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Planning begins for new Essex Elementary School building

Committee decides between location, grade configurations

By Charlie Baker
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

The Essex School Building Committee is now assessing options for a new or renovated Essex Elementary School.

After a needs assessment by Habeeb and Associates in 2022 concluded that the Essex Elementary School building was past its useful life, the Massachusetts School Building Authority, or MSBA, accepted Essex Elementary into their grant program in 2023, identifying the building as needing significant improvement, Principal Kimberly Provost said.

The building opened in 1957, making it 68 years old.

Provost said the project is currently in a feasibility study, the third of nine steps in the MSBA process, which includes looking at different options based on community feedback.

School Committee member and School Building Committee co-chair Theresa Whitman said they are looking at three options: K-5 in a new or renovated Essex Elementary; K-5 at a Manchester Memorial Elementary added on to for more space; or K-3 at Essex Elementary, with grades four and five going to Manchester.

The Regional Agreement between the towns, created in 2000, states, "The District shall at all times maintain at least one (1) elementary school facility in each member town." Whitman says that any configuration that sends Essex students to Manchester would require the School Committee to amend the Regional Agreement.

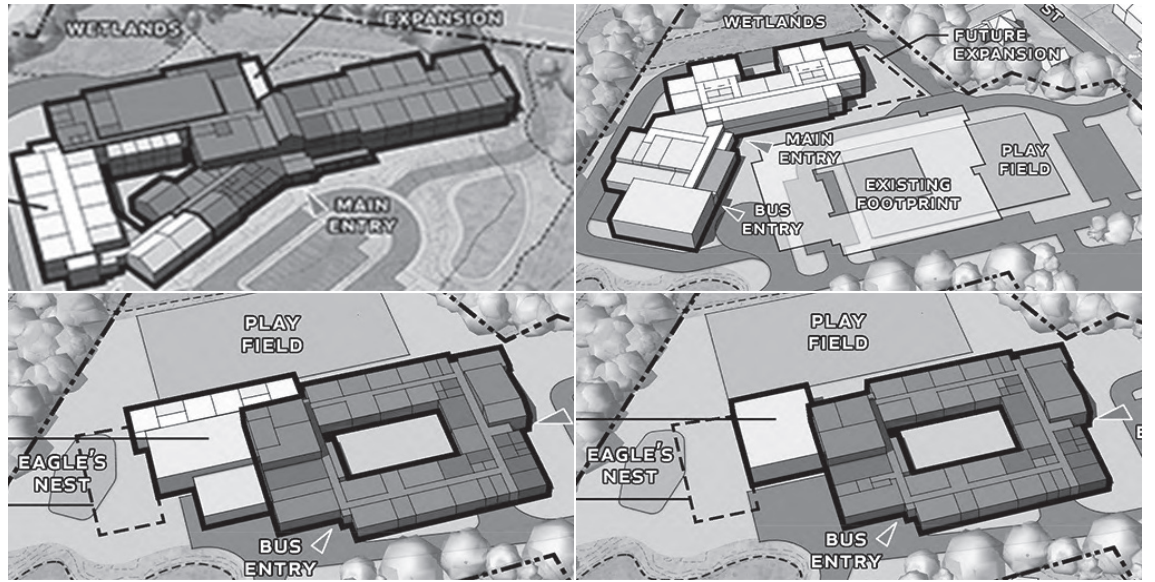
Provost said she thinks maintaining a school within Essex is best for the town and the students.

"There's a lot that happens here, whether it's town meetings or some of the other community events, and it's a very significant part of the Essex community," she said.

School Building Committee member Emily Dwyer, who is

'If you think of it like driving an old car, you can keep putting money into it, but at some point the return isn't worth it.'

- KIMBERLY PROVOST



ESSEX SCHOOL BUILDING COMMITTEE

The Essex School Building Committee is considering various options for updating the elementary school, such as a new K-5 in Essex, renovations, or combining with Manchester Memorial.

also a first-grade teacher at the school, said she has heard the same from community feedback.

"People very much agree that they want to keep a community school, both for the kids but also as a resource for the community," she said.

After the Essex School Building Committee finalizes its design choices, it will make a recommendation to the School Committee, Whitman said.

If approved by the School Committee, each town must vote to finance the school by tempo-

rarily raising taxes, likely through a Proposition 2.5 Debt Exemption, she said.

Voting will happen at each town's separate town meeting, where a two-thirds majority is needed, as well as in a ballot vote requiring a simple 50% majority. These votes will likely take place next fall.

Dwyer said that the recommendation will also include a concrete number for construction costs and a design by the architects.

The committee has selected Dore & Whittier as project man-

agers and JCY Architecture as architects for the project, Provost said. They are the same companies that oversaw the construction of the new Manchester Memorial Elementary School.

Whitman said the design of Essex Elementary School needs to reflect Essex.

"I wouldn't expect that Essex Elementary School looks and feels exactly like Manchester Memorial Elementary School because we have different towns with different core identities,"

ESSEX SCHOOL, page 2

Students attend DECA chapter's networking night

Event provides opportunity to learn about business world

By August Capotosto
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

In the first large DECA event of the year, students participated in the annual networking night, DECA adviser Barrett Alston said.

The event took place on Nov. 6 in the high school learning commons from 6 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Alston said that in his four years of being a DECA adviser, this is the third year they have hosted a networking night.

"It's the first big event of the

year, so it kind of kicks off our DECA season," he said.

Alston said the main purpose of the event is for students to learn the basic skill of networking, become confident with asking questions in professional settings, and learn more about the business world and life after education.

In past years, students have used this opportunity to secure internships and SCORE positions, he said.

All active DECA members are encouraged to invite parents who are willing to attend and speak with students about their personal job experiences and career paths.

Junior DECA chapter officer

'It's the first big event of the year, so it kind of kicks off our DECA season.'

-BARRETT ALSTON



BISSY MITRANO PHOTO

Local parent Andrew Gardner, who consults businesses to turn ideas into projects, tells senior Ernest Taylor about his occupation.

Alex Hatfield said that when networking, students introduce themselves to these parent volunteers, with the takeaway from each conversation varying from person to person.

"Depending on whatever industry they are in or what they're specifically talking about, you could ask them a personal question like 'What motivated you to get into this field?' or 'What do you think is the most important value that you provide to your community?'" he said.

After the event concluded, students filled out reflection sheets detailing what they learned, Alston said.

"A lot of them actually seemed to ... be interested in the process and had learned stuff that they find unique and valuable for their futures," he said.

Senior Megan Graeter, who is currently in her third year of DECA, said that meeting local small business owners makes students realize that they can start their own business.

"It's motivating to see that they're also normal people, and you can do that too," she said.

Hatfield said these reflections detailed conversations with five parent volunteers, including what the student asked and learned.

"It's not just 'What did you learn about them?' It's 'What did you learn about how to talk to people?' so it's really important for the students to reflect on it and not just do it," he said.

In the past, students were provided with a list of questions to ask parent participants. However, Alston said this year he has gained more confidence in the students, encouraging them to deviate from their scripts and prioritize natural interactions. He said this helps prepare students for real-world business discussions.

"Ideally, in a networking situation, you're not going off a bunch of set questions; you're going where the conversation leads," he said.

Having joined DECA as a sophomore and becoming an

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Long-term substitute joins social studies department

Goal to rediscover love for teaching

By Rosie Renehan
INDEPENDENT STAFF

Long-term substitute teacher David Stein has joined the social studies department this year, teaching US History I and II until March when social studies teacher Abigail Donnelly returns from maternity leave.

Stein grew up in Tewksbury and attended high school there.

He earned his degrees in history and secondary education at Roger

Williams University and attended Northeastern University for his master's degree in world history, he said.

Stein was a substitute teacher for five years in Tewksbury for both the middle and high schools.

He then taught English language learners world history and co-taught two sections of biology and one section of English for a year at Acton-Boxborough Regional High School, he said.

Stein also taught seventh-

grade social studies for a year at Innovation Academy, a charter school in Tyngsborough.

He said that he knew that teaching at Manchester-Essex would be a chance for something new.

"[I] felt like it was just a good opportunity," he said.

His first impressions of Manchester-Essex were positive.

"The teachers were really nice, really helpful; it was very clear that they wanted whoever was going to be in this position to do well," Stein said.

The students have been engaged, he said.

Stein thinks that the students appreciate that the class doesn't

run as it would with a regular substitute who would sit there and only follow the lesson plan.

He added that it should be an easier transition from him to Donnelly once she returns.

Stein's main goal for this school year is to rediscover his passion for teaching. Around the end of this past year, he had been burnt out from teaching, he said.

"I didn't really enjoy teaching middle school," Stein said.

An aspect he found compelling



ROSIE RENEHAN PHOTO

David Stein teaches US History I and II as a substitute.

about teaching at Manchester-Essex is that he can teach high school history.

History classes, specifically world history, have been his favorite classes to teach.

He said another one of his biggest goals is to work to establish relationships with students and try to make lessons as "engaging and meaningful as possible." He wants to "try to be more aware of their abilities to learn and what they're learning," he said.

Junior Miriam Garrett-Metz, a student in Stein's US History II class, has had a positive experience in his class.

"I love his class, and it is so low-stress, and he's a really good teacher," Garrett-Metz said.

She said the class atmosphere is social and fun and that Stein often

starts class with a warm-up question, followed by presentations as well as note-taking, before doing a hands-on group project.

Social studies department chair Lauren Dubois said that Stein has adjusted well to his new job and that he's teaching some new classes this year in addition to some he's taught before.

"He's really done a great job in creating lessons and assessments but also leaning on members of the department to help with that kind of stuff as well," Dubois said.

She said that she has gotten a lot of positive reviews from both students and faculty.

Stein has done well at creating a safe learning environment and building positive relationships with students, Dubois said.

Outside of school, Stein said he tries to keep an active lifestyle and spend time with friends and family.

"I think just as much time as you can spend doing stuff you like outside of work is really important, just because I think sometimes people get so caught up in what they do during the day," he said.

Stein said that this is important for having good mental health, unwinding, and following one's passions.

FUN FACTS

- He gave a speech at his high school graduation after winning a speech-writing contest.
- Overseas, his favorite place to travel has been England.
- In the US, he enjoys traveling to Colorado.
- He loves hiking and being outdoors.
- His favorite class to teach this year has been US II.
- He loves to work out, golf, and play basketball.

CONTINUATIONS

ESSEX SCHOOL CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1 she said.

The building committee also recently ruled out the option of building at 30 Apple Street, a property acquired by the town of Essex in 2023, Dwyer said.

The primary issues with the current building are air quality, heating and cooling, and a lack of handicap accessibility, Dwyer said, and while renovation is still technically an option, it would likely end up being almost as expensive as a new building.

Provost agreed, saying, "If you think of it like driving an old car, you can keep putting money into it, but at some point the return isn't worth it."

Dwyer said a new building could give the school opportunities for new programs like a district preschool in Essex and a special education program for students with more severe disabilities, and also extra room for community events that they don't currently have the space for.

Whitman said the MSBA will pay for at least 31%, and possibly more with incentives from their Green Schools Program, of all parts of the project that fit their guidelines.

Spaces not related to education, like a potential community center, something that was discussed during the Manchester Memorial building process, would be funded 100% by taxpayers.

The apportioned cost for each town is calculated through a formula outlined in the Regional Agreement that equally weighs the population and equalized val-

uation (combined market value of all taxable properties) of the two towns. Using the most recent data available - the 2020 census and 2024 Department of Revenue Equalized Valuation Reports - Manchester would be responsible for 65.8% of costs, and Essex would be responsible for 34.2%.

Whitman said that in 2016, when both schools first submitted to the MSBA, extensive community outreach concluded that both towns wanted to keep their community schools. Manchester Memorial was deemed to be in greater need, and Essex taxpayers voted to fund the project with the understanding that when the time came, Manchester voters would support a new Essex Elementary, even if that would mean paying the majority share for a school in another town.

"Manchester voters have made it very clear that they understand the need to complete this triad of building projects for our district. All voters should be concerned about the rising cost of education, but if we come up with the most cost-effective solution to meet the educational plan, I am confident that Manchester voters, as well as Essex voters, see value in moving this forward," she said.

Manchester Memorial Elementary School had a final cost of \$42 million once completed in 2022.

Provost said that the goal is to start construction in 2027, with the building ready to move into in the fall of 2030. She also noted that they are still early in the process and nothing is guaranteed.

Dwyer said the most important part of this whole process is what the students and community think.

"What all of this should be about is like, what is the best thing for these kids, and building a school that is going to be great for them now, but also that can last another 60 years, because nobody in the community wants to have to go through this anytime soon," she said.

DECA CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

officer this year, Hatfield said that he and fellow officers kept busy facilitating conversations between students and parents.

"I was checking people in, making sure everything was running smoothly, and talking to students. If I saw someone who didn't have that many visitors, I moved people over to them," he said.

Hatfield said that this event is particularly beneficial for preparing DECA members for events later in the year, such as role plays.

"It's really important because you could have subpar information, but if you sound confident enough, you can beat out someone who is monotone, reading basic information. One of the best ways to do that is to cultivate this network night," he said.

Alston said that in the event's history, only parents of students have been asked to speak with the students; however, he said in the future, the chapter hopes to include other community members to participate in the event. He said he hopes that creating opportunities for students to make connections in a wider range of career fields will bring the local community together.

MOM BOWL



COURTESY OF BIANCA TORRI

During the second annual Mom Bowl, a fundraiser for the freshman through senior classes, the class of 2029 moms defeated the class of 2026 moms in the first round. In the second round, the class of 2027 moms beat the class of 2028 moms and then beat the class of 2029 moms 26-20 in overtime in the final round.

New SPED chair joins middle-high school from Manchester Memorial

Excited to work with middle, high school students

By Natalia Randazza
INDEPENDENT STAFF

After working in the Intensive Reading and Written Language program (IRWAL) at Memorial Elementary School for 13 years, Colleen Kelleher has joined the middle and high schools as the chairperson of the special education department.

Kelleher grew up in Lawrence and graduated from Lawrence High School. She then attended Florida Institute of Technology in 1988, majoring in biology. She earned a master's degree in special education from Simmons University in 2002, she said.

She returned to school to get her doctorate in educational leadership from the University of New England in 2020.

"I always wanted to make sure I have updated information about how to best help the kids," Kelleher said.

Before deciding to switch to special education, she taught chemistry and biology at Dracut High School. She said that her year of teaching made her realize that some students were not getting the support they needed.

"I saw kids that needed more than I was able to give them," Kelleher said.

For 13 years, she taught chemistry, biology, and physical science at Landmark High School, which specializes in students with dyslexia. Kelleher said that she also ran reading tutorial and



NATALIA RANDAZZA PHOTO

Middle/high school SPED chair Colleen Kelleher has a master's degree in special education and a doctorate in educational leadership. She worked at Manchester Memorial Elementary for 13 years.

study skills classes at Landmark. In 2012, she started the IRWAL program for second through fifth-grade students at Manchester Memorial Elementary School and was in this position for 13 years, she said.

Kelleher said she moved to the middle school in 2020 to teach special education and math in addition to her position in the elementary school.

Kelleher said she was excited when she was offered the position to chair the special education

department because she would be able to work with both middle and high school students.

On a day-to-day basis, Kelleher works with the special education department to support students and teachers. Special education teacher Jim Umile

said that Kelleher has been extremely supportive of the SPED department staff in whatever they need.

"She's been doing a great job at making herself available," he said.

'She's been doing a great job at making herself available.'

-JIM UMILE

She also runs IEP (Independent Education Plan) meetings and makes sure that students' IEPs meet regulations.

High school counselor David Conwell said that from these meetings, Kelleher shows knowledge of how the system works.

Other staff members can see this, Umile said.

"She has a good handle on special education law requirements and what our typical students require," he said.

Kelleher said that this year, she aims to work with guidance counselors to learn more about resources that can help students with learning disabilities transition as they leave high school.

FUN FACTS

- She likes to travel.
- She enjoyed doing crafts with kids at the elementary school.
- She has been to Disney World many times.
- She has four nephews and one niece.
- She used to wait tables at Planet Hollywood and met some celebrities.

Student teacher engages history students

Students give positive feedback on teaching style

By Bissy Mitrano
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Student teacher Alex Berube is working under the mentorship of social studies teacher John Mullady as part of her master's degree in history at Salem State University, where she earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in history and education in 2021.

Berube grew up in Lexington, where she was surrounded by history, inspiring her to become a history teacher, she said.

"I was very close with my grandpa, and we would go to museums together. And I would learn about history, and that was something that I feel like really helped me ... because it was something that I was interested in," she said.

Berube attended high school in Swampscott for two years and later went to Lexington High School.

High school was a difficult experience for her but was part of the reason she decided to become a teacher, she said.



BISSY MITRANO PHOTO

Alex Berube is working on her master's degree in history at Salem State University through a student teacher program.

"I actually didn't have a great school experience growing up ... I was able to look at history as something that I can use to get through the things I am going through," Berube said.

Berube student teaches during Mullady's 9/11, World History, and U.S. History classes.

"The 9/11 class has definitely been super interesting because it wasn't something that I knew a whole lot about," she said.

She works in Gloucester for Pathways for Children, an after-school program, but is looking to balance her work schedule with her student teaching and classes, Berube said.

"I kind of have been doing this

at my own pace and on my own terms," she said.

The student teaching portion of the graduate program is one semester, from September to December, she said.

After her program, Berube's goal is to become a full-time history teacher.

"It might be a little challenging, but now that I have the experience, I think it will be much easier to [become a teacher]," she said.

Social Studies teacher John Mullady said Berube has finished the observation portion of the program, and is now teaching classes to the students.

"The observation parts are the

worst, because you're stuck there. But, I have really enjoyed bouncing ideas off of her. Anytime you can get another professional to provide feedback, it is really useful," Mullady said.

Berube has begun teaching World History and United States History, and occasionally 9/11, Mullady said.

"I have been really, really impressed with some of the supplementary sources that she's brought in. I also love, you know, seeing a very sincere and passionate person," he said.

Berube said her experience at the high school has been positive and that the history department has been welcoming and supportive.

"My experience has been awesome here ... everyone has been so great and helpful. Mr. Mullady has made me feel comfortable, and I can tell he does the same with his students too," she said.

Senior Steel McDonald said that Berube engaged the students in her lesson in the 9/11 class.

"I was really impressed by her thoughts on the subject, and I felt like she did a great job directing the class and keeping us on task," McDonald said.

Senior Lily Oliver said Berube is helpful in class.

"I think that she is a really good teacher, and she's good at

engaging with the students ... she is really funny and super nice," Oliver said.

FUN FACTS

- She has a dog named Daisy, and calls her "Crazy Daisy."
- She likes to hike and be outdoors.
- She does not have social media
- She was on a dance team in high school and college.
- She loves music, but is picky about it because she loves it so much.
- She liked history and English in school.
- Her favorite movie is "The Sound of Music."

Faculty dresses for annual Halloween costume contest

Social studies department wins as 'Inside Out'

By Kiki Campbell
INDEPENDENT STAFF

Winning another annual faculty Halloween contest, the social studies department dressed as characters from the movie "Inside Out", including Joy, Anger, Disgust, Sadness, Riley, Fear, Deep Dark Secret, Anxiety, and Envy.

The student body voted for their favorite costume.

Math teacher Alicen Shaw, dressed as Vector from "Despicable Me," won second place.

Third place went to math teacher Lauren Woodcock, who wore a costume mirroring a Louvre robber from the Louvre

jewelry heist.

Social studies teacher Jennifer Coleman, organizer of the contest, said she was surprised that the English department, who won fourth place, didn't win first place with their "Department of Fowl Language" costume. Playing on the fowl/foul pun, they dressed in bird inflatables wearing T-shirts with the word "BLEEP" on the front.

"This year, I really loved the English department costume. I thought it was really creative and witty, and I'm honestly surprised that they were not the winners," Coleman said.

Students enjoy the tradition

of Halloween; however, some have ideas on how to improve the contest, such as junior Bianca Torri.

"To get better voter representation in the future, teachers could advertise the whole thing



COURTESY OF JENNIFER COLEMAN

Social studies department was voted best costumes by students this year in the Halloween costume contest. Math teachers Alicen Shaw and Lauren Woodcock won second and third, respectively.

a little more and at least post the form as an assignment. If it were more mandatory, students would definitely do it," she said.

Teachers' and students' favorite part of this Halloween tradition is getting to see everyone in their costumes.

English teacher Allison Krause said, "I like the reveal where everyone puts it together the morning of. I get to see the whole thing kind of come to life."

When asked what the most exciting part of the contest was, world history teacher Jessica

Tran said, "I think it brings us together as colleagues. I think it shows the students that you can still have fun with Halloween even as an adult. It is fun to surprise my students when I walk into the room looking extremely different than I normally do."

Sophomore helps protect monarch butterfly population

By Maddy Holsomback
INDEPENDENT STAFF

Sophomore Kiki Campbell has dedicated years to protecting the Monarch Butterflies and ensuring their habitat is conserved. She was awarded the JFK Make a Difference Award for Monarch Butterfly protection and was listed as a Monarch Guardian by the Massachusetts Butterfly Club.

In sixth-grade Campbell won this award, which recognizes middle school students for their creative community service projects and the volunteer work they do, according to the JFK library.

When Campbell was 5 years old, she attended a lecture about Monarch Butterflies by Dr. Charlie Hoffman from Boston College at an event in the Hamilton Wenham library, hosted by

the children's librarian Lorraine Derr.

"Now 10 years later, Dr. Hoffman refers to me as his protege, and I help him give the lecture," Campbell said.

Campbell hopes that through her presentations, including the district's STEAM Showcase, people will learn how to preserve monarch habitats and spread awareness about their declining population.

Part of her presentation shows people how to create milkweed seed balls to throw into open fields, aiding in the spread of milkweed plants for monarch

butterflies.

Campbell is also involved in the tagging of butterflies through Monarch Watch. When the monarch butterflies migrate, they head for a section of Mexico where people will be compensated if they find dead monarchs with tags on them. They can

bring the tagged monarchs to Monarch Watch and can eventually earn enough money to be able to feed their families, Campbell said.

Sophomore Rosie Renehan, Campbell's

friend, said, "I just think that the things she does is very important, and I love how much work she puts into it."

When science teacher Keith Hartan received a grant from Spaulding Education to create

'Kiki is extraordinarily knowledgeable in the areas of Monarch conservation preservation.'

- KEITH HARTAN



COURTESY OF SUZI CAMPBELL

Sophomore Kiki Campbell gives a presentation on monarch butterflies at the Essex County Greenbelt's annual Birds, Bees, and Butterflies event.

and maintain a native perennial garden at the school, Campbell donated plants and milkweed seed balls. She is taking the Environmental Health and Society class with Hartan and is using its opportunities to continue her

work with monarchs, teaching others about the issues the butterflies face.

"Kiki is extraordinarily knowledgeable in the areas of Monarch conservation preservation," Hartan said.

NHS, Red Cross host schoolwide blood drive

By Sophia Eagan
INDEPENDENT STAFF

Students and teachers donated blood during the National Honors Society (NHS) and the Red Cross blood drive, which was held in the gymnasium on Nov. 10.

Before donating, contributors were checked in by the student volunteers and asked questions to ensure their eligibility to donate, said NHS communications director and senior Annie Pinkin.

Pinkin explained what happens after contributors donate blood.

"You have to rest for 15 minutes, and then you get snacks,



COURTESY OF ANNIE PINKIN

Seniors Annie Pinkin and Violet Jakes, and junior Nikos Sadler-Andrew help at the NHS blood drive benefiting the Red Cross.

juice and a T-shirt," she said.

The blood drive went very well and accumulated a total of 26 donations, Pinkin said.

This is Pinkin's first year as the NHS communications director. Despite her lack of experience, Pinkin thought that the

event went smoothly.

NHS has put a large emphasis on the significance of donating blood and what it does for people in need. NHS president and senior Penelope Riggs said donating blood is a meaningful and simple sacrifice.

"It's not that hard, and it's a small sacrifice for what it helps people do," she said.

Pinkin stressed the importance of the demand and benefits from blood donations.

"The U.S. is in a blood shortage right now, and each donation has the potential to save three lives," she said.

After the blood drive NHS addressed areas of improvement.

One of the main takeaways was emphasizing the need to prepare before donating, Riggs said.

"People need to drink water, a lot of water, because that'll make it go by faster too because when your blood's flowing better, it won't take as much time for them to collect it," she said.

Pinkin also recommended that people secure their parental consent forms before donating.

"I think next time we should

definitely put a larger emphasis on the parental consent forms for the people who are turning 16," she said.

Moving forward, NHS will focus on promoting the drive itself and opening it to the public to increase the number of donations, Pinkin said.

"I think just more promotion and getting more people involved outside of NHS and outside of people just donating. I think it's important for people to know that they can help out too, just as volunteers," she said.

Similarly, Riggs suggested that spreading awareness would allow for more donations.

"I think educating others will help them realize the importance of it, because I think a lot of people just don't want to do it because it's inconvenient," she said.

Thrift stores benefit shoppers, help save environment

Secondhand apparel encourages unique personal expression

By Bissy Mitrano
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Thrift stores have myriad benefits and serve as sustainable alternatives to fast-fashion retailers, whose clothing production generates large amounts of waste that harm the environment.

According to the 2023 article, “The Impact of Thrift Stores” by Sunil Hedge et al., “The fashion industry has a significant impact on the environment, with textile production and consumption contributing to pollution, waste, and other environmental problems.”

Every time someone shops at the thrift store, they are standing against the waste and pollution that characterizes the modern clothing industry.

Thrift shopping allows consumers to obtain necessary items, particularly clothing, at a fraction of traditional retail prices.

According to the 2022 CNBC article by Jessica Dickler, “Thrift store shoppers save nearly \$150 a month, or \$1,760 a year, on average, by buying secondhand items.”

In an era of inflation and economic uncertainty, thrift stores provide a practical and responsible alternative to mainstream retail stores. This affordability is crucial for families and students managing a limited budget.

Thrift stores are also appealing because they encourage creative styles and unique expression. Shoppers can alter purchased clothes to personalize the style.

According to the Goodwill website, “The desire for unique and personalized styles is a driv-



BISSY MITRANO PHOTO

Thrift stores offer affordable clothing while granting shoppers the opportunity to be more environmentally conscious with their purchases. The growth in thrift store popularity has become noticeable in the economy and in people’s creative personal styles.

ing force behind Gen Z’s preference for secondhand clothing. Unlike the mass-produced items of fast fashion, thrifted pieces offer the chance to express individuality.”

This move toward originality reflects the shifting ethos of younger generations. There is a greater awareness of individuality through fashion.

Thrift stores also offer a social activity rather than just shopping at the mall. Thrifting is an experience that makes finding clothes that fit desires more rewarding and prevents impulsive buying, unlike in mainstream stores.

The growth of popularity in thrift stores has been noticeable throughout the economy.

According to a 2025 Retail-Wire article by Nicholas Morine, “Findings from a recent ThredUp resale ... revealed that the U.S.

secondhand apparel market grew by 14% last year, its strongest annual growth since 2021 and well ahead of the broader retail clothing market.”

As thrifting grows in popularity, the trend revealing some unexpected downsides.

For-profit chains, such as Savers, set prices based on brand and condition. This system often leads to inflated prices for poor-quality items, limited access for lower-income shoppers, and a reduction in the thrill of finding unique and affordable fashion pieces.

Stores like Savers have faced

criticism for increasing prices on donated items, a move people say undermines the purpose of secondhand shopping. This is unlike Goodwill, which prices

Thrifting is an experience that makes finding clothes that fit desires more rewarding and prevents impulsive buying, unlike in mainstream stores.

items by category and operates as a nonprofit.

For example, according to the Goodwill website, all jack-

ets are priced the same at \$6.99, and all skirts are priced at \$4.99, regardless of the brand.

If Savers followed Goodwill’s pricing practice, shoppers would have more opportunities to purchase affordable products.

Thrifting also offers employ-

ment opportunities. Resellers are taking advantage of the thriving thrift economy, searching for items to resell at a higher cost.

According to the 2025 PBS News interview, American correspondent and commentator John Yang said, “The thrifting economy is booming. While thrift shops, antique stores and consignment boutiques are nothing new, they’re becoming more popular as shoppers deal with the rising cost of living, want to help the environment, and even in some cases, want to earn a living as a reseller.”

Thrift stores offer customers immersive shopping experiences that are environmentally conscious, creative, and accessible to everyone. Fast-fashion shoppers should consider secondhand shopping as a more reasonable choice for the world they live in.

AI actress Tilly Norwood threatens human artistry

By Sophia Eagan
INDEPENDENT STAFF

Tilly Norwood, an actress created with Artificial Intelligence, undermines human artistry in film.

According to the CNN article, “Hollywood is fuming over a new ‘AI actress’” by Clare Duffy, Tilly Norwood is an AI-generated actress created by talent studio Xicoia and AI production company Particle6. This invention has caused a divide within Hollywood.

The Vice article, “Meet Tilly Norwood, the AI Actress Making Hollywood Very Nervous,” by Ashley Fikes, states that Norwood’s producer, Eline Van der Velden, spent six months customizing Tilly’s face and performance through 10 different AI programs and has expressed her positive outlook on Norwood’s career.

“Tilly was built to be the kind

of star studios dream about: versatile, tireless, and immune to bad press,” she said.

Using AI and CGI technology, Norwood can act as characters as if she were a human portraying the part.

Many casting agencies feel similar about Norwood, Duffy wrote.

“But the project sparked a flurry of criticism after Hollywood news outlet Deadline reported on Saturday that talent agents were looking to sign Tilly as an actress and that movie studios are quietly embracing AI-generated content,” she said.

Despite the positive feedback from producers and talent agencies, Norwood’s flexibility takes away opportunities from real actors and actresses. AI may be more beneficial for Hollywood companies, but the livelihood of these professionals is being sacrificed.

In a 2025 interview with Vari-

ety, actress Emily Blunt responded in fear when told about Tilly Norwood. “That is really, really scary. Come on, agencies, don’t do that. Please stop. Please stop taking away our human connection,” she said.

Not only does AI take jobs, but it also disrupts the human elements of acting. Humans build a real connection with the audience, but with AI, this connection becomes unnatural and hollow.

According to the University of Virginia article, “AI ‘Actor’ Tilly Norwood Isn’t Real, But Could Present Real Problems for Hollywood” by Becky Duffy, issues with AI did not begin with Tilly Norwood. The labor union SAG-AFTRA has felt threatened by the use of AI for years, she said.

“AI-generated characters filling in for human actors is one of the primary concerns for SAG-AFTRA voiced in 2023 when they fought Hollywood studios for protection against AI-generated content,” she said.

The authenticity of a human performance outweighs the



WIKIPEDIA.COM

New Artificial Intelligence actress Tilly Norwood raises concerns that human actors will be replaced by AI technology.

advantages that come with using AI.

The goal of a performance is to evoke empathy and create a connection between the viewer and the character. This intimacy is not just the visuals or the lines being said; instead, the raw emotion and imperfections move the

viewers.

AI can work efficiently, but no level of technology can imitate the human soul behind a character. AI actresses such as Tilly Norwood should be prohibited in the film industry to leave space for the hardworking, human actors.

STAFF EDITORIAL

9/11 class's visit to NYC memorial deepens knowledge of tragedy

The school's field trip visiting the 9/11 Memorial & Museum has become a valuable resource in helping aid students' understanding of the tragic event.

The trip first began in Nov. 2019 when social studies teacher John Mullady made it part of the 9/11 and the War on Terror elective that he teaches every other year.

"The size and scale of the attacks is tough to teach when you're showing notes or watching a documentary ... the Memorial

does a very good job of focusing on the human aspect of the tragedy, where you see pictures, and victims are more than just a name on a wall," Mullady said.

Similar to how the sophomore class watches 12 Years a Slave while they learn about American slavery, the ability for students to take time away from school to visit both the museum and memorial is crucial for them to properly remember the event as the date grows further into modern American history.

If children become disconnected to such devastating events, especially ones that connect to their own national identity, it paves the way for historical mistakes to repeat themselves.

Even if a student goes in with the expectation that the trip will have little impact on their perception, what they are exposed to in the museum will most likely change their mind.

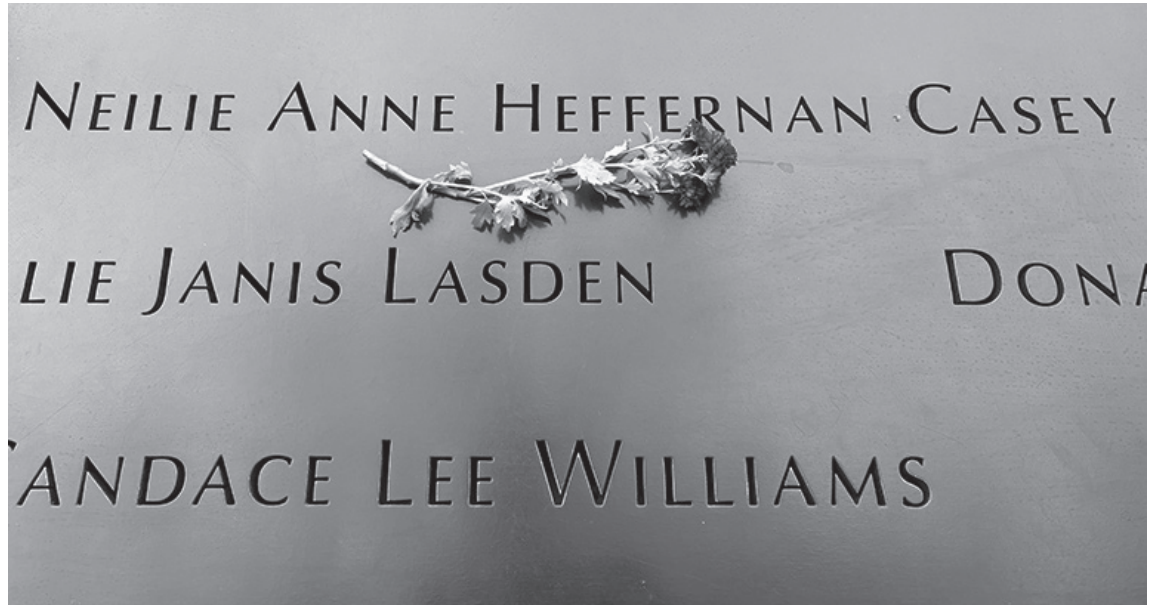
Learning from collective loss is powerful in maintaining a united country.

The design for the 9/11 Memorial began in April 2003, when the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation started a contest of

submissions for the memorial's design.

According to the 9/11 Memorial & Museum website, the concept of using water and name placards as tribute to the victims, created by architects Michael Arab and Peter Walker, was chosen in January of 2004. The design was meant to show the vastness of emptiness and loss that resulted from both the 1993 and 2001 terrorist attacks.

Exactly one decade after the attack, the Memorial was offi-



COURTESY OF CIA DONOHOE

Senior Cia Donohoe left a rose for Neilie Heffernan Casey, who graduated from college with English teacher Mary Buckley-Harmon. In-person field trips such as these help students make connections.

cially opened to the public. Now, it receives 2,265,000 visitors per year as of 2023.

The trip has become an important way for students who were not alive during the attacks to get a better grasp on their comprehension of the reality of that day. It brings the materials they've studied in class into a physical atmosphere that they are allowed to walk through and reflect upon at their own pace.

"It's hard when you're just

reading articles but you're not really seeing it ... the way they have the museum and memorial set up is not only just give you information, but to let you take it in at your own speed," senior Anna O'Leary said.

O'Leary said the trip fits into the curriculum as the class watches the documentary "9/11: One Day in America," leading up to their departure.

"[When I was at the memorial] I was trying to find the names we

had heard about in the documentary. It was really cool to know those people's stories and then see that this is how they're being remembered," she said.

The events of 9/11 will always be present in the history of America. Learning from collective loss is powerful in maintaining a united country. This is why events such as 9/11 must be taught to future generations in order for these tragedies to never be forgotten nor repeated.

Decrease plastic use for health

Environment, water affected, causing safety concerns

By Anna Garth
INDEPENDENT STAFF

Plastic must be replaced in nearly all circumstances because of the harm it causes to humans.

A Sept. 2022 American Lung Association article said microplastics — tiny pieces of broken-down plastic — are in human lungs, blood, and placentas.

The article said patients with chronic lung disease had microplastics found in their lungs, indicating a possible connection between lung health and microplastics. Plastic shouldn't be used if it harms people.

Another health concern is airborne microplastics. A 2024 review on the world of plastic

waste by Nayanathara Thathsarani Pilapitiya, P.G.C., and Amila S. Ratnayake from Science Direct said airborne plastic particles can cause irritation, cell damage, acne, asthma-like symptoms, chronic bronchitis, pneumothorax, and lung cancer.

These plastic particles often come from synthetic textiles. Drying and wearing them releases microplastics; 1 gram of acrylic fabric releases around 1100 airborne microplastics, said the review. People shouldn't be wearing clothes that make themselves or others sick.

Even basic items can harm people. The 2024 review said phthalate plasticizers, found in toys and food packaging; BPA-containing plastic, found in food packaging; and BFR-containing plastic, found in many electronics, can cause birth defects, infertility, hormonal changes, and



ANNA GARTH PHOTO

Environmental pollution due to plastics has become prevalent in communities, affecting humans, animals, and water quality.

lower sperm counts in babies. In adults, these chemicals can cause rashes, liver dysfunction, and skin cancer.

Microplastics can also leach into tap water, said an International Union for Conservation of Nature Nov. 2021 brief. More research is needed, but the brief

said this may cause developmental, reproductive, neurological, and immune disorders. Giving up water quality for plastic is not a sacrifice people should be willing to make.

On its own, plastic can be useful. The 2024 Science Direct review said 85% of medical

devices are manufactured with plastic due to their lightweight and biocompatibility properties. Certain plastics reduce energy consumption and greenhouse gas emissions compared to glass and metal. However, the excessive prevalence of plastic in everyday life causes too many health concerns to justify its use.

Most plastic is unnecessary, and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development said plastic waste will triple by 2060, exacerbating current problems.

Replacements for plastic textiles include cotton, linen, mohair, and wool, said the 2024 review. The review said bioplastics (plastics that can be composted industrially) or recyclable plastics are also improvements, but the energy used and chemicals produced are major drawbacks. The best thing consumers can do is use reusable materials as much as possible.

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the
INDEPENDENT

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

We welcome letters to the editor from MERHS students, faculty, and community members. All submissions must be signed. The Independent reserves the right not to print letters and to edit the content for clarity and length. While letters can be critical of an individual's actions, they cannot slander or libel.

The staff editorial may be considered the opinion of the staff of The Independent.

By-line opinions are written by individual staff members and should not be considered representative of the entire staff.

The Independent staff hopes that all Manchester and Essex citizens will take advantage of this forum. The paper is meant to serve the school community, and we are open to suggestions to help it better serve its purposes.

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Golf ends season with 13-4 record, CAL Baker Champions

Travels to Scotland post season, plays high school teams

By Maya Chaghouri
INDEPENDENT STAFF

With 13-4 record and the title of CAL Baker Tri-Champions, the golf team placed fourth in the MIAA Division III State Championship.

Head coach Bill Melvin reflects on the post season.

“It would have been great to win the State Championship, but fourth place, there’s nothing wrong with that,” he said.

Senior captain Gray West finished third overall with a score of 77 and was named CAL Baker Golfer of the Year 2025.

In the MIAA Division III North Sectional, the team tied with Wilmington for second place. Junior Matt DeOreo was named the 2025 Co-Sectional Champion.

DeOreo said it was a wonder-

ful round, but he’s glad that the golf team qualified for States.

Another major match for the boys’ golf team was their 158-144 win against Hamilton-Wenham Regional High School at Myopia Hunt Club on Sept. 15.

Melvin and DeOreo said that this was a proud win for the golf team because Hamilton-Wenham is a rival school that they have previously fallen to.

Seniors Jack

McCavanagh, Jake Zschau, Connor Dickson, along with West, and DeOreo, will be graduating in the spring.

Melvin said that he is grateful for these players and they had a great run.

In addition, Melvin said that he is thankful to his younger players, juniors Graham Lewis, Charlie Mannel, and sophomore

‘Best trip of my life, can’t get much better than that, going to the birthplace of golf.’

-GRAY WEST



COURTESY OF O’CONNOR STUDIOS

The golf team practices at Essex County Club. Senior Gray West was named CAL Baker Golfer of the Year, and senior Matt DeOreo was named the 2025 Co-Sectional Champion.

Damian Etna for being there to step up and continue to help the team be competitive.

Post-season, the team took a five-day trip to Scotland from Nov. 4-9.

While in Scotland, the players competed in golf matches against

Scottish high school teams and visited Edinburgh.

“Best trip of my life, can’t get much better than that, going to the birthplace of golf,” West said.

At a private boarding school, the players presented a slideshow, created by senior captain

McCavanagh, comparing American golf to Scottish golf.

“They couldn’t have done a better job with it,” said Melvin, who noted that the trip was a significant cultural experience for the players, as well as a learning experience.

Field hockey wins CAL Baker, reaches Elite Eight

By Claire Masters
INDEPENDENT STAFF

This was the fourth year the varsity field hockey were named CAL Baker Champions. They ended their season with a record of 13-5-1.

The Hornets were ranked eighth in the MIAA Division IV tournament and reached the Elite Eight before getting eliminated by Monomoy Regional High School.

Head coach Courtney Brown said she recalls many strong moments from this season.

“I think my favorite game was tying Lynnfield High School. We played some of our best field hockey,” Brown said.

Senior captain and 2025 CAL Baker Player of the Year, Abigail

Kent, looked back on the team’s 6-0 match against Ipswich High School.

“Our win against Ipswich was a big one. We usually can only beat Ipswich by like one or two,” Kent said.

After the regular season, the team was the eighth seed in the MIAA Division IV tournament.

They won their Round of 32 game against Triton Regional High School, with a score of 6-0 on Nov. 3.

In the Sweet Sixteen on Nov. 5, they faced West Bridgewater Middle-Senior High School, who were ranked seventh.

The Hornets won 4-1 and advanced to the Elite Eight, where they played number 1-ranked Monomoy on Nov. 7, losing 7-0 and ending their postseason.

Even though the Hornets lost, Brown said they had an “amazing season,” and the girls have grown tremendously since the start.

Senior Laila Mears, forward, acknowledges the team’s growth throughout the season.

Mears is a key player on the team, Brown said.

“She just has such a special touch on the ball ... She pursues every ball in front of the goal,” she said.

Another key player on the team is Kent, Mears said.

“I don’t actually know what we’d do without her on the field,” she said.

Last year, Kent was recruited to play field hockey for the College of the Holy Cross. On Nov. 12, she signed the financial agreement, making her commitment more official.

Brown said other strong players on the team include junior Kiernan Day, on the first



COURTESY OF BIANCA TORRI

During a home field hockey game against North-Reading on Sept. 15, the Hornets celebrated a 3-1 win.

team of 2025 Cape Ann League All-Stars, and junior Madeleine Franco and senior Penelope Riggs, who were named to the second team of 2025 Cape Ann League All-Stars.

Not only is the team strong, but they also have wonderful

chemistry, Brown said.

Kent said sophomore Maeve McArdle stepped up this season as goalie in place of Brigid Carovillano, who graduated and now plays lacrosse at the University of North Carolina. McArdle has had 10 shutouts this season.

Football finishes regular season as No. 5 seed in Division VII

Lose to rivals in Thanksgiving game

By Maya Frangioso
INDEPENDENT STAFF

After qualifying for the playoffs as the No. 5 seed, the football team fell 33-22 to No. 12 seed Millbury Jr./Sr. High school in the round of 16 of the Division VII state tournament on Nov. 7 and lost 28-21 to Essex North Shore Agricultural and Technical School in the Thanksgiving game on Nov. 27.

The Hornets finished the regular season with a record of 6-2.

In the non-playoff consolation round, they won 36-22 against Boston Latin Academy on Nov. 13.

Senior captain Zach Hurd said he hoped to build some momentum and gain confidence from their consolation game going into their Thanksgiving Day game.

“There is no other feeling than putting the whole suit on with your guys and going out there for the game,” he said.

Historically, the team participated in a long-running tradition of playing against the Georgetown Royals every Thanksgiving. This tradition ended in 2023 due to low player numbers in George-



COURTESY OF CHASE ANDERSON

Captain and quarterback senior Zach Hurd led the football team to a 6-2 record this year, closing out his final season as a Hornet.

town’s program.

“This is our second year of our rivalry with Essex Tech, but [the Thanksgiving day game] goes back 100 years,” head coach Joe Grimes said.

Senior captain Felix Wood said he is disappointed with the Thanksgiving game’s result but

not with his teammates’ efforts.

Grimes noted the impact of Hurd’s leadership on and off the field.

“Zach Hurd is our two-time captain and leader, and plays such an important position on the field. He is such an important part of what we’re doing,” he

said.

Wood said the Hornets faced challenges early in the season, including multiple injuries to key players such as senior captain Walker Valeo.

Hurd said the team’s ability to handle those obstacles defined who they were as a team this season.

“A ton of people suffered injuries at the beginning of the season, but something we emphasize on as a team is dealing with adversity, and we did that very well,” Hurd said.

Wood said the team’s chemistry has had a large impact on their strong record.

“Everyone shows up for the guy next to them, no matter what. That is what sets us apart from other teams,” he said.

Two new music electives implemented in high school

Semester-long classes offered during U block

By Charlie Baker
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

Contemporary Music Ensemble and Instrument Lab are two new classes offered by the music department.

Contemporary Music Ensemble is a similar class to band but

with more modern instruments and songs, band teacher Harry Wagg said.

"It's to tie in to what's happening at the elementary school with rock band. It's just more modern or contemporary instrumentations, things people might hear on the radio or with music they listen to," he said.

Instrument Lab is taught by

chorus teacher Ben Icenogle, who said the class lets students work on their own instrument based on their skill level and musical interests.

"It's very choice-driven, and every student comes in with an instrument in mind that they want to improve at, whether they are a beginner or they've already had some experience, and then they work on creating their own goals," Icenogle said.

Both classes take place on

'It's very choice-driven, and every student comes in with an instrument in mind that they want to improve at ... they work on creating their own goals.'

-BEN ICENOGLLE

even days of the schedule during U block and are semester-long.

Contemporary Ensemble is available for the second semester, while Instrument Lab is replaced by composition/song writing, Wagg said.

To make

room for these classes, the option of taking regular band or chorus every day is gone.

"We felt like since we didn't have the option of putting more



CHARLIE BAKER PHOTO

Junior Maggie Whitman, sophomores James Donohoe and Gus Arcari rehearse "Iris" by The Goo Goo Dolls, which will be played with "American Pie," by Don McLean, at the winter concert.

music classes into the rotating schedule, that really limits the opportunity for high school music electives. Compared to other districts, we have very few high school music electives for a school of our size. The only way we could seem to adjust that was to take those days where we only had partial band and chorus and turn them into new courses,"

Wagg said.

Sophomore James Donohoe, who plays the acoustic guitar in Contemporary Ensemble, said that the class finally gave him an opportunity to play songs written for his instrument.

"I've been begging Mr. Wagg to do a normal song in band forever, and I never really enjoyed normal band as much because I

never got a guitar part that actually sounds cool. I was kind of just the background," Donohoe said.

Contemporary Ensemble will perform in the winter concert on Dec. 4.

Their current set list, which the students decided on, includes "Iris" by the Goo Goo Dolls and "American Pie" by Don McLean.

Night of Stars brings community together, fundraises for Spaulding

By Anna Garth
INDEPENDENT STAFF

29 performances with over 40 people showcased talents at the Night of Stars, a fundraiser for Spaulding Education Fund, on Nov. 15.

The event took place in the high school auditorium at 4 p.m. Performances included singing, dancing, and musical talent.

Students in the upcoming high school musical "Chicago" also performed as a preview to their production.

"It brings all of the schools and all of the grades together for this one event," said Wendy Brady, a major organizer for Night of Stars and a part of Spaulding's fundraiser committee.

Brady said community-build-

ing is one of the most important parts of the Night of Stars, as it brings the community together for entertainment while fundraising for a purpose.

The Spaulding Education

Fund's website said the Night of Stars is Spaulding's biggest fundraiser of the year. \$27,000 was raised this year,

their Instagram page said.

Brady said Spaulding gives grants to try to bring more innovation and creativity into the average high school curriculum.

One program recently funded by Spaulding was the Native Perennial and Pollinator Gardens,

located in the raised beds by the football field. The grant was awarded to high school science teacher Keith Hartan.

Hartan said the Green Team and the Environmental Health and Society classes have been trying to help native pollinators, who are declining, by planting native plants in the beds. He said

organizations like Spaulding are "absolutely essential"; without them, many opportunities wouldn't be possible.

Before working at MERHS,

Hartan worked overseas in Madrid and Milan. He said those schools were impacted by the lack of organizations like Spaulding.

"There are certain things you want to do that are more activity-based, more hands-on,

'It brings all of the schools and all of the grades together for this one event.'

-WENDY BRADY



COURTESY OF SPAULDING EDUCATION FUND/INSTAGRAM

Harry Wagg, Ben Icenogle, Kate Bilsbury, and Robbie Bilsbury perform "These Boots Are Made for Walkin'" by Nancy Sinatra.

that you simply can't do without the support," he said.

Brady said she thinks it's important to help teachers bring their ideas to life.

"Our teachers have great ideas, and I believe they have the ability to bring a little more to our students if they have the right resources," she said.

Drama Club presents 'Chicago'

By Riley McKinnon
INDEPENDENT EDITOR

"Chicago," the school musical, received positive feedback from its cast, crew, and audience.

The show was performed on Nov. 21-23.

Junior Maggie Whitman was stage manager for the first time.

"I [was] excited to see the final product of what I've been working on," she said.

Some students were part of the cast and crew, including actress and dance captain junior Cate Vendt.

"I've just had interest in [dancing], and it was one of the



COURTESY OF ANDREW LUCAS

Lead actress senior Steel McDonald and cast perform "Roxie" in Act One of "Chicago," a middle and high school production.

roles being offered this year, so I said I would be interested," she said.

With the musical being heavily choreography-focused, actors learned dances that were specific

to the time period, such as the Charleston, as well as the Fosse style of jazz, director and choreographer Tyler Garofalo said.

Garofalo said the new use of rehearsal blocks as set pieces

made this production of "Chicago" different from other traditional stage renditions.

"This is something we've never done before in terms of style and history," Garofalo said.

Audiences responded positively to the production.

"It was great to see a production that combined the middle and high school students. I was absolutely blown away by the talent of the cast, crew, and musicians," English teacher Allison Krause said.

Garofalo noted the audience's support.

"Our audience was so appreciative, and every night they were so ... excited and grateful to see a show that showcased so many different performers on stage, in the booth, and in the

band," she said.

Music director Ben Icenogle appreciated that the production strayed from formats used in the past.

"The morals and messages in the story were not as spelled out as past shows we've done," he said.

Another new element to the show was the implementation of a sitzprobe on the first day of tech week, when the performers and the pit band worked through the music without running through the blocking, Icenogle said.

"I love playing with a pit band ... you get to lock in with the musicians so much. The interaction between the cast and the pit band is flexible and organic," he said.