’s a lot of dedication, a lot of keeping focus, nutrition, and sleep,” he said. “Being among good peers and teammates also really helps.”

Good coaches have also assisted Tafe to get to the point he is now. “Good coaching along the way really

helps build it. I’ve been on four different teams now, so all the different coaches and all of their minds coming together really helps.” Tafe said.

Being the fastest freshman cross country runner is quite a title, and it is one Tafe is proud of. “It’s an honor, but I have to keep working and get better,” Tafe said. “We have to get better from a national standpoint. If we want to qualify at an XR and keep doing well there then we all have to get better.”

Tafe earned the title in a competition at Woodgrove on September 30. “I got a 15:56, which is the top time in the state,” Tafe says.

Cross country run times are tracked through the organization Milestat. “It’s a website that if you run in a race the times will be sent and they have every meet out there,” Tafe explained. “If you look at all the times on a list they have everyone’s times.”

The cross country season this

year has been a good one. “Overall the team is doing absolutely amazing, we’re really young so the goal is to be good for years to come, and right now we’re looking at district and region champs, and hopefully the highest place in state finish in

Loudoun County history for cross country,” Tafe said.

Tafe is excited for the cross country seasons to come, and will continue with doing winter as well as spring track this year. “Go Captains!” Tafe exclaimed. •

Michael Tafe at a cross country competition. Photo courtesy of Michael Tafe.



STUDENT LIFE

Students bring spirit and competition to homecoming week celebrations



Junior Mikey Richardson, sophomore Logan Stanard, and juniors Abby Graham, Jesse Schwarting, Olivia Rowand, Autumn Ryan, Ana Smithson, and Catherine Schroeder smile from the Captains Crew student section at the homecoming football game. The game was a gold out and a 17-10 victory for the Captains over the Riverside Rams. Photo by Kiko Dudley.

Evelyn Kuzminski | Editor-in-Chief

The last few days of September saw a whirlwind of school spirit from the Captains as they celebrated annual homecoming events.

The homecoming spirit week was only four days this year, but still drew enthusiastic participation from the student body. The week was filled mostly with two contrasting themes each day, giving students more freedom to choose how they participated.

Tuesday kicked off with a Barbie vs Oppenheimer theme, while Wednesday embraced the '70s with Hippies vs Rockers and Thursday presented Country vs Country Club. Friday wrapped things up with September's classic gold out to show

support for the fight against childhood cancer.

The bells operated on an adjusted schedule - as well as a new tone - to accommodate the schoolwide pep rally at the end of the day. Captains Crew leaders **Liam Howard** and **Grace Spencer** led the rally, which started off with applause for each fall sports team. The cheer squad made an entrance and lined up to teach the student body cheers to be used at the night's football game, featuring a variety of call and response chants and coordinated clapping.

During the pep rally, members of this year's homecoming court participated in a relay race of various field day-like events, including three-legged, sack, and wheelbar-

row races. Students paired up and completed the race around the gym in a couple rounds. Seniors **Sophie Bourgeois** and **Aria Williams** won the first round while junior **Chris Luku** and senior **Sam Novak** took first in the second round.

"I love winning, so I did everything I could to win it," Luku said. "The race was fun and just being in it was a good time. It was also fun to get bragging rights against my friends. If there's another race next year, I definitely want to be a part of it, I want to go back to back."

Senior **William Zheng** was crowned boys' homecoming royalty during the afternoon pep rally, while the girls' homecoming royalty wasn't announced until later in the night. Senior **Sophia Casciano** was crowned queen during half-time of the home football game after taking the field and being introduced with other senior girls on the homecoming court.

"My favorite part was hearing everyone's bios and seeing everyone dressed up pretty," Novak said. "I enjoyed earning recognition for all of my accomplishments in school and outside activities."

"It was just a fun experience to be on court, especially having friends in it and getting to experience it with them," Luku said. "Participating in it was like knocking something off of a bucket list, so I'm glad I did it."

Before the game began, there was a parking lot tailgate for clubs and teams to advertise their organization. Students decorated cars and lined up to promote their clubs to anyone stopping by or arriving early

for a spot at the game.

The Captains took a victory over Riverside after a close four quarters of football, ending 17-10 with points by sophomores **Parker Clarey** and **Luke Morrison** and senior **Aiden Ballve**. The day's gold out carried into the night, with students in the Captains Crew section showing out in gold t-shirts, beaded necklaces, and face paint.

Saturday's semi formal dance was a glowco, a "neon and glow in the dark theme," according to student council member **Gemma Vogel**. If the dance seemed particularly early this year - most other schools in the county held their homecomings a few weeks later, closer to last year's mid-October dance - it's mostly due to football scheduling and when the gym was available to host the dance, Vogel said. Vogel mentioned lining up the dance and spirit week with a home game and hoping to avoid the colder weather that comes later in the season.

The dance was filled with neon decorations, glowsticks, and balloons. Students had the opportunity to wander between the dance floor and DJ playing in the main gym, the photo booth in the athletics hall, and the yard games set up in the cafeteria, with snack tables sprinkled in between.

The homecoming celebrations came to a close when lights came on at the dance around ten o'clock, wrapping up days of school spirit, competition, and good times for the Captains.

"I found that being able to be part of such a surreal and cool experience was valuable," Novak said. •

Power Buff, not Powder Puff: seniors win annual game

Scarlett Ashford | Staff Writer

On Wednesday, October 11, County held its annual Power Buff game, where girls run the plays and guys stand on the sidelines.

After finishing the PSAT that morning, the day was topped off by heading to the football stadium to watch the Power Buff game. The atmosphere was lively on the fields, and team spirit was running high.

The day started off with the juniors and sophomores facing off, with the juniors in bright pink and the sophomores in blue. Unfortunately for the sophomores, the juniors ended up winning after some good runs.

"It was fun," sophomore **Norah Lee** said. "I decided to compete because SCA asked me to sign up, and I thought it'd be a fun activity."

She's planning to do it next year as well, where she hopes the

sophomores will be able to find newfound spirit as juniors. Now let the games continue.

"Freshmen are on top!" **Alexa Karschner**, a freshman who participated in the Power Buff game, said. "We have a bunch of solid plays, and we are going to run the field!"

The freshman team, decked out in purple, then ran out onto the field to face the seniors in an intense game filled with well thought out plays and almost interceptions. In the end, the seniors came out on top.

"I'm so excited to be here," senior **Camryn Kolodziej** said before her game against the freshman team. "We're going to win!" senior Kolodziej said

The senior team had figured out their plan, and with senior **Zoe Kolodziej** as the team's quarterback, they made their way to the championship game where they

won 21-7 as the final score.

After a long day of testing, a last minute bell-schedule change, and Wellness Wednesday, County was able to end it

in an engaging and positive light that brought out the spirit of all four grades.

"Confidence is key!" Karschner said. •



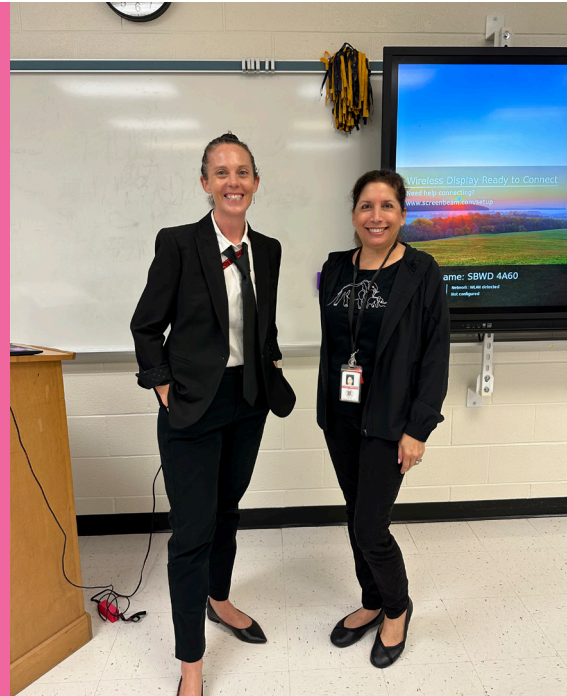
Freshmen line the railing of the football stadium as seniors and freshmen play against each other. All watch the game with high intensity as they call out to friends on the field. Photo by Scarlett Ashford.

Memories made: Homecoming spirit week

Barbie vs Oppenheimer • Rockers vs Hippies • Country vs Country Club • Gold Out



Sophomores Sabrina Galan (left) and Benita Nulaans (right) excitedly pose as Barbie's in the toy box made for celebrating spirit week on Barbie vs. Oppenheimer day.



Math teachers Abby Schutte (left) and Elaine Voketaitis (right) dressed up in all black to represent Oppenheimer and show their school spirit.

Freshman Katherine Sotomil strikes a pose while dressed as a rocker for spirit week.



Sophomore David Diaz-Amaya models his rocker outfit on Rockers vs. Hippies day.



Teacher Mel Hefty shows off her cow and cowgirl costume on country vs. country club day.



Freshmen Ivy Tomaszewski (left) and Ashleigh Whitlock (right) pose together for the camera. With their festive boots and hat, they show their country pride on country vs. country club day.

Teacher Jana Wagoner smiles for the camera in her all gold outfit for gold out day.



Sophomore Anthony Membreno goes all out on gold out day. Membreno was decked out in all gold from his golden wig, to his golden shirt and pants.



Football players connect with elementary students through Readers as Leaders initiative



(Above) Juniors Will Hancock and Chris Duellman color with a first grader while (bottom right) junior Patrick Groves reads to other first grade students during a Readers as Leaders meeting at Catoctin Elementary School. The football players spend two mornings a week helping the elementary schoolers with their reading skills, building relationships with and providing mentorship to the younger students. Photos courtesy of @loudouncountyfb on Instagram.

Evelyn Kuzminski | Editor-in-Chief

Although the football team has been having a successful season, the field isn't the only place they're making an impact. Football players are teaming up with first graders at Catoctin Elementary School to help develop their reading skills and provide mentorship to the younger students through a program called Readers as Leaders.

Over two dozen first graders will meet with the football players twice a week for thirty minutes before school in Catoctin's cafeteria. Each first grader will be paired with two football players to work with throughout the program, which will last about six weeks during football season. During that time, they'll read books at their level, work on sight words and letter identification, and engage in other reading activities. The first graders will also receive free books as part of the program.

"[The football players will be] kind of meeting them where they are," reading specialist **Valerie Rife** said. "We're looking for students that would need a mentor and maybe are struggling in reading."

Beyond developing reading skills, Readers as Leaders is an opportunity for the football players

to be mentors for the first graders. "The whole thing is that during the season, [the football players] are giving back to the community," Rife said. "I think it's amazing because some kids may not have a mentor in their life, so this is good for the first graders, but it's also great for the football players because they are being a leader and learning how to communicate, learning how to interact with young kids."

To continue "building community and building the link between elementary and high," there will be opportunities for the players and students to spend time together outside of their reading sessions. "We're planning some culminating activities to couple along with it," Rife said. The first graders will be invited to a home game this season, where they will get to run through the tunnel the team uses to make their entrance at the start of each game. Rife is also hoping to organize a team dinner for the players and students to eat together and continue building their relationships.

"It's a wonderful union and kind of fun for the first graders because they get to be friends with a high schooler," Rife said. "We've got some amazing football players.

I'm not talking athletes, I'm talking people. I know them and I'm excited to see these relationships bud and grow."

The Readers as Leaders program is new to both the football team and first graders this year. Rife has partnered with **Valerie Lacy**, the reading specialist at Catoctin, to facilitate the program. "I'd say the last two years we've been trying to make it happen," Rife said. Pandemic restrictions stood in the way of getting things up and running sooner, but "this year, we're ready to go," Rife said.

Although this is new to football and Catoctin, other sports teams and schools have successfully run this program in the past, including County's soccer and baseball teams, in partnership with Frederick Douglass Elementary School. Rife has also led the program previously in her time working at Tuscarora High School, where their football players worked with students from Frances Hazel Reid Elementary School. "We tried it there and it was such a big success."

Rife hopes to expand the program to other sports teams at County so that it runs year-round. "My goal is that we have all three seasons coupled." She has eyes set on basketball next, and plans to approach a coach to figure out how to get that team involved as well. In addition to involving other sports teams at County, Rife hopes other schools in the county will be inspired to start similar

programs.

Both the football players and first grade students were surveyed prior to the start of the program to get an idea of "where everyone is coming from," Rife said. The questions asked of the football players focused on their community involvement, while those asked of the first graders focused on how much they enjoy reading and learning. The survey will be given again at the end of the program, and Rife is hopeful that the responses will demonstrate growth in both groups.

Rife also expressed enthusiasm for the opportunity for the football players to have an impact on their community, as well as build a foundation to continue doing so. "I'm glad that this is happening now and that the kids can give back," Rife said. "It will hopefully encourage them to do community service, giving back, whatever that looks like, whether it's in education or coaching or athletics, whatever they want to do, or just in their own community in life. It's a great stepping stone for that, because it's all structured for them, all they have to do is go forward."

Rife acknowledged that there will inevitably be a few logistics still to be worked out, but that she remains confident and excited about the program. "The preplanning and now, the first year, is always the most chaotic and there's going to be bumps in the road," Rife said. "But once we get the plates spinning, it's just going to be super great." •



Two seniors bring light to County through new mental health club

Sophia Casciano | Staff Writer

In 2022, 37% of high school students reported mental health struggles, according to a CDC survey. Seniors **Madison Rice** and **Pia Patel** acknowledged this problem and decided to take on bringing some light to their very own high school.

Sources of Strength (SOS) is offered around the world as a youth suicide prevention program intended to strengthen school communities. Despite other local schools offering this national suicide prevention program, LCHS had not implemented it yet.

“We want to increase the well-being and help seek resilience for our community,” Patel said.

“The key point of the club is to provide sources for the students in our school,” Rice said. Both girls are the founding members of the club.

Both students agreed last school year after the tragic death of a student that they needed to take matters into their own hands.

“No school or community is perfect and we want to do our best to take a step forward to something bigger,” Rice said.

Both girls were excited to bring their spontaneous idea to life. They went to the counseling office to learn the required steps to establish this club. Student assistance specialist **Heather Rainey** and school psychologist **Mackenzie Crawford** agreed to help the two with the creation of the school club by becoming the two sponsors.

Initially Rice and Patel wanted to create their own original idea by naming the club Captains Lighthouse. Rainey decided to angle them to take a look into bringing the national SOS program to the school.

The girls decided to adopt this program over their original idea and began the steps to bringing it to County. The program would give the girls more opportunities and guidance from a professional group while giving the two the freedom of running the club.



Seniors Madison Rice and Pia Patel are the founders of the school’s new Sources of Strength club, originally named Captains Lighthouse. Both girls were happy with the turnout of students after the first SOS meeting held on October 3. Photo courtesy of Pia Patel.

“Metaphorically thinking, a lighthouse is in the middle of a dark sea creating light,” Rice said. “That somewhat describes the student body and the depression and violence that is held in the student body. The lighthouse is that one point of light that helps you to find your way out of the darkness.”

“We loved our original idea but we decided that the organization would provide us with many more opportunities,” Patel said.

The girls decided to create an Instagram account after keeping the making of the club a secret all through the summer. The Instagram account @captains_sos immediately gained attention, building up a following of 103 followers within a few days of being created. The girls both were ecstatic about the unexpected attraction the account received.

“We were absolutely blown away

by the amount of followers, reposts, DMs, and texts we got,” Patel said. “Considering it was a soft launch, I was shocked.”

“It was amazing how much support we were receiving as well as all of the feedback was amazing,” Rice said. “It is amazing to see that sharing things like this can just reach so far.”

The Instagram account sent out a survey including questions about the first meeting. They gathered around 40 responses of people who would be showing up for their first meeting. In their first meeting, they wanted to establish the meaning of the club to them. After both girls have openly admitted to struggling with mental health themselves, they have decided that the club will have no hierarchy.

“The point of this club is to have everyone on the same level, everyone is together,” Patel said. “We don’t want to have a president and a vice president that are viewed as more important than the other members of the club. No member is ranked above anyone, we are all one.”

Both founders agreed that they are rightfully the founding members of the group but “we are not going to dictate what anything,” Patel said.

During the monthly meetings the founders will go over information about upcoming events, gather input from the members, and do fun activities. The two have come up with a few activities that they would like to do with the club.

“We want to do activities like create flyers and fun events,” Rice said.

“Our first event we are starting small by doing a teacher appreciation event where we recognize teachers in the school who are considered trusted adults,” Patel said. “We want students to realize that there are many trusted adults in the school and we really want to get it out there that teachers will understand and want to help you; there is no stigma between the teachers and students.”

“We want to strengthen the bridge between the students and teachers,” Rice said.

Rice and Patel both stated their excitement about the creation of the club and the two are so excited to work with each other.

“We are both very driven, hard working people, and good communicators with each other,” Patel said. “We’re just so excited to have this project where we are able to help each other but also help the community.”

The girls’ work ethics complement one another’s. “We are just a really good dynamic which is exciting,” Rice said.

With one another’s passion the girls’ shared interest in mental health is going to be taking County down a brighter path.

“We are all struggling in similar ways; it is just a matter of who shows it and who doesn’t. If our club helps one person I believe we did our job,” Rice said.

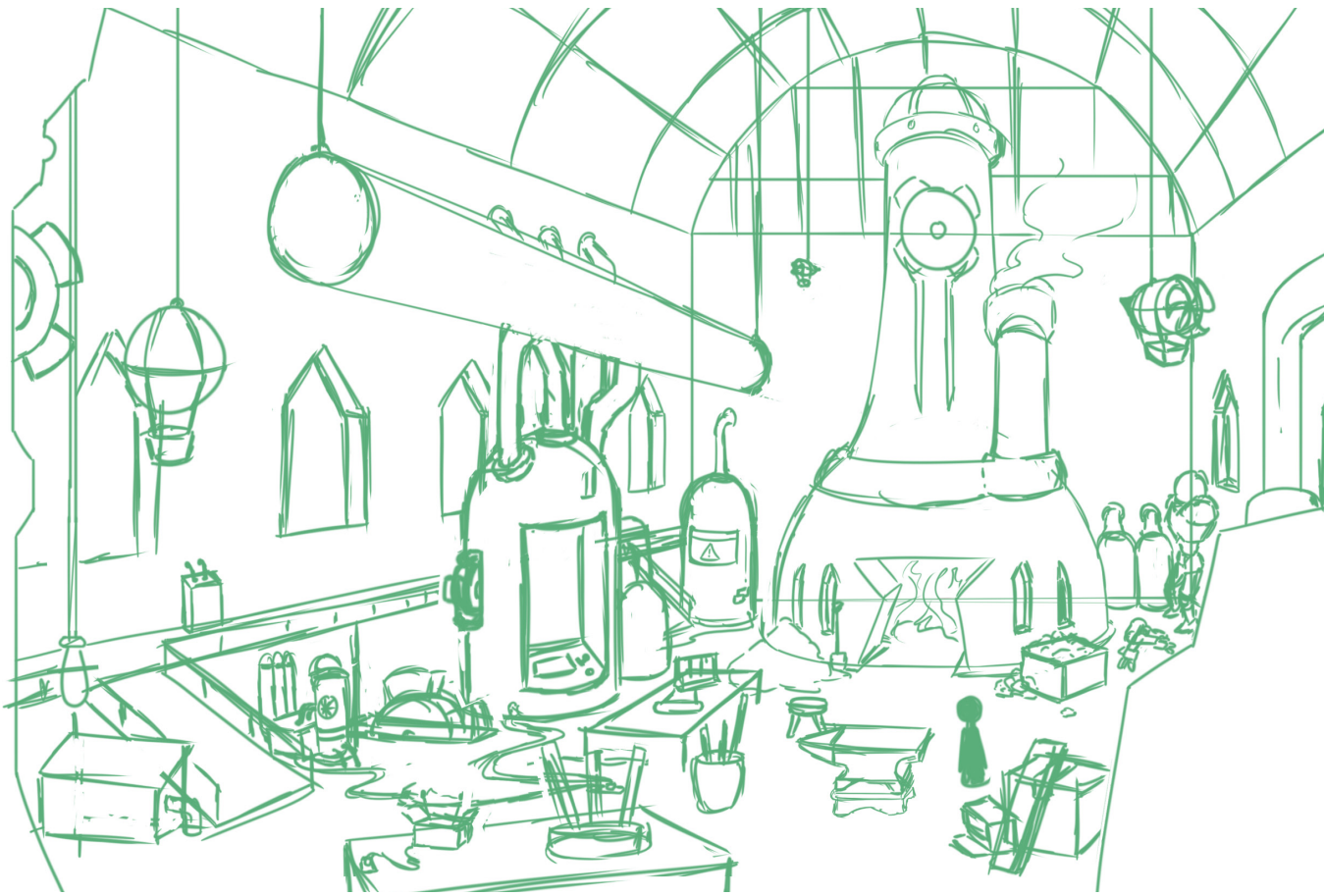


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Anthony Tran pursues his passion for animation



An unfinished project by animator Anthony Tran features the rigorous, beginning stages of animation and his own personal style. Anthony Tran is a past MATA animation student and is interested in attending Sheridan College in Canada for animation. Photo courtesy of Anthony Tran.

Taylor Helfer | Managing Editor

What seems like an ordinary Saturday viewing of Adventure Time to some may be a spark for senior **Anthony Tran's** love for animation.

While having always been interested in cartoons and animated movies alike, Tran began his own animation career at the Academies of Loudoun Monroe Advanced Technical Program (MATA) program.

"At MATA, I learned about the programs they [big animation groups] used more and I learned about animation and I got better at it," Tran said. He later mentioned the rigorous class schedule, starting at 9:30 in the morning and ending at 3:30 in

the afternoon.

Despite the intriguing material, Tran dropped the two year MATA program to focus on a variety of AP classes.

Tran mentioned wanting to pursue his academic career. "It was really stressful," Tran said. "The deadlines kind of ruined my sleep schedule and I felt like I wasn't learning as much as I could have on my own."

Since choosing to return to County full time, Tran has gotten himself an animation tutor and has focused on his individual studies, which include time-consuming processes.

"You do need a lot of planning," Tran said. "Like for animation, we go through a storyboarding phase where we

are drawing out just keyframes to get the rough idea down. Then, we do in-betweens as they call it, which is like making it smoother."

In addition to his individual studies, he actively participates in animation-related projects in the local community.

Tran recently worked with a couple of friends to create a 32 second short film. "We would write, animate, and edit all in the span of 48 hours," Tran said. It was really challenging because we've never done anything like this before. But, I think going through it, we definitely improved our animation and communication."

These projects are especially important to developing Tran's

portfolio, as he wants to attend Sheridan College in Ontario, Canada, which is where many of famed animators attended.

"It's definitely the Harvard of animation schools, it's really competitive," Tran said. "But, I think I have a chance."

The tedious, time-consuming process of animation is difficult, but can get even harder when mistakes are present. However, they are inevitable and a part of the process.

"It's kind of hard when you're really far into the animation because you have to go back in the animation," Tran said. "You have to redraw each frame individually so you'd have to readjust everything."

Tran's style has adapted in many ways, due to the MATA program, outside projects, and most of all, other animators.

"I'm studying great animators like Spencer Wong, who worked on the Owl House, and other shows like that," Tran said. He also learns from other animators like James Baxter, who worked on cartoons such as Steven Universe and Adventure Time. In addition, Tran said, "I lean more towards Spencer Wong's style, which is less weighty, like it has a nice sense of flow and strength."

Through nine months of animating at MATA, watching cartoons as a kid, and now independently studying animation on his own, Tran has found something that he is passionate about and is hopeful to make a career out of. In fact, Tran said, "I've always wanted to push myself further, look at animation, analyze it, see how it's been done, and try to get to that same skill level." •

STEPS OF ANIMATION

1. CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT
AT THIS STAGE, ANIMATORS FIND A WAY TO MAKE THEIR IDEAS A REALITY. THIS STAGE MAY ALSO INCLUDE WRITING A SCRIPT OR FINDING VOICE ACTORS IF NEEDED.

2. STORYBOARDING
THIS STAGE OF ANIMATION IS USUALLY THE LONGEST AS ANIMATORS NEED TO SKETCH AND REVISE A ROUGH DRAFT FOR MANY HOURS AT A TIME.

3. GENERAL DESIGN
THIS STAGE, LIKE THE PREVIOUS STAGE, FOCUSES ON SKETCHING AND MAKING ANIMATOR'S IDEAS COME TO LIFE. IN THIS STAGE PARTICULARLY, THEY ADD DETAILS, COLOR, AND THEIR OWN STYLES.



4. ANIMATION
THE ANIMATIC STAGE, WHICH IS A PART OF THE ANIMATION STAGE, IS WHERE ANIMATORS MAKE SEVERAL STATIC PICTURES BLEND TOGETHER. ONCE ANIMATORS FINISH, THEY BEGIN ANIMATING EVERYTHING TO MAKE MOTIONS MORE FLUID AND OTHER ADDITIONS GENERALLY SMOOTHER.

5. POST- PRODUCTION
FOR MAJOR ANIMATING COMPANIES, THIS STAGE MEANS ADDING VOICE OVERS AND SOUND EFFECTS. FOR SMALLER ANIMATORS, THIS COULD BE SIMPLY RENDERING TO MAKE THINGS SMOOTHER. BOTH BIG AND SMALL CREATORS SHARE THE SAME STEP IN POST-PRODUCTION, WHICH IS SHARING YOUR WORK WITH THE WORLD EITHER ON YOUTUBE OR EVEN IN MOVIE THEATERS.



Is County a sports or arts focused school?

Scarlett Ashford | Staff Writer

For years, there has always been the question of whether County is a sports or arts focused school, and why it is that way.

Since she began working here, principal **Dr. Michelle Luttrell** has worked to make County a more inclusive school, no matter what your interests are.

“I feel that since I’ve been here for the past 10 years, the school has gotten steadily better at giving fine and performing arts students more opportunities and showcasing them more,” Luttrell said.

One way that she’s showcased fine arts students more is through the Principal’s Gallery, where she gets to choose her favorite piece of senior art and hang it up in the hallway.

“I also buy student art sometimes, and have numerous pieces in my office and home,” Luttrell said. She then pointed to one in her office. It brought out a vibrant array of colors shrouded in deep emotion.

This is just one way that the school has been supporting the arts, but that doesn’t mean that sports don’t have more of an influence over the student body.

“Our ticket sales (for sports games) are the third largest in the county, which means that we have good participation by our students and by our parents in the community,” athletic director **Kate Cassidy** said.

This goes to show how important sports are to our school. Attending events such as football games helps bring our community together and strengthen school spirit. Not only do sports games have high attendance, but they also have a large online presence. Sports teams post on X, Instagram, and their respective websites, unlike many of the performing and fine arts programs. Though this may not necessarily be a negative thing.

“There’s almost zero online awareness. I don’t do anything online. All

of our social media is student run and they handle it. I approve posts and that’s about all of my involvement,” **Matthew Trkula** said, the guitar and orchestra teacher.

He’s happy with it being student run, possibly because his motives as a teacher are different compared to those of a sports coach.

“Our only income is gate receipts, when people pay to come to the games. Two years ago the school went into a shared revenue system. That means that all of the money that comes in, goes to the county, and they distribute it between the 17 schools,” Cassidy said.

Sports teams are dependent on game attendance so that they can pay for items such as equipment and uniforms. Not to mention any variables, such as broken equipment. Tens of thousands of dollars are necessary to pay for all of this equipment, while fine and performing arts don’t cost nearly as much.

“We have what we need, and I’m very grateful for that. It (the money) either comes from the school or the county, and we use it to buy music, and we use it to buy supplies, and mostly just keep operations going,” Trkula said.

The music programs just don’t seem to require as much money to have all of the things that they need. They’re appreciative of what they have. “It’s not like this everywhere, and it wasn’t like this at my last school. It’s something I’m very grateful for, and do not take for granted,” Trkula said.

The idea that arts programs don’t need as much money as sports programs is confirmed by other teachers, such as **Kyla Jenkins**, one of the art teachers.

“We were sitting down to make our supply list, and we were like ‘we’re good’! The county supports you,” Jenkins said. The fine arts programs gain money from the school and through fundraisers run by



This is one of the many student artworks Luttrell enjoys keeping in her office. “I think this one’s my favorite, the colors are beautiful, and you can just see how it’s showing all the different voices going on in your head,” said Luttrell. Photo courtesy of Dr. Michelle Luttrell.

booster clubs. They also don’t have a large social media presence.

“Standard LCPS webpage, we have an instagram and twitter for the art club. A decent amount, but not a lot of online stuff. We publicize the events, but that is about it,” Jenkins said.

Fine arts also doesn’t have a large social media presence. This is not because there aren’t people willing to raise online awareness, or that the school doesn’t support these programs, but because arts programs just don’t need the revenue generated through event attendance.

The thing she enjoys most is “Getting to know the students in a different way, because we have to get really creative/vulnerable, and we have to share ideas/thoughts, in ways which I think are different from talking to a math teacher,” Jenkins said.

Fine and performing arts teachers at the school tend to focus more on building connections with their students rather than creating more game attendance to pay for equipment. “Everyday is awesome when you get to make music with other people,” Trkula said.

That’s not to say that the sports

coaches don’t care emotionally about their players, or that all they care about is winning. This is just discussing the differences between the amount of online presence the sports and arts programs.

“Athletics is really important because it’s a bigger, wider audience,” Jenkins said. “The fine and performing arts hit those smaller families.”

She’s undecided on whether there’s a more sports or arts focused environment. One thing she does know is that Luttrell does “a great job of supporting the arts and athletics.” She’s proud of the growth the arts program has had, and understands that sports need more money simply because there’s more people involved.

“I think that whatever kids are into they have a lot of opportunities to pursue it. And I’ve never felt like one has been put above the other. It seems balanced to me,” Trkula said.

There are so many different clubs you can join or classes you can try. Both performing arts and sports administrators can agree on this. “I think County is a well rounded school,” Cassidy said. “No matter what type of kid you are, or what interests you have, you can find something to do.” •

Lights Up! A glance at stage management

Justin Goodhart | Staff Writer

When we watch theater, we always see the actors. We hear their lines and we watch their movements. We are there to see a story told. Oftentimes, the actors get a lot of recognition, but it’s not the actors that make the show. Sure, the actors are very important, but what really ties it all together is the people behind the scenes.

Meet **Sienna Longendyke**, a senior who is one of the stage managers for 12 Angry Jurors. Her love for theater came from watching shows as a kid.

“I would go see shows, and my jaw would drop, but not for the reasons everyone else’s was,” Longendyke said.

Her interest was piqued by the lighting, the sets, and props. She took this interest to her school life as well. Another reason why she’s so interested in tech is because of the comradery amongst the crew.

“For me, getting to work with different groups of people and people with different backgrounds because it helps you understand the world you’re surrounded by,” Longendyke said.

The job of stage manager isn’t an easy one, as is the same for many other aspects of tech. Longendyke is in charge of making sure the production is running smoothly, and also writing down actor’s blocking (what the actors are supposed to do on stage).

She’s in charge of making sure that what happens backstage, and what happens in the booth, are working at the same time and pace.

“We just facilitate a lot of communication between say, props and lights,” Longendyke said.

Longendyke’s love of tech runs

deep, did she ever have any desires to be on the stage?

“Yeah, I think if it came up and if there was a possibility or if there was a show that I really love,” Longendyke said. “I think I would 100% do it on stage. It’s just not something that has felt right for right now.”

Longendyke’s love and dedication to her craft is and should be inspiring. She brings the expression “it’s not work if you love what you do” to fruition. Her kindness to everyone, and her determination to do her best makes her a good stage manager. •