



## Zach Johansen: Graduation speaker for the class of 2026

Ashleigh Whitlock | business manager

The class of 2026's grad speaker will be senior **Zach Johansen**. Johansen was chosen after an audition with a five-minute long prepared speech in front of a small committee. Johansen explained, "I was like, oh, let me audition because I was feeling like **Carrie Bradshaw**."

Johansen has been heavily involved in our school community. He has been a four-year SCA member and currently holds the role of secretary. Additionally, he is president of the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund club (UNICEF), a member of the French Club, and has managed the field hockey team.

Outside of school, Johansen has volunteered for the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society and the March of Dimes, a nonprofit organization that focuses on bettering the health of mothers and babies. The



Commencement speaker Zach Johansen stands in front of the school on the front lawn, which is where graduationally is traditionally held. Photo courtesy of @LCHS1954.

involved senior plans to attend the University of Georgia in the fall with a major in Public Health and Biology.

For many years, the student graduation speaker has been the valedictorian. A few years prior, even before the county replaced the valedictorian system with the Latin Honors system, our school shifted

from recognizing the valedictorian and inviting outside guests as speaker, to choosing a speaker from a pool of senior volunteers who write, review, rehearse, and present a speech to a committee to be chosen as the class speaker for graduation.

We will have to wait until graduation to hear his speech, but

Johansen gave a hint about the topic.

"It's not just... I, it's kind of we. If there's... a common theme it's like the last four years... [but] I don't want to spoil too much," Johansen said.

The speech will take place during graduation on June 17, on the front lawn. •

## Luttrell recognized as a principal of distinction

Ashleigh Whitlock | business manager

Every day, principals are rushing around, managing all issues from students, parents, and staff. Their work is dedicated to improving the school on a daily basis, providing a safe and content environment. They give up time—their free and family time—to support school events, recognizing anyone and everyone who contributes to the school.

After 12 years of being our principal, **Michelle Luttrell** has been recognized as a "Principal of Distinction" by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE). This title is only given to 25 principals from schools of all levels in Virginia, making Luttrell one of roughly 2,175 principals selected to receive this title.

According to the VDOE, in order to be awarded this title, a principal should demonstrate strong administration, engaging teaching, and an exciting and well-bonded school community. Alongside the endorsement of the LCPS superintendent, Luttrell had to submit school data and provide the VDOE with a summary of the teaching and learning in the building in order to apply for the award

Additionally, Luttrell was re-

quired to submit a project that she felt was important and unique about our school. For Luttrell, that was the Spanish professional learning opportunity she organized for the staff starting last year.

"I spent the fall and winter working on showcasing our Spanish professional learning that we have for the adults on campus. Because our students actually help teach," Luttrell said.

The project allows for collaboration between students and teachers, switching their roles, so that staff members are able to better connect with Hispanic students—22.5% of our student body, according to US News.

While many staff members recognize her for her contributions, Luttrell focuses on the team effort involved in education. "It's an honor. I'm really excited because as the principal, I get to represent our school... as the principal, I get to celebrate what we do collectively," Luttrell said.

Luttrell wants to emphasize that her Principal of Distinction award isn't just a celebration of her, but a tribute to the school community and education. "It was an honor that I got to shine the light on them," Luttrell said. •

## School store expansion and other building renovations

Ashleigh Whitlock | business manager

In an email sent to the faculty dated April 25, Principal **Michelle Luttrell** announced plans for future building renovations.

### SCHOOL STORE

The current school store exists in the back of the foreign language hallway, hiding in a small room next to a thin staircase

After business and marketing teacher **Schuyler Henderson** and his students—the same students required to work in the store—brought attention to the administration about the store's poor placement, plans for relocation were made. LCPS officials analyzed the quality of our school store compared to others in the county, and found it wasn't equitable. It took roughly four years for their request to become real change.

The new site for the store will be directly across the hallway, in room 100, which is currently a German class. Room 101, where the store is currently located, will become an athletics storage room.

With the new room being double the size of the original, new features will be added to fill the space. "We're adding seating... a couple bar stools. The fridge is going to be like, three times the size of [what] we have

now," Henderson explained. Furthermore, they'll have a new TV displaying a menu, prices, and rotating promotions.

The new store will be open when students arrive in the fall. "It's going to be completely different next year. Definitely come check it out the first week of school. I'm excited," Henderson said.

### CULINARY ARTS

Luttrell also announced that the culinary arts classroom and lab will be renovated in the summer of 2027, with additional classrooms converted into a second culinary arts kitchen. "This work will transform the lower wing at the D14 entrance into a dedicated culinary arts lab space," Luttrell wrote. According to Luttrell, this will expand the culinary arts CTE pathway to serve more students.

### FUTURE RENOVATIONS

Luttrell said town hall meetings that will happen in fall 2026 and spring 2027 to discuss issues like fine and performing arts renovations, new athletic press boxes, an independent living lab, and an on-campus garage. She also noted the possibility of expanding the NJROTC program with a competition drill deck, noting that funds for these projects are targeted for July 1, 2028 with larger projects to start in July 2030. •

## 2026 editors signing off

*Taylor Helfer & Karan Singh | editors-in-chief*

Our story starts in our sophomore year when Karan had a scheduling conflict that led him to The County Chronicle. On the first day of school, little did Karan know that sitting at the desk behind managing editor Taylor would change the course of their high school experience for the years to come.

The moral of our story here at County exists because of our desire to get involved with our school community. While these decisions were at first influenced by wanting to strengthen our resumes, our unexpected – yet exciting – bond was at the center of our motivation to stay and continue our work with the school newspaper.

Taylor joined the newspaper her first year of high school, but did not immediately enjoy it until Karan's appearance during her sophomore year. Through our various positions held with this newspaper, from business manager to now editors-in-chief, we have lived numerous experiences that have shaped the people we are today.

From field trips to the Thomas Balch Library to meet archivists to leading an exclusive interview with best-selling author **Bruce Holsinger**, we have learned to get involved in each opportunity that has been presented to us, and we believe that staying involved is paramount to a successful high school experience.

While classes partly define a person's high school years, it is

the opportunities and extracurriculars one takes that define who the person is. There are various sports, clubs, such as Captains United or DECA, and electives, such as Student Council, PEER, Sources of Strength, and our personal favorite, journalism, to get involved in. Letting these opportunities pass by is like watching an award-winning movie with a phone in front of your face. Each pep rally or sports game hands you an experience that will not be the same in college. Participate in each game that SCA takes the time to prepare. Go to sports games and cheer, and refuse to settle for mediocrity.

Each extracurricular or elective provides you with unique opportunities to grow your public speaking, writing, leadership, and work ethic skills that are detrimental to your future successes; however, along with all of these assets, being part of a larger community is simply just fun.

This past year, our class took a field trip to two data centers in order to learn more about the functionings of the facilities that are rapidly appearing in our surrounding areas. Although it was quite interesting to understand how the massive amounts of engineering work within a data center, this trip also made us think more about Artificial Intelligence (AI) and its use in our world.

Generative AI has grown to become a daily part of so many students' lives, and while we understand the benefits of having such a vast resource readily available at our fingertips, we want to urge students to notice the dangers of letting

its use become a habit.

While numerous studies have been conducted as to why Generative AI has become so widespread, one answer lies clear: it's an addiction.

Once you begin using AI as a tool, you are no longer contributing to the betterment of yourself. Receiving a mediocre grade on a test is much more important than a good grade obtained through the use of AI. Critical thinking and hard work will prove to be the fuel for accomplishments that will motivate you through our high school life and beyond.

At The County Chronicle, we commit ourselves to writing without AI. Throughout our past three years together, we have learned to write from the heart and harness our critical thinking skills. If you were to ask our adviser **Valerie Egger**, she would agree that we have always brought a creative approach to the class, and we have grown as people as a part of it. We implore you to approach your life and academic prowess the same way.

Through our choice to join The County Chronicle, not only have we built a trophy class award winning school newspaper, we have also shared unforgettable memories that will follow us in our years to come. From running around in the hallways in attempts to find people to interview, to spending countless hours putting together bulletin boards and Instagram reels, to ensuring that our school newspaper "does not look like a hospital," our time spent in room 203 has left a permanent mark on our hearts. •

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### EDITORIAL POLICY

The County Chronicle is produced by students in Newspaper Journalism I, II, and III under the direction of an adviser. Topics are student-chosen, student-researched, and student-driven, but all content is subject to administrator review.

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The staff of The County Chronicle welcomes guest opinion pieces and letters to the editor. Pieces should be less than 400 words and must be founded on researched fact. Any student, faculty, staff, or alumni interested in contributing to the newspaper should contact the adviser, Valerie Egger, at [valerie.egger@lcps.org](mailto:valerie.egger@lcps.org).

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Congratulations to the nominees from The County Chronicle for the Loudoun Now Excellence in Journalism Awards.

The awards were held at the Loudoun County High School auditorium on May 20 and included nominees from all the high school journalism programs in Loudoun County. Pictured left to right: Adviser **Valerie Egger**, junior **Matthew O'Hara** (podcast), junior **Scarlett Ashford** (podcast), senior **Abigail Cunnington** (podcast), sophomore **Yanzila Manzoor** (videography), senior **Taylor Helfer** (podcast, news), senior **Karan Singh** (photography, feature), junior **Ashleigh Whitlock**, and librarian **Patrician Bagdasarian**.

**Thank you to the advertisers who supported our paper this year. Please take time this summer to visit them online and in person.**

# How the College Board has twisted the education system

Matthew O'Hara | staff writer

Would you have ever thought that the College Board made over 2.06 billion dollars in 2025? The more I found out about this non-profit, the more I realized that this massive corporation is a leech on the education system trying to take advantage of everyone it manages to suck on.

## What is The College Board?

The College Board, which created the Advanced Placement, or AP, program, and the Scholastic Aptitude Test, now known simply as the SAT, was founded in 1900 by professors at Columbia and Harvard Universities. Their BigFuture program links students to colleges and provides them with financial aid and scholarships.

The College Board offers 42 AP classes created via a development committee that writes curriculum, designs tests, and determines the difficulty of the class. These committees are made up of college professors, high school teachers, and College Board executives.

In Loudoun, the county pays for four AP exams for every student who wishes to take them. After that, students and their families pay \$90 for every exam that a student takes.

## "Non-Profit" Status

The College Board is considered

a non-profit, one of the largest in the country, since its mission of connecting students to colleges suggests it is beneficial to the public. Like all non-profits, it has no owner and is exempt from federal taxes while acting as an independent institution.

The non-profit status also allows for the company to receive government contracts, grants, and tax-deductible donations. The College Board is governed, or owned, by other member schools and its top executives.

For all of the products that the College Board offers, people must pay for the products in order to use them, with students paying to test and paying for books to study for the SAT. School districts pay for students to take AP exams to get college credit, and they also pay the College Board to administer the PSAT. Parents pay late registration and cancellation fees when students change their minds about whether to take an exam.

If the company is making over two billion dollars yearly, then why should they not be taxed and get tax-deductible donations?

## Is the College Board A Monopoly?

The College Board is such a part of the college application and preparation process that to gain college credit before going into college, it seems like the only way to do it is by passing an AP test. In Virginia, dual

enrollment courses are only guaranteed in Virginia schools. The IB program is only offered in three schools and greatly limits course choices. Colleges also look for certain test scores, and one of them is the SAT. Why the SAT? Because the College Board has been able to link itself to so many colleges that the score you get on an SAT has become a factor in the college admissions process.

But why should a single company be able to dictate what classes and tests look good to colleges?

The College Board doesn't just control colleges—they also control high schools. Through the AP program, the College Board has been able to dictate the curriculum of too many classes throughout the entire country. It doesn't help that the appeal of getting college credit comes with the Advanced Placement program, because this incentivizes schools and districts to use the AP curriculum as the main advanced curriculum since administrators likely believe that kids want the college credit, so why try and develop an alternative?

This statement couldn't be farther from the truth.

The College Board has also somehow been able to monopolize educational research as well. The College Board has over 6,000 institutions that have their program throughout the United States alone. From these places, the College Board has been able to gain data about how students perform in their classes, what classes students are taking the most, and what classes students want to take the most.

If the College Board is able to know what classes students want to take, then they will be able to start a committee to create it, and soon it will be offered. What does this mean? More money and power.

## The Breach of Power

This year, when I took the time to read through the Terms and Conditions prior to my AP Calculus exam, I read some truly appalling things.

What scared me the most was one of the first things stated: when you take a College Board test, you are signing a legally binding contract with the College Board. This is different from signing an SOL testing ticket or agreeing to take an ACT, because in their terms and conditions, it is never stated at all that you enter into a legally binding contract with them.

Why is this scary? Because as stated in the U.S. Constitution, minors cannot enter legally binding contracts. This means that the College Board illegally forces you to enter a contract with them whenever you take an AP exam. Yet we have let them get away with it. Our failure to act has allowed the College Board to take advantage of every single one of us, and twist the education system into their hands and monopolize it.

But if education is something that is public and controlled by the federal government, then why should a private, "non-profit" be allowed to control our education?

## Is The System The Problem?

The problem with all of this is that the College Board is providing all of these classes to take, and continues to expand with more students taking their classes, but the cost is our well-being, motivation, and general happiness. It feels like every year more people take AP classes, and every year more people feel like their class load has been increased, and they continue to have less free time.

It doesn't help that external pressures continue to make students feel like we need to take these advanced classes. The number of people applying for college has increased, so students take AP classes to differentiate themselves. Parents, teachers, and counselors continue to remind us that AP classes look good to colleges, that we'll feel more challenged in an AP class, and that an AP class is the "next natural progression" in our high school career.

But why should it be?

The number of AP classes I've taken here at County has increased year by year. My friends continue to take AP classes, which makes me, a developing teenager, feel pressured into taking AP classes because at least my friends and I will be together. I continue to force myself to go to bed later each night because the work I'm assigned goes to my desk and forms an endless pile, eventually completed for a class in which I'm learning material for an exam that I might not score high enough on to earn the college credit that I worked so hard on earning.

## A Final Thought

It may seem like ending this corporation may be impossible. However, we as students have been a part of this battle and can be the solution.

**Nicholas Murray Butler**, the main founder of the College Board, once said that "...education is not merely instruction, far from it. It is the leading of the youth out into their environment so that they might act and be able to better their environments around them."

If we truly believe that education is not just about learning in a classroom, but the foundation for the impact that we will have in the real world; if we truly believe that our education will have an impact on who and what we will become; and if we truly believe that this is a critical point in not just our generation's future, but for the future of this world with all of the constant technological innovations occurring around us and the ever-increasing access to knowledge that we have, then we must do our part to ensure that we keep our sanity so that we will be able to be successful in the future. •

## RUNNING THE NUMBERS

### ON THE COLLEGE BOARD

Many don't know some of the secret statistics about the College Board. Some, such as specific testing data or how they score tests, will never be known; however, here is what we know.

Matthew O'Hara | staff writer

#### WHAT EXAMS ARE TAKEN THE MOST?

These 5 AP classes had the most students registered to take their respective exams in 2022 across the United States.



#### HOW MUCH DOES LCPS PAY THE COLLEGE BOARD?

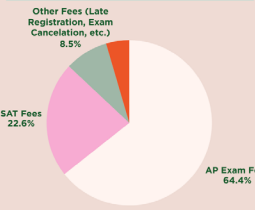
In 2024, roughly, 3,300 LCPS students took AP exams.

**\$297,000**

would be owed to the College Board from students who took exams in LCPS, whether they were free or not.

#### HOW DOES THE COLLEGE BOARD MAKE MONEY?

Other Fees (Late Registration, Exam Cancellation, etc.) 8.5%

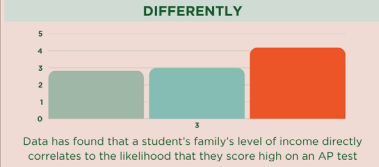


According to an article from TotalRegistration, The College Board made over 2.06 billion dollars in 2024, going up from 1.77 billion in 2023.

#### HOW DOES THE COLLEGE BOARD USE THEIR MONEY?

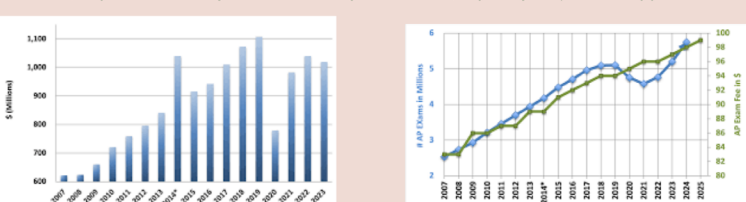
The College Board primarily uses their money to develop new versions of their SAT and AP tests and invests the money. According to a report from Total Report, The College Board has nearly \$170 million in investments. The College Board also uses money on educational research and providing waivers to low-income students.

#### DIFFERENT INCOME LEVELS PERFORM DIFFERENTLY



#### HOW HAVE THE COLLEGE BOARD'S FINANCES CHANGED OVER THE YEARS?

Since 2007, the year when the College Board's finances began to be tracked, they have gone up almost every year since 2007.



#### WHAT CIVIL SUITS HAS THE COLLEGE BOARD BEEN INVOLVED IN?

In 2024, the New York State Attorney General found the College Board liable for illegally selling millions of students' data that they had collected from students who used College Board products across the state.

**\$750,000**

owed to millions of students in New York whose data was stolen and misused by the College Board.

#### HOW MUCH DO COLLEGE BOARD EMPLOYEES MAKE?

College Board's CEO David Coleman has a yearly salary of 2.56 million dollars per year, while College Board executives earn over \$1,000,000. Most College Board employees have an average salary ranging from \$72,000 to \$140,000 per year.



## Gleedsville Cemetery provides a glimpse into hidden history

Scarlett Ashford | managing editor

It's a gorgeous sunny day, perfect for a walk, and as I reach Gleedsville Road, I make a split-second decision to cross the street and take the road less traveled. The road is covered in coarse gravel, and it leads me to an open field overgrown with tall grass. A small sign painted in white tells me where I am: Gleedsville Cemetery.

Gleedsville Cemetery is the largest African-American cemetery in Loudoun County, and



After an awkward turn off the main road, a gravel road leads to a small sign that marks the entrance to Gleedsville cemetery. Photo by Scarlett Ashford.

was first made for the African-American community of Gleedsville, initially founded by John "Jack" Gleed after he bought a small plot of land just south of Leesburg. Today, it is the resting place of an estimated 40 to 100 people, many of whom have no marker to honor their legacy.

One of these people is Martin van Buren Buchanan, a freed African-American man who served in the U.S. Colored Troops for the Union during the U.S. Civil War at age 19. After serving in the war, he helped establish the Gleedsville community by helping to build Mt. Olive American Episcopal Church, which is the only remaining building of the community, and is now the Unitarian Universalist Church of Loudoun.

Another one of these people was Valentine B. Johnson, who was the first African-American from Loudoun County to be killed in combat during World War I.

Despite the information I could find on these two veterans, finding information on most people buried in the cemetery was extremely difficult, as Gleedsville community members were not included in the U.S. Census.

I found myself continuously

drawn to finding information about Mary Young Johnson, who died at age 22. One would think the death of someone so young would be written about, but in my search to discover the reason why, I found no record of her—nothing.

This community is a significant part of Loudoun County's history as it marks the struggle of African Americans to find a place in white society after the Civil War.

Besides the lack of historical information, I was also upset by the conditions of the cemetery. Why was such a historically significant cemetery filled with unmarked graves?

Currently, the cemetery is struggling to provide the funding to remove forest overgrowth and a dead tree threatening to fall on the cemetery as well as the funding to identify all of the unmarked burial sites.

Although basic upkeep of cemeteries, such as weeding, can be done by anyone as long as they have explicit permission from the trustees or owners of the cemetery, care, such as mowing, requires the hiring of a professional company. This is done to prevent damage to the headstones and the grounds, but

can make the process expensive, especially for smaller cemeteries that lack funds or support.

"Through the years, the number of people contributing funds for the maintenance of the cemetery has decreased steadily, as people have passed away, moved away, or have stopped contributing funds," Dwight Smith, a current trustee of Gleedsville Cemetery, said.

Although the situation is difficult, organizations like the nonprofit Loudoun Cemetery Conservancy (LCC) help to support struggling cemeteries by offering clinics on cemetery management as a trustee and cemetery upkeep.

Led by Chairman and Executive Director Al van Huyck, Treasurer Michael Alter, and Secretary Samantha Ferringer, the LCC also works to honor historic and African-American cemeteries specifically.

Maintaining and preserving historic cemeteries allows the lives of forgotten people to be remembered and respected, and provides a glimpse into unrecorded history. The Gleedsville Cemetery is currently attempting to raise funds, but these cemeteries are still in need of support. •

## Update: sidewalk completion planned on Dry Mill Road

Abigail Cunnington | copy editor

Earlier this year, our newspaper ran a story featuring guest writer Yanzila Manzoor, who reported on the dangers facing students forced to cross Dry Mill Road in order to get to and from school. She identified those living in the White Oaks neighborhood as particularly at risk.

Manzoor's video report on the situation demonstrated that to get to school, these students had to choose between walking along Dry Mill Road due to an incomplete sidewalk, at times walking with traffic, or running across the street without a crosswalk while traffic slowed. A promise by the district to resolve the issue six years down the road didn't pacify Manzoor.

After tenacious communication with principal Michelle Luttrell, Leesburg Mayor Kelly Burk, the town council and dozens more on the town council committees, Manzoor reported to us that an email from Leesburg Town Council Member Zach Cummings dated May 4 confirmed the town's intention to move the completion of the

sidewalk to before school starts in August of 2026.

"It's amazing we're provided with a safe route to school now," Manzoor said. "I thought I'd have to get this story on the local news for some sort of action to be taken."

For her, the result was both surprising and extremely rewarding. After sending over two dozen emails to different people, it was a matter of trust that adults in positions of authority would take to heart Manzoor's concerns.

"The first thing I did [after hearing the news] was tell the people who supported me and guided me throughout this campaign. My family, the librarians, Dr. Luttrell, and Ms. Egger," Manzoor said.

"Yanzila consistently impresses me with her ability to see things around her that she would like changed and figure out a way to make those changes happen," librarian Patricia Bagdasarian said. "She is learning first-hand how to address things within her community and larger world in the kindest, most respectful, yet persistent way, approaching problems with a solution in mind." •

## Local Outdoor Gems FOR A SUMMER DAY TRIP

MATTHEW O'HARA | STAFF WRITER

### BALL'S BLUFF BATTLEFIELD

Distance from LCHS: 3.7 miles | 14 minutes  
Ball's Bluff Battlefield is a historic site that was the site of the Civil War Battle of Ball's Bluff. Located not too far from Ball's Bluff Elementary School, the site is open from dawn to dusk and has many hiking trails where you can see the historic sites, including a cemetery with graves of the soldiers who died in the battle. It also has guided tours on the weekends at 11 a.m. and 1 p.m. in the summer.



### BANSHEE REEKS NATURE PRESERVE



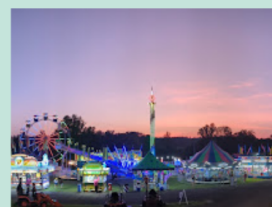
Distance from LCHS: 6.7 miles | 12 minutes  
Banshee Reeks Nature Preserve is located in Leesburg down Evergreen Mill Road, and has nearly 15 miles of hiking trails for those who visit. It also has ponds and rivers where you can fish. Fishing at Banshee Reeks is catch and release and can only be done if you have a Virginia state fishing license. The preserve also has around 700 acres of land that is home to numerous species of plants and animals.

### MORVEN PARK'S POLO IN THE PARK

Distance from LCHS: 2.8 miles | 10 minutes  
Morven Park, which is near downtown Leesburg and home to the historic Davis Mansion, hosts Polo in the Park, which are arena-like polo games in their equestrian center. These events are free to the public and they occur on seven Saturday nights throughout June and July. They also will have food trucks for those going to watch the polo matches.



### THE LOUDOUN COUNTY FAIR



Distance from LCHS: 2.9 miles | 5 minutes  
The Loudoun County Fair occurs from July 21 - 25, and is located at the Loudoun County Fairgrounds on Dry Mill Road. Some of the events at the fair include the Power Derbies for little kids, the Kiss-a-Pig, and Cow Pie Bingo. The fair also has a live auction for livestock. There will be vendors and food trucks at the event. This year will mark the 90th year of the Loudoun County Fair.

# LCHS says goodbye to its band director of 31 years

Scarlett Ashford | managing editor

The Marching Band can boast 20 years as a Virginia Honor Band and four national championships. However, behind every success story is someone who pushed and led that group to achieve their goals. That someone is marching band director and music educator **Darron Young**.

He has been leading the band program for the past 22 years, and has been a music educator for 31 years. After dedicating three decades to educating students in the musical arts, Young is now saying goodbye.

Throughout his years as an educator he has humbly maintained that the successes of the band program are a result of the students rather than him, but this article hopes to honor the impact he has on his students and the legacy he will leave behind.

Young was first introduced to music at a young age by his grandfather and father, who were both trumpet players, and his mother who “listened to music 24/7.”

“I remember as just a wee little baby hearing music,” Young said. “It just always had this control over me. It was just otherworldly.”

He initially wanted to be a drummer, but he eventually became a trumpet player after playing around on a trumpet in his father’s closet. Despite never taking lessons, he quickly became proficient at playing.

“When I picked up the trumpet, it made sense,” Young said.

Young continued trumpet through high school, during which his experiences as part of the band helped catalyze his journey towards becoming a band director.

“What my band director did for me changed my life, and I wanted to be part of that,” Young said. The type of environment that his high school band director created was representative of the importance of having music in his life.

“When you went to band, it didn’t matter whether you were a freshman or a senior, whether you were an awesome player or you weren’t,” Young said. “It didn’t matter, you had a family.”

He fondly recounted a memory during which he and his friend were invited to be first chair trumpet for an event similar to District Band. Because he never took music lessons until attending college, he mostly relied on his friend to sing the melody so he could reproduce the sound. The issue? His friend got sick and wasn’t able to go.

“The guest director’s up there, ‘okay, first trumpet, can I hear you?’” Young said. “I had no idea what to do.”

These types of life-long memories are part of the essential band experience that creates such a strong bond among the students.

After going to college, Young seriously debated the path that he should take with his life, but after switching majors several times, he eventually



(Left to right) Current high school band director Darron Young and former middle school band directors Cheryl Newton and Beth Paquette pose at the recession for Young’s last concert. Photo by Karen Jimenez.

decided that becoming a music educator was what he wanted to do with his life.

“That’s why I went back to music, because I tried a little bit of everything, and I could not in any way see myself doing anything other than music,” Young said.

Although he entered college as a trumpet player, he learned to conduct as part of the music education curriculum.

“One thing you can tell young band directors are nervous about [is] their conducting,” Young said. “Now, after all these years, it becomes something you don’t even think about.”

Now preparing to retire, questions surrounding what he will do during retirement and how he can maintain the presence of music in his life remain.

“It’s a bittersweet feeling, being the last time maybe forever that I’ll stand up in front of people and wave

my arms,” Young said in reference to conducting his last concert. “It’s hard to imagine all of it just going away after tonight.”

In light of this, he hopes to join some type of music group, such as a jazz band, after he retires. Besides that, he hasn’t formulated an official plan.

“No matter what, when a director leaves, it’s change,” Young said. “Everybody says kids are resilient, but change is hard.” However, he also wants to continue to have faith in the program. “[The marching band] is a machine that runs itself.”

Known throughout his teaching career for being modest, Young’s emphasis has always been on the students.

“The biggest kick I get is watching kids perform and then watching them realize what they’ve accomplished,” Young said. “I didn’t earn any of these trophies...the kids did.” •

# Shepherd retires from 54 years of teaching science

Charlie Pizzarello | staff writer

After 54 years in education, **Judy Shepherd** is retiring and leaving behind a lasting impact on her students.

Although she spent most of her career as a special education teacher, she later became an Earth Science teacher after earning her license.

Shepherd says her favorite part of teaching was seeing students finally understand a lesson. She hopes students will remember her as a teacher who cared about them and was always willing to help.

Most of her students remember her passion for discussing water bottles on the very first day of class: take the cap off of your water bottle before you recycle it in an effort to save water.

“A lot of my students will come back and say, you taught me about not keeping a cap on a bottle of water, but once you told me that, even if there’s just drops in there, I can never leave the cap on,” Shepherd said.

She believes teaching is about more than academics and encour-

ages teachers to help students become good citizens and stewards of the Earth.

Over her years of teaching, she has seen technology use increase and has mixed feelings about its impact on students, which goes along with her main focus: making connections with students.

As for advice for new teachers, she says, “It’s important to not only teach the content, but it’s also important to teach the students to be good stewards of the Earth, just good people, good citizens, and I think that’s part of teaching.”

She credits several science teachers as inspirations for her to follow in their footsteps: retired teachers **James Benedict** and **Felicity Francis** and science teacher **Michael Weinstein**.

In retirement, Shepherd plans to spend more time with her children and four grandchildren, volunteer at the VA Hospital in Martinsburg, and stay active in her community.

Her final message to students is: “Look outside of yourself and see who you can help along the way.” •



Shepherd poses in front of a mural painted outside her room by junior Avery Bennett for art class. Bennett chose the mural because Shepherd often spoke of a patch of milkweed that attracts monarch butterflies every year. Photo by Charlie Pizzarello.

## STUDENT LIFE

# Junior class advisor: 'I'd hate for prom to die.'

## Upperclassmen skip prom, and it changes the future of the dance

Taylor Helfer | editor-in-chief

On April 18, students, party buses, and limousines flooded the streets of DC and the steps of the **Abraham Lincoln** and **Thomas Jefferson** Memorials. It's customary for upperclassmen to get dinner and pictures before the school's official prom, but in the past couple of years, seniors and juniors have been skipping the dance altogether.

In fact, the junior class, who hosted and prepared the prom for upperclassmen, was only able to sell 65 tickets with only 60 people actually attending. Last year, they sold 112 tickets and 100 people showed up. According to junior class sponsor **Patricia Arnold**, the prom committee, which collaborates with junior SCA members, "broke even" on last year's prom, held at the Dulles Marriot, and it forced the committee to rethink the prom's venue. This year, the dance took place in the school cafeteria. The new venue saved money, but with the cost of the DJ and other expenses, 65 tickets is not enough to justify holding the event.

The students who did attend enjoyed themselves and the work done by the committee.

"It was a lot of fun," junior **Lily Kingsolver** said. Kingsolver mentioned that the decorations and especially the DJ made the envi-



(Left to Right) Juniors **Abby Lippincott**, **Sydney Miller**, **Jared Campbell**, **Madison Karschner**, **Alexa Deke-nipp**, **Jack Galos**, **Mason Smith**, and **Zander Long** take a picture with the DJ, who has been at the event for the past two years. According to **Patricia Arnold**, the junior class sponsor and prom coordinator, DJs cost upwards of \$4,000, but many people who attended the event, such as senior **Rachel Nimtz**, note that the DJ "cultivated an energetic environment and got people really involved." Photo by **Victor O'Neill Studios**.

ronment enjoyable.

Still, with such low attendance, the committee has been thinking about the future of prom. Arnold has been looking to open the dance up to all grades, giving it a new name: "Spring Formal." Arnold explains that it will act as "prom," and that it will hopefully garner more support.

"We could open it up to the en-

vironment enjoyable," Arnold said. She explained that the only way for the committee to be able to fund the event is through broader participation from all grades.

While more people may be in attendance, she plans for it to still be at the school.

"We could have it in the gym because it would be a bigger group," Arnold said. "Another idea

would be maybe having a concert on the lawn."

Arnold's only hope is that more students will take interest in the event, and the committee is open to new ideas. "I'd hate for prom to die," Arnold said. "We need to shift. We're open to ideas. We'll be having conversations about this next year [with the school community]." •

## Gay and Straight Alliance hosts fifth annual pride prom

Scarlett Ashford | managing editor

As you walk into the cafeteria, sunlight reflects the colors of the rainbow onto the room, creating an atmospheric glow. LGBTQ+ hits like *Girls Like Girls* by **Hayley Kioko** and *HOTTOGO* by **Chappell Roan** echo throughout the space while students bust a move on the dance floor.

This was the fifth annual Pride Prom, which is open to students from all schools across the county. Teachers and students alike went to support and enjoy the event.

Hosted by the Gay and Straight Alliance (GSA) club, Pride Prom serves as a place where everyone can be authentic to themselves and their expression.

"I feel like everybody should have a safe space or know that there's a safe space at County for them," GSA President **Keira Pulley** said.

Pulley noted how Pride Prom is important for queer representation in a society that may not be as accepting.

"Representation matters," principal **Michelle Luttrell** said. "Support matters, and it's important that everyone has a place to be themselves and feel safe and to be loved and respected." •

(Top) Seniors **Brielle Campbell** and **Leah Asheber** dance the night away. The event was filled with a positive and accepting environment with people from all schools enjoying themselves. Photo by **Karen Jimenez**.

(Bottom) (Left to right) Seniors **Eva Moore**, **Keira Pulley**, **Leah Asheber**, and **Brielle Campbell** pose together. Pulley, along with seniors **Basiah Bryant** and **Karen Jimenez**, make the event happen. Photo by **Karen Jimenez**.



# Students and staff face off, tie on basketball court



Senior Ty Kessler prepares to shoot the ball to gain points for the students' team. Kessler played a major role in the offensive strategy for the students. Photo by Karan Singh.



Students defend their basket as the staff team attempts to score. The annual student vs. staff basketball game takes place during the spring pep rally. Photo by Karan Singh.



Football coach Matthew Reidenbaugh runs across the court in an attempt to score points for his team. Reidenbaugh led the offense for the staff team throughout the game. Photo by Karan Singh.

## The crossword: graduation edition

Charlie Pizzarello | staff writer

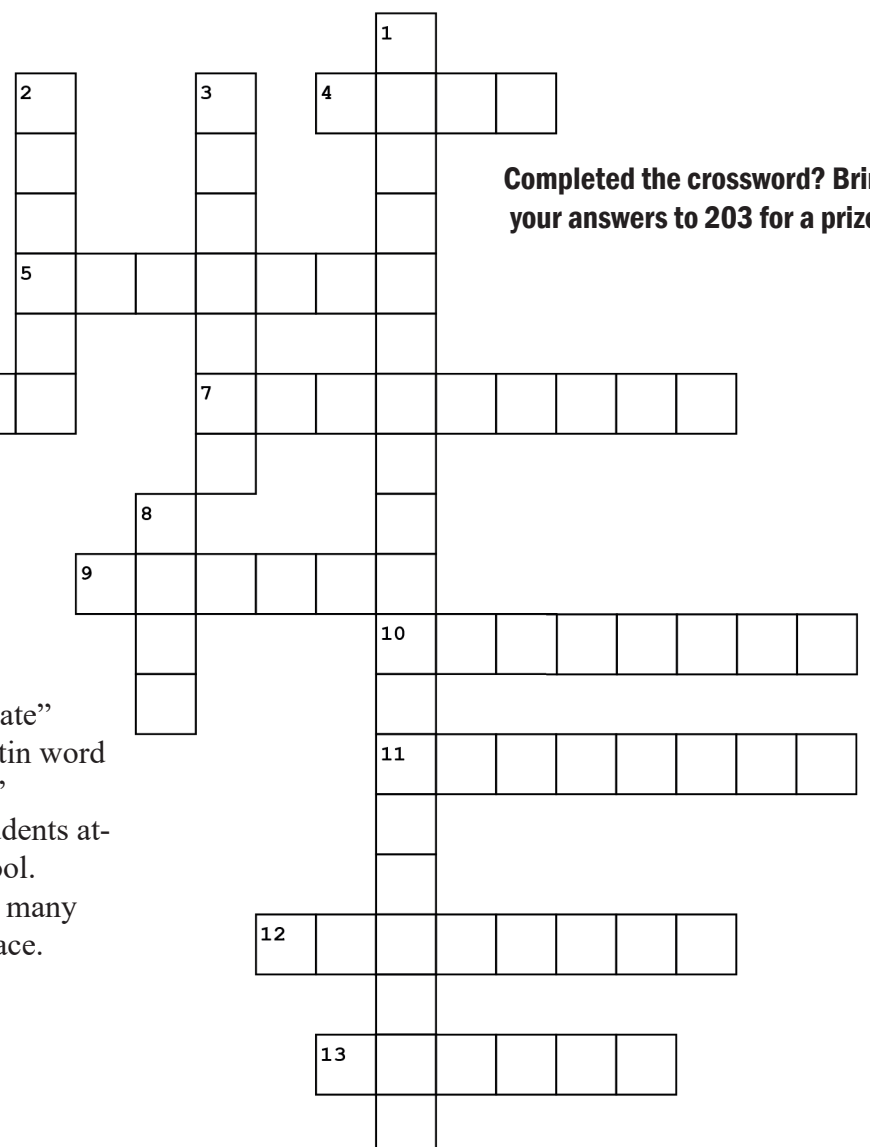
### ACROSS

4. Special clothing worn at graduation.
5. The certificate you receive after finishing school
6. A group of students graduating together.
7. A celebration hosted by families for individual graduates
9. A warm season that begins in June.
10. After the Latin tradition, students can graduate with honors such as magna or summa \_\_\_\_\_, meaning with praise, with great praise, or with highest praise.
11. Even though we are usually quite hot on the front lawn, originally, graduation gowns were worn by \_\_\_\_\_ scholars
12. A student who has completed school.
13. A place where students learn.

### DOWN

1. The traditional music played at a graduation, composed by Sir Edward Elgar in 1901.

2. The word "graduate" comes from this Latin word that means "a step."
3. A place many students attend after high school.
8. The month when many graduations take place.



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# ATHLETICS

## Lacrosse and soccer teams make it to region semifinals



Senior Kate Klerekoper smiles as she runs across the field. The girls lacrosse team season ended with a tough loss against Dominion High School in the region 4C tournament semifinals on May 28. “My favorite moment from the season was putting hair glitter on before senior night and matching with the girls,” junior Eimile Abbott said. Photo by Victor O’Neill Studios.



Boys varsity lacrosse played a season of “ups and downs,” said senior Brandon Butler (pictured above). Despite being the 2026 district champions, their season ended with a 12-13 loss against Woodgrove High School in the region 4C semifinals. “My favorite moment was beating Broad Run in a thrilling 7-6 game,” Butler said. “They have been our biggest rivals.” Photo by Victor O’Neill Studios.



Senior Nathan Hobbs defends his team’s goal. The boys soccer ended with a loss against Dominion High School during the region 4C semifinals. Photo by Victor O’Neill Studios.



Senior Harper Keus dribbles the ball across the field in an attempt to score a goal. The girls soccer season ended after a close 2-1 loss against Heritage during the region 4C semifinals. Photo by Victor O’Neill Studios.

## Senior Baseball Spotlight: Calvin Rosati

Ashleigh Whitlock | business manager

[even] go to states, but mainly, to have fun,” Rosati said. The baseball team is currently dominating in the Catoctin district, standing at 2-0. Overall, the team is 9-6.

Since the young age of four, senior Calvin Rosati has been out batting on the baseball field, guided by his grandfather.

As a second baseman, when he’s not hitting, Rosati spends his time on the field defending the section between first and second base. His role can be game-changing, as he’s often the first to come into close contact with the ball after it’s hit.

“My goals for this season are to win districts and regionals, and

This fall, Rosati will attend Brown University. Because of the school’s open curriculum, he will go into the school with an undecided major until the spring semester of his sophomore year. “I plan to continue baseball through club baseball at Brown.”

Although he may be growing and moving onwards, Rosati will never leave his passion for baseball. •



Senior Calvin Rosati (middle) stands with his family, including sophomore Linden Rosati, at his senior night game against Broad Run High School. Photo by John Klimavicz.

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# Senior softball spotlight: Abby Williams

Abigail Cunningham | copy editor

This year's Varsity girls softball season can be summed up in one word: aggression. The girls achieved a 13-3 record with some major shutdowns, including a 15-1 win over John Champe in early May, and a 17-0 win over Dominion. They beat out Gainesville in early April, winning with a slim margin at 3-2, and came out on top against Briar Woods with a 6-3 victory. Throughout

the season, senior Abby Williams has been a major player.

Williams shared that the team this year had an "abundance of talent" that was really cool to see in action, especially when it came to their aggressive baserunning strategy.

Due to time spent on the field, team dinners, and spontaneous trips to Wegmans, the community of girls has grown strong. All in all, despite injury to her back during preseason conditioning,

she says this final spring season was a good way to close out her high school career.

Earlier this year, Williams committed to play softball at Grove City College. As she was reaching a decision, she was intentional to consider softball an option, but not make it a deciding factor.

She says the "small environment" of Grove City was appealing and that she trusted the college would provide a good

balance between sports and academics. For her, "Softball was an added bonus."

To incoming freshmen and others considering playing high school sports, Williams says, "Go for it. You only have one high school career, and you don't want to look back and regret anything." She urges people not to let their lives revolve around the sport or to take it too seriously. After all, she says, "High school sports are supposed to be fun." •

# Senior Spotlight: Crew Captain Kate DePrado coaches

Abigail Cunningham | copy editor



(Left to right) Seniors Connor Tanner, James Sutter, Kate DePrado, Nick DePrado, and Nathan Ko pose together before a regatta. The team had a good season, with the Men's Novice 4 Boat making it to finals. Photo by Abigail Cunningham.

The crew team put up a good fight at the Virginia Scholastic Rowing Championships regatta on May 9 following a season of preparation. The Men's Novice 4 boat made it to finals, a first in the school's history. For team captain senior **Kate DePrado**, the event constitutes her new favorite memory as a member of the team. "We flew out of our start and we were neck and neck with all the other boats...it was just such a cool feeling," she said.

DePrado has been a member of the crew team since freshman year and has contributed as both a rower and a coxswain. "I've always stepped up and tried to help coach out the best I can," she said. As captain, she said her role became simply "more official."

In addition to being captain, DePrado even became somewhat of a pseudo coach this past season. She shared that it's been fun seeing both

sides of the sport, saying the behind-the-scenes work that goes into her coaching has been exhilarating: "I have a whole binder of drills and I have my little notebook...it's actually so much fun creating practice plans and race plans. Now that I'm like a captain and senior I feel like I have more legitimacy to do those things."

DePrado said being given authority to do some coaching has been a beneficial approach for the team since she has the bandwidth to focus more acutely on her boat and can assess their needs in real time. "Some days Coach says, hey, do this drill, and then other days, he's like okay, you're all on your own. You do what you think your boat needs," she said.

Despite the early morning practices, the resulting sore muscles and the freezing water, DePrado said, "I really do love the sport. It's like my favorite thing I've done in high school." •



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# Connor Thompson: junior player becomes social media sensation

Rand Harrison | staff writer

Connor Thompson recently changed from an average junior to one of our school's most recognizable athletes thanks to social media. Thompson's classmates praised both his talent and character. In a recent chat, Sam Edwards compared him to the soccer player Mbappé, highlighting Thompson's "explosive speed, elite finishing, and high tactical intelligence." All this publicity came after the Instagram account @connorthompsonlover went viral, making Thompson increasingly popular around school.

Thompson commented that the attention caught him off guard, saying, "I didn't expect that page to

pop off as well as it did," but he's grateful for the support and encouragement. Recently the stands have been packed with signs glazing Connor Thompson, including giant cutouts of his face. Thompson, who is now in his third year of JV soccer, says the encouragement "really helps me do better," and he credits soccer for helping him grow into a better person "not just physically, but mentally." •

*Junior Connor Thompson plays Full Back against Potomac Falls High School. The victorious game, with the help of Thompson's skills and cheering audience, ended with a 9-0 win. Photo by Victor O'Neill Studios*



# Carter Williams commits to Grove City

Matthew O'Hara | staff writer

For many, the thought of running long distances in the scorching heat or the chilliest winter seems disheartening. For senior Carter Williams, running in these conditions has defined the past four years.

Williams ran "all 12 seasons of cross country, indoor track, outdoor track" and recently committed to Grove City College in Pennsylvania to continue his running career.

Williams reached out to the coach since he is friends with a current member of the team. "He got back to me pretty quickly, and we set up a visit," Williams said. "I pretty quickly narrowed it down from three to two and here I am with Grove City."

While going through the recruiting process, Williams had multiple schools contacting him. "The other two options I considered heavily were Cedarville University, which is a D2 Christian school in Ohio, and then

Oklahoma Christian, a D2 school in Oklahoma," he said.

While in college, Williams will be studying mechanical engineering. "While looking for colleges, I was looking for a Christian school with a good running program that I could run for while being a part of the engineering program."

Williams didn't start running until freshman year. "Up until then, I was just playing every sport I could," Williams said. This has led to him having an even greater respect for what his coaches have been able to do through the past four years.

"Not only are they my coaches, they're the only coaches I've ever had, so whatever I am as a runner is thanks to them because I started running with them," he said. Williams is also grateful for what his coaches have done for him outside of athletics. "All of my coaches are great people. They've been a big influence in my life and I'm super appreciative of

them."

Throughout high school, Williams has made many notable memories and friendships. "Some of the best memories were team dinners or racing in crazy hurricane-like conditions with friends and then going and hiding in a car after," Williams said.

Now, Carter will also be attending Grove City with his twin sister Abby Williams, who will be playing softball at Grove City. "We never thought we'd end up at the same school, but I'm definitely glad we did, because it's my twin sister, right? We've gone through our entire life together so it's super cool that we get to end up in the same place."

When looking back, Williams has nothing but gratitude for the experiences that he has had during the past four years. "Now that I'm the senior and team captain, I think back to the guys who were kind of like that for me, like Randy White, Blake Conner, and it's super cool to

be in that situation because I looked up to those guys a lot." Williams has also benefitted from many pieces of advice he hopes to continue to use. "Doing the small things, staying healthy, starting to learn that discipline early can help a lot over the course of four years, and, a Coach Campbell quote, get comfortable being uncomfortable."

When looking to the future, Williams hopes to keep running, but doesn't know if he'll be able to continue professionally. "I would love to keep running, but I'm probably not good enough to run professionally," he said.

Instead, he hopes to give back to the sport that has given him many great experiences throughout high school through coaching one day. "I would love to coach," Williams said. "Our coaches have poured a lot into us over the last four years, and I want to be able to do the same, both from a coaching and running perspective." •

# Despite weather challenges, tennis finishes a strong season

The boys and girls tennis teams faced several weather challenges, with excessive heat cancelling twice and days of solid rain postponing several other matches. Despite these challenges, both teams improved from last year in the region standings, both making it to the region 4C tournament semifinals. On the girls team, juniors Lexi Bryson and Ivy Tomaszewski played in the region

doubles tournament on June 3. On the boys team, Tyler Partlow and Aidan Armistead. Both Tomaszewski and Armistead played in the region singles tournament. While they did not move to the next round, Tomaszewski says she is proud of her performance and says she played well. •

Guest journalist Cameron Covert contributed to this story.



**Girls team:** (Top row) Michaella Conteh, Lexi Bryson, Autumn Gonzalez, Reagan Griesbach, Milania Ruparelia, Holly Ding, Hope Hathaway, Aspen MacLeod. (Bottom row) Sarah Juban, Ivy Tomaszewski, Avery Timmes, Cameron Covert, Phoebe Nunes.

**Boys Team:** (Left to right) Cooper White, David Phillips, Tyler Partlow, Salaar Saleem, Tyler Colavita, Grayson Bradley, Rand Harrison, Coach Schuyler Henderson, Andrew Massey, Connor Quinn, Aidan Armistead, Jaishua Manalel, and Jordan Bruce.

# ARTS AND ENTERTAINMENT

## 'Means Girls' musical tackles high school drama

Rand Harrison | staff writer



*(Top Left) The Plastics make their iconic entrance: freshman Ali Owens as Karen Smith, junior Emma Barts as Gretchen Wieners, and senior Norah Lee as Regina George. In the April 24–26 production of "Mean Girls," the musical takes on the chaos of high-school social hierarchies and the pressure to fit in.*



*During the number "Where Do You Belong?," junior Emma Nicholson as Janis Ian and junior Elias Kaywork as Damian Hubbard invite junior Grace Allred, playing Cady Heron, to join their lunch table and navigate the madness of North Shore High. Director Nathan McGraw helped set the scene with his leadership and management of the students.*



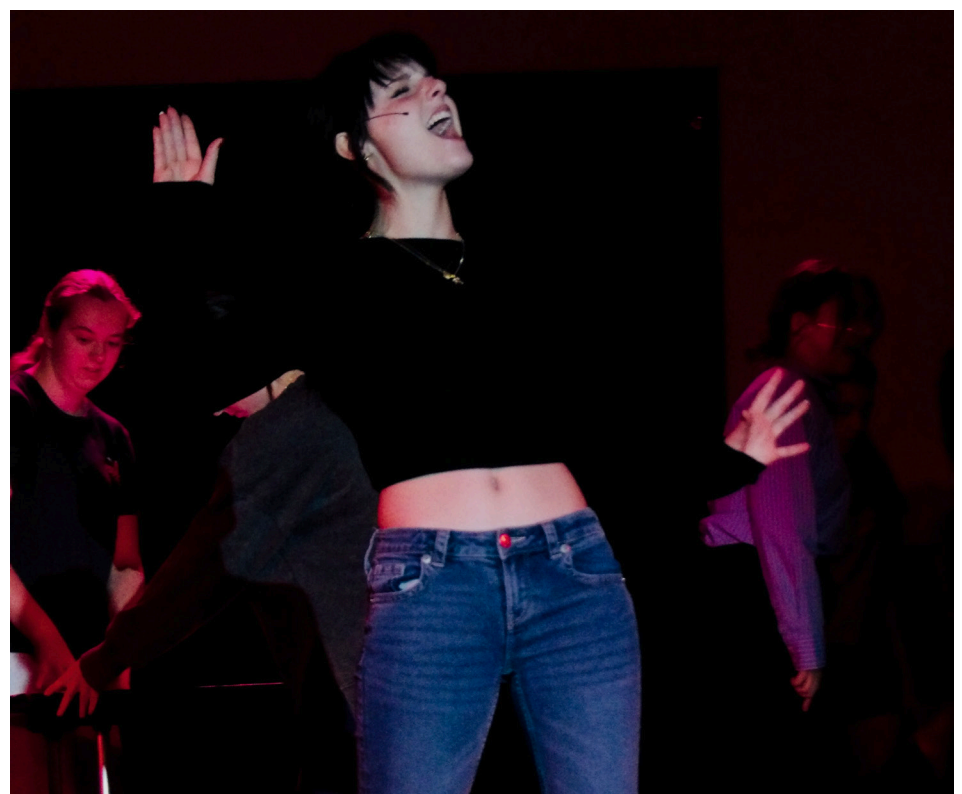
*Senior Collin Diem as Aaron Samuels and senior Norah Lee as Regina George share a dramatic moment at the Halloween party, leaning in for a near kiss. The musical featured a full band made up of instruments such as piano, guitar, drums, and more, which accompanied the singers with live music.*



*In the final song "I See Stars," junior Grace Allred as Cady Heron and senior Collin Diem as Aaron Samuels share an important moment at the Spring Fling dance as everyone makes peace with one another. The cast members rehearsed for two months before the show, logging dozens of after-school hours to perfect the finale.*



*Junior Ashleigh Whitlock as Ms. Norbury prepares the mathletes, played by juniors Danny Rosenfeld, Grace Allred, and sophomores Eddie Moshrefi and Eli Poggi, for the mathlete state championship as Cady redeems herself in the end of the play.*



*Norah Lee performing the musical number "World Burn" during the climax of the play, where Regina snaps and creates chaos by turning all girls in the school against each other. All photos by Jaxon Brown.*

# Geidl's artwork chosen for the principal's art Gallery

Rand Harrison | staff writer

Senior **Elizabeth Geidl** has been selected as the Principal's Art Gallery winner for her piece "Observational Abstraction."

Geidl completed the featured piece over the summer while attending an art camp at Virginia Commonwealth University. Instead of creating the work as part of a regular class assignment, she developed it through a summer exercise that tasked students to collect random objects from Monroe Park and reinterpret them.

"We had the option to either do a direct observational drawing or make an abstract piece," Geidl explained. Choosing the route she thought would be more enjoyable, she created an abstract composition inspired by objects she found interesting and fun to draw.

The piece itself reflects that. Built from an assortment of found objects, like leaves, branches, vines, and seed pods, the artwork transforms organic material into a layered abstract piece. While Geidl

says she is typically more comfortable working in charcoal, this project pushed her outside of her usual medium and artistic habits.

The piece was fully drawn using graphite pencils. "It was definitely a little bit more difficult than I intended it to be," Geidl said. "I'm a little bit better at charcoal drawings, I'd say, but I was pretty proud of this."

Though the process was more difficult than expected, the final result stood out enough to catch the attention of principal Michelle Luttrell, leading to her being chosen as the Principal's Art Gallery winner. In this annual tradition, the principal chooses a piece from the senior art gallery, then frames it and displays it permanently in the main hallway.

Geidl admitted that being chosen came as a surprise.

"I was very surprised and did not expect that to happen," Geidl said. "I thought it was one of my most boring pieces out of all of them, so I'm still a little bit shocked that that happened." •



Senior Elizabeth Geidl displays her winning abstract piece, showing off the overlapping and intricate details that led to her work being chosen for the principal's art gallery. Courtesy of @LCHS1954.

## Biopic review: 'Michael' presents a believable, if incomplete, portrayal of Micheal Jackson's life appropriate for new fans

Charlie Pizzarello | staff writer

The movie "Michael" is a biographical film that tells the story of the life of **Michael Jackson**. Directed by **Antoine Fuqua**, the film follows Michael Jackson from his childhood to his rise as one of the most successful musicals in history. The movie explores his achievements and some of the challenges Michael faced during his life. "Michael" is an entertaining film that shows why Michael Jackson became known around the world as the King of Pop.

One of the strongest parts of the movie is the acting. **Jaafar Jackson** delivers an amazing performance as his uncle Michael Jackson. He looks super similar to Michael Jackson and also portrays Michael's voice and movements in a way that makes it hard to differentiate the two. His movement

and performances feel realistic, especially during scenes recreating famous images and music videos. A lot of moments in the film feel like Michael Jackson is there. Jaafar shows Michael's confidence on stage and his more personal side away from the spotlight.

Another major feature of the movie is the music and visuals that they recreated. The film shows recreations of Michael Jackson's most famous performances, which makes the movie a must-watch even for people who may not know much about Michael Jackson's life. The concert scenes are visually impressive featuring realistic visuals and multiple camera angles. The movie successfully captures Michael Jackson's life.

The movie also does a good job showing all the pressure that came with Michael Jackson's success. It shows how hard it was for him to

live under public attention from a young age. A lot of scenes show his loneliness and struggles. These moments help make Michael Jackson feel more relatable instead of him as one of the most famous celebrities.

However, the film has received some criticism. Some people believe the movie focuses more on celebrating Michael Jackson's success and talent than fully exploring his life. Certain topics are either shortened or not discussed in much detail. While some criticize that some allegations Michael faced later in life were left out, the film also moved through the Thriller phase of his life very quickly. Because of this, people may feel the film presents a more positive version of events rather than a completely balanced story. Even then the movie is showing the huge impact Michael Jackson had on music culture

around the world.

The film ends with the words "his story continues," and rumors are that Lionsgate studio is already at work on a sequel, so perhaps some of those holes will be filled in a second film.

"Michael" is a powerful and fun biopic with amazing acting, a lot of Michael Jackson's most famous music, and impressive visuals. Jaafar Jackson's performance stands out as the best part of the film because he brings emotion and realism to the role of Michael. The movie may not fully cover every part of Michael Jackson's long and complicated life, but it does a great job of making him a person, not just an act that would only perform. Fans of Micheal Jackson and biographical films will likely find "Michael" to be an emotional and enjoyable movie experience that tells a great story. •

## Album review: 'THIS MUSIC MAY CONTAIN HOPE' Raye's perfectly curated album explores themes of hope and love

Karan Singh | editor-in-chief

Raye's new album is a masterpiece of cinema crammed into a record. The record begins with an oral introduction that sets the scene: a girl in a red dress walks down the pathway along a road, lost in Paris, with a "perfect storm brewing." As the orchestra built in the background, I was mesmerized by Raye's ability to fully immerse the listener in her

world. "Intro: The Girl Under The Grey Cloud" is a flawless track one.

The same orchestra continues into the next track, "I Will Overcome." Immediately, Raye's vocals here reminded me so much of **Amy Winehouse**, and the main idea of the song also imitates Winehouse's own struggle with the media. Raye's ability to create catchy and unique yet somehow conversational cho-

rases remains one of my favorite aspects of her discography.

"Aren't we all broken people, just perfect how to hide it?" Raye sings, the orchestra piquing behind her voice. The song builds and builds, and just when you think it can't get any better, Raye bursts into a high note, a climax that emphasizes that idea that anyone "can overcome."



Scan the QR above to read the full review on our website.